

The Trayvon Martin-George Zimmerman Encounter and its Policy Implications

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The Journal of Public Management and Social Policy uses this symposium to provide a panoramic analysis of the encounter between Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman. While the objective of this symposium lies beyond ascertaining the guilt or innocence of George Zimmerman, its purpose is to leverage various theoretical lenses from multiple disciplines and fields to better understand the contextual factors leading up to the encounter and to highlight relevant implications for public management and social policy as well as reveal pathways for future research. Towards these ends, the symposium presents four contributions from scholars, practitioners and subject matter experts whose research and experiences shed light on the practical and policy implications that this encounter offers.

In “Out of the Recent Darkness and into the New Light: Managerial Implication Emerging from the Martin-Zimmerman Encounter,” Brian Williams, Billy Close and Seong Kang deploy two theoretical perspectives in their analysis of the issue at stake. The first perspective focuses on the coproduction of public safety and public order in a dynamic interactive way depicting the role that citizens and other societal actors or institutions play in helping public agencies in the creation and implementation of public services. The second perspective centers on black crimmythology, which describes both the present and past historical integration of blackness, maleness, and criminality in the minds of the United States citizens. Williams and his colleagues not only present the challenges that coproduction of police services pose for society, but they highlight their implications for public management.

Renita Seabrook and Heather Wyatt-Nichol, in “The Ugly of America: Institutional Oppression and Race,” examine structural racism through a socio-historical context of institutional oppression and its impact on contemporary society. Using an epistemological framework of intersectionality, Seabrook and Wyatt-Nichol deliberate on the dimensions of race and gender as they relate to the troubled relation between African American community and law enforcement agents—especially African American males and police officers. Through a historical exploration of African American experience in the United States, these authors argue that Constitutional rights that were rebuffed for African Americans in this country are still relevant today as they pertain to racial profiling and police brutality. Seabrook and Wyatt-Nichol conclude that since racism, criminal behavior, and police brutality are learned from people’s external environment, the society needs to

contemplate on what it means to unlearn now from a public policy perspective.

LaKerri Mack and Kristie Roberts-Lewis, in “The Dangerous Intersection between Race, Class and Stand Your Ground,” trace the historical origin of stand your ground (SYG) law from the Castle doctrine that enables citizens to protect themselves. However, data from FBI Uniform Crime Reports show that the race of the victim matters in the outcome of SYG cases when the perpetrator is a non-minority. In view of this, Mack and Roberts-Lewis conclude that it is time for policymakers to craft public policy that addresses racial discrimination and policing disparities among disenfranchised communities.

Megan LePere-Schloop and Joseph Lumpkin, in “Learning from Trayvon: Lessons and Implications for Police Organizations and Leaders,” draw from Lumpkin’s practical executive experience as an African American law enforcement veteran and his reflections on community-oriented policing (COP) literature and representative bureaucracy to enhance JPMSP’s readers understanding of the Trayvon-Zimmerman encounter. LePere-Schloop and Lumpkin argue that establishing a representative police force that intentionally deploys COP strategies can assist police departments in cultivating a more trustful and productive relationship with marginalized groups. They conclude that any ingenious contemplation with the aim of learning from past experiences could be the best practical method to honor the memory of Trayvon Martin.

Finally, I will like to thank all the authors and our reviewers for making this special symposium possible within the timeline projected for its completion. I appreciate Brian N. Williams for not only suggesting that we do a special symposium on the Trayvon-Zimmerman encounter, but also for facilitating its review process up to the publication stage. I hope the ideas and thought provoking questions raised in this issue will help our readers to deepen their understanding of the SYG law and its implication for public management and social policy.