





TRAYVON

LOST IN ALL THE HORRIBLE POLITICS SURROUNDING HIS DEATH IS THE STORY OF A BOY. BEFORE HE BECAME YET ANOTHER FLASH POINT IN AMERICA'S PAINFUL AND NEVER-ENDING RACIAL DRAMA, **TRAYVON MARTIN** WAS JUST A NORMAL TEENAGER. HERE, AT LAST, IS THE STORY OF WHAT WAS LOST ON THAT FEBRUARY NIGHT. **BY JOHN H. RICHARDSON**

PHOTOGRAPH BY CRAIG CUTLER

He wanted something sweet, he wanted to get out of the apartment for a while. He slid open the glass door of the patio and slipped out into the steamy Florida twilight, an ordinary thing on an ordinary night. ¶ Trayvon Martin was three weeks past seventeen that day, which was the day a stranger named George Zimmerman shot him through the heart. He was growing so fast, he'd stretched out like a rubber band, 158 pounds on a five-eleven frame, so long and thin everyone teased him: *Boy, you too skinny to take a breath.* ¶ He was wearing the hoodie he always wore, lost in his music like he always was. People teased him about that, too. Next door to his uncle Stephen's house, a modest ranch house where he often spent the night, lived an old lady who called him Mouse. ¶ *Don't you ever talk? Say something.* ¶ Trayvon would just grin. ¶ He strolled down the narrow cement path between two buildings. Trayvon didn't live there, he was just visiting, so it was all fairly new to him. Double glass doors faced the area from apartments on both sides, little white fences separated each little yard, central-air units hummed, televisions lit the curtains with their blue glow. Sometimes a Big Wheel tricycle sat forgotten in the path. ¶ The complex looked nice. The buildings were two or three stories, with neat little lawns with neat little borders. No visible garbage bins, a clubhouse, a little lake. Not as nice as the luxury complex just across the no-man's-land where no one had

bothered to build a sidewalk, but pretty nice for a kid from the modest side of Miami Gardens. Last night he had a long talk with DeWayne, his buddy from pee-wee football. DeWayne asked what he was doing.

Just chillin' with my ol' boy, Trayvon said. Trayvon's dad was dating a woman who lived there, a woman named Brandy, and it was looking serious. If he had to change high schools again to move up there, he said, it would be a'ight.

When he got to the gate of the complex, he could have slipped through the pedestrian gate. It wasn't locked. Even after the shooting, they never locked it. Florida is geared to cars, and Trayvon was still a BMX kind of guy. He tooled all around Miami Gardens on that little bike, standing on the pegs or doing the cat-walk wheelie on one wheel. And there was no sidewalk most of the way, just a lumpy depression in the grass, so why walk along the road? A man on foot could walk through trees and sand halfway to the 7-Eleven.

So Trayvon probably took the shortcut that cut through between the two buildings at the end of the lane. There the complex wall stopped and the foliage never grew in, probably because so many people took the shortcut.

We know this is the route he took on the way back, and that was his fatal mistake.

versal Studios, Busch Gardens.

When he was in third grade, they sent him to a private school called the Beacon Hill Center. *It was expensive*, Tracy says, *but it was—It was worth it*, Sybrina says.

Tracy remembers the time they went fishing at Pompano Beach. They were out there for three hours and didn't get a single bite. And then finally Trayvon caught this little bitty fish.

Tracy falters for a moment, wondering how this story will be received. Because for more than a month, the police let Zimmerman go without any charge, he and Sybrina had to rouse the media with suspicious details in his 911 call, like the moment when a police dispatcher told him to stop following Trayvon or the moment when Zimmerman called Trayvon, a person he had never met or even spoken to, a "fucking punk." Since then, Tracy and Sybrina have become the target of an astounding campaign of racist hatred. Trayvon had tattoos, don't you know, proof that he was a thug. But in Trayvon's world, tattoos are common. His father has a neck tattoo. The one on Trayvon's wrist said SYBRINA, his mama's name. The one on his chest said CORA, in honor of his grandmother, and his father's neck tattoo is an image of hands folded in prayer.

