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Letters

LETTERS | ACQUITTAL OF ZIMMERMAN STIRS REACTION

We've created excuses for racial violence

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AT THE heart of the case of Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman is the question of how much weight to give to Zimmerman's fears. Florida's "stand your ground" law allows the use of deadly force if someone believes his or her life is threatened. So Zimmerman's feelings are his defense.

His fear of a young black man, however, does not exist in a vacuum. We have long privileged — and created — fears of black men, from the myth of the black rapist to the relegation of our military's blacks to menial work. We have created excuses for racial violence in the name of safeguarding whites.

Incentives to overlook this history have been powerful. In the 1920s, for example, white women who attempted to speak out against the horrors of lynching were ostracized as race "traitors" and sometimes attacked.

Florida's "stand your ground" law is racist because it refuses to take that long history into account. It assumes that we are capable, either as individuals or a nation, of race blindness and race neutrality in the assumptions we make about each other.

This case will deepen the tragedy of racial misapprehension for decades to come. As a nation, we are not capable of just laws based on our racial feelings. The sooner we admit that, the better.

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