

Something is rotten in the state of Louisiana

Black and white make gray. In a small town in Louisiana, though, the combination draws forth the color red – the color of blood.

In front of the high school in Jena, L.A., a small, predominantly white town, there once stood an oak tree. Traditionally, the tree served as a meeting spot for white students attending Jena High School. Last year, a black student asked school administrators if he could sit under the tree. The following day, three nooses were found hanging from its branches. Three white students were suspended for what many would consider a hate crime; in Louisiana, though, these students were not breaking any state laws, and therefore, did not face any charges. Something is not right here.

Three months later, a *Gotta Go* convenience store in Jena witnessed three black students, including Robert Bailey, Jr., wrestle away a shotgun that was pointed at them by a white youth. The black teenagers fled from the site with the shotgun, only to take it to the police station where they were charged with theft of a firearm, second degree robbery, and disturbing the peace. The white student who produced the shotgun in the first place was not charged. Something is, in fact, very wrong here.

Two days later, six black youths, again including Bailey, beat Justin Barker, a white teen who openly supported the noose hangings, unconscious. He was able to attend the school's ring ceremony later that evening. The six boys who performed the beating were arrested on the charge of attempted second-degree murder. A trend seems to be forming here.

Something is rotten in the state of Louisiana - blacks and whites do not receive the same treatment.

These boys, now known as the "Jena Six," have received unjust charges that may well be rooted in the ancient practice of slavery in the southern United States.

The charges of the "Jena Six" have been lowered to second degree battery, except for the fourteen year-old who will be tried as a juvenile. In the course of trying Mychal Bell, one of the "Jena Six," the District Attorney argued that the shoes that Bell had been wearing when he kicked Barker, were "deadly weapons," a statement with which the all white jury agreed. How can shoes be deadly weapons? It goes against school policy to show up without shoes, but students are also not supposed to have weapons on campus. Are students going to get suspended for wearing shoes? What will come next? Detention for running with paper-clips? Expulsion for lending protractors? This is hypocrisy.

Many of the objections to the Jena happenings stem from the differences in punishment of the noose incident and the beating. While the events were not directly correlated, they did exhibit a difference of treatment for different types of people. Swinging nooses bring to mind a flashback of the Deep South during the late 1800s. Confederate flags and other signs representing white supremacy have been sighted around Jena, and the families of the "Jena Six" have been receiving threatening phone calls and letters.

What the "Jena Six" did was not right, but they were not nearly as wrong as authorities have made them out to be. The boys should be charged with simple battery, a fight between youngsters in disagreement. As for the nooses, hate crimes cause just as much grief as battery. It has certainly turned many eyes toward Jena in the last year. With people of all races mingling together in this great country, how can hate crimes exist? Haven't we learned to get along, or at least "peacefully coexist" by now?

Racial discrimination is an anachronism in the 21st century that needs speedy and immediate removal. Excuse me, Mr. Jim Crow, I thought you were dead. Why does a crime hold greater punishment for one person than it does for another? Is this a society of separate equality? Does racism still exist in the United States of America, the greatly exalted country for granting equality to everyone?

This country boasts of its rights to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” its freedom of all peoples, its great manifesto that anyone can achieve the “American Dream.” When there are people in this country, though, that do not receive fair treatment because of the color of their skin or religion or social status, there is a great discrepancy between what America practices and what it preaches.

Sources:

Jena Six. <http://www.jenasix.org/>.

Justice in Jena! <http://www.freethejena6.org/>.

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