

Descendants of slaves pursue reparations in Chicago

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO — Almost 150 years after Andrew Jackson Hurdle was torn away from his family and put on the auction block as a 9-year-old slave, his daughter is seeking justice for him.

Hannah Hurdle-Toomey, 71, of Belleville, signed on as one of two people from Illinois named in a class-action lawsuit seeking reparations from 19 companies that they say benefited from the slave trade. The other is Marcelle Porter, a 74-year-old Chicago woman who said her great-grandmother was a slave in North Carolina.

A Jan. 26 hearing is scheduled in U.S. District Court in Chicago. Judge Charles Norgle could dismiss the lawsuit if he agrees with the defendants' argument that the plaintiffs can't sue for something that happened to their ancestors.

But if the plaintiffs eventually prevail, they said they will use the money to set up a trust fund to help the black community support social programs, said Lionel Jean-Baptiste, the lawyer representing the two women from Illinois.

"It's not about individuals, it's about a broad community

seeking capital to rebuild our community," Jean-Baptiste said after a recent meeting with dozens of supporters of the lawsuit. "We need a Marshall Plan to help our community. This is a collective remedy."

The lawsuit was first filed in U.S. District Court in New York in 2002 and moved last year to Chicago. The suit names companies like the Lehman Brothers brokerage firm, Aetna Insurance and R.J. Reynolds Tobacco.

Lawyers for the companies named in the lawsuit contend that people do not have the right to sue for some-

thing that happened to the plaintiffs' ancestors. They also argue the companies were not directly responsible for the plight of slaves.

"Plaintiffs' grievances are claimed to arise from the fact of their inclusion in a racial group, and are therefore insufficient to overcome the problem that they constitute a 'generalized grievance' which does not give them standing to bring this suit," the lawyers argued in court papers filed recently.

Hannah Hurdle-Toomey said that even if the lawsuit is dismissed, it will not diminish the life of her

father — who helped found a religious college. Like her father, Hurdle-Toomey was ordained a Disciples of Christ minister.

"It's that independent streak I inherited from my father — nobody controls my mind but me and the Lord," she said. "There's nothing that the judge could do or nothing anybody else can do. ... The what-ifs don't bother me."

Hurdle, whose life stretched well into the 20th

century, had 25 children with two wives; Hurdle-Toomey was his youngest. In a letter collected in a 1978 family book, Hurdle recalled his life.

"I am a self-made man, have never gone to school a day in my life; got what little education I have by studying at night by a pine torch light a great many times," Hurdle wrote. "I was sold off from my parents. ... I consider that God has blessed me in raising my children."

Researcher gets \$1M to study thin people

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER — A Denver endocrinologist has been awarