



## **ALPHA KAPPA ALPHA DEMANDS JUSTICE FOR THE JENA SIX**

Chicago, Illinois – September 17, 2007 - The decision by the Louisiana Court of Appeals to overturn the conviction of Mychal Bell, one of the “Jena 6,” confirms the long-held belief by Alpha Kappa Alpha’s international president, Barbara A. McKinzie, that the charges levied against the young man were motivated by “prosecutorial overzealousness.” She said the dramatic turn of events should strengthen the resolve to demand “justice in Jena.”

To that end, she urged Alpha Kappa Alpha’s 200,000 members—and all fair-minded citizens—to fire off letters to Louisiana Gov. Kathleen Blanco and Attorney General Charles Foti and demand that they wield their constitutional power to call for a new trial. McKinzie said that on behalf of the membership, she is sending a letter to the U.S. Department of Justice asking that federal officials intervene and investigate this issue to make sure the constitutional rights of these young men are protected.

She also asked all members to wear black on Thursday, September 20—the day of unity set aside to show support for the Jena 6.

McKinzie cautioned those hailing the decision to “stop celebrating” since the fates of the six young men still hang in the balance.

“Driven by a racist dynamic in the city of Jena, Louisiana, the district attorney who levied the charges is guilty of prosecutorial overreach,” declared McKinzie. “Because lives are at stake, we demand that the governor, the attorney general and the U.S. Department of Justice launch an immediate investigation and right this judicial abuse of discretion. These boys are entitled to their constitutional right to fairness. Right now, the scales of justice are heavily tilted against the young men.”

McKinzie said the meting out of punishment that is disproportionate to the “crime” has marked the entire Jena 6 saga.

She noted that the decision to lower the punishment against the white youth who hung nooses on a tree in an apparent protest of a black youth sitting under the “whites-only” tree set the tone of unfairness that has marked the entire series of events surrounding this case.

“Levying a light punishment against these whites and dismissing it as a ‘prank’ while imposing harsher charges against the black students illustrates an unfair mindset of which school authorities and prosecutors are guilty,” McKinzie said. “An investigation will, hopefully, expose this imbalance and will result in a reexamination of this matter and a dismissal of all charges.”

She also took the occasion to place culpability on school authorities, the district attorney and parents for relinquishing their responsibilities and allowing this matter to escalate to a “national disgrace.”

“The Jena 6 case illustrates misplaced values, erosion of morals and relinquishment of parental responsibility. Because these principles lie at the core of Alpha Kappa Alpha’s platform, we must address these issues if we are to engage in an honest dialogue and learn the lessons that this case presents.”

McKinzie said that lost in the furor swirling around this case is the fact that the incident for which the students were eventually charged happened prior to the football championships.

“Some of the students charged were members of the winning team and were allowed to play so they could be used for their athletic prowess,” she noted. “Once the championship was secured and the trophy hoisted, the boys were no longer of use to the school. That’s when the prosecutors descended upon them and the charges were levied.”

McKinzie said that the “glorification of athletics” outweighed the alleged crime and minimized the incident until the boys had been used for the school’s athletic gain.

“If the charges had been that severe, the LaSalle Parish district attorney would have arrested the youth prior to the game rather than wait until afterward. This is symptomatic of a larger societal dynamic that glorifies athletes when it’s convenient and then derides them when their purpose is met. It is a double standard that sends a mixed message about our priorities.”

McKinzie also faulted the parents on both sides of the issue for not being vigilant and for not monitoring their sons’ behavior.

“Parents are empowered with the task of raising their sons and teaching them character and infusing in them values that would help them avoid situations like these. If the parents had been doing their jobs, this would not have imploded to the level where the boys’ lives and futures are at risk,” she said.

McKinzie declared that “as a community, we must reclaim our value system.”

These realities notwithstanding, McKinzie said Alpha Kappa Alpha is committed to uplifting youth through its Black Male Initiative. The Sorority is also devoted to strengthening the black family. Inspired by this, she said that the specter of these six boys spending years in jail is a dire outcome that is disproportionate to the alleged crime. She also noted that the young men have promising futures and their lives deserve to be spared.

McKinzie said, “The future of the black family hinges on the African American male being an integral part of the family unit. If the judicial system removes these young men from their families and sends them to prison on suspect charges, more than six families will be impacted. An entire community will be affected and a nation that could benefit from their talents will also be victimized by these actions.”

McKinzie added that New Orleans has been the beneficiary of the world's humanity. With chapters in Louisiana and driven by the Sorority's credo to "provide service to all mankind," members donated money to Katrina survivors. Responding to the call to address the need to rebuild homes in the region, Alpha Kappa Alpha members recently sponsored and built two homes for evacuees in partnership with Habitat for Humanity. She added that, in collaboration with the organization Feed the Children, members passed out food to 400 residents. Most significantly, she said Alpha Kappa Alpha decided to cancel a Hawaiian cruise and instead host its Leadership Conference in New Orleans. In making this change, the Sorority pumped \$5 million into the economy.

"Louisiana has been the beneficiary of Alpha Kappa Alpha's treasure, time and talents and we have provided a boost to its economy," she said.

McKinzie said that the Jena 6 scenario threatens to cast a bad light on the state. "This can be reversed with a commitment to fairness and with a resolve by officials to see that justice prevails for the Jena 6."

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