

Profiling Robert Allen Zimmerman

by Linda Seccaspina

Since when has it become a crime to walk about a neighbourhood?
No one will ever convince me that it 's okay to follow, harass, or approach any unarmed person with a gun and shoot them.

In New York, the police can stop and frisk anyone who they think looks suspicious. In Florida as you well know, you can stop, shoot and kill any person who appears fishy as long as you comply with Stand Your Ground, although they never used that in George Zimmerman's defense.

Zimmerman was supposed to back down when he encountered Trayvon Martin, but one of the burdens of being a black male is carrying the heavy weight of other people's suspicions. Society has become frightened of anything that moves and we have become a people who go, "cluck, cluck, cluck."

In October of 2009 Robert Allen Zimmerman was wandering around a low-income, predominantly minority neighbourhood in Long Branch, N.J. looking at houses. One of the local residents became concerned and called police as they assumed he was looking for drugs or he must be crazy and be a danger to himself or the people around him.

The police officer drove up to the man, who was wearing a blue jacket, and asked him his name and the following exchange ensued:

"What is your name, sir?" the officer asked.

"My mother called me Robert Allen Zimmerman, but you can call me Bob Dylan," Dylan said.

"OK, what are you doing here?" the officer asked.

"I'm on tour," the singer replied.

The officers asked Dylan for identification but the music icon didn't have any ID with him. He told the officers he was just walking around looking at houses to pass some time before that night's show with Willie Nelson and John Mellencamp in nearby Lakewood. The officers asked Dylan, 68, to accompany them back to the Ocean Place Resort and Spa, where the performers were staying. Once there, tour staff vouched for Dylan to two young police officers who had no idea who he was.

How frightened we are when a scared "resident" will call the cops on someone who was doing nothing more than taking a walk around the block. How lost we are when a man can be harassed by anyone for walking down the street minding his own business.

One day you too could find yourself in a similar situation being profiled in a strange neighbourhood, and if you think that isn't so — ask a couple of your African American friends about it. I suggest that everyone read "The Pedestrian" by Ray Bradbury which is based on a society where it is illegal to walk around. Seems like Bradbury correctly predicted the future, just as he did with so many other things.

It makes me very angry that our differences will never go away and society will never tolerate each other completely. We'll be post-racial when we're post-human.

"How does it feel to be on your own, a complete unknown, like a rolling stone?"

