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Lamont Hill visits UMSL to discuss social justice and racial inequality

HEATHER WELBORN
FEATURES EDITOR

Some students were visibly uncomfortable as they listened to Lamont Hill, PhD, passionately discuss social activism for over an hour last Thursday in the Century Rooms of the Millennium Student Center. Hill's impassioned argument for racial equality in America was undeniably polarizing. Many attendees departed within the first half of his lecture. Those who remained gave Hill their rapt attention, fully engaged by Hill's emotional appeal for equality in education.

According to his website, Marc Lamont Hill is one of the leading hip-hop generation intellectuals in the country. He has been involved in social justice activism since childhood. Hill is a news correspondent with BET and a political commentator at CNN. He writes at length about the overlap of culture, politics, and education in western society. Three years ago, Ebony Magazine named Hill one of America's 100 Most Influential Black Leaders.

Hill's address, entitled "Social Justice and Social Media," was part of the ongoing campus-wide observation of Black History Month.

Each sequential position Hill presented in his speech was backed with more historical precedence than its predecessor. His spoke with an indignant yet optimistic eloquence, drawing from a political and social history spanning hundreds of years into our nation's past. Hill's words forced audience members to confront painful and



1) Lamont Hill addresses the crowd



2) Students gathered in the Century Rooms for Hill's discussion on social justice and social media

inhumane aspects of being black in America, as well as to question the objective significance of racial progress in modern society.

Hill's main lecture point was a plea to audience members to listen more. As he spoke, his words seemed to gain momentum with every frequent mention of social leaders long since past. Looking back on the brief lives and longstanding legacies of men like Malcolm X, Che Guevara, and Martin Luther King Jr., Hill urged attendees to resist the appeal of triumph glossing over tragedy in our memories. He contended that examining the uncomfortable aspects of the lives of these men allows people in the present to remember the pain of the past as the inspiration for necessary social change.

"Thirty-nine years old," Hill remarked to the audience, astounded. That's the age of the three men he mentioned when they were killed. "Thirty-nine! Tough year for a revolutionary," he continued as the audience

scoffed in shame. He urged America to listen to itself in the face of such tragedy, to "be true to its fundamental character, at least its articulated character," of equality and possibility for every member of society.

Hill's lecture doubled as a historical literature primer, drawing from great writers like David Walker and W. E. B. Du Bois to support his call to activism. "Look at the contradiction, America," Hill said, "of having a freedom document that promises life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, that fetishizes freedom on the one hand, while the African remains mired in unfreedom." His tone turned accusatory as audience members nodded their heads in agreement. "America, look at what you promised your citizens, just for being human," Hill said. "Listen to yourself."

For such serious subject matter, Hill had his moments of hilarity. "Picking on poor people is easy, Bill Cosby!" Hill

said at one point. The humor took the edge off of statistics he shared about current educational standards and incarceration rates. Hill stated that 250,000 Americans were in prison in 1964, and the nation saw it as a travesty. Today, there are 2.5 million locked up, an increase in prison populations by tenfold.

"Do not be seduced by the logic that we created a generation of criminals," Hill said, comparing the structure of public schools to that of prisons. "We've militarized the space, and nobody stops you from leaving," Hill said. "We have a generation of criminalized, not criminals." He also pointed at the decline in treatment for the mentally ill as a large contributor to the increase in prison population, now composing one out of every ten Americans.

Hill suggested that shutting down mental health facilities forces the sick to live on the street, only to have homelessness be made illegal. This lack of

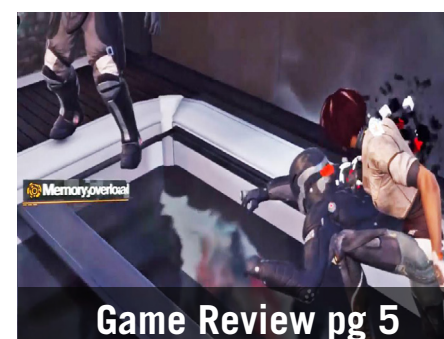
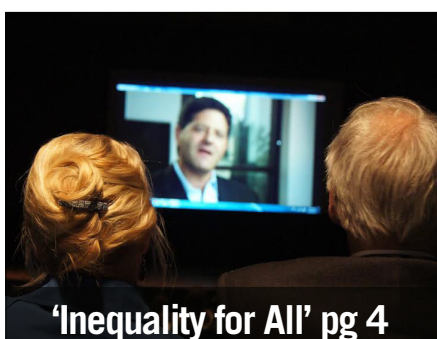
medical help leads those in need to self-medicate on the street with cheaper alternatives. Hill condemns the War on Drugs as preventable and ineffective, stating that street drugs are cheap and easy to acquire, and are stronger than ever.

"The War on Drugs is over, poor people. We lost," Hill said.

When poverty is made illegal, Hill urges students to fight criminalization. According to Hill, the biggest problem in America today is the presence of too many people who don't do anything. He tells the audience that the truth is hard to listen to, and difficult to insist upon, but it is necessary to address social disparity in a realistic way. He ended his lecture with an appeal to courage and action.

"Speak the truth even when it's difficult and unpopular," Hill said. "Hope relentlessly."

INSIDE



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Step show photo by Ryan Brooks

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- More photos from the annual ABC Step Show
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Letters to the editor should be brief, and those not exceeding 250 words will be given preference. We edit letters for clarity and length, not for dialect, correctness, intent, or grammar. All letters must be signed and must include a daytime phone number. Students must include their student ID numbers. Faculty and staff must include their title(s) and department(s). The Editor-in-Chief reserves the right to respond to letters. The Current reserves the right to deny letters.

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THE UNDERCURRENT By Siyun Zhang

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO DOING ONCE THE WEATHER WARMS UP?



CARLOS NAVARRETE
Junior, Communication

“Going to a park with my wife.”



JENNIFER GOLDRING
Graduate Student,
Masters of Fine Arts – Poetry

“Hiking.”



PAIGE LEIBLE
Graduate Student,
Masters in Accounting

“Going on The Bull Float Trip this summer, and spending more time outside.”

MON 39^{HI}
24^{LOW}

TUE 37^{HI}
9^{LOW}

WED 27^{HI}
19^{LOW}

THU 39^{HI}
20^{LOW}

FRI 31^{HI}
17^{LOW}

SAT 33^{HI}
20^{LOW}

SUN 36^{HI}
20^{LOW}

Discussions on higher education funding continue at capitol

HUNG NGUYEN
MANAGING EDITOR

Conversations continue in the Missouri Legislature over how to fund higher education in the next year. After much excitement from Governor Jay Nixon’s State of the State address, where he pledged to boost funding for higher education, came the harrowing process of getting such a proposal through the rigors of the bicameral legislature.

Nixon had called for state universities to freeze their tuition rates for the 2014-2015 school year in exchange for the increase. The University of Missouri System was the first to answer the governor’s call, with a Board of Curators approval days after Nixon’s speech.

At the 40th Annual Legislative Day on February 18, both Nixon and Wolfe called for increased investment in higher education,

particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Wolfe cited a backlog of overdue infrastructure development and rehabilitation needs totaling over \$1 billion among the four UM system campuses.

But while the Legislature appears to be on-board for increasing higher education funding, there is some disagreement over where the money should go.

Missouri Senate Bill 492, sponsored by Senator David Pearce, R-Warrensburg, is referred to as the college performance funding bill. It calls for universities to meet certain performance criteria in order to receive funding increases from the state when available. The bill would expire in 2016. The criteria would include statistics such as

retention rates, job placement, and graduation rates, among other metrics. The importance of the bill is that it would require universities to include such metrics into their goal-setting and

“The bill will need to be voted on again before passing to the House.”

would hold them accountable for good and bad performance.

Some concerns were raised as to whether the bill would leave

lawmakers powerless for some time by codifying such a strict evaluation process for funding. Opponents of the bill were assuaged, however, by the 2016 expiration, an amendment added to the bill that would enable legislators to give the bill a shot but not renew it if it doesn’t work. The bill will need to be voted on again before passing to the House.

In addition to SB 492, Representative Mike Thomson, R-Maryville, is sponsoring a measure that would allow Bright Flight qualifiers to receive forgivable loans. Missouri House Bill 1308 will expand the Higher Education Academic Scholarship Program, also known as the Bright Flight Program, to include loans that would be incrementally forgiven in exchange for a certain period of employment in

Missouri after graduation. Bright Flight recipients are determined based upon performance on ACT or SAT standardized tests. To qualify, students must rank in the top 3 percent or in the top 4th or 5th percentile of all Missouri students taking the test.

