

Trayvon Martin, February 5, 1995 - February 26 2012, 17 years old

Trayvon Benjamin Martin was born February 5, 1995, in Miami, Florida, to Sybrina Fulton and Tracy Martin. Sybrina and Tracy divorced when Trayvon was 4, but stayed in each other's lives. Though Trayvon lived with his mother and older half-brother after that, his father Tracy lived nearby and both parents worked hard to give him opportunities to learn and expand his horizons, taking him on trips snowboarding, skiing, fishing, and sightseeing. Trayvon also enjoyed assembling, repairing, and riding pocket bikes and dirt bikes, an interest that grew out of his father's love of motorcycles.

His family described him as quiet, usually listening to music on his headphones, and always wearing a hoodie, even in the Florida heat. "It could be 100 degrees outside and he would always have his hoodie on... Sometimes he was so quiet you didn't realize he was in the room." said Miriam Martin, Trayvon's aunt. "But he just loved to eat. If I knew he was coming over, I tried to make sure I had some Ramen noodles and oatmeal. He would eat that anytime of the day." What his aunt remembered most was "Him smilin'. Him smilin'. 'Cause he always had a smile on his face. Always had a smile."

A USA Today article tells the story of how Trayvon saved his father's life at age 9:

When he was 9, Trayvon saved his father's life during a fire. The Miami truck driver had been frying fish when a fire started in their apartment. When Tracy threw a blanket on the flames, oil splashed and burned his legs, immobilizing him. He yelled for Trayvon, who pulled his father out of their home and called 911.

Trayvon was an athlete who enjoyed football, baseball, soccer, and skateboarding. His favorite sport was football, which he had played since he was 5, spending time at his local park every weekday evening and all day on Saturdays, which were game day. Even after he was too old to play in the recreational league, he still liked to be at the park, and would go on Saturdays to volunteer at the concession stand.

Around the time Trayvon started high school, he became interested in aviation. In 2009, Trayvon's parents enrolled him in a summer aviation program led by pilot Barrington Irving, who at 27, made history by being the youngest person to fly solo around the world, as well as the first Black pilot to do so. After graduating the

program, Trayvon returned the next summer as a volunteer, helping the new students.

At school, Trayvon's favorite subject was math. Trayvon's cousin, Stephen, said "In our family, you knew what you had to do, we all had to go to school. We all had to graduate. He was on a path to that. Our parents would accept nothing less." Trayvon hoped to attend the University of Miami or Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, and was looking forward to prom and taking his senior pictures.

In February 2012, after Trayvon was suspended from school for marijuana residue found in his backpack, his father took him to Sanford, Florida, about 4 hours away from home, to stay with him for a few days. On the evening of February 26, 2012, Trayvon got permission from his dad to walk to 7/11 to get snacks before the NBA All Star game while his father was out for dinner with his fiancée, Brandy Green. Walking back from the convenience store, Trayvon was followed by armed neighborhood watch captain, George Zimmerman.

Brandy's townhouse was in a gated community called The Retreat at Twin Lakes, where multiple break-ins and attempted break-ins had taken place in the last year, and Zimmerman, who was working toward a criminal justice degree, had become very involved in the Twin Lakes Neighborhood Watch program as a result. Following Trayvon in his car, Zimmerman called the police to report "a suspicious individual in a hoodie" saying "This guy looks like he's up to no good, or he's on drugs or something... He's just staring, looking at all the houses... Something's wrong with him."

Despite being told not to by the dispatcher, Zimmerman continued to follow the teen. Trayvon, who was on the phone with his girlfriend, was aware he was being followed. A Huffington Post article explained:

The call began at 7:12 p.m. Martin told her that "some strange dude" was following him... Martin slowed to see who was behind him. The girl urged him to run, and he picked up his pace. Martin said he thought the man was gone... Instead, Zimmerman was likely closing in.

"He's right behind me, he's right behind me again" Martin told his girlfriend.

