Hilltopics: Volume 4, Issue 3

Hilltopics Staff

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Recommended Citation
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The Jena Six: hoping for justice, a lowering of racial tension, and that Jena finds healing.

James Longhofer

It’s hard to believe that something like the events in Jena, Louisiana could still happen in America. An entire town has been consumed by racial tension and unwillingly thrust into the national spotlight because of a series of incidents that started with a dispute over a “white tree,” and culminated in the beating of a white student by six black students who were then charged with attempted second-degree murder. While there is plenty of blame to go around, the actions of the district attorney, Reed Walters, are particularly disturbing, and his abuse of authority is as bad if not worse than the behavior of Mike Nifong of the Duke Lacrosse Case.

The events surrounding the Jena Six are not the kind of thing that you would expect in 21st century America. In September 2006, a group of black students decided to sit under a tree at Jena High School that was known as a “white tree,” after being told by their principal that they had the right to sit wherever they wished. The next morning nooses dangled from the tree. The students responsible for the nooses were discovered and the principal recommended that they be expelled, although the school board overruled him and lessened their punishment to three days of in-school suspension. As a way of lowering racial tensions, the school had an assembly where District Attorney Walters spoke. Allegedly, Walters told the black students who complained about the nooses and the light punishment for the perpetrators that with “a stroke of my pen, I could make your life disappear.”

That statement has become infamous and certainly shows a level of arrogance that an elected official shouldn’t have, but it is just the least of Walters’ sins. For some reason, his statement didn’t do much to lower the tension in Jena, and over the next three months, there were a number of incidents throughout town between white and black residents. This ended in the beating of a white student by six black students and the controversial attempted murder charges. The white student was taken to the hospital, but released after being treated for two hours. While he was bruised and one eye was swollen shut, none of his injuries were life-threatening and certainly did not warrant attempted murder charges. The white student was even able to attend his high school’s ring ceremony the same night!

When the first of the Jena Six, Mychal Bell, came to trial on aggravated battery and conspiracy charges (after Walters agreed to reduce the attempted murder charge), Walters made two galling decisions. First, he decided to try Bell as an adult even though he was 16 at the time of the incident. This caused Bell’s convictions to be overturned on appeal. Second, because aggravated battery...
Pros and Cons at a Commercial Music Venue
by Jenny Simon

Although I was willing to pay twenty-five dollars plus eight dollars in convenience fees for the Bloc Party concert I still had doubts about my purchase. My uncertainties had nothing to do with the band that was performing. If anyone has heard Bloc Party you know their music is pure genius. Sometimes, no matter how spectacular the band is if the venue they perform at is unpleasant the concert will be unpleasant. Bloc Party performed at the House of Blues, that’s what I was nervous about. I had never been to the music hall or even the restaurant portion of the House of Blues until last weekend. I did not know what to expect but I knew it wasn’t going to be anything like the Gypsy Tearoom and that was unsettling.

My experience at the House of Blues started off negatively. The entrance fences displayed posters promoting 106.1 Kiss FM; which I thought was very unnatural at an indie rock concert. Kiss FM isn’t exactly known for their eccentric artist line up. Then as I stood in line waiting for my over 21 wrist band I noticed a massive amount of pre-pubescent teenagers herding into the venue. All I could think was, “Great since it’s a 17 and up concert smoking and drinking rules are going to be strict.” I was half right. The music venue had a no smoking policy, which was a disappointment. Of course I am bias as a smoker, but even as a non-smoker you expect to leave a concert with your clothes reeking of cigarette smoke. It comes with the package. Instead everyone had to go back upstairs, outside and then they could smoke. Although it was tedious to exit the building every time you had the urge to smoke a cigarette the upside was you could take your alcohol anywhere. At this point my opinion of the House of Blues was mediocre.

The actual layout of the House of Blues was one of the best music hall setups that I have ever been too. The bars were located on the sides of the room. This made ordering drinks less chaotic and a lot easier than it is at Gypsy, where the bar was in the middle of the music hall. My next concern was the cliental attending the show. The House of Blues is a very commercial venue, so I expected to see a lot of attendees not normally fitting the profile of an indie concert goer. While I did run into a lot of d-bags I wasn’t going to get me down. All I wanted from the crowd (because a crowd can also make or break a concert) was some righteous dancing.

As soon as Bloc Party came on stage it was like a completely different venue. The crowd went crazy, everyone was dancing, and if they weren’t, they looked like the odd ones. Someone even started smoking pot, which definitely made it fell like a dirty, smoky, old venue; rather than a sterile, commercial one.

In the end I got what I expected from the House of Blues. but now I will be less likely to assume a venue sucks before I go to the show.

Jenny Simon is a senior sociology major.
Person or Robot, Part 1: Ed Hochuli, head NFL referee (Part 1 of a 1-part series)

by Josh Wood

If you happened to be watching last Sunday night’s football game in which the Cowboys took on the NFC Champion Chicago Bears, you might have been slightly frustrated with the officiating. Let me rephrase: you might have had to go out and buy a new TV remote because yours shattered into a million pieces. Those darn remotes are so aerodynamic these days, and just beg to be thrown across the living room in response to a ridiculous call. So I am assuming you saw the erroneous clipping penalty called on tight end Jason Whitten (who I feel is the most mild-mannered individual ever to play the position). How about the head ref winding the clock down to finish the half, despite the fact that Dallas deserved three seconds on the clock to attempt a makeable field goal?

As spectators of the realm of professional sports, the fans need something that gives them hope. Hope that the residing ref didn’t just fail an eye exam. Hope that a back judge can get down the field quick enough to see that blatant pass interference on the defense. Hope that one man can inspire hundreds of youngsters to dream that they too can one day be an NFL referee. That shining star is Ed Hochuli.

I’m sure you are asking yourself many questions. Who is Ed Hochuli? Where have I heard that name before? Why am I even bothering to read an article about an obscure sports referee? Don’t worry, as these questions and many more will be answered. Simply put, Ed Hochuli is the man. When he steps onto the field of play, interest in the superstars of football is lost; all eyes are on him. As a head NFL ref and crew chief, it is Ed who wears the mic; it is Ed who can stop a battle between two giant football teams and command the attention of millions of audience members. It is Ed who explains every call with a sureness that is unparalleled in sports officiating. Ed is probably a referee-bot sent back through time to stop bad calls.

Where do his robot-like powers come from? A combination of physicality and intellect make Ed an officiating machine. His balance of brains and brawn give him this authority. Physically, Ed Hochuli is in better shape than many of the football players half his age. He was a linebacker at UTEP in his college days, and he hasn’t lost that physical edge. Several players actually attempt to compare biceps with him during the lulls before a game; few live to tell the tale. He also has perfect vision—he can probably count the bumps on the football from over 50 yards away. Needless to say, he never misses a call. His intelligence is unrivaled on the field. He can analyze and settle disputes so well because he is a practicing attorney in Phoenix, Arizona. How can one man do so much? He’s not a man, that’s why.

Next time you’re watching Monday Night Football and see the muscular, square-jawed Hochuli explaining in great detail why that receiver was ineligible, keep this in mind: he probably won’t be on our side when the machines start to take over the world.

Josh Wood is a junior electrical engineering major

Do you have an opinion about... politics, music, class, television, football, shopping, intramurals, fraternities, movies, tests, the Mavs, sex, restaurants, religion, sororities, driving, study abroad, Umphrey Lee, fashion, news, the war, parking, technology, magazines, bars, baseball, the weather, professors, the Mustang Band, dating, books, nightclubs, Texas, the Daily Campus, pets, club sports, or anything else?

we’re listening at hilltopics@hotmail.com
Provost Paul Ludden: SMU’s newest academic administrator sits with Hilltopics for Q&A

by Todd Baty

This academic year, Hilltopics will be sitting down with various members of the SMU community in hopes of initiating a very open and frank conversation on our university and its future. This week, I spoke with Provost Paul Ludden, one of SMU’s newest academic administrators. Dr. Ludden served as Dean of the College of Natural Resources at the University of California, Berkeley before coming to SMU.

As one of our newest members in SMU’s administration, tell me a little about how you arrived here. Essentially, why did you choose to take this job?—why SMU?

