

U.S. Murder Trial Leads to National Protests

Welcome to As It Is! I'm Christopher Cruise.

Today, we will visit a New York City neighborhood known for its amusement park. But for one family, the park has not been all fun and games.

"It was, it was like a death."

We will also talk about an American court case that has led to protests across the country.

The George Zimmerman trial ended last Saturday in Florida. The jury found Mr. Zimmerman not guilty. He had been charged with murdering 17-year-old Trayvon Martin.

George Zimmerman was driving in his neighborhood in February 2012 when he saw the teenager. Trayvon Martin was walking to a friend's house. Mr. Zimmerman told the police the young man was acting suspiciously.

George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer, left his car and followed Trayvon Martin. The two fought. Mr. Zimmerman had a gun, and he shot and killed the teenager.

The death left many Americans saying Trayvon Martin was targeted because he was black. George Zimmerman is half-Hispanic and half-white.

His defense lawyer, Mark O'Mara, said his client shot Trayvon Martin because the teenager attacked him.

"George Zimmerman was never guilty of anything except protecting himself in self-defense. I'm glad that the jury saw it that way. And I hope that everyone who thinks -- particularly those who doubted George's reasons, and doubted his background -- now understands that the jury knew everything that they knew, it was enough for them to find him not guilty. "

The not-guilty verdict in the case has led to protests in several American cities. The protesters are calling for justice in what they say is a race-based ruling. Five members of the jury are white, and one is Hispanic. All are women.

The head of the Department of Justice, Attorney General Eric Holder, is studying the case. Mr. Holder says he will decide whether federal charges should be brought against George Zimmerman. Government lawyers would have to prove that Mr. Zimmerman followed Trayvon Martin because he did not trust black people.

The attorney general says that Americans should use the case to discuss their beliefs about race and young people.

"We are resolved, as you are, to combat violence involving or directed at young people, to prevent future tragedies and to deal with the underlying attitudes, mistaken beliefs and stereotypes that serve as the basis for these too common incidents."

President Obama commented on the case on Sunday. He called Trayvon Martin's death a tragedy for the Martin family and for the country. But, Mr. Obama asked Americans to stay calm. He said, "We are a nation of laws, and a jury has spoken."

When super-storm Sandy hit the east coast of the United States last October, it caused major damage in coastal areas like New York's Coney Island. VOA's Adam Phillips followed one family affected by the storm. He watched as they cleaned up, re-imagined and rebuilt their Coney Island business for opening day 2013. June Simms has the story.

For more than a century, Coney Island has been known for seaside fun and a place to escape from New York, the city that never sleeps. But that dreamland turned into a terrible experience for the Vourderis family on October 29th. Rising waters from Sandy flooded their Coney Island amusement rides and games.

"When we got here and saw the devastation, it was like a death, figuratively like a death."

Deno Vourderis is a third generation worker in this family-owned business. "I mean figuratively like a death because a lot of the stuff has history."

Those things include the family's 93 year old Wonder Wheel. The 45-meter high structure was named an official New York City landmark in 1989. It survived the strong winds of super-storm Sandy, but the storm's sand and water nearly destroyed it.

The family's over 50 year old Spook-A-Rama house also suffered damage.

The Vourderis family decided to rebuild. Deno worked with a five man crew he has known since he was a boy. His father Steve directed the clean-up and rebuilding effort.

"...We're men and we do what we have to do. We get it done."

Steve's brother, Dennis Vourderis, supervised planning and finances. He says the family had to borrow a huge amount of money to pay for repairs and new equipment.

"But what hurts more is when you have an old piece of equipment that has been around for 70 or 80 years that was underwater and you know it can't be restored. So that's especially painful to throw away."

"We might be able to fix this. Louis! Don't throw this guy out, okay? We're gonna bring him in the shop and see what we can do with him."

After months of hard work, the Wonder Wheel is rebuilt and the rides for children are ready. So is the Spook-A-Rama's gimmicks for frightening people. The Vourderis family was excited with the results.

"We kept a couple of the old relics, but a lot of it is new. All new mechanics, all new haunts. So, you know, the silver lining is if you come by this summer you're gonna have a lot of new stuff to see. "

Coney Island's rebirth became a reality in late March when people gathered together for Opening Day.

The Vourderis family offered up fun at no cost for everyone in attendance.

"I couldn't be happier. Everything worked out the way we wanted it to work out. All the rides are up and running. Wonder Wheel is at 100 percent. So I couldn't be happier."

Much of what Sandy destroyed has been rebuilt.

It is probably safe to say that nowhere have the results been more fun than here at Coney Island.

"We love you Coney!!"

Speaking of amusement parks, Disneyland opened on this date in 1955.

And, if you don't know the history of "Wrong Way Corrigan," you're missing a great story. Douglas Corrigan was an amateur airplane pilot. On July 17, 1938, he left Brooklyn, New York headed for Los Angeles, California. Mr. Corrigan landed in Ireland 28 hours later.

I'm Christopher Cruise, and that's As It Is on the Voice of America.