Next thing she hears is Martin saying, "Why are you following me?" And she hears a voice that says, "What are you doing around here?" Then she hears what she believes is a push against Martin and the phone crashes to the ground. She can hear them arguing in the background. Moments later, the phone line goes dead.

After Trayvon became increasingly frightened and began to run, Zimmerman pursued him on foot, and a struggle ensued that ended with Zimmerman shooting Trayvon in the chest. Police arrived almost immediately afterwards. Trayvon's body lay motionless on the ground, just 70 yards from the back door of Brandy's townhouse.

Trayvon was not carrying any identification, so was tagged as John Doe at the morgue. Trayvon's father and his fiancée returned home from their dinner late and thought Trayvon was in the house. It wasn't until Brandy woke up around 1am that she realized Trayvon was missing. Trayvon's phone was going to voicemail, and his cousin, Stephen, hadn't seen him since the night before. They called local hospitals, but no one by the name of Trayvon Martin had been admitted. After many calls but no answers, his father called the police to make a missing person's report. Less than an hour after that call, three detectives, along with a clergy member, arrived at the townhouse. In an interview with WLPG, Trayvon's father shared what happened:

[The detective] said, 'I'm going to show you a picture and you tell me, is this your son?' And so he pulled out the picture and that was the photo of him lying on the ground dead...

I was in denial. This is my son... I love him and he loved me and now I am looking at a still photo of his lifeless body on the ground. My world had just crumbled...

As news of the case spread, thousands of protesters called for Zimmerman's arrest and a full investigation. Countless people took to social media, posting pictures of themselves wearing hoodies, or holding the snacks Trayvon purchased shortly before his death, Skittles and a can of Arizona juice.

Zimmerman was charged with second degree murder and manslaughter, but was found innocent on both charges in 2013, due in part to Florida's 'Stand Your Ground Law', which says individuals who believe they are in danger from another person are not required to retreat before using force, including deadly force.

In March 2012, Sybrina Fulton, Tracy Martin, and Trayvon's half-brother, Jahvaris Fulton, established *The Trayvon Martin Foundation*, a non-profit organization whose main purpose is "to provide emotional and financial support to families who have lost a child to gun violence."

In 2013, Trayvon's family settled the wrongful death claim against the homeowners association of the subdivision for an amount they chose to keep confidential. Ben Crump, the civil rights attorney who represented the family *pro bono*, went on to represent many other families in civil rights cases, including the families of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. In the 2022 Netflix documentary, *Civil: Ben Crump*, Crump says, "I want to make it financially unsustainable for [police] to continue to kill Black people unjustly."

Catalyzed by Trayvon's murder and the not-guilty verdict, the Black Lives Matter movement was formed, as well as other activist groups like Million Hoodies, Dream Defenders and Black Youth Project 100. The Movement for Black Lives was founded in 2014, becoming a hub for organizations committed to ending state violence against Black people and helping Black communities have their say in how they are governed.

Trayvon's family commemorates his life each year with a peace walk on February 5, his birthday.

In January 2017, *Rest in Power: The Enduring Life of Trayvon Martin*, was published, written by Trayvon's parents. In 2018, the book was adapted into a six-part non-scripted series produced by Jay-Z.

A 2022 VOA article, remembering Trayvon Martin 10 years after his death, reads:

Though Martin's death did not come at the hands of a police officer, his killer's exoneration prompted calls for the reform of a legal system that, according to advocates for change, systematically undervalues the lives of Black Americans....

In an essay published this month marking the 10th anniversary of her son's death, Fulton wrote, "Even now, a decade later, when I see the continual acts of racial violence – against George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery - I don't tell people that justice is coming, because we did not receive justice."

However, Fulton also struck a hopeful note, writing, "We are at a turning point now. Things are changing. If the protests during the summer of 2020 showed us anything, it's that we cannot afford to be silent."

She added, "While one generation is getting older, we need the next generation to step up to the plate and use their voice on behalf of our people. The youth have the spirit and enthusiasm, we just need to show them how and then get out of their way. The very future of our people is at stake, and there's no room for nonsense or playing games."

In loving memory of Trayvon Benjamin Martin.

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