I was completing my term as dean at Berkeley and considering what was next when out of the blue the search firm conducting the search for Provost called me and said, “have you thought about SMU?” I knew of SMU and I had a very high regard of SMU and that began an exchange of information, and I visited, really fell in love with the place, and here we are.

What was your first positive and negative observation of SMU?

The positive one is easy and that is the people. The first people that I met were members of the search committee. It was a broad search committee and they were obviously very enthusiastic about the place. The co-chairs were wonderful ambassadors for SMU and the whole committee made me feel welcome. They were very honest about the opportunities as well as challenges at SMU. I am way too much of an optimist to ascribe anything as a negative...It’s hot here in late July.

What do you anticipate as being your main goal as Provost and how does that relate to your initial assessment of the university?

As Provost, I am responsible for the academic programs of the university. We have a number of goals. The overriding goal is to take SMU forward. I believe that SMU is regarded as an excellent, but regional university. Our goal is to take SMU so that it is recognized as the great private university of Dallas. Every great city deserves a great university, and we intend to have SMU recognized as that university. SMU is already the leading university of Dallas; we need to make sure it is recognized as the great private university of Dallas.

Do you have any concrete examples on how you anticipate accomplishing these goals?

We’ll build on several things. We have a very significant turnover in faculty coming up, just based on the age distribution. The great competition among universities now is for the best faculty. We will be working very hard to hire the best faculty possible. We want to expand the research portfolio of the university. Great universities not only teach, but they also generate knowledge and they involve their students, their faculty, and their staff in the generation of that knowledge, so we will be dramatically expanding the research portfolio of this university. That means recognizing and rewarding research as well as recognizing and rewarding outstanding teaching. Research is teaching, when we involve our students in that process. Teaching people how to go about generating new knowledge is perhaps the most important teaching we can do to our society.

How will these goals connect to the upcoming centennial capital campaign?

We are on the early stages of defining this campaign. Clearly, this campaign will be focused on the people and the programs of SMU, so building programs, building expertise will be a great component of this capital campaign. The other thing about SMU is we need to address big ideas. We need to define what the big questions are for us. One of the things I’ll be rolling out in the next few weeks is something we are calling “Big Ideas” with a small “i” and a capital “D.” It will be an invitation for students to build groups and make links with faculty to define and address big questions relevant to Dallas, and the world, but to Dallas.

What do you think is SMU’s niche in academia? Is that niche necessarily connected to Dallas, as your previous
answer suggests?
That’s only one component of it, Todd. To be the great university of Dallas, we have to build our links to the metropolis. But we also have to play on the national stage and help define the national research and educational agenda. We have to have great international presence; that means great international programs. But we also have to define what we want to do, and we can’t do everything. It’s too early to tell you what our definition will be.

As I’m sure you have been asked before, how important are the U.S. News & World Report rankings in assessing the quality of a university’s education?
We are always pleased when groups on the outside recognize that SMU is on the ascendance among universities, but we are not going to define ourselves in terms of U.S. News and World Report rankings or any other rankings. They are a valuable endorsement of what we are trying to do, but we don’t set our agenda to attempt to satisfy this poll or that poll.

Will you be working, as Provost, to increase SMU’s ranking?
We want to take SMU forward so that we are broadly recognized as a leading university. Various formal rankings are only one component of that, but another component is when students want to be part of SMU, when we are recruiting faculty, and they recognize that this is an outstanding place.

How will SMU be able to rise through the ranks ahead of other fine academic traditions? It seems that in order for SMU to ascend, it must do so at the cost of other educational institutions. How will we be able to accomplish this?
One of the things that attracted me to this place is this is an ambitious place. I tell my students when they go out looking for jobs that a good job is where the resources match the expectations and that is quite true of SMU. We have great resources; we have great human resources. We also have great financial resources. We have a great leader in Gerald Turner, and we have a wonderful group in the President’s office. I have a wonderful cadre of deans to work with; they are inspiring people. The faculty are ambitious for themselves, their departments, and SMU. We will all work together very hard to take SMU forward. Part of our philosophy will be building bridges between and among units so that the sum is greater than the parts.