Thomson contends that this would help with a phenomenon called “brain drain,” whereby the best and brightest students are leaving the state in search of better scholarships and post-graduation employment. He hopes that by increasing the financial incentive for remaining in Missouri for school and also work the bill would help with this issue. Mike Thomson is chairman of the House Higher Education Committee.

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NEWS BRIEF



Faculty and students discuss current events at ‘News at Noon’

‘News at Noon’ focuses on sexual assault

“News at Noon: Sexual Assault in the Military” was held on February 19 from 12:15 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. Hosted each year by The Current, News at Noon serves as a forum for open discussion between faculty and students regarding current events.

Jim Craig, Chair of the Department of Military and Veterans Studies at the University

of Missouri-St. Louis, and Pamela Dorsey, Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Coordinator for Scott Air Force Base, served as presenters. Discussion was lively, as attendees discussed a variety of viewpoints, including societal views of sexual assault in America and the effectiveness of newly-introduced sexual assault prevention programs in the

military.

News at Noon is co-sponsored by The Current and The New York Times, with support from the Center for Teaching and Learning and the Office of Student Life at UMSL. Visit thecurrent-online.com for more information on upcoming events.

UMSL hosts ‘Inequality for All’ screening

CATE MARQUIS
A&E EDITOR

The University of Missouri-St. Louis joined universities across the nation for a documentary screening and discussion that focused on income inequality and the declining American middle class. The Sundance award-winning documentary “Inequality for All” was shown on February 20, followed by webcast discussion with the documentary’s creator, political economist and former United States Secretary of Labor Robert Reich. The free event took place in the J.C. Penney Conference Center Auditorium at 4 p.m. and was sponsored on campus by the Des Lee Collaborative Vision at UMSL.

“Today’s screening of ‘Inequality for All’ is part of a national event sponsored by the American Democracy Project. UMSL has been affiliated with ADP for over a decade, working to create and offer opportunities related to civic engagement on our college campuses,” Patricia Zahn, director of the Des Lee Collaborative Vision, said.

The American Democracy Project is also a co-sponsor of “News at Noon,” a monthly current events discussion co-sponsored by The Current. The Des Lee Collaborative Vision “brings together educational, cultural, governmental and social service institutions to establish programs and share resources to benefit the St. Louis community.

The documentary is a “passionate argument on behalf of the middle class,” according to its website <http://inequalityforall.com>. “The 400 richest Americans now own more wealth than the bottom 150 million combined,” Reich notes in the documentary. While the middle class has continued to prosper in other developed nations, such as Great Britain, Australia, Germany and Sweden, the middle class has been in decline in this country. The United States now has the greatest level of income inequality among developed nations. Income inequality has become a frequent topic of political discussion in recent months.

Turnout for the UMSL event was good. “We had about 100 people, a good mix of students, faculty and staff with a few community members,” Zahn said.

Robert Reich, the force behind the film, led a discussion by webcast after the screening. Reich was Secretary of Labor under President Clinton but also served in the Ford and Carter administrations. He is now a professor of public policy at University of California - Berkeley and was a Rhodes Scholar who studied Philosophy, Politics, and Economics at Oxford University.

The film was shown at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival, where it won the U.S. Documentary Special Jury Award for Achievement in Filmmaking for its director



Members of the UMSL community gathered in the JC Penney Conference Center Auditorium to watch the film.

Jacob Kornbluth. The film was distributed theatrically last year by the Weinstein Company and played locally at the Plaza Frontenac Cinema.

The documentary is based in part on Reich’s bestselling book “Aftershock: The Next Economy and America’s Future.” A study guide for the documentary describes the film: “In the wake of the U.S. economic crisis, the widening gap between the rich and the poor has gained unprecedented public awareness. [The documentary’s] narrator and guide, UC Berkeley professor and noted economic policy expert

Robert Reich, helps us understand how the extreme inequality we are now facing has roots in economic and policy changes that began over 30 years ago.”

As the study guide notes, “Reich sees this disparity as a threat to democracy. ‘Inequality For All’ explains why. There is no vilifying of the rich here. Instead, ‘Inequality For All’ investigates how policy changes have stacked the deck against the middle class.”

The documentary uses graphics, new and archival footage and economic facts to explain how this economic unbalance came about

and where the country is headed if that course is not changed. The film shows how policies that benefit the middle class also benefit the country as a whole, even the wealthy, through something known to economists as a “virtuous circle.” The film also offers some of Reich’s personal story as well as “his unwavering passion to return our society to one in which the American dream is possible for everyone.” The film’s website has background information and resources for further research on the issue.