Then there has been the intense focus on Trayvon's history of tweets, which shows nothing more than ordinary teenage bravado mixed with sweet romantic yearning: *Yo panties leakn?* followed by *Im READY for a REAL relationship im talking mama meetin and all*. That was enough to lead a right-wing blogger named Debbie Schlusel to a fast and brutal conclusion: "It's becoming more and more apparent that George Zimmerman may have unintentionally performed a service to the world."

So given the savage way their son has been talked about in death, they have to take great care with every word they say. There are invisible people out there whose job it is to destroy him more than George Zimmerman's gun already has. This is serious business.

Tracy smiles. In truth, he finally says, he pointed to that little bitty and probably illegal fish and said, *What you gonna do with that?* And Trayvon held it up and said, *We gonna fry this one!*



Seven months after her son died, Sybrina Fulton still looks as though she were hit by a truck. Her round, dark face seems to be concentrated on a spot behind her eyes. He was a happy baby, she tells you, a playful baby, then he changed slightly and became more withdrawn into the TV. But as a teenager, he came back to his old playful self. He loved you to kiss and hug him, she says. He loved to go outside and play. He was never an indoor kid.

He was always outside with the football, with the baseball, with the soccer ball, the skateboard, she says.

Sybrina and Trayvon's dad, Tracy Martin, a tall truck driver with a close-trimmed black beard, dressed right now in shorts and a Dolphins T-shirt, are in Dallas today to attend an event at the megachurch run by pastor T.D. Jakes. They've been divorced since Trayvon was four but he always brought them together, and now his death has bound them even closer. Every now and then Sybrina goes over and lies down on the hotel bed. Tracy does most of the talking.

He was exposed to a lot of things. It's not like he was just right there in Miami and never went anywhere. He went snowboarding. He went skiing. He loved the Walt Disney, Islands of Adventure, Uni-

HE LOVED LIL WAYNE, 2PAC, MYSTIKAL, OLD-SCHOOL, ANYTHING WITH A BEAT, BUT HIS HEADPHONES ALWAYS HAD A MICROPHONE SO HE COULD SWITCH TO HIS OTHER FAVORITE ACTIVITY: TALKING TO GIRLS.

Trayvon's best sport was football, always on defense, starting with the Optimist Club when he was five or six. For the next eight years, he was at the park six to eight every weekday evening and all day Saturday, which was game day. He called himself the Playground Legend. His teammates called him Slimm.

He loved football, man, he loved it.

Sybrina comes over from the bed. *He just liked the park*, she says. *He liked to be at the park, liked to be with the kids. Even when he was too old to play there, he would go on Saturdays to sell food and drinks.*

Her voice has the special quality of deep grief, flat and lifeless.



AMERICANS OF THE YEAR

JOHN ROBERTS

Barring a catastrophic health event, some kind of personal scandal that seems unimaginable, or a sudden desire to become a beach-combing wastrel on a Polynesian island, John Roberts is going to be the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court for a very long time. He is fifty-seven years old. That means, all things being equal, Roberts could easily surpass the record tenure of John Marshall, who presided over the court for thirty-four years and died in office. It should be no surprise, then, that when tasked to rule on the constitutionality of the Affordable Care Act, Roberts's knees declined to jerk. He didn't want to march into history with two dead elephants on his court's back.

Prior to the decision in *National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius*, the best-known decision produced by the Roberts court was in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, which blew up a century's worth of campaign-finance law, enshrined in law the principle that corporations are people and that money is speech, and legalized political corruption for the foreseeable future. Roberts had to know that striking down a Democratic president's signature

achievement after having struck down any barriers to unlimited corporate cash in our elections would mark his court lousy with partisanship for the rest of his tenure, which, as we said, is going to be a long one. Given that, and with the court still laboring under the long shadow of *Bush v. Gore*, it seems that Roberts was looking for a way to decide the case that would preserve the court's institutional integrity. He found one.

Roberts upheld the law under the taxing power of the Congress, and not under its power to regulate commerce, a distinction that may become more important than the decision itself. He always has been dubious of the expansion of the Commerce Clause that had been undertaken throughout the last century, especially during the New Deal. So with this opinion he managed simultaneously to save the court's credibility while also staying faithful to the corporate power to which he has shown deference his entire career. No one saw this coming or had reason to believe that John Roberts was even capable of such nimbleness. But on that day, June 28, 2012, the Supreme Court of the United States truly became the Roberts court.

—CHARLES P. PIERCE

Trayvon was into motorcycles, too. Tracy rides a motorcycle, so Trayvon rode a dirt bike and a couple of those little pocket motorcycles, which sent his knees up around his ears. One time he took a dirt bike apart and started to put it back together. Tracy was like, *Ain't no way that's gonna work, man*. But Trayvon put it back together and rode it till the brakes burned out.

Sybrina remembers the time he dismembered her radio. Put that back together, too. He was good with his hands.

Trayvon liked planes. One summer he took an aviation course with Barrington Irving, the first African-American to fly solo around the world. The year after that he attended an aviation school. One day Tracy went to pick him up and he was sitting in a simulator saying, *I know how to land a plane!* And he did, too, he landed that plane. He was thirteen years old.

He did hit some trouble in his teenage years. He skipped classes and got suspended a couple times. Tracy won't go into detail, says it was just regular teenage stuff, but Sybrina's caution is overridden by her disappointment. *He didn't pass the FCAT*, she says. The FCAT is Florida's big standardized test. If you don't pass, you don't graduate.

But Trayvon was going to set that right, they know it. One mistake doesn't mark you for life.

Sybrina is a religious woman. She attends the Antioch Missionary Baptist Church, which has four tall pillars and an active community-service program. Tracy believes in service, too, and once took Trayvon to feed the homeless. He will never forget his son's compassionate shock. *He was like, "Wow, these people don't have nothin' to eat."*

But Tracy doesn't want to name the group they worked with, probably because they were Masons and the Internet is full of people who still think the Freemasons are an international con-

spiracy. These tend to be the same people who took offense when President Obama said Trayvon Martin could have been his own son: "Mason Barack Obama & Mason Tracy Martin are working together; There is almost no difference between Islamic-fascist & masons; What role models," etc.

You ask about racial prejudice.

Until this moment, this question, Tracy has been soft as velvet, no pushover but a naturally amiable man. But he wants no misunderstanding on this point. He has always taught his children to judge a man by the content of his character and not the color of his skin. Sitting at the little table in his hotel room, he begins pounding the wood with his fist. *I don't look at individuals as white human beings—thump!—black human beings—thump!—Asian—thump!—Cuban—thump! I look at a human being—thump!—as a human being—thump!*

Because, he says, we all bleed the same color.

They took Trayvon to New York last year. He saw *The Addams Family* on Broadway. He saw Central Park and Times Square. And they were going to buy him a car, a little Ford Explorer. He took the written driver's test online, in January, a month before he took that final walk to the store.

That last Saturday, Trayvon went to a football game with his dad and his cousin Boobie.

The wind was blowing cold. Trayvon was wearing his hoodie, but they were all shivering, so Trayvon's dad stopped at Kohl's on the way and bought them long-sleeved shirts. Trayvon took off the hoodie, pulled on the shirt, and slipped back into his hoodie. The hoodie was his trademark, his portable refuge. He felt comfortable in there.

The football field was in Sanford, one of those new suburban towns

that has exploded out of the Florida swamps near Disney World. They were there because Brandy's son Chad was playing in the game.

So they watched the pee-wee teams skirmish. Boobie had recently moved near Orlando, so he hadn't seen Trayvon for a couple months, but as far as he could tell Trayvon was the same sweet kid he'd always been. Quiet, smiling, lost in his hoodie and his headphones. He loved Lil Wayne, 2Pac, Mystikal, old-school, anything with a beat, but his headphones always had a microphone so he could switch to his other favorite activity: talking to girls. At one point, he walked away and sat in the bleachers with his headphones on and Trayvon's dad said, *Look at this man over there. He over there on the phone, talkin' to a little girl.* So they went over there to tease him and realized Tray had found a spot out of the wind. So Tracy was like, *Oh, you stayin' warm, playin' it smart.*

Trayvon and his dad were always best friends, Boobie says, tight left and right. No problem there.

Then Trayvon's phone rang. Boobie was holding it, looking at some pictures, so he answered. A girl's voice murmured hello—an excellent opportunity for some friendly teasing. Boobie said, *Hey, so you like my cousin?* The girl was like, *Maybe.* Boobie kept talking to her for a couple minutes, just juggin' at her, and Tray let him have his fun. He wasn't the type to grab the phone.

From the bleachers, they watched the rest of the game. Brandy's son scored twice, his team won, a good game, a good day.

On the phone, Uncle Stephen says he can't talk about it. He doesn't want to talk about it. But he lets Aunt Miriam take the phone and she says she'll talk to you. She's known Trayvon since the day he was born. He spent as much time at their house as he did anywhere else.

Their home is a modest place, a cinder-block ranch house on an ordinary suburban street. Stephen arrives right behind you in an

old black SUV, just back from running an errand. A big bald fire-plug in basketball shorts and a Florida A&M T-shirt, he's polite enough but not exactly happy to see you. He served in the Marine Corps, he tells you later, which comes as no surprise.

Inside, there's a sofa and a TV, pictures of the kids and a small American flag. Above the dining table, there's a large print of *The Last Supper* flanked by two portraits of hands folded in prayer. A small open kitchen stands to the left. Five or six fishing poles lean in the corner.

Stephen sits down on the sofa and pretends to watch a game.

Miriam leads you to the dining table. She's a plump woman whose smiling, motherly eyes have a hint of Queen Latifah's warm pride. *First thing you need to know about Trayvon*, she says,

is he loved his dad. When he was little, he would follow Tracy around and hold onto his shirt-tail. And he always got along with everybody. And he loved to eat. He loved instant oatmeal and ramen noodles. He loved Nickelodeon. And he loved football. She's not sure what position he played.

Tray played defensive end, Stephen says from the sofa.

He also loved his uncle Ronald, the third Martin brother, and did a lot to help him out, mostly by reaching. Ronald is a quadriplegic. Ronald was the one who got him interested in planes.

And Trayvon knew God, Miriam says. No doubt about that. *He understood that man could not create the earth and the clouds and the water.*

He helped a lot. If he wanted to go out with their son Boobie, whose real name is also Stephen, Trayvon would get in there and help him wash the dishes. And Boobie would help him cut his dad's lawn. They always knew they had to get their chores done before they went out to play.

From the sofa, Stephen speaks up again. *Tray was into music—he would sit there on his iPod and he would just listen to his music with the earphones on.*

BUT WHY DID TRAYVON “ESCALATE THE EVENT” INSTEAD OF CALLING THE POLICE? THE SHOOTER’S LAWYERS ASK. DOESN’T THAT SUGGEST A MENTALITY THAT “MIGHT BE URBAN”?



AMERICANS OF THE YEAR

JESSICA SCOTT

Poor, fat, sexless old white men. Such an oppressed minority. Especially poor, fat, sexless old white men driven to distraction by the very thought of women having nonprocreative sex. The very idea makes them so sweaty that they take to their radio shows and call these women sluts. That's what Rush Limbaugh did this past spring. He went on the air and called Sandra Fluke, a college student who had the gall to advertise

her need for birth control publicly, a “slut.”

And in the din that followed, nothing was as beautiful as the simple tweet of Jessica Scott, a captain in the United States Army, who wrote these words to the world: “I used #birthcontrol while deployed with my husband so I *wouldn’t* get pregnant & sent home. #iamnotaslut.”

And with those 106 characters, composed by an officer (and novelist!) who is the mother

of two young daughters, and who has deployed to Iraq, and who took birth control to better serve her country, Limbaugh's rightful humiliation was complete. “This issue came to the national attention because of Limbaugh,” Scott says now. “But this is the norm for women in America. We have little girls in the world being shot in the face because they want to be educated. And we're still talking about birth control here? Seriously?” —MARK WARREN

You ask him to come over and sit where the tape recorder can hear him. He pretends not to hear.

He was a Dolphin fan, too.

Too bad for him, huh?

No, too good for him. I like the Dolphins, too.

Stephen's warming up. He loves all the kids, he says, because, for one thing, they were never disrespectful, because he was the type of uncle who didn't allow them to be disrespectful. *Nieces, nephews, all my kids, they didn't grow up like they portraying this kid to be—he was nothing like that.*

Nothing?

Nothing! This kid, he did everything. He would vacuum when we told him to vacuum. If I needed the dog fed, he would feed the dog.

Didn't he ever get a little rambunctious?

