

West Memphis Three attorneys speak at panel discussion

JERRY DON BURTON

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Attorneys who defended three freed men convicted as teenagers, known as the West Memphis Three, spoke in a panel discussion at Arkansas State University to share insight, advice and theories regarding the case. The highly publicized and controversial case originated from the murders of three boys in West Memphis, Arkansas, in 1993. Damien Echols, Jessie Miskelley Jr. and Jason Baldwin were convicted of the murders, despite questionable evidence. The A-State Sociology and Criminology Association (SCA) hosted the public panel Thursday, Nov. 6, in the Reng Student Union Auditorium. Stacy Dewald, faculty co-adviser for the SCA, said she wanted the event to bring attention that the criminal justice system is flawed, show wrongful convictions exist and offer new perspectives for those who still think the West Memphis Three are guilty. She said she believes the panel discussion achieved this goal. The three attorneys who participated in the panel, Jeff Rosenzweig, Paul Ford and Dan Stidham, began the discussion by detailing their connection to the case. Rosenzweig was on the team responsible for releasing the West Memphis Three in 2011, Ford was on the original defense team for Baldwin and Stidham represented Miskelley as an attorney. Ford said this case highlights the power of confirmation bias. "Once you have this notion,



Photo by Jerry Don Burton | Editor-In-Chief

(From left) Jeff Rosenzweig and Paul Ford listen as Dan Stidham speaks during the West Memphis Three panel discussion. All three men were attorneys involved in the defense of the West Memphis Three and were invited by the Arkansas State University Sociology and Criminology Association to attend the panel.

all new information is going to be sorted to reaffirm whatever that notion is. If your first notion is 'they're guilty,' you're going to hold on to that," Ford said. "So when you meet people who are less than 40 years of age and their first involvement in this proceeding was to watch the HBO documentaries, they can't believe they were convicted. Because that was the first story that they heard, but that was not the first story that people heard in 1993." Ford said the citizens of West Memphis needed somebody to blame so they could feel their community was safe. The existence of multiple potential suspects other than the West Memphis Three contributes to the controversial nature of the case and is the topic of many ongoing debates. The three panelists said

they are confident the West Memphis Three are innocent and have their own theories as to who committed the murders. Rosenzweig said one valid suspect is "Mr. Bojangles," referring to a bleeding man who was seen entering the nearby Bojangles restaurant about two hours after the boys were reported missing. Witnesses said the man was mentally disoriented and entered the women's restroom. The next day, police took blood samples from the restroom that were later lost. Ford said he has always been suspicious of Chris Morgan, a teenager who unexpectedly traveled to California with Brian Holland, another teenager, four days after the bodies were found. During questioning, Morgan said he had a history of drug and alcohol use and experienced blackouts and

memory lapses. He said he might have killed the victims, but recanted this statement. This recanted statement was debated in the trial, but was found inadmissible as evidence. Stidham said he has a suspect, a serial killer, whom he can place in the vicinity of the murders. He said he will explore the lead further and hopefully have more information to present before he retires. Prevalent media coverage represents another element that generated controversy for the case. Ford said national attention in the case, specifically from the media, was a double-edged sword. "To have a CNN truck pull up outside of the courthouse in Corning, Arkansas, that's like finding Bigfoot," Ford said. "It was a big deal. Everywhere you went, there were reporters, cameras, people wanting interviews, producers from talk shows." Ford said if he could do anything differently in the trial, he would trust the media less. However, without a relationship with the media, he said, there would never have been a documentary and the West Memphis Three would still be in prison. Dewald said the 1996 HBO documentary, "Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills," saved Echols' life. Echols was the only teenager sentenced to death in the trial. The case is also associated with the Satanic panic, due to the prosecution's assertion that the children were murdered as part of a Satanic ritual. The Satanic panic was a social panic that began in the 1980s and continued throughout the late 1990s, involving widespread cases and accusations of Satanic ritual abuse. Rosenzweig said some still believe the West Memphis Three are guilty for a number of reasons, ranging from having personal connections to being ill-informed.

CAMPUS CRIME



ALLIE CARSON

NEWS EDITOR

Nov. 9 | 11:11 p.m.
Patrol Officer Marcus Caskey was dispatched to the Living and Learning Community building 5 in reference to a resident assistant (RA) report that he had found a vape in the building. Upon arrival, Caskey entered the building and made contact with the complainant. He then escorted Caskey to the laundry room of the building to show Caskey his findings. On top of the washing machine, Caskey saw what, based on his training and experience, appeared to be a glass pipe commonly used to smoke marijuana. The pipe was approximately three inches long and contained burnt marijuana residue. An odor consistent with burnt marijuana was also detected coming from the pipe. Caskey obtained the complainant's information and took possession of the pipe. Caskey transported the pipe back to the police department, where it was properly destroyed. Once back at the department, Caskey reviewed the building's camera footage in an attempt to identify the individual(s) who may have been in possession of the pipe. He was unable to locate any evidence linking a specific person to the item.

Nov. 9 | 1:38 a.m.
Patrol officer Marcus Caskey was notified by UPD Dispatch that a cleaning crew working at the Reng Student Union had found a bag left in the Spring River Room. Upon arrival, UPD Dispatch provided me with the found property, which was a large orange "T.J. Maxx" tote bag with a ghost printed on it. The bag contained multiple items, all consisting of makeup, personal care, and hygiene products. Caskey collected the above-listed items and transported them to the police department, where they were logged into evidence. The property was labeled and placed in evidence locker number five.

Nov. 6 | 11:50 p.m.
Patrol Officer Cooper Roberts was dispatched to the parking deck in reference to a hit-and-run accident. Upon arrival, Roberts spoke to the victim, who said he parked his grey Nissan at approximately 7:15 p.m. Upon his return, he noticed damage to the rear driver's side bumper. Upon reviewing the security footage, Roberts saw the victim park his vehicle at approximately 7:06 p.m. At 7:12 p.m., a white Nissan is seen backing out of a parking spot and striking the gray Nissan. The white Nissan drove away from the scene. Upon following the vehicle through security footage, Roberts was able to locate it at the Northpark Quads building 3. Roberts was also able to identify the driver of the vehicle as the suspect. This identification was made through the vehicle being registered through Parking Services and Roberts

being able to identify the suspect who exited the vehicle.

Nov. 6 | 8:46 a.m.
The University Police Department received an email request from the manager of Campus Card Services and ID Management for Arkansas State University, who requested assistance in identifying a potential fraudulent user of a physical student ID card. The manager stated that a student reported on Nov. 5 that her physical student ID card was lost at the beginning of the semester; this was not reported to the ID center at the time of the loss. The victim stated to the manager that she noticed unauthorized usage on her card; someone was using her meal plan and flex dollars. The first transaction started on Oct. 3 and continued intermittently through Nov. 4. The manager wanted to confirm that it was a different person than the reporting student. The manager provided a list of card usage time stamps and dates. Tac Officer Rebekah Colvin pulled up the historical camera footage and screen-grabbed each person who utilized a physical card for that exact time. Colvin requested an ID photo of the victim to compare with the person who utilized a physical ID. One female had repeated usage of each of the provided dates and times that the victim's card was used, As there was no way to identify the unknown female at the moment, Colvin checked each of the listed days/times for someone she was with, to potentially find a repeat individual that seemed to know her. On two days, one male individual scanned in right after her and sat with her in the dining room. Colvin requested from the manager the name of the person who scanned in with the female, and she was able to pull up the male's name. The manager also stated that on Oct. 30, the associated person scanned in 5 minutes after the victim's ID was scanned. When looking at the camera footage, Colvin saw the associated person sitting with the unknown female. On Oct. 40 at 5:49 p.m., the associated person and the female left the dining room. Following them on campus cameras, Colvin tracked them to the Red Wolf Center. The associated person walked by the service desk and did not scan in, but the female did. Colvin requested from the manager the name of the person who scanned in at this time. The manager also provided time stamps for card usage at the Red Wolf Center for both the associated person and the suspect, to ensure they were the same individuals. Colvin requested an ID photo from the manager for the suspect, to match the subject on the camera footage at the time of the fraudulent ID usage.

WEST MEMPHIS 3

PANEL & DISCUSSION

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 6TH

2:00PM TO 3:15PM

RENG STUDENT UNION,
3RD FLOOR AUDITORIUM

FEATURING GUEST SPEAKERS

JEFF ROSENZWEIG
JESSIE MISKELLEY'S APPELLATE ATTORNEY

PAUL FORD
JASON BALDWIN'S TRIAL ATTORNEY

PHOTO COURTESY OF ARKANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY CAMPUS CALENDER

Graphic posted to advertise the West Memphis Three attorney panel. The panel comprised of Jeff Rosenzweig, Paul Ford and Patrick Benca.

CONTINUED:
WM3, 4A