

Did Marijuana Use Make Trayvon Martin Violent?

Written by Earl Ofari Hutchinson
Tuesday, 09 July 2013 11:32 -



The instant that Sanford police officials in March, 2012 leaked to the media school records that showed Trayvon Martin had been suspended from school for possessing a trace amount of marijuana, there was little doubt that George Zimmerman's defense attorneys would jump all over this to prove their point about Martin. The point was, and is the centerpiece of their Zimmerman self-defense claim, that Martin's marijuana use made him edgy, aggressive, and violent. And since this is supposedly the case, it bolsters two of Zimmerman's contentions that Martin came under his watch because of his drugged out, suspicious behavior and more importantly that Martin attacked him and he had to resort to deadly force to save himself from mortal harm from a doped out Martin. A toxicological report found a trace amount of marijuana in Martin's system the night of his slaying.

Zimmerman's attorneys wasted no time in loudly demanding that this be entered as prime evidence of Martin's alleged aggressiveness. Prosecutors rightly opposed its admission as being irrelevant since Zimmerman could not have known this and even if he had ESP and did know it there is absolutely no evidence that marijuana use predisposes anyone to violent behavior. Judge Debra Nelson initially seemed to agree. Her reversal and decision to allow Martin's alleged marijuana use into the trial is potentially a huge sop to the defense.

But if facts mean anything it shouldn't be. The few studies that have tried to link marijuana use to violent behavior have managed to prove only two things. One is that there is no firm connect between the drug's use and individual violence. The other is that whatever violence an individual that tokes up may exhibit is because that individual has a violent or criminal history. In other words, there's a predisposition to violence that has absolutely nothing to do with their marijuana use. The White House which relied heavily on a report from the Office of National Drug Control Policy takes a hard-nosed stance against marijuana liberalization and any slack off in tough federal enforcement of medical marijuana regulation. But it did not make any case that marijuana increases violence. It focused instead on the need for enforcing the law and continued to insist that marijuana represents a health hazard, and a harmful addiction, but violence due to its use, no. Even if there were no studies on marijuana use and violence or

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White House concern over marijuana use and its alleged harmful effects, the notion that marijuana use spurs violence notion is ludicrous.

The National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 2009 and 2010, report found that nearly two-thirds of the nation's adult population aged 21 to 54 has used marijuana at least once. Common sense would tell us that if even a fraction of the tens of millions of people that have tried marijuana rampage in their homes and in the streets, the jails would be bursting at the seams with those arrested for drugged out marijuana induced violent acts. However, that's only part of the problem in trying to separate fact from deliberate distortion about marijuana use.

The other part is the public perception of who uses drugs and their effects. Studies and reports have overwhelmingly found that African-American students are far more likely than white students to be suspended or expelled from school for marijuana use and possession. They are far more likely to be arrested and convicted for drug use than whites. This despite countless studies that show that blacks do not use drugs in any greater incidence than whites, and in some cases, even less than whites. This reinforces the deeply ingrained stereotype that not only is the average drug user and pusher a young black male. But that a young black is the cause of most of the drug related violence in the country.

Zimmerman's defense attorneys, however, aren't interested in these facts or the corrosive effects of racial stereotypes and drugs. Their defense game plan is to tar Martin as a violent druggie and further muddle the issue for jurors whether Martin's behavior was the trigger for his killing. This was crudely and insultingly put by one of the attorneys to Martin's mother on the witness stand when he flatly asked her whether she thought he had any culpability in his death.

The issue then boils down to whether the Zimmerman jurors can separate his defense attorney's deliberate muddle of the facts and trash of Martin and see that there's absolutely no credible proof that marijuana use in and of itself induces violent behavior in anyone. There is not a scintilla of evidence that Martin was inherently aggressive and violence prone. The prosecution's job is to make sure that they see this. Anything short of this could bolster the terrifying thought the defense has worked overtime to implant and that's that marijuana use made Martin a legitimate target.

Earl Ofari Hutchinson is an author and political analyst. His new ebook is America on Trial: The Slaying of Trayvon Martin (Amazon). He is an associate editor of New America Media. He is a weekly co-host of the Al Sharpton Show on American Urban Radio Network. He is the host of

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