Annual high school step show rocks the Touhill

The Associated Black Collegians of the University of Missouri-St. Louis hosted their annual high school step show on February 21 in the Blanche M. Touhill Performing Arts Center. This two-division step show allows student teams from the St. Louis area to strut their stuff on stage, utilizing rhythm, spirit and imagination to create the best possible show.

Photos taken by Ryan Brooks, with special thanks to the Touhill volunteers and staff.

1. The Elite Steppers’ routine revolved around women working in factories during World War II.
2. Girls Inc. were among the largest step groups to perform.
3. Platinum performed a large and well-synchronized act.
4. Sounds of Stomp performed a routine telling the story of a scientist who created a number of humanoid robots.



Gallery 210

‘Sacred Symbols in Sequins: Vintage Haitian Vodou Flags’ exhibit displays beautiful bead work of a vastly misunderstood culture

CATE MARQUIS
A&E EDITOR

Say “voodoo” and for many it brings to mind images of curses, scary ceremonies and even zombies. That’s the Hollywood version. The real Vodou is the unique national religion of Haiti, a religion that blends influences from Christianity, West and Central Africa and the Taino people who were native to the island.

“Sacred Symbols in Sequins: Vintage Haitian Vodou Flags” is a traveling exhibit of a central liturgical object in the Haitian religion, the Vodou flag, one that also is a stunningly beautiful piece of textile art. The free exhibit opened February 8 and continues through March 15 st Gallery 210.

Photos do not do justice to these dazzling art objects. The flags are densely embroidered with brilliant, colorful sequins and bead work, creating objects that rival the best of other Native American beading. During religious services, the flags are waved around in elaborate fashion, so that the brilliant colors and sparkling sequins come to life. The point of the colorful, light-catching religious art is to boost a congregation’s spiritual link to the divine, much as stained glass church windows, elaborate priestly vestments and banners for holy

day processions do. In fact, the European tradition of banners for holy day processions are a direct inspiration for the Haitian practice.

The exhibit includes a wonderful array of these gorgeous religious objects, as well as beaded bottles also used in services, photos of altars, temples and modern Haitians themselves. There are 16 flags, known as Drapo Vodou, mostly from the early to mid-20th century. The exhibit also puts this sacred art in context, with several posters describing the origins of the religion, its practices and traditions and some of Haiti’s history. The exhibit also includes some touchable objects.

The bead work is exquisite throughout and gallery patrons will find a close-up look at the works very rewarding. The flags incorporate symbols of the Vodou religion that are important in religious services and often include icons of Christianity. The religion has a single god but worshipers appeal to that deity for favors through an array of lesser gods often associated with Catholic saints. These spirits are viewed as “hot” or “cool” and are often paired, with a few deities seen as neutral mediators between the hot



and cool realms.

A common theme in the flags are images of saints, frequently a Catholic printed image of the Virgin Mary or a saint cut out and incorporated into the flag. The name of the spirit represented is often include in the flag. Some flags feature snakes wrapping around a central staff, a figure on a white horse carrying a flag with a sideways cross, or skulls. Others include palm trees or geometric patterns, all of which have specific meaning for the Vodou religion. Similar symbols appear on the

decorated bottles than are also featured in ceremonies and in this exhibit. These colors are nearly always brilliant, and the sequins and bead work cover the cloth or bottle surface completely.

One example is “Ogou Sen Jak Maje (St. Jacques Majeur),” a late 20th century flag that depicts a spirit associated with St. James the Greater. According to its plaque, “As a hard, hot spiritual force, Ogou Sen Jak Maje balances the cool Danbala.” Banners representing the two spirits are most often paired in Vodou temples.

The exhibit also includes one modern secular work, by artist Evelyne Alcide, which depicts the aftermath of the 2012 Haitian earthquake. Like the sacred objects, the subject is depicted in bright colors and dense beading.

A trip to this exhibit is well worthwhile, whether one goes to take in the pure beauty of these objects or to learn a little more about a misunderstood, misrepresented tradition and culture. Either way, “Sacred Symbols in Sequins: Vintage Haitian Vodou Flags” is a rewarding experience.