No! Him and my son, they know, if I tell 'em to be in at ten at night, don't be in at ten-o-one.

But some of the stuff in the media—

—It's a bunch of crap!

Miriam tries to soothe him.

It's a bunch of crap!

Those folks just don't know Tray like we know him, Miriam says.

It's a bunch of crap!

Trayvon's not coming back, and bad people who knew nothing about him have turned him into something unrecognizable, a twisted caricature to make themselves feel better about killing a boy. Teenagers is gonna be teenagers, Stephen says, but that stuff in the media is just a bunch of crap. The finality of it all seems almost too much for him to bear.

Last year, Tray got into some trouble at school and Stephen sat him down at the dining table, unzipped his big leather-bound Bible, and read from the Book of Psalms. Sitting down in the same place now, he unzips the same Bible and perches a pair of gold-rimmed glasses on the end of his nose. Was it the Fifty-first Psalm? *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew the right spirit within me."* Or maybe this one: *"Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in thy sight."*

Sighing, Stephen puts his gold glasses down on the table.

Miriam says, *What was wrong with him going to the store to get some Skittles and get some iced tea and walkin' back mindin' his business? He ain't the type of person that would have confronted nobody. For what? That wasn't him.*

He had to put his hand on Tray 'cause Tray would definitely defend hisself, Stephen says. If somebody's puttin' their hands on you, you defend yourself. They been taught this ever since they been goin' to school. Don't start nothing, but defend yourself.

Miriam says, *He was so tall and skinny, and what was so wrong with going to the store? Going to the store!*

Rain starts falling, and Miriam starts getting ready for work. She works in the stockroom at Miami Transit.

Oh, I think about Tray all the time, she says. Sometime I just get, maybe listenin' to a song or something, and it just weigh on me, weigh on me heavy in my mind, and I may just start cryin'.

One memory comes back the most, she says.

Him smilin'. Him smilin'. 'Cause he always had a smile on his face. Always had a smile.

Stephen wipes away a tear. *That's why when you called, I mighta sounded upset or whatever—I just hate talkin' about it.*



Top: Trayvon Martin with his father, Tracy—"My ol' boy" the teenager would call him. Above: With his big brother, Jahvaris, and mother, Sybrina.

In her blue uniform, as rain patters on the roof, Miriam warms up a couple of Stephen's conch fritters for her lunch.

Trayvon would always tease him about being old, Stephen remembers. *Uncle Steve, you wanna go back and play basketball with us? Aw, you can't play? You too old to play?*

Miriam remembers the last time she saw him, just a week before he passed. He was so skinny, she just wrapped her arms around him and told him, *You better be good, okay?* And she told him she loved him, not knowing that was gonna be the last time she saw him.

But Stephen says he never left. *You didn't see him over there while you were talking? He was sittin' right there.*

Outside, the backyard is hauntingly empty, hauntingly quiet. Then Stephen is standing at the barbecue stove cooking up some chops and the yard is full of people, all three Martin brothers and all the cousins and aunts. Tray is about ten. He doesn't eat pork because his father doesn't eat pork, but those pork chops smell so good and he's just ten. He says, *Uncle Steve, what are those?*

Those are pork chops, Stephen says.

No they ain't, Uncle Steve, those are beef chops. And he grabs one. Oh, they laughed about that for years. Years.

But that was the last time Trayvon ate swine. Not for religious reasons, Stephen insists, back in the present now. Trayvon was a Christian. But he was a boy who honored his father.

That last Saturday, after the football game, Trayvon and Boobie went back to Brandy's place, a lovely three-bedroom unit with granite countertops and hardwood floors they barely noticed. They took baths and thought about going to the movies. Instead, they ended up playing Madden and about fifteen rounds of a card game called Tonk. And talking to girls and watching *Friday After Next*, the Ice Cube comedy about people getting up to silly weekend fun. Multitasking was their way of life. And Tray loved all comedy, from Martin Lawrence and Will Smith to *South Park* and *Family Guy*.

About 2:00 A.M., they got hungry and cooked up some chicken.

Boobie's a sweet kid himself, soft-spoken and shy, working at McDonald's and trying to get up the nerve to join the Army. He's wearing a medallion with Trayvon's picture on it. Every time he goes to Miami Gardens, Trayvon's grave is his first stop after his parents' house. After the chicken, he says, he went to sleep and Trayvon stayed up to chat up girls on his computer. He's not sure when Trayvon finally went to sleep.

