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Jena 6 Rally (Part 3: The Understanding)

Part 3 of 3

By Shamontiel

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I got a letter in the mail today from Jan Schakowsky, of the House of Representatives, who stated that "...the original charges, which allow up to 100 years in jail, are extremely out of line with the crime. I applaud the decision, by the District Attorney in this case for reducing the charges against one of the defendants, Mychal Bell." But Schakowsky also goes on to say, "Although I am a member of Congress and can have no official role in this matter, I assure you that I am monitoring this situation closely." Well, Ms. Schakowsky, I assure you that grassroots members all over America are not only monitoring this situation closely—we're also taking an official role in this matter. I've said it in a previous article, [How African American Followers Can Be Leaders](#), and I'll say it again. If regular common folk wait for other people to do something that they can do on their own, we will never get anything accomplished. I heard complaints about the NAACP, Jesse Jackson, and major news networks not covering the issues. But the more I listened, the more I wondered "Why can't you step up to the plate instead of waiting for someone else to do it?" If not for those who were less popular to speak out, I still would have never known about the Jena 6 case.

I learned about the Jena 6 case by listening to [R2C2H2 The Artivist's BlogTalkRadio show](#). Various people I've encountered found out about it through [Michael Baisden's radio show](#). I've heard several people say the first time they heard about it was through me. The list goes on of various ways that the Jena 6 issue was explored, but in all of the people I interviewed at the march, at my job, and in my family, not one person said they found out about it through a major news network or someone who was considered to be an African American leader. That's not to pick on these stations and people. I say that to say that common folk have a lot more power than we think they do. If we want things done, waiting for Schakowsky or CNN or radio stations to do it is not going to happen. People who couldn't give a damn about hip hop music knew that Kanye West and 50 Cent's albums were coming out on September 11th, the anniversary of USA PATRIOT Day. I saw so many articles, reviews, and blogs on that, but when searching through [AssociatedContent.com](#) and other sites, I was finding a minimal amount of information on Jena 6. After the rally on September 20th, I'm finding pages upon pages upon pages. Finally, people are posting MySpace bulletins, blogs, and sending email forwards about relevant issues like the Jena 6 instead of surveys with "deep" questions like "What's your favorite color?" Even excellent fiction books such as [Andre Coleman's Blackbirds](#) take on the subject of racism in Louisiana.

People in the crowd watched [Mychal Bell's mother, Melissa Bell](#) come to tears with all of the support her son had from regular people who wanted to take a stand. Fifteen thousand to 20,000 people showing up on buses, chanting, wearing shirts, guzzling water in the heat, and standing outside of a courthouse waiting on a response to Bell's fate came to Jena, Louisiana because they cared. [Tenisha Wilkerson](#) would not have organized the Chicago March to Free the Jena 6 if she had not cared. [Benita Arnold](#) would not have organized a bus trip to Jena, Louisiana from the Midwest if she had not cared. [Michael Baisden](#) would not have set up his Website so as many people as possible could come out to Jena, Louisiana if he had not cared. Even people who had minor setbacks fought the good fight to keep rallying. One gentleman on our Spirit Tours bus had heat stroke and Jena's hospital wouldn't allow us to come in and check on him. There was one truck and a police car blocking the entrance, and only a maximum of two people could go in at a time because, as the driver said, "Jena just doesn't know how to handle this much activity."

Those who could not come to the rally wore black shirts or Jena 6 t-shirts, spread the word to those around them, went to various events in their own hometowns, and/or had their noses glued to a computer to watch YouTube videos and news interviews of what was going on. We really do care. The news would like to believe we're more interested in Britney Spears being pregnant or Paris Hilton going to prison, but events like September 20th are a smack in the face to major news outlets that we want to hear about something else. We're tired of only seeing Black faces on the news when they're in prison, but this was one of those times that we really wanted to see these young Black men's faces. Even FOX news, a station that takes great joy in running every possible Black person's name they can through the ground, avoided talking about the Jena 6 case too much. You want to know why? Because even the most creative writer would have a hard time spinning this one to make the Jena 6 look wrong. These young men stood up for their civil rights, and in turn, the crowd screamed "We got your back!" to show that we were behind them as well.

On my way home from the trip after seeing people cheering and rooting for Mychal Bell supposedly being released and the crowd raising the money for bail, I went into a Chinese food restaurant called [China Buffet](#). I'd forgotten I had my [Free Jena 6 t-shirt](#) on. The host stopped me before I could sit at a table, grinned, and said "I've been hearing about you all over the news. I really wish Chinese people would come together like you guys. White people stick together. Black people stick together. I wish we could." I told Johnson Guo, the host, that no matter what race/culture we are, we all have our faults and sometimes we are not as united as we'd like to be, but in situations like this, people around America had no choice but to do what news programs and the law refused to do: stand up.

As we all know by now, Mychal Bell, even after the crowd had the funds to bail him out was not granted permission to be released. This news did not come until after most buses were already on the road. Were we tricked into thinking that Bell would be released? Yes. If we'd have known he wouldn't have been released that day, would we have stayed? Yes. Did the courthouse and Reed Walters know this? You're damn right they did. Why do you think (318) 992-8282, Reed Walters' number, just rings and rings? But what they fail to realize is that we will not stop until the charges are clear. We will keep writing, keep calling, keep fighting, keep reading, and keep visiting. It's too late for us to step down and let the legal system handle this issue alone. We've already seen how much power there are in numbers.

For more information on the rally, please visit [Jena 6 Rally \(Part 1: The Scene\)](#)

[Jena 6 Rally \(Part 2: The Experience\)](#)

For more information on another rally for the Jena 6, please visit [Chicago Marches to Free the Jena 6](#)

For more information on the Jena 6, please visit [Jena 6: Six Black Men Face Up to 100 Years Prison Time](#)

More resources

http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/388808/jena_6_rally_part_1_the_scene.html

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