Trayvon was clearly operating within those boundaries when he faced-off against Zimmerman.

By GEORGE E. CURRY

NNPA Columnist

Most people are asking whether Florida's 'Stand Your Ground' law should apply to George Zimmerman, the 28-year-old neighborhood watch captain who killed an unarmed Trayvon Martin. That's the wrong question. A better one is, given the circumstances, did the law protect Trayvon when he physically confronted Zimmerman?

In a word, yes.

Looking at the 2005 law from a different perspective – through the eyes of 17-year-old Trayvon instead of Zimmerman – is critical because the debate over what happened on Feb. 26 in Sanford, Fla. is being misframed.

Some facts are undisputed: Trayvon was walking home from a nearby 7-Eleven store, where he had purchased a bag of Skittles and a can of Arizona iced tea, when he was spotted by Zimmerman, who was driving a SUV. Zimmerman dialed 911 and reported seeing a suspicious Black male in the gated townhouse community.

Though he had no proof, Zimmerman claimed that Trayvon appeared to be high on drugs. When Zimmerman confirmed that he was following Trayvon, the 911 operator specifically told him to stop following Trayvon and that police officers were on their way to the scene. Instead of following instructions, Zimmerman continued to follow Trayvon.

What happened next is unclear because we are left only with Zimmerman's version of events. We do know that shortly before he was shot to death, Trayvon had been talking on his cell phone with his girlfriend. She later told Trayvon's family lawyer that he told her he was being followed by a strange White man. She urged him to run away from him.

According to the *Orlando Sentinel*, Zimmerman told police he lost sight of Trayvon and got out of his SUV to follow him on foot. Zimmerman said he was returning to his vehicle when Trayvon allegedly approached him from the rear. The two exchanged words and began fighting. The neighborhood watch captain claimed Trayvon knocked him to the ground with a punch in the nose. Zimmerman said Trayvon climbed on top of him and began slamming his head into the sidewalk.

Zimmerman told police that he began yelling for help, but two voice experts hired by the *Sentine* l concluded that the voice heard screaming for help on the 911 tapes was not that of the neighborhood watch captain. During the scuffle, Zimmerman pulled his 9 millimeter semi-automatic handgun and fatally shot Trayvon once in the chest.

Police said that when they arrived, Zimmerman was bleeding from the nose, had a swollen lip and had cuts on the back of his head.

Those details were leaked by police to the Orlando newspaper in hopes of bolstering Zimmerman's case. However, even if everything Zimmerman said is true – which is doubtful – he was clearly the aggressor, not the victim. He was the one who pursued Trayvon against the advice of the 911 dispatcher. And with police officers en route, he decided to leave his SUV and hunt for Trayvon.

Even supporters of Florida's Stand Your Ground law don't believe Zimmerman should be allowed to hide behind the controversial legislation.

State Rep. Dennis Baxley, the Ocala Republican who sponsored the bill in the House, told the *T ampa Bay Times,*
"They got the goods on him [Zimmerman]. They need to prosecute whoever shot the kid. He has no protection under my law."

Jeb Bush, who signed the bill into law when he was governor of Florida, agrees.

"This law does not apply to this particular circumstance," he said. "Stand your ground means stand your ground. It doesn't mean chase after somebody who's turned their back."

Florida statute 776.013(3), known as the Stand Your Ground law, says, in part:

(*a) person who is not engaged in an unlawful activity and who is attacked in any other place where he or she has a right to be has no duty to retreat and has the right to stand his or her ground and meet force with force, including deadly force if he or she reasonably believes it is necessary to do so to prevent death or great bodily harm to himself or herself or another or to prevent the commission of a forcible felony.*

Trayvon was clearly operating within those boundaries when he faced-off against Zimmerman. He was a guest in one of the townhouses and therefore had an undeniable reason to be in the neighborhood. He had no duty to retreat simply because Zimmerman was the aggressor. And Trayvon had every right to believe that the person who had been stalking him was intent on inflicting great bodily harm.

Regardless of how Zimmernan's family tries to spin the facts, it was Trayvon Martin who had the clear right to stand his ground. Whatever he did to Zimmerman was totally justified. And Zimmerman had no right to kill a 17-old-old youth carrying only a bag of candy and iced tea.

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of Emerge magazine, is editor-in-chief of the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service and editorial director of Heart & Soul magazine. He is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach. Curry can be reached through his Web site, www.georgecurry.com. You can also follow him at www.twitter.com/curry george .