GAME REVIEW

Fight for freedom and steal memories in ‘Remember Me’

DANYEL POINDEXTER
STAFF WRITER

Gamers will enjoy “Remember Me” if they are fans of the movie “Inception.” However, it’s safe to say that they will enjoy this game even if they are not. “Remember Me” leads players into adventures in the world of memories, much like “Inception” did with dreams (only this game makes sense).

Developed by DONTNOD Entertainment and published by Capcom, “Remember Me” was released in June 2013. It is an open-world game that includes 3D graphics, action, and adventure. Originally, the publishers believed that since the main character is a woman, sales might not pan out, but since the release of this never-ending adventure, it is hard to grab a copy from the shelves before they

are all gone.

“Remember Me” is based on a third person point of view story set in Neo-Paris in the year 2084. This game takes a look into a future where memories stay with you forever. A new technology is developed that is placed on the back of the neck, connecting to the brain. This device helps keep memories clear in one’s head, never to leave. Though the thought sounds nice, not everyone is in agreement with the world-widely distributed technology.

Gamers get to play as the character Nilan, a former elite memory hunter who used to work alongside the rebellion who are against this new found “memory enhancer.” Nilan has the rare ability to break into people’s minds and

steal or even alter their memories. However, the game starts off, with all Nilan’s memories, except her name, erased from her mind by the authorities. Because her memory wipe was flawed and she still knows her name, the authorities send her away with others to make sure every single memory is gone. As she walks to her end, the player is contacted by a member of the rebellion that sets out to help Nilan. Mission after mission, the player must help Nilan recover her own identity while at the same time being hunted by the authorities as a wanted escapee, hunted by the very people who made this surveillance-controlled world.

Being set in a somewhat realistic future, small, tiny little mistakes



can mean the end for the player - even diving into people’s memory. One wrong move in someone’s mind could mean a devastating ending.

The ability to dive into someone’s memory and change it or permanently “override” it, as the game puts it, is an incredible feature that this game contains and the most important one. However, with new abilities and moves to gain throughout the game, there is always something more to learn. The graphics are phenomenal and the continuous action is right on

point.

“Remember Me” is a true, somewhat scary outlook on what could really be our own future. With technology developing as it is, what is not to say someone really could come up with this amazing technology and it becomes a widely used device?

“Remember Me” is rated Mature and is available on Xbox 360, Playstation 3, and PC. This game is an artistic masterpiece waiting for more people to help “override,” erase, and remix memories.

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POINT

COUNTERPOINT

IS THE ADVANCEMENT OF TECHNOLOGY
DETRIMENTAL TO THE HUMAN RACE?

POINT: Too much has a negative impact

Today, technology is completely unavoidable and almost mandatory in every day life for us humans. We are provided with instant knowledge and answers from behind a screen. Because they rely on technology so much, people don't think profoundly for themselves anymore. Our devices are becoming an attachment.

Adults, on average, spend at least eight hours a day in front of a screen. In the classroom, students no longer pay very much attention to the teachers when they have a computer screen or tablet right in front of them. Studies also show that social skills suffer if individuals spend too much time in front of a screen, due to the lack of interaction with other humans.

Meanwhile, communication has been taken over by texting and social media websites, such as Facebook and Twitter. Before texting or Facebook, people were more thoughtful and expressive to one another. Heartfelt or intellectual conversations, asking someone out on a date, and even telling someone a simple "thank you" are all things that are better performed in person. Which would you choose:

real, meaningful interactions or something you read off of a screen? Most of us are more than guilty of it.

Another problem is that, with people so focused on new technology, they forget their environment and lose opportunities to creatively express themselves. Imagination is very important for childhood development. Taking walks in the park, stargazing, or just being surrounded by nature opens their mind and encourages imagination. It seems that it is harder to do any of that, due to the new technologies supposedly making things simpler. Sure, it may seem that life is getting easier, but we are losing something very important. As we gain new experiences with scientific knowledge, we are exchanging our real human connections for new connections to machines. Technology is never going to go away, but this is something to be more aware of when we continue with our every day life. If we allow technology to take over our lives, our connections with our friends, family, and even just the people around us will degenerate.

COUNTER: Technology is a gift to us all

Technology is not something to be feared. Though advanced technology is finding its way into most facets of our everyday life, this shift toward a more hi-tech world is one we should celebrate. Today, we can get to where we are going more quickly and contact one another more easily. Thanks to technology, the day-to-day tasks in our lives are as close to hassle-free as they have ever been.