Event though you are new to campus, what is your assessment of the deaths of three students last year? That is, what does that indicate about SMU and what will you do as Provost to provide a solution to the problem?
I think my role as Provost is to work with every possible group to provide opportunities for students to avoid finding themselves in those situations. What happened last year was tragic. We never want to see that occur again. Lori White is the new Vice President of Student Affairs and I know she is a recognized expert in helping students and I will do everything I can, working with Lori and others, to ensure this won’t happen. The President appointed a Task Force and I think it is a group of incredibly committed individuals, who also view that as a tragedy and want to do everything they can to make sure that doesn’t happen again. We want our community to be safe; we want our community to be stimulating. We want to provide opportunities for students so they don’t get involved in the things that led to those student deaths.

Do you think the three student deaths on campus reflects something about SMU’s academic life?
The great majority of students at SMU are serious scholars. That’s not to say that those that tragically died were not serious students. I don’t know enough yet to say if that was a component of a small subset at SMU, but we are going to be reaching out to try and discover the root causes of that.

What is the most influential book you have ever read and why?
That’s a hard [question]. You’ve gotta give me five. [David] Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest—a stunning analysis of how even those with great talent can take a wrong turn. This is the story how the Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson administrations got us engaged in a foreign policy that ultimately was tragic. As pure literature, my favorite book has always been Dickens’s Tale of Two Cities. I just think it is wonderfully written, full of human emotion. As a scientist, one of my favorite books of all time is a Nuel Pharr Davis book, Lawrence and Oppenheimer, the story of two towering intellects who were also incredible scientists, but a mixture of the applied and the theoretical. But also towering egos, and how they took on the great challenges in science and human history in developing the atomic bomb, for better or for worse. Barry Commoner’s book, A Closing Circle—way ahead of its time addressing environmental issues, predicting many of the things we are facing now. Edgar Snow’s Red Star Over China, a flawed commentator but nevertheless a thrilling account of the changes that took place in China during the long march with Mao; a fabulous read.

Hilltopics would like to specially thank Dr. Paul Ludden for taking the time to share his thoughts with us.

Todd Baty is a senior history and music major
Little known to the SMU community, a short jaunt down Bishop Boulevard a few times each month will allow you to listen to some prominent individuals lecturing on some of the most enlightening topics relevant to the world today. I am talking about Highland Park United Methodist Church’s Cornerstone Speakers Initiative, which rivals SMU’s Tate Lecture Series in many of the people it invites to speak to the community. Past guests have included John Grisham, Mike Wallace, and John Stossel, among many others.

Unfortunately, I didn’t come to know about this speaker series until last week, just an hour before Wednesday’s scheduled lecture. The guest? Steven Pinker, a renowned Harvard psychologist and bestselling author, and possibly my personal hero. Pinker’s lecture covered the material of his new book, *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature*. This newest book is the third in two series, one about the human language faculty (*The Language Instinct and Words and Rules*), and the other about the mind more generally (*How the Mind Works and The Blank Slate*). Pinker’s trademark is a very readable, often humorous prose that makes potentially difficult topics accessible to the casual reader.

He brought that style easily to his lecture last Wednesday, in which he looked at how humans use metaphors to convey abstract ideas, why and how people swear, and why innuendo is such a convenient tool of language. Dismissing the notion that it’s all “just semantics”, Pinker gave a particularly telling example of why the way you say (or in this case, write) something can have real-world implications. He asked the audience whether, at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, there occurred one event, or two. On the one hand, there was one terrorist mastermind with one grand plan, and one group of followers to carry it out with one particular building in mind. On the other hand, there were two towers, and two separate collisions spaced several minutes apart, each tower collapsing at different times.

Why does this matter, you ask? As Pinker explained, the leaseholder for the World Trade Center had taken out an insurance plan that provided for $3.5 billion to be paid out “per catastrophic event”. As you can imagine, the leaseholder and the insurance provider had very different ideas about what the total payout should be. In this case, as the professor noted, the value of semantics was $3.5 billion!

If you missed Professor Pinker last week and are curious about language, the mind, or maybe both, fear not, for his collection of works is available at any decent bookstore, and at SMU’s own Fondren Library Center. If you’re interested in future Cornerstone lectures, upcoming guests include former Mexican president Vicente Fox and MSNBC political commentator Chris Matthews; admission is free and open to the public, and every talk is followed by a book-signing opportunity. For more information, check out http://www.cornerstoneworship.org/pages/cornerstone_speaker_initiative.

Monica Chavez is a senior political science and foreign language major.
Alright, you caught me, I have horrible taste in television. Ok, maybe I'm not giving myself enough credit, but for every good show I watch, there are about 3 shows that I'd be embarrassed to admit to. I only stopped watching Survivor because I moved into the dorm's my freshman year and I no longer had DVR.

Understanding this, you cannot be surprised by my excitement over CBS's new show Kid Nation which premiered on September 19, 2007. Before its premier, Kid Nation had a lot of buzz, shrouding it in controversy and legal allegations.

The show features 40 children, age 8 to 15, isolated away in the historic ghost town of Bonanza City, New Mexico, where the children are given the task of "creating" a functioning society. Think Lord of the Flies but with a fun, family entertainment kick. The children are somewhat ominously told that their task is to succeed, given the unsuccessful history of Bonanza City, where others have failed. Kind of intriguing, right? Well the kicker is that they are to do this all without adult help or "supervision."

Each episode, the "town council" (comprised of 4 producer selected children leaders) award a gold star, worth $20,000 to one of the members of the community who has shown themselves to be an essential contributor. The children may elect to go home at anytime, but are encouraged to make their announcement at a town meeting (conveniently there is one each episode). The four town council members split the kids into 4 teams, and they compete for jobs around town.

The humbug surrounding the show is mainly in reference to the fact that the children are unsupervised. What kind of parents would let their kids participate in a show like this? It doesn't seem so disturbing to me that there were a few hospital visits for relatively minor injuries. I'm not even that surprised that some children accidentally drank bleach that had been stored in an unmarked soda bottle. I don't want to say that kids getting hurt is entertainment, but I've seen kids eat glue--this isn't obscene.

The most interesting thing to come out of all the controversy is the discussion concerning reality show participants. Are they more like subjects in a documentary, or working actors? If the latter, then Kid Nation raises concerns about child exploitation. Because the producers declared the set a summer camp officially with the state of New Mexico, they have avoided many legal issues thus far. But parents present on the final day of filming observed producers feeding lines, re-casting dialog and re-shooting scenes--all of which suggest that the children functioned more as actors and less as autonomous participants.

I would say that the participants understand when they go into reality shows that they are going to be exploited, but they'll have a chance to win some money. With Kid Nation I think the kids would have agreed even if there was no reward. I'm going to keep watching and take solace in the fact that none of the allegations are serious enough to prevent a second season, which CBS is accepting applications for.

Janet Arnold is a senior marketing and psychology major
Thumbs up:
- To SMU Guildhall getting a week off for Halo 3
- To harmless pranks
- To Mommy and Daddy being in town (They bought food from something besides Umphrey-Lee!)

Thumbs down:
- To losing the Iron Skillet
- To pranks that lead to four hour long fire drills in the middle of the night
- To Mommy and Daddy being in town (How can we go out with them around?)

Headline of the week: “San Diego baseball player Milton Bradley suffers season-ending injury while trying to attack umpire.”
http://www.sltrib.com/sports/cl_6982727

SMU Fact:
On November 17, 1916, during Southern Methodist University’s second football season, the Rice Owls beat SMU 146–3, the worst defeat ever in SMU’s football history (and one of the worst in collegiate football history). Coach Ray Morrison was asked for his resignation at the end of the season.

Hilltopics would like to take a moment to recognize one of the many people in this world that bring joy and humor into our lives.

Couple proves that you have a soulmate whether you like it or not:
A married couple, using the names “Sweetie” and “Prince of Joy” in an online chat room, spent hours telling each other about their marriage troubles. Realizing later that the person they were chatting with was their spouse.

We’re not going to say you give us hope, but you do make us laugh.

http://www.digg.com/offbeat_news/Online_couple_CHEAT_with_each_other_2