

JENA 6 BRIEFING

Please bring this information to the attention of your members.

Jena, Louisiana is in LaSalle Parish, Louisiana. There are about 350 African Americans in the town of less than 3000. LaSalle Parish has a population of about 14,000 people – 12% African American.

On September 20, 2007 in Jena, Louisiana, a judge will determine if 17-year-old Mychal Bell, a young Black male will be sentenced to serve 22 years in prison. Bell and five of his fellow Black high school students, ranging from the ages of 15 to 17 years of age, are facing a lifetime in prison for a schoolyard fight. In total, the young Black male high school students are facing up to 100 years in prison, with charges of attempted murder, the alleged weapon - tennis shoes.

In rural Louisiana, a Black student asked permission from school administrators to sit under the "white tree." Permission was granted and the next day three nooses were hung from the tree, a tree symbolically labeled "for white students only."

- ✓ The school's principal recommended expulsion for the three white students responsible. The superintendent of schools over-ruled the expulsion and gave the students a three-day suspension for "an adolescent prank."
- ✓ Over the next several weeks, Black students organized a sit-in under the tree; the District Attorney threatened them with "stop making a fuss over this innocent prank – I can be your best friend or your worst enemy. I can take away your lives with a stroke of my pen."
- ✓ The school was put on lockdown. A still unresolved fire burned down the main academic building.
- ✓ A Black student was beat up at a party by whites. The white assailant who cracked a beer bottle on the Black student's head received a "simple battery charge." Another white student involved in several of the incidences, on and off campus, began taunting the African American students at school, was knocked down and beat up by Black students. He was taken to the hospital, treated, released and went to a social event that evening.
- ✓ Six Black Jena high school students were charged with attempted second-degree murder and expelled from school. Bails were set from \$70,000 - \$138,000.

Jena is the same place where in 2000 the Juvenile Correctional Center for Youth was forced to close due to racism and choking of juveniles by the guards. Jena now joins the historic and infamous line of gross legal injustices against African Americans in the tradition of the Tulia, Texas arrests in 1999.

And throughout America's rural communities, the story is being repeated over and over again, case after case, our children wasting away in adult prisons. African American man-child in the promise land still at risk and still under watch.

Facts to Know and Share

Over 10,000 youth are presently incarcerated in US adult prisons. African American men are three times more likely than white men to face jail once they have been arrested in the US; 24.4 percent of African Americans arrested in 2005 ended up in jail compared with 8.3 percent of white men; African American men receive jail sentences that are on average 15 percent longer than whites convicted of the same crime. (State of Black America Urban League Report)