



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on June 28, 2013

Star Witness Against Zimmerman Flops Big Time

The prosecution's "star witness" against former neighborhood watchman George Zimmerman, accused of murder in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, endured an embarrassing grilling both inside the Florida courtroom and in the national media. From potentially incriminating social-media posts publicized by reporters to major gaffes during her testimony, Rachel Jeantel, 19 (shown), has sparked even more criticism of what legal experts say appears to be an overzealous bid to convict Zimmerman regardless of the [evidence](#) supporting his claims of self-defense.



First, reporters [uncovered](#) a Twitter account used by Jeantel, who was on the phone with Martin shortly before he was killed and has been repeatedly described as prosecutors' "star" witness in the case. While dozens of the expletive-laced and potentially incriminating messages were deleted or "scrubbed" in recent days, the controversial posts were captured by journalists before being taken down. Jeantel tweeted about everything from "getting high" and drug use to underage drinking and apparent drunk driving.

Inside the courtroom, matters went even worse for prosecutors. Among other controversies, the key witness was forced to admit in cross-examination that she could not understand the handwriting in a letter that she supposedly "wrote" about the killing. "I don't read cursive," she responded when Zimmerman's defense attorney asked Jeantel if she could read the document. The witness claimed that a friend had helped her write it, but media accounts [said](#) the explosive revelation sent a "hush" through the courtroom.

Jeantel's testimony also revealed other major holes in the prosecution's case. For example, while the establishment media and race-profiteers have been fiendishly trying to paint Zimmerman, who is Hispanic, as a racist, Jeantel said that Martin had in fact made a racist comment about Zimmerman over the phone. According to the witness, Martin told her there was a "creepy-a** cracker" following him. Cracker, of course, is generally considered a [racist term](#) used to describe whites.

There were also some apparent contradictions in Jeantel's story — major ones. During her testimony, for instance, she claimed that shortly before the shooting, she heard Martin ask Zimmerman "why are you following me?" After that, Jeantel claimed she heard Martin tell Zimmerman to "get off!" Under cross-examination by the defense, however, Jeantel alleged that she had not mentioned the supposed remarks in earlier statements because she did not think they were important. In a taped interview with prosecutors before the trial, Jeantel had also said she "couldn't hear" Martin tell Zimmerman to get off.

While on the witness stand, Jeantel even admitted to telling several lies [under oath](#). Defense attorney Don West pointed out that the witness, who had known Martin since elementary school, lied to Martin's mother about her age, claiming she was 16 when she was in fact two years older than that. Jeantel also



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told Martin's mother that she did not attend the funeral due to hospitalization, which was untrue as well. The witness claimed the lies were told because of how she felt.

Unsurprisingly, defense attorneys seized on the testimony to argue that Jeantel was an unreliable witness. West, co-counsel for Zimmerman, also suggested that Jeantel did not call the police after hearing the confrontation "because Trayvon Martin started the fight, and you knew that." Jeantel responded by denying the accusation and saying she did not know what West was talking about. Eventually, Jeantel was finally forced to admit under oath that she did not know who started the fight.

In the court of public opinion, meanwhile, the "star" witness was being grilled as well. The Smoking Gun, an online service that publicizes "exclusive documents," managed to track down Jeantel's profiles on social media services. In a [series](#) of [explosive reports](#), the site exposed numerous Twitter posts by the witness that were embarrassing at the very least — and incriminating at worst. The account was promptly scrubbed, but the damage was done.

"Party time let get high," one of the posts read. Another said: "Omg everybody high" followed by "Lol we going to hell for smoke on Sunday I need some more drink." Separate tweets apparently referring to driving while under the influence were also deleted. "I hope I dnt hit no one tonight lord plz watch my driving," Jeantel reportedly wrote. "Just got home thank u lord good night," she added later. Numerous pictures and expletive-filled comments were deleted as well.

Legal experts have been [blasting the prosecution](#) and its alleged ethical violations since long before the trial began. In the wake of Jeantel's embarrassing testimony, however, more than a few analysts even suggested the witness and her statements may have actually benefited Zimmerman. Kevin Martin, a member of the conservative-leaning Project 21 black leadership network, which was formed after the [L.A. riots](#), was among the commentators suggesting that Jeantel could have hurt the prosecution.

"To say that Miss Jeantel's testimony was anything other than a fiasco would be an understatement," Martin said in [statement](#) distributed by the National Center for Public Policy Research. "The prosecution did a real disservice to the memory of Trayvon Martin in apparently not preparing Rachel Jeantel well enough to testify. To the casual observer, it seems that Miss Jeantel did not have any understanding of the gravity of testifying in this trial."

Meanwhile, Jeantel's demeanor in court — described in media reports as "annoyed," "confused," "combative," "hostile," and more — was probably not helpful to prosecutors either. Among the more controversial comments: referring to the defense attorney as "the bald man" and answering questions with remarks like "that's retarded."

"Her seeming contempt for the proceedings of the court itself was detrimental," Project 21's Martin continued. "While some outside observers were very critical of the defense's tactics early on, it must be remembered that the burden is not really on the defense here as much as it is on the prosecution to prepare their star witness. It seems that did not happen here."

Some legal analysts suggested that West may have been too hard on Jeantel during cross examination — especially considering the [controversial selection](#) of an all-female jury, which might sympathize with her. At one point, for example, the defense asked the witness whether she was feeling OK after the previous day's testimony. In a question that might have sounded like it was aimed at making Jeantel sound ridiculous, West asked her "what wet grass sounds like," a question based on her previous statements.

The defendant has argued from the start that Martin brutally attacked him and bashed his head on the



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ground on February 26, 2012, leading Zimmerman, 29, to shoot in self-defense. Photographs of the injuries and [other evidence appear to corroborate](#) those claims, legal experts have said. Zimmerman was not even arrested until more than 40 days after the incident — not until race-profiteers and [deceptive media coverage](#) tried to inject alleged racism into the case.

The prosecution, meanwhile, is trying to prove that Zimmerman profiled the unarmed 17-year-old, followed him, and then murdered him with a “depraved mind showing no regard for human life.” With much of the key evidence now out in the open — Jeantel’s testimony, the 911 call, and more — the trial is expected to last at least another week, possibly more.

The judge [ruled](#) that defense attorneys cannot talk about Martin’s history of drug use, school suspensions, and more. Also not admissible: testimony based on novel techniques that could supposedly identify Martin as the person screaming that night. If convicted by the jury on charges of second-degree murder, Zimmerman could face life in prison.

Photo of Rachel Jeantel: AP Images

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