It was later than me, he says. It always was.

When they woke up the next day, Tracy gave him a couple boxes of clothes he didn't want and Trayvon helped him carry them out to the car. Trayvon asked his dad, *When are we goin' home?* and Tracy said, *We're going home tomorrow.* And then it was just *A'ight, man*. Boobie didn't even hug him. He feels a little bad about that. Just clapped him up and said, *I'll see you when I get back home.*

A'ight, Trayvon said.

For Boobie, the dream goes like this: They're in Trayvon's room at his dad's house. There's an old PlayStation gathering dust on the desk, football trophies and his MVP plaques on the wall. They spend the whole night just sitting on the bunk bed, playin' around

like they always did. Talking about girls, talking about football, playing games on the computer. When it's time to go to bed, they squeeze in together on the bottom bunk, head to toe, both so skinny there's plenty of room.

Move over, Boobie says.

Or he's walking Trayvon's last walk, which he did for real a couple of days after Trayvon passed. He walks out of the house down that empty street, past the clubhouse and through the shortcut and down the grass path along the side of the road. He walks to the store and then he turns around and walks back. All the way he's talking to Trayvon. *I miss you so much, man.*

When he gets to the sidewalk where Trayvon stopped, he doesn't go no farther. *I'll see you later*, he says.

And Trayvon says, *A'ight.*

Everywhere you go, these are the kinds of things people say. At the Forzano playing field, Coach Jerome Horton, a handsome veterinarian technician who oozes warmth and confidence, stands on the sidelines watching his team of twelve-year-olds in full football gear. Cheerleaders practice across the field, parents sit around the concession stand, lights shine down from high poles. Trayvon was a kid that had no quit in him, he says. Never missed a practice, never missed a game, always wanted to run the ball. *Let me hold the ball*, he'd plead. *Just let me hold it.* They'd kid him: *You ain't got no wheels, man.* And he'd come back, *Just let me get the ball. Just let me hold it one time.*

And the suspensions? Cutting classes?

Aww, it was just kid stuff. Like one time when he was about nine, Tracy benched him for not doing his homework. Horton tried to talk him out of it, but Tracy just would not bend. He even made Trayvon come out here and watch the whole game from the sidelines. And they never had that problem again.

That was around the time Trayvon saved his dad's life. *You didn't know about that? They didn't tell you about that?*

As he starts to tell the story, a group of high school football players comes up, diamonds or fake diamonds glittering in their ears. At first glance, they look aloof and a little dangerous, but a moment later they're grinning like fifth graders.

He was a cool kid. He didn't start no trouble.

*He was a good linebacker. Like, if you hit against him—
—Your helmet comin' off.*

I remember the first time he hit me. I started cryin' like, "I ain't playin' with him no more."

Trayvon said, Toughen up.

He blitzed me. I didn't want him to blitz no more.

F'real.

I stay out of his way. I try to trip him, but it ain't working.

Horton sends them off with a laugh: *A'ight, knuckleheads, get going.*

Next to come over is Horton's son, DeWayne, known as DeMurk on the field. He's been coaching another team over on the sidelines, playing semi-pro now but heading to college soon to study engineering. He and Trayvon did everything together, he says. Went to the movies, went skating, walked around the park talking about football and football. They liked to have fun. *They liked girls.*

And the girls liked you?

Of course. Two good-looking men.

Horton rolls his eyes. *Oh, please.*

Coach Carter Eve comes up, too. He remembers an away game in Georgia. Tray was the kind of kid who would pump up the team when they were feeling nervous. He was telling them on the bus, *We can*

do it, we can do it! And Trayvon pumped him up, too—the year they went to the Super Bowl and lost, Tray told him, *Coach, man, you guys did your job. Y'all did your job. We ain't got nothing to be sad about.*

He was just a loving kid, Coach Eve says, *nothing about him not loving.*

Later DeWayne comes back. He's been on the sidelines thinking about what he really wants to say. This time his dad walks away to give him privacy.

We just wanted to have fun, he says. *Lotta times we'd go to my house and throw gummy bears at each other and stuff. Wrestle. Stay up all night. Talk on the phone to girls. Play Madden.*

One time they got caught playing chicken in the street. Almost got hit, and the person in the car knew their dads. So he and Trayvon went to their fathers and made a formal apology. Their dads let it slide.

Before they went to bed, they'd pray.

We would be lyin' down and we would just pray. Sometimes we would tell each other, "All right, bro, love you."

As he talks, the 125-pound team goes into a final huddle and ends with a chant. *Can't hit, can't win. Any team that won't be beat, can't be beat. Trayvon Martin on three.*

And there he is again, a little guy walking next to a big man. They cross the field and cut through the security gate into a very nice apartment complex—over here on the west side of town, where the parks have landscaped lakes and clubhouses like Greek temples, life is good. Tracy fills a pot with enough grease to deep-fry some fish and Trayvon goes into his room to collapse on the bed. That boy pushes himself so hard. Tracy's had to carry him off the field like a baby. Then Tracy sits down on the sofa and dozes off, too.

The smell of smoke wakes him. He runs into the kitchen and the pot is writhing in flames, sending up black oily smoke that floods the ceiling and curls under the doors. Tracy runs into his bedroom and grabs a blanket and runs back to the kitchen and throws it on the fire, but he throws wrong and it catches on the pot and tips the burning mess forward. Flaming grease splashes all over his legs. He falls to the floor screaming, and Trayvon, just nine years old, runs out and drags his screaming father out the apartment door. Then he runs back through the flames and the smoke to get a cell phone and calls 911.

Tracy spent four months in the hospital getting skin grafts. On the playing field, the kids give Trayvon major respect. *You saved your father's life!* But Trayvon always shrugs it off.

What else was I supposed to do? That's my ol' boy.

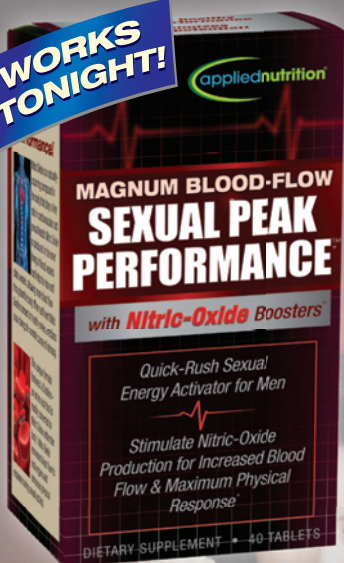
Zimmerman's lawyers will contest these portraits. They will point out that Trayvon was no longer the cute little twelve-year-old in the picture that helped make the case famous. They would like to say Trayvon missed fifty-three days of school between August and February, had three suspensions, including one for possession of marijuana and one for writing "WTF" on a wall. They would like to say that he had traces of marijuana in his system and that his teachers found a handful of jewelry and a screwdriver—often described as a "burglary tool" in the media—in his bag. Depending on the rules of evidence, some or none of this will make it into court. Not that any of it justifies shooting a teenager in the heart.

"We're not trying to demonize him," one lawyer says, holding out a laptop to show you the picture taken by the 7-Eleven security camera, which shows Trayvon's face looking dark and ominous in the shadow cast by his hoodie.

They would also like to tell the court that Tracy Martin was still married to a woman named Alicia when he was visiting his girlfriend in Sanford, evidence of an "urban" [continued on page 180]

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Trayvon Martin

[continued from page 158] lifestyle.” They will say that there’s a video on YouTube of a kid who might be Trayvon in a boxing match. He’s wearing boxing gloves and there’s a referee, but the lawyers are trying to make a positive identification because they need to prove that Trayvon knew how to hit. There’s another similar video and a guy in New Jersey who’s trying to sell a third video that might show Trayvon in a real fight. He took it to CNN and ABC, the lawyers say, asked for \$100,000. That’s what happens when a killing becomes international news, yet another flash point in America’s endless race war.

The lawyers tell you that Zimmerman had a broken nose and cuts to the back of his head and Trayvon had no marks on him. “Somehow George ended up with all the injuries.”

Except for the gunshot to the heart, you say. Silence fills the room.

But why did Trayvon “escalate the event” instead of calling the police? they ask. Doesn’t that suggest a mentality that “might be urban”?

