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The Edward W. Hazen Foundation is committed to supporting organizing and leadership of young people and communities of color in dismantling structural inequity based on race and class. That is the Foundation's mission statement and as such, the Hazen Foundation is dedicated to lifting up the experiences of young people of color and supporting them in pushing for just policies and laws. It is therefore impossible to allow the acquittal of George Zimmerman in his trial for the shooting of Trayvon Martin to go by without comment. But while there is a clear institutional interest, I must concede that this commentary is personal.

I am a white woman in America and, yes, I have walked nervously past a group of teen-agers late at night on a deserted street. I have taken the Implicit Association Test available on Harvard's website and found some racial bias, nothing off the charts, but it is there. I try not to judge myself for that, but I do know that I am working to surface my biases and not allow my unconscious prejudices to rule my actions and behavior. Unfortunately for Trayvon Martin, George Zimmerman had no such self-awareness. Nor, apparently, did the jurors in his case. I will leave it to the lawyers to speak to the legal arguments for or against an acquittal, but I have a keen interest in how those that I live around choose to participate in the public sphere and I feel compelled to comment on that.

Absent race, the story of a 17 year old boy going to a convenience store and finding himself followed by a grown man, then ending up in an altercation with that man and winding up shot to death is confusing. Why would the man have followed him? Why would he react by confronting and, possibly, striking out against him? Why would the man have pulled a gun on him? And why would he have shot? Add in race, and the story becomes both clearer and more troubling.

As many black men are saying, the experience of being followed is not unfamiliar and often unsettling, enough so to make one fear for one's own safety. Even our President named the frustration and humiliation of being suspect just because of being an African American man. Repeated time and again, such encounters cannot help but trigger anger in anyone, regardless of age, class, or education. Some may argue that no one but George Zimmerman can know whether he would have followed a white Trayvon Martin, but I would posit that Zimmerman cannot know that either, that he was operating out of unexamined, unconscious biases. That, if he is at all like 88% of whites and 42% of blacks, he is more likely to associate a white face with "good" and a black face with "bad" on Harvard's test of implicit bias (<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>) and therefore more likely to think the young black man on the street did not belong there.

Quite possibly, the teen's fears about the man following him would escalate and perhaps his reaction would be to confront the man and try to get him to stop intimidating him. And even if

we can imagine the fear leading the man to pull a gun, wouldn't that man consider the sight of the weapon sufficient to stop the other person? But why fire?

We have been reminded that Sanford, Florida holds a particular place in the history of race in America. Jackie Robinson was run out of Sanford and so the Dodgers responded by moving the entire team to Daytona Beach for spring training. Harry Tyson Moore, founder of the Seminole County branch of the NAACP was killed, as was his wife Vida Simms Moore, when their house in Sanford was firebombed in 1951; their deaths considered one of the first casualties in the Civil Rights struggle.

I do not know whether George Zimmerman is a racist in the Bull Connor, Orval Faubus tradition, but I firmly believe that he is in some sense racist, understanding that his mother is Latina complexifies but does not change that. Research and experience show that everyone is and we all, and white people in particular, have a responsibility to own our biases and the power that we have in society and to use our power for change.

So, while we both may be biased, a salient difference between Zimmerman and me is that I am working to ensure that my biases, prejudices, and unwarranted fears are material for my own understanding of the biases that undergird so many policies, laws and actions in America; that my recognition of my own shortcomings feed my determination to shine a light on the nefarious impact that these policies are having on all of us, of whatever race, but specifically people of color; and that I believe that is the work that we must all do in order to make this a just society. Perhaps, then, we can honor Trayvon Martin by using the events of his death as a catalyst for a deeper and more honest confrontation of the individual and structural biases that brought us to a place where a teenager's evening walk can result in his death.