

## **RADAR PILOT SCRIPT**

### **The White Tree**

Warning: the story you are about to hear takes place in 2007, not 1955.

In Jena, Louisiana, a small, predominately white town, six black students are facing attempted murder charges for their alleged roles in a schoolyard fight. Mychal Bell, the first of the so-called Jena Six to be tried, was convicted of two felonies, and faces up to 22 years in prison.

The trouble began in September 2006, when a group of black Jena High School students sat under the so-called White tree, which, as you can probably guess, was a hang out for whites ....only.

The next day, three white students retaliated by hanging nooses from the tree. Jena High School's principal recommended the students responsible be expelled, but the expulsion committee opted for a 3-day suspension, explaining that the nooses were an innocent prank inspired by a scene from the TV miniseries Lonesome Dove.

Wait a minute: Did they mean this scene? .... Or maybe this scene?

Black students were incensed, and organized a sit-in under the White Tree, which prompted a visit to the school from District Attorney Reed Walters. Walters, flanked by police officers, warned the kids to stop their protests, saying: "I can take away your lives with a stroke of my pen"....

Following Walters' visit, black and white youth in Jena clashed in several racially charged incidents that resulted in drastically harsher criminal penalties for the black students. Robert Bailey, one of the Jena Six, was beaten by a group of whites at a party. The next day, a young white male threatened two black students with a sawed-off shotgun. The black students wrestled the gun away and fled the scene. They were later charged with theft and aggravated battery, while the man who brandished the shotgun was never charged.

The following Monday, the fight that landed the Jena Six in jail erupted in the school cafeteria. Eyewitnesses offered conflicting accounts about who was involved, but District Attorney Walters wasted no time in charging the Jena Six with second-degree attempted murder.

Which brings us back to Mychal Bell—the first of the Jena Six to be tried. Bell was convicted by an all white jury who heard testimony from all white witnesses. And Bell’s court appointed attorney failed to call a single witness on his behalf.

Local and national civil rights groups are outraged. Online activist group Color of Change is rallying concerned citizens to descend on Jena, July 31, for Mychal Bell’s sentencing.

Meanwhile, Mychal Bell’s five co-defendants will soon be tried, and District Attorney Walters, is promising to seek the maximum penalty... which is 80 years without parole.

### **Scotting Justice**

While several of the Jena Six watched fireworks from their parish prison, Independence Day came early for Lewis “Scooter” Libby, former top aide to Dick Cheney. On Tuesday, President Bush commuted the 30-month prison sentence Libby received for his role in the outing of CIA agent Valerie Plame.

Plame, you’ll remember, is the wife of former Ambassador Joe Wilson, who in 2003 debunked the Bush administration’s claim that Saddam was pursuing uranium in Africa. The leaking of Plame’s identity is widely viewed as payback for her husband’s public dissention.

Bush’s decision has met with outrage. A recent poll found 60% of Americans saying the President should have let Libby go to jail, and liberals have renewed calls for Bush and Cheney’s impeachment. So why would the President risk the last shreds of his political capital on Scooter?

Well... besides providing a cushion for his fall guy, Bush’s commutation removed any incentive for the former aide to implicate his bosses, which may have been a real threat. After Libby’s sentencing, several reporters overheard his wife saying, “we’re going to fuck them.” While no one knows whether Scooter was ready to rat out Rove and Cheney...as grand jury member Dennis Collins implied, the Libby case leaves the biggest questions unanswered:

And now on to Rapid Fire:

## **An Inconvenient Traffic Stop**

Early Wednesday morning, Al Gore's son, Al Gore III, was arrested for possession of marijuana and assorted pharmaceuticals.

This is not the first time Gore has run afoul of the law, but the timing of this arrest was especially inopportune, coming just days before his father's mega-concert Live Earth.

Perhaps the only saving grace for the young Gore is that he was pulled over in a Toyota Prius, so while his car's inside was dirtier than a D.C. drug den, his tailpipe remained squeaky clean.

## **In the Zone**

As Al Gore III ponders his wayward ways in rehab, one blessing he can count is that he wasn't arrested in a designated "drug-free zone," where criminal penalties are significantly heightened.

West Florida's Palm Beach Post recently released a study questioning the racial implications of these zones, which are usually found in urban areas with large minority populations. According to the Post, during the past 10 years in Florida, blacks convicted for distribution in "drug free zones" outnumber whites 12-1.

Due to time constraints, the half million young black men incarcerated nationwide could not be reached for comment.

## **Justice Blows**

One young black male fighting to reclaim his lost youth is Genarlow Wilson of Douglas County Georgia. In 2005, Wilson, 17 at the time, had consensual oral sex with his 15-year-old girlfriend, an act caught on video in classic R. Kelly fashion. The tape found its way to prosecutors, who convicted Wilson under an antiquated Georgia statute that made teenage fellatio a felony.

After public outcry and national media attention, the Georgia Legislature changed the law under which Wilson was tried, and in June a judge reduced Wilson's original 10-year sentence and ordered his release. However, Georgia's Attorney General appealed that decision, putting Genarlow's fate in the hands of the state Supreme Court.

In a surprise move, the Court recently expedited Wilson's appeal hearing, leading some legal experts to believe Genarlow will soon be set free. But until that day, Wilson will remain Georgia Inmate No. 1187055

Which, divided by 5138.76 equals 231, the number of years ago our nation declared its independence with the claim that all men are created equal. As we celebrate the anniversary of that radical assertion, these stories of justice denied should give us particular pause. A rich, white presidential confidant who helped hide the truth about our rush to war in Iraq walks free, while young black men convicted of lesser crimes see their best years stolen by overzealous prosecutors and discriminatory laws.

When justice depends on skin color, connections, and cash, we have to ask: If President Bush is willing to risk political fallout to save a loyal staffer, what will the rest of us do to reclaim a system that falls so far short of our highest ideals?