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Jena 6 Rally (Part 1: The Scene)

Part 1 of 3

By **Shamontiel**

Jena townspeople closed their stores, wrapped tape around their homes with Keep Out signs on them, put up big-lipped and big-eyed Keep Out tree masks, and a Closed Thursday sign on Popeye's Chicken. For that kind of sign to only be on a chicken restaurant, Black visitors confirmed what kind of mindset they were about to deal with when they traveled into Jena, Louisiana on September 20, 2007 for Mychal Bell's trial. Police officers were on every block directing semi-heavy traffic and parked side by side around neighborhoods to make sure ralliers didn't enter. White residents parked their trucks by the entrance to Jena and took photos of the buses. A guesstimate of 15,000 to 20,000 people arrived in Jena, but no one really knows the true number of people who would have been there because 60 buses were turned away due to the massive crowding.

There were rallies in Alexandria, led by Michael Baisden, a rally with the Rainbow/Push Coalition and Jesse Jackson in Jena, and a rally that was full of college students from various southern universities, Black Greek organizations, grassroots organizations, people from outside of the United States as well as inside the United States, popular radio deejays, and hip hop artist, Mos Def came through. Tyler Perry, screenwriter, actor, and director of movies such as "Daddy's Little Girls," got out of his limo and walked with the crowd because it was too crowded to drive at one point. Ray Nagin, mayor of New Orleans, shook hands and took pictures with anybody who walked by him as he strolled to the park where a concert was going on, NAACP members met, and Robert Bailey Jr. was in attendance. Cousin Jeff of BET marched with a crowd of people behind the Rainbow/Push Coalition. While some questioned why there were three different rallies, others understood the perks of three. If a bus couldn't get into Jena, LA, then it might be able to get into Alexandria, LA. If a bus had trouble getting its passengers in Jena, LA on time to be in the first rally, they were just in time for the second one. And the people came in droves.

At one point, an officer by the park that Nagin was headed to said he wished the rally would end soon so he could go home. No such luck. The rallies started somewhere around 9 am and ended around 6 pm. Various people gave speeches, and the crowds were packed with brown faces holding up various signs about the Jena 6 case (ex. Mychal Bell's face; signs demanding that Reed Walters go to prison; and signs demanding to free the Jena 6 with photos of nooses, trees, and real lynchings). Chants were heard back and forth in call and response form. The ringleader would say, "What do we want?" The rest of the protestors would say, "Justice and peace." The ringleader would follow with, "When do we want it?" The protestors answered, "Now!"

One radio personality sitting on the roof of a store had various helpers with boxes raised to the sky collecting Mychal Bell's bail money while a band played. Black Panther members walked the sidewalks on the inner side of the courthouse, and a 16-year-old gentleman named Troy, with his parents, held signs of himself after he'd been brutally beaten by police officers for doing nothing other than being a young brotha with dreadlocks driving in New Orleans, Louisiana in an expensive SUV. Approximately 30 officers surrounded the courthouse steps with their arms folded and looking ready for any protestors to go berserk.

But just as various organizers and participators continuously said, we all came in peace to get Bell out of jail and had no interest in bothering the others who lived there. As far as we could tell, Bell was unable to come to the windows or doors to see the crowd he drew, but you could hear the chanting and speeches from blocks away. Rumors circulated that he was still in jail and not in the courthouse finding out whether he could be released. The crowd of people didn't just include Black people though; there was a White woman playing the drums while protestors chanted, a trio of White ladies with a sign that said "Not All White Folks Are Crazy," Joann Michel of [Revolution: Voice of the Revolutionary Communist Party](#) newspaper rode with Friends of Northwest Indiana on a Spirit Tours bus (traveling from Midwest states such as Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri), along with hundreds of other diverse groups.

Jena 6 t-shirts were in various designs with everything from tree stumps, nooses, Jena 6 faces, and messages stating to free the Jena 6, such as "Enough is Enough," "It's Not About the Tree. It's About Me," and "Just When We Thought It Was Safe, Here We Go Again." African flags blew lazily in the 91 degree weather, and while a few people were rushed to the hospital for heat stroke, thousands sucked up the heat, guzzled water from the [American Red Cross](#) trucks, and kept the rally moving.

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

More resources

http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/338132/jena_6_six_black_men_face_up_to_100.html

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