

Claire Hoy ? Facts being trumped by politics

There's often a fine line between seeking justice and seeking revenge. Take the current uproar in the U.S. over the 'not guilty' verdict in the Florida case where George Zimmerman, an Hispanic-American, shot and killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed African-American teenager while on neighborhood patrol on Feb. 26, 2012.

All across the U.S., thousands of people - particularly blacks - have been holding protest marches and rallies in the wake of the verdict.

There is no evidence to legitimately suggest that Zimmerman's full and open trial was anything but fair. There certainly were some conflicting accounts, but strong forensic evidence did support Zimmerman's story that Martin had attacked him and he was defending himself.

But in cases like this, truth has little impact on preconceived notions; facts are trumped by politics.

Even President Barack Obama - who as leader of 'all' Americans should have known better - publicly implied that racism was behind the verdict. He even said that Martin 'could have been me,' many years ago - a considerable stretch, given his relatively protected upbringing, and hardly demonstrative of a presidential approach. Rather than playing to his crowd, justice would have been better served by upholding the justice system, even if he didn't like the outcome.

And that's what this is. As we've said, the verdict was fairly found by a jury chosen fairly and squarely by both sides, with no evidence - none whatsoever - that it was decided on anything but the facts in the case.

Yes, there is legitimate criticism of Florida's 'stand your ground' law, which essentially allows people the right of self defence when they are under attack. Many states have these laws. But beyond that, once again, there is nothing to suggest the jurors based their findings on racism.

But that doesn't stop some of the more prominent 'social activists,' or, to be more precise, skilled fear-mongers, such as the Rev. Al Sharpton, who led a huge rally in New York City joined by Jay-Z and Beyonce, in condemning the verdict.

'We are going to fight for what is right,' thundered Sharpton. 'They used to say segregation is better than slavery but they never sat in the back of the bus. This is a movement, not a moment.'

It is true that blacks in the U.S. suffered a tragic history of slavery - there aren't many countries in the world that didn't practise slavery; indeed, some still do. Even at its worst, by the way, the U.S. had fewer slaves than Brazil, and the fact is that many African leaders were complicit in the slave trade, supplying their captured enemies to American slave traders in return for buckets of cash. That being said, however, it is completely understandable that the descendants of those slaves would view these issues through a different lens from those whose ancestors did not experience slavery and who themselves did not suffer from the more subtle forms of racism which still exist in the U.S. and elsewhere.

It is just unfortunate that these battles are so often co-opted by the likes of Sharpton, a man with such a sketchy history of hate-mongering that one wonders why anybody would believe anything he says.

Sharpton first burst onto the public consciousness in 1987, when he co-opted protests over the brutal case of 15-year-old Tawana Brawley, who claimed she had been raped by six white men, including police officers, in Wappinger, New York.

It turned out, after a prolonged festival of outrage led by Sharpton - who even accused the local prosecutor of racism and of being one of the perpetrators of the abduction and rape - Brawley's story was a complete and utter fabrication.

Rather than short-circuit Sharpton's public 'activism,' however, it made him a household name, and he has continued unabated - sometimes legitimately, often anything but - ever since.

Sharpton's overheated 'activism' was central to the Crown Heights riots in 1991, after a car driven by a Jewish man and part of a procession led by an unmarked police car, struck another car and accidentally veered onto the sidewalk and killed seven-year-old Guyanese boy, Gavin Cato. That led to riots and stabbings against Jews, looting of their stores and worse. Four years later, Sharpton led protests against a Jewish tenant for evicting his long-time sub-tenant, a black-owned record store, telling protesters, 'We will not stand by and allow them to move this brother so that some white interloper can expand his business.'

And so it goes. Another perceived 'injustice.' Another opportunity for Sharpton to strut his stuff.

And the worst part is that Obama - who has twice been elected to his current office by the American voters - while more measured in style and language, seems to share Sharpton's view of what constitutes 'justice.'