The advancement of technology has also allowed us to go further than we ever dreamed of in the field of medicine. Many of us have loved ones who would not even be alive today, were it not for modern technology and the things it has done for the world of health care. If you were sick, would you prefer to go to a hospital with state-of-the-art equipment, or an institution stuck in the middle ages?

Progress never comes without its downfalls. While technology has changed the way we communicate, who's to say that that change is necessarily a bad thing? While social media isn't the same as talking to someone face to face, it opens up the realm

of communication so that you can have debates and meaningful conversations with someone on the other side of the world (using only one hundred and forty characters or less). Thanks to Facebook, we can now keep in touch with our loved ones overseas, bridging physical gaps between families with nothing but an internet connection and a computer screen.

Advanced technology has also helped individuals express themselves creatively in new and exciting ways. Digital art is just as beautiful as anything painted by hand, and it would not have been possible without computers. Word processors revolutionized the world of literature by allowing writers to record their work more quickly than ever. New technology provided yet another medium in which art and beauty could thrive.

As many of us have been claiming since the 1980s: it is only a matter of time before we are all riding jet packs to work. With that said, embrace the future and have fun with the changes technology can bring.

SOCIETY NOW

Is “standing your ground” justification to kill?

SIMONNE KIMBLE
STAFF WRITER

A “stand your ground” law was created to protect those who feel threatened in a situation where a person(s) is trying to cause harm to them. However, the question remains: is the law being used to protect people, or is it being used as justification to kill others?

This self-defense law is supposed to be able to give people a fair opportunity to defend themselves from danger, not provide them with an excuse for killing innocent people. In 2012, Michael Dunn, a white man, was accused of the attempted murder of seventeen-year-old Jordan Davis, a black teenager in Jacksonville, Florida. Davis and his three friends were at a Florida gas station playing loud music when Dunn asked the four teenagers if they would turn down their music. Dunn states that he began to feel threatened when Davis started saying disrespectful and inappropriate words to him. Dunn then opened fired, shooting at the car that the four teenagers were inside of.

The question still remains: how is it that Dunn felt so threatened by unarmed teenagers when he had a weapon of his own to protect him?

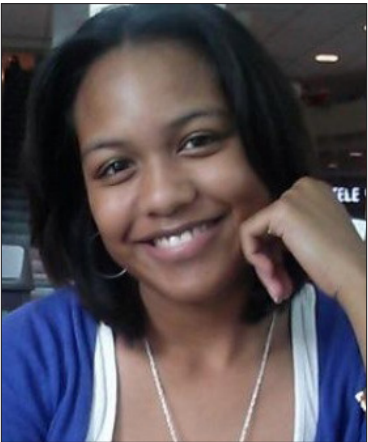
I do not believe that this case involved true justice. An innocent teenager was

murdered for the wrong reasons, yet the Florida “stand your ground” law is saying otherwise. I believe that Dunn put himself in this situation that he felt so threatened by; he approached the teenagers. What if the situation was the other way around? Would there be a case then?

He could have avoided the situation if he really wanted to, but for some reason he did not. Dunn could have easily ignored the teenagers by rolling up his car window. When the verbal argument with Davis began to get heated, he could have simply driven away. Valerie, Juror number 4, had the same mindset about the situation.

Does this case involve controversial racial issues? Maybe it does, or maybe it doesn't. In any case, Michael Dunn was sentenced to at least 60 years in prison, but not for the reason that many, including myself, wanted. As Lisa Bloom stated in her recently published Huffington Post article, “true justice requires a conviction for murder.”

A “stand your ground” law is legal in almost half of the United States. How is this law beneficial to Americans when it seems like it is being used for an excuse for heinous crimes? There have been multiple



cases in dealing with this law including the Trayvon Martin case, which also involved an unarmed teenager that was murdered. The issue is that people let other's words and their own hatred control their mind and actions. It's also a matter of people taking advantage of what is given to them. Even though this law gives another option of protection, people try to get more out it, hoping that they can slide or get a “free pass,” which I believe Michael Dunn has gotten from this case.

A “stand your ground” law is intended to protect those who have used self-defense when they are in danger and no other option is apparent. There should not be any type of violent action going on if the person is not actually being harmed.

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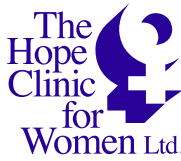
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