

From VOA Learning English, this is “In The News.”

Americans continue to **react** to the decision in the murder trial of George Zimmerman. Last week, a jury in the southern state of Florida found that he was not guilty in the shooting death of 17-year-old Trayvon Martin.

The unarmed teenager was killed last year in a **struggle** with the defendant. At the time, George Zimmerman was a neighborhood watch volunteer in his community in Florida. Trayvon Martin, an African American, was walking to the home of his father’s girlfriend at the time of the killing.

George Zimmerman is a white Hispanic man. He called police to report Trayvon Martin as a suspicious person in the neighborhood. He followed the teenager, although police told him not to. The two fought. Mr. Zimmerman says he acted in self-defense after he was attacked by the young man.

Under Florida law, people can use deadly force to fight back if they feel their lives are in danger.

Soon after the six woman jury reached its decision on Saturday, people used social media and public protests to express their opinion about the verdict.

“No justice. No peace. Trayvon! Justice for Trayvon!” (:06)

Many **protests** have been held across the United States since the trial. Hundreds of people demonstrated in Chicago, Illinois. They expressed opposition to what activist Dickey Gaines says was a predetermined verdict -- one reached before the trial.

“Because there was a lot of people across this country that was in favor of George Zimmerman being acquitted by virtue of them donating money to his defense, so that was a clear indication early on people was in support of him being acquitted in this case.”

Casey David Cole Senior was one such supporter. He spoke to reporters near the Sanford, Florida courthouse, where the trial took place.

“I’m here to express my opinion. I believe that George Zimmerman is an innocent man.”

For Chicago protester Bryan Burroughs, the case is clear in his mind.

“I think Trayvon Martin was guilty of nothing but being black in a mostly white neighborhood.”

Activist Dickey Gaines says the ruling has not changed his belief that George Zimmerman targeted the teenager because he was black.

“He focused on Trayvon because of Trayvon’s skin color.”

Hans von Spakovsky works for the Heritage Foundation research group here in Washington. He says the legal action against Mr. Zimmerman should end now.

“If the Justice Department continues to pursue this case when, one, he’s been found innocent and, two, we know there’s no racial animus which is necessary for a civil rights violation, that once again makes it look like politics is driving the case, not justice.”

Racial inequality in the United States goes back centuries. The issue of slavery was a major reason for the nation's civil war in the 1860s. But discrimination continued after black slaves were freed. And racial tensions still exist.

Greg Carr is chairman of Afro-American Studies at Howard University, a historically black college here in Washington.

"One thing that's tangible that can come out of this verdict is a renewed commitment to addressing people, and not looking to the courts -- not looking to the law to somehow regulate or change people's hearts and minds."

Mr. Carr warns that if a civil rights case were brought against George Zimmerman and lost, it would increase the distrust of many people. But if such a case were won, he says, Americans would look to the courts for racial healing, not within themselves.

And that's "In The News" from VOA Learning English. I'm Steve Ember.