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## The Lie That Launched Black Lives Matter

By Jack Cashill

The Black Lives Matter movement began as a hashtag in July 2013 immediately after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin. Although the movement would be reinforced along the way by any number of lies -- “Hands up don’t shoot” comes quickly to mind -- not enough attention has been paid to the original lie, one that may eventually launch a thousand riots before it burns itself out, namely that Trayvon Martin was an innocent little boy.

On the night of February 26, 2012, George Zimmerman shot and killed the seventeen-year-old Martin. For a week the story went nowhere until the attorneys representing Martin’s family reached out to Ryan Julison, an Orlando-based media strategist and the one white member of what was rapidly becoming Team Trayvon.

Team leader, attorney Benjamin Crump, understood that the national media were suckers for a story with a racial angle, specifically one that featured a black victim of white injustice. If Zimmerman’s parents had named their son Jorge Zimmerman -- he was named after his Uncle Jorge -- there might not have been a Black Lives Matter movement.

After meeting with Crump, Julison immediately began pitching the Trayvon saga to the larger world. Reuters bit first. On March 7, just two days after Julison was contacted, Reuters [posted an article](#) headlined “Family of Florida boy killed by Neighborhood Watch seeks arrest.”

The oversized opening sentence establishes a thesis that has proved irresistible to the major media for the last half century: “The family of a 17-year-old African-American boy shot to death last month in his gated Florida community by a white Neighborhood Watch captain wants to see the captain arrested.” Trayvon was a “good kid.” He hoped to be a pilot. He was carrying the soon to be iconic ice tea and Skittles, the latter for the “thirteen-year-old” son of Trayvon’s father’s girlfriend, now elevated to the role of Martin’s “brother.” Said Crump, “Trayvon only has skittles. He has the gun.”

On March 8, [Current TV’s “The Young Turks”](#) took up Trayvon’s cause. Co-host Ana Kasparian, an impressively self-righteous twenty-five at the time, made no fewer than a dozen errors in her five-minute presentation, including this whopper, “There was no self-defense in this situation.” As Kasparian envisioned the action, Zimmerman called 911 and said “there was someone in the gated community who looks very suspicious, i.e. a young black man who makes me uncomfortable.” Apparently to ease his discomfort, “George Zimmerman decides to go ahead and shoot the 17-year-old black boy in the chest which led to his death.”

“Oh, my God,” gasped her co-host Cenk Uygur. “He just shot him?”

“He just shot him,” affirmed Kasparian, who then pontificated, “I get so angry when people deny there is racism in this country.”

In fact, Zimmerman, an Obama supporter, made about as unlikely a racist poster child as America could produce. He had most notably involved himself in a December 2010 incident in which a white police lieutenant’s son sucker punched a black homeless man named Sherman Ware outside a bar. Although Ware suffered a concussion, and there was video evidence of the punch, no action was taken for nearly a month.

As Zimmerman would later relate, he and his wife Shellie printed fliers demanding that the community “hold accountable” officers responsible for misconduct. They then drove the fliers around to area churches and passed them out on a Sunday morning. As a result of the publicity, Police Chief Brian Tooley, whom Zimmerman blasted for his “illegal cover-up and corruption,” was forced to resign, and the lieutenant’s son was arrested.

Zimmerman headlined his fliers with a famous quote from Anglo-Irish statesman Edmund Burke: “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” He might more accurately have quoted another Anglo-Irishman, Oscar Wilde, “No good deed goes unpunished.” In her book on the Zimmerman trial, *Suspicion Nation*, NBC’s Lisa Bloom does not mention this incident.

Although at least one member of Team Trayvon worked with Zimmerman on the Ware case, the team chose to introduce him to the world as a thuggish white man, a loose cannon, an armed vigilante who preyed on undersized black children. To make this narrative work, Team Trayvon also had to scrub Martin's background and package him as something that he was not, an innocent little boy. They would have remarkable success in doing both.

On March 8, CBS's "Good Morning" interviewed Trayvon's father, Tracy Martin, and encouraged him to express his outrage that Zimmerman had not been arrested. Getting the biological parents in front of the cameras was at the heart of Julison's strategy. No one dared challenge a parent who buried a child.

On March 10, "Good Morning America" [added a new wrinkle or two](#), but it only reinforced the narrative established by Team Trayvon. Trayvon was the unarmed teenager carrying Skittles. He had always wanted to be a pilot or a football player. The viewer saw him as a smiling innocent through a montage of pre-adolescent photos. For the first time, Tracy Martin and Trayvon's mother, Sybrina Fulton, were interviewed together. Sybrina got the last word. "This clearly was murder. It was not an accident," she cried, "and it hurts. It hurts as a mother." Weeks before the shooting, Fulton had thrown Trayvon out of the house for fighting.

There is a time-honored standard in America's newsrooms to use the most recent photo. The media across the spectrum ignored this. On March 28, for instance, *People Magazine* [ran a cover story](#) titled "An American Tragedy" and subtitled "Heartbreaking New Details." There, staring out from the magazine racks on just about every supermarket aisle in America, was a clean-cut Trayvon, age about thirteen. Those who read no deeper than the cover learned that the death of this "unarmed" lad left "a family devastated and a country outraged."

Zimmerman met an entirely different Trayvon Martin on the night of February 26. His Trayvon towered over Zimmerman. In fact, his Trayvon was roughly the same height and weight as legendary boxer Tommy "The Hitman" Hearns. His Trayvon was into street fighting, drugs, guns, burglary, and mixed martial arts.

The one good eyewitness confirmed this within a half-hour of the shooting. He told the Sanford police he saw a "black man in a black hoodie on top of either a white guy... or an Hispanic guy in a red sweater on the ground yelling out help." According to this witness, the black man on top was "throwing down blows on the guy MMA style." In her book, NBC's Bloom made no mention of this key witness's testimony, not even at the trial.

On March 23, four weeks after the shooting, Barack Obama addressed the nation. By this time, the White House had access to all the information the Sanford Police Department did. The courageous step for Obama would have been to defend the police and to demand an end to the media lynching of Zimmerman. As an African American, he had more latitude to do this than a white politician would have.

If Obama had called attention to the painful fractures in Martin's domestic life, his suppressed criminal record, his all but unseen descent into drugs and violence, and especially his reckless attack on Zimmerman, Obama could have sent a powerful message to black America. But he did not. He went with the lie.

Said Obama for the ages, "My main message is to the parents of Trayvon -- If I had a son, he would look like Trayvon." With the police intimidated into inaction, kids like Trayvon have been dying ever since.



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