The lawyers will point to Zimmerman’s efforts to mentor two black children. They say that he just happened to have a gun that evening. They say he was alarmed by the sight of Trayvon emerging from the bushes at the corner of the complex, a place where “bad things happen.” They will tell the jury that the development where the killing occurred had suffered a total of nine burglaries, eight thefts, and one shooting in a single year, and they will try to downplay the arrest the police had just made in the latest burglary. They believe that all of this is pertinent to their defense because the case will hinge on whether Zimmerman had a reasonable fear for his life.

But all this just takes us deeper into the bleeding heart of this iconic American story. What is a reasonable fear? When you live in a gated community in a state full of gated communities in a country blooming with gated communities, when you carry a gun in a state that grants you the legal right to “stand your ground” and shoot the people who frighten you, when so many of the young black males who suffer the indignities of racism and the worst unemployment rate in the country turn to the cheap respect that rewards an intimidating posture, when the TV news whips up paranoia at every opportunity, when you’re living in a modest multiracial development next to a luxury complex where they post the subsection of the law and dollar amount of the penalty for every possible parking violation on attractive wooden signs, when the value of your apartment has dropped more than 50 percent in the recent economic crash, what is a reasonable fear?

The 7-Eleven is a big one, with a cupola over the entrance, a clean bathroom open to the public, and a Sam’s Club next door. Down the sidewalk, there’s a Boston’s Fish House, Hop Sing’s Thai-Chinese cuisine, a motorcycle gear store, a Trustco bank.

From here, it’s exactly one mile to Brandy’s apartment.

From the row of glass refrigerators, Trayvon picks out an Arizona Watermelon Fruit Juice Cocktail. The Skittles are on a shelf across from the cash register.

When he leaves, Trayvon passes the Trustco Bank and walks along the edge of the road, which is six lanes across when you include the turnouts. Night is falling, but with the big Towne Center across the street and an auto superstore down the way, everything is brightly lit. Soon the grass gives way to another sidewalk for the Lake’s Edge development, brown stucco condos with little inset porches. Then it’s back to the narrow groove worn into the grass.

Trayvon passes fan-shaped palms, neatly bordered gardens with a full cover of mulch, electrical wires that fan from yellow anchors, a manhole cover for the optic cables. From there, he takes the dirt path that cuts a couple hundred feet off the road, passing a lovely shade tree on the border where the wild grass meets the perfectly mowed lawn of the condominiums. He passes a billboard that reads NOW LEASING, COLONIAL VILLAGE AT TWIN LAKES.

The shortcut drops him in the driveway to the Colonial Village complex, right across from a small sign that says ANY UNAUTHORIZED VEHICLES WILL BE TOWED AT OWNERS EXPENSE 24 HOURS A DAY 7 DAYS A WEEK UNDER FLORIDA STATUTE 713.78-715.07-715.05. Down the driveway, he may have glimpsed white picket fences, screened porches, fire-plugs painted in Christmas red and green, Lexuses and Camrys and the occasional BMW.

From there, the sidewalk is broken in spots. Red cones fill the holes. Then it’s grass again. Crickets, cars, the sound of someone coughing inside their apartment, but Trayvon hears none of this because he’s listening to his tunes. He sees some shreds of Spanish moss in the trees, the yellow glow of the halogen streetlights, a school-crossing sign.

At some point, rain starts to drizzle. The wind picks up.

And there it is up ahead, the shortcut back into the Retreat at Twin Lakes. Coming from this direction on foot, there’s no question it’s the quickest way to go. Later they’ll put up a sign: PRIVATE PROPERTY NO TRESPASSING VIOLATORS WILL BE PROSECUTED and a series of little arbor poles for foliage to grow on, but even then they’ll leave a gap big enough for a man to slip through. For Trayvon, it’s a straight shot down an open lawn, between two buildings and onto the Retreat’s main street.

This is where Zimmerman sees him.

Under streetlights but not too many, just enough to dapple the light.

Trayvon keeps walking, past the vaguely Spanish roofs, past the arched garage windows that look like eyes on a Halloween pumpkin, past the big clubhouse with its two far pillars. Past palm trees. Past CR-V’s, Hyundais, Fords. He becomes aware that he’s being followed.

At some point, he begins to run. ■