

Trayvon Martin's mother speaks out against racial profiling, calls for respect

Written by Madeleine Brown

Thursday, 16 January 2014 20:37 - Last Updated Friday, 31 January 2014 07:41

That's what was printed on the back of Dennis Barrett's shirt Thursday afternoon when he and his wife attended a discussion at the University of Utah about racial profiling.

Sybrina Fulton, Trayvon Martin's mother, was invited to speak and lead the discussion as part of the university's 30th annual celebration for Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Fulton described herself an average person and said losing a son is not something she signed up for. But it was apparent she isn't average as she talked about her son and called for respect, action and an end to profiling.

"There should not become a time when we are comfortable with burying our children," Fulton said. "What happened many miles away in Sanford should be uncomfortable for you."

People who aren't looking for ways to improve the country and its communities are part of the problem, she said, adding that she's working to make Florida a better place.

On Feb. 26, 2012, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, a neighborhood watch volunteer, then 27. Martin was visiting his father, Tracy Martin, in Sanford, Fla., when he walked home from 7-Eleven through a gated community on a rainy night.

Zimmerman approached Trayvon Martin because the teenager looked suspicious, he later told police. He confronted the boy, who was unarmed, and shot him in the chest after a scuffle, police said.

Police said Florida's Stand Your Ground self-defense law kept them from bringing charges against Zimmerman, and he wasn't arrested for 44 days. The law says people acting in self-defense don't have to retreat before using force.

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Trayvon Martin's parents said Zimmerman racially profiled their son and that the investigation was stalling because Martin was black. Zimmerman identifies as Hispanic.

"But is it the hoodie that really made the difference? Or the color of his skin?" Fulton asked. "And if by one second, just by one mere second, we think that it's the color of his skin, then something is wrong with America."

The case became an impetus for national debates on guns, self-defense and race relations.

Zimmerman was found not guilty of second-degree murder and was acquitted of manslaughter in July 2013.

"I think, at the end of the day, it's not about Trayvon. It's about the person who thought he was suspicious," Fulton said in response to a question during the discussion.

She repeatedly responded by urging people to respect themselves and each other, to remember that everyone is different and to think about what they can do to make sure something like Trayvon Martin's death doesn't happen again.

"All you need is positive people," Fulton said. "Positive does not come in a color at all."

Kendall Andrews said he couldn't relate easily with the situation, growing up as a white male in suburban Utah. But, he said, the issue is important.

"You have to admire how Trayvon Martin's mom has handled everything and just how she's not been violent, not been aggressive, been peaceful the whole time," Andrews said. "Even in horrible situations, some people can take things positively and do good with even the worst situations."

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Chloe Cole, a U. student studying strategic communication, said she was impressed with Fulton, who has chosen to fight against racial profiling with words, action and love. Fulton said it's pointless to take a life in revenge; that only results in another death.

"It's like she brought the issue right to home, and so now as she leaves we can continue that conversation about whether it be racial profiling or other issues of profiling I experience and other people experience here in Utah," said Fattima Ahmed, a Muslim student at the U.

The Trayvon Martin Foundation is hosting a peace walk and talk in Miami in February to celebrate Trayvon Martin's life and tell young people "they have a right to walk in peace," Fulton said.

The discussion kicked off a weekend of events celebrating Martin Luther King Jr.

Fulton said King's message of nonviolence is at the forefront of her efforts, and she aims to lead by example.

"Racism is still alive. Racial profiling is still alive. Injustice is still alive," Fulton said. "And we have to make a difference. We have to change this."

Source:

<http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865594323/Trayvon-Martins-mother-speaks-out-against-racial-profiling-calls-for-respect.html?pg=2>