

Making sense out of Jena Six's nonsense

By George E. Curry
Special to Sentinel-Voice

One would think they would have learned their lesson in Jena, La., by now — but they haven't. Of the teens making up the Jena Six, five didn't have a criminal record. So authorities decided to first prosecute Mychal Bell, the one who did have a record. They apparently thought it would be easier to get convictions later against his more upstanding co-defendants. But they mishandled Bell's case and had no idea that their legal shenanigans would ignite a national outcry.

The Jena Six case is being portrayed in the White-owned media as being simply a case of six African-American youth attacking a fellow White student at Jena High School, stomping him into a state of unconsciousness.

Most accounts gloss over racially charged incidents that preceded the attack, including the hanging of three nooses on a Jena High tree after the unofficial Whites-only lunch area had been desegregated (the principal recommended that the three culprits be expelled, but the school board overruled him); Whites beating Robert Bailey Jr., one of the Jena Six, prior to the assault on the White student; and a White student drawing a rifle on African-Americans at a local convenience store. Instead of arresting the White student, the Black victims were charged with several

crimes, including stealing the weapon they had wrestled from the White student.

Adding to this perverted version of Jena justice was the approach the prosecutor and judge took toward Bell, a star running back at Jena High. As long as he was putting on stellar performances on the field, like the time he gained 232 yards in a 40-14 rout of Vidalia High, no one seemed overly concerned about his off-field antics. According to court records, Bell had been involved in two cases of battery and two instances of damage to property. He had been placed on probation until January 18, 2008, his 18th birthday.

The cheers turned into boos after the attack on the White student, Justin Barker, who has since been expelled from Jena High for taking a hunting gun to school.

Under Louisiana's Children Code, someone 15 or older can be tried as an adult for certain violent crimes, such as attempted murder. Bell was 16 years old at the time of the incident. The Jena Six were initially charged with attempted second-degree murder and conspiracy to commit murder. This meant that only the 14-year-old unnamed juvenile in the case would be exempt from be-



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ing tried as an adult.

Bell's bond was initially set at \$130,000, but it was later reduced to \$90,000. He was the only member of the Jena Six unable to post bond.

Shortly before Bell's trial began in June, LaSalle Parish District Attorney Reed Walters reduced the charges to aggravated second-degree battery and conspiracy to commit battery. Bell was convicted by an all-White jury. Although the reduced charges were not sufficient to try Bell as an adult, District Court Judge J.P. Mauffray Jr. threw out the conspiracy conviction against Bell, but inexplicably maintained he still had jurisdiction over the battery charge in adult court.

The Third Circuit Court of Appeals in Louisiana disagreed, ruling on Sept. 14 that Judge Mauffray "erred" in maintaining jurisdiction over the battery case and holding that "the conviction for aggravated second degree battery is vacated." The appeals judges ruled "jurisdiction remains exclusively in juvenile court."

Judge Mauffray was forced to release Bell on \$45,000 bond, which was put up by a Black businessman.

In small, rural cities, such as Jena, judges

often preside over both juvenile and adult courts.

So, when Bell went to juvenile court, where there is no jury, there to meet him was none other than Judge Mauffray, the judge who had been overruled for his mishandling of the adult case against Bell.

Instead of recusing himself because he had a conflict of interest, Mauffray ruled that Bell had violated the terms of his probation growing out of a December 25, 2005, battery by getting in a fight with the White student and ordered him back to jail after two weeks of freedom.

Bell's attorneys are filing yet another appeal on his behalf, hoping to extricate Mauffray from a case he seems determined to control.

On Nov. 7, the four remaining defendants eligible to be tried as adults — Robert Bailey Jr., Carwin Jones, Bryant Purvis and Theo Shaw — will appear in court for a hearing. Unlike Bell, they can be clearly tried as adults.

Just as protesters descended on Jena September 20, the original date scheduled for Bell's hearing, they should return en masse on Nov. 7 to let officials in Jena know that what they consider Jena justice is no justice at all.

George E. Curry is a speaker, moderator and media coach.

Nine big issues speeding demise of America

By Harry C. Alford
Special to Sentinel-Voice

America, a.k.a. The United States, came out of World War II as a new world leader. It has been a little over 62 years and our leadership appears to be in jeopardy.

We will be history's shortest "Empire" or "World Leader" in terms of longevity unless we can return to that fine leadership that got us here. There are serious issues that are, in fact, turning into critical problems for us because we have no apparent leaders that can face these issues head on and provide us with the prescription to overcome them.

We need a viable prescription or else the issue that is becoming a problem will fester into critical mass and bring our society down like a lead balloon. There are nine major problems that need immediate attention if we are to survive as a world leader. Here they are.

Social Security System: This program has accumulated a debt we cannot pay. It was a slick "ponzi game" created before the big war. Blacks would pay a disproportionate amount into the system as our lifespan was quite less than Whites. A bigger boom was the enormous increase in population after the World

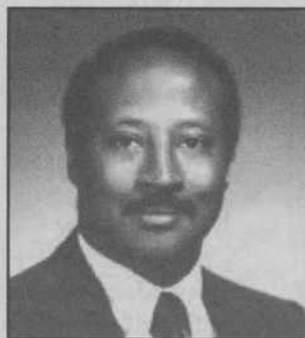
War II that created more into the coffers for a small retirement population.

That has significantly changed. This system is over \$1 trillion in debt and we don't have a clue as to how we can fix it. Our politicians are saying "Don't Worry."

National Debt: We are over \$14 trillion in debt to the world. This is a record level and we have no strategy how we can alleviate it. Our biggest creditor, to everyone's shock, is China who holds 20 percent of this debt. If they were to call it in, our dollar would shrink to pennies.

Already, the Euro (European currency) is whipping our dollar like never before. Our politicians are saying "Don't Worry."

Healthcare: This is a total crisis. Companies can no longer afford to offer it to their workforce and individuals cannot even begin to provide adequate coverage for their families. We are a first world nation with a third world healthcare delivery system. A third world delivery system at the highest



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costs known to the world, it's a living tragedy.

There was a time when doctors were rich and the masses were healthy. The doctors are no longer rich and we can't afford to be healthy. Our politicians are saying "Don't Worry."

Terrorism: No time in history has a nation so strong be in the grips of fear due to a

minute few idiots. Terrorists living in caves and bent on suicide are holding us in total fear. Rules and laws are being generated at the expense and quality of life of the general public because our security and intelligence forces have become totally inept. The CIA, Central Intelligence Agency, which was born from World War II, seems to be impotent. Our politicians are saying "Don't Worry."

Education: A decent education for our children should be a right and not a privilege. If we cannot rely on a viable public education system, then we are going to produce inferior readiness for this competing global society. We can no longer lead the world if

we cannot educate our children. We don't have a clue as to what will solve this problem. Our politicians say "Don't Worry."

Trade Imbalance: 40 percent of what is in your grocery store's produce and fruit section comes from another nation. Our manufacturing plants are closing down and moving to other countries.

Their products will be sold back to us. Our manufacturing prowess was the key to our victory in World War II. Today, it is only a memory of what it once was. We buy more than we sell and our jobs are dwindling. Our politicians say "Don't Worry."

Military Collapse: Our once proud military machine is a skeleton of what it once was. As a veteran of the U.S. Army I am appalled at how we operate our military today. Reserves are used as regular troops and the combat strain on them and their families is enormous.

Never have our troops been so demoralized as today. We are so weak that there can be no exit strategy regardless of the conflict. Our politicians say "Don't Worry."

Immigration: No courage and no policy. Who's right and who is wrong? Define legal and prosecute illegal. Let's develop a true policy. Our politicians say "Don't Worry."

Sub-Prime Mortgages: The easy credit rip-offs have now hit our neighborhoods. Millions of Americans, especially Blacks, are losing their American Dream (home and property). As we get kick out into the streets due to reckless financing schemes, all we can do is cry and face a credit collapse. Our politicians say "Don't Worry."

Don't worry? Hell, I am terrified!
Can we find a JFK type of president and Congress this time?

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ticket.

That's stupid! It is also evil and just plain wrong if you are doing the more serious crimes like robbing, raping, assaulting, or killing. At the end of it all there will be someone, who looks nothing like you, who will profit from your stupidity and your evil deeds, while you sit in a cell and waste your life away.

When you get out of jail you look for a job, mostly from someone who does not look like you, and get frustrated because you can't

get hired. Then after so many turn-downs you decide to do something else stupid and go right back into the same system. Can't you see the pattern here?

It is sad that Black people, especially, would subject ourselves to such a no-win situation, but we do it everyday. Even sadder is the fact that our illogical actions have a negative and exacerbating effect on our friends and families. We end up paying on both ends of the system, folks.

This article started with a simple phone call, but you can see the implications of our

behavior when it comes to crime and punishment — and, I might add, wealth. In a system, things work together, in conjunction with one another; everything fits together, brothers and sisters.

As for the money-making prison system, let's stay out of the cells and get into sales — legal sales. In the meantime, maybe we should look into using carrier pigeons to talk to one another.

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