

JENA 6 RELEASED

Friday, nearly two years after more than 320,000 of you stood up to protect them from Jim Crow justice, the Jena 6--Jesse Ray Beard, Carwin Jones, Robert Bailey, Theo Shaw, Bryant Purvis and Mychal Bell--are all now free to move ahead with their lives. We should all be proud.

The five remaining Jena 6 cases were brought to conclusion on Friday¹ when Jesse Ray, Carwin, Robert, Theo, and Bryant pleaded "no contest" to misdemeanor simple battery charges.² They will spend no time in jail, serve seven days of probation, and pay relatively minor fines and court fees.

It's an incredible outcome given that the young men were originally charged with attempted murder in small-town Louisiana and had neither the funds nor the connections to get high-quality representation or attention for their cases.

Luckily for the Jena 6, hundreds of thousands of you got involved, and the power of your participation changed the game. An amazing team of lawyers worked tirelessly to achieve Friday's outcome. Our staff helped recruit them, and your financial contributions--over \$275,000--provided the bulk of the funds for their work. Jim Boren, the coordinating attorney, said this about ColorOfChange members' contribution: "None of this would have happened without you."

But it wasn't just lawyers and money. Over 300,000 of you wrote to Governor Blanco and District Attorney Reed Walters. On September 20th, 2007, more than 10,000 of you went to Jena. Members who couldn't make it to Jena held more than 150 rallies and vigils across the country, and made more than 6,000 phone calls to elected officials in Louisiana. And a few weeks later, ColorOfChange members sent almost 4,000 complaints demanding an inquiry into the DA's actions.

Your actions offline and online helped put Jena on the map and resulted in critical coverage in every mainstream news outlet. You started a movement that made it impossible for Louisiana officials to support the status quo.

Today we offer congratulations to these young men and their families, and we say thank you to the entire ColorOfChange.org community. We're also so thankful to the attorneys who took these cases but chose to stay out of the limelight. They and several others³ are the unsung heroes of this story.

As the young men of the Jena 6 close this chapter of their lives, we wanted to give you an opportunity to wish them well. Click the link below to leave a personal statement for the young men of the Jena 6, or to listen to the voicemail from Jim Boren thanking the ColorOfChange community for our work:

<http://www.colorofchange.org/jenaresolution/?id=2570-509938>

While this is a great moment, it's important to remember that if it were not for the extreme nature of this case, most of us wouldn't have known about it or gotten involved. The reality is that there are

countless Jena 6's: young people--often Black and male--who are overcharged or unduly criminalized, and whose plight is unknown to most of the outside world.

Even in the case of the Jena 6, we need to take stock of what did not happen. While Judge JP Mauffray was taken off the case due to the appearance of bias (a pivotal moment for the cases), District Attorney Reed Walters--the person largely responsible for the problems in the first place--still has his job.

It's the reason our work cannot just be about identifying and fighting for individuals railroaded by the system, but about creating systemic change in criminal justice in America. We are truly grateful to have the chance to do this work with you, and we're hoping for your continued engagement and support.

Thanks and Peace,

-- James, Gabriel, William, Dani and the rest of the ColorOfChange.org team

June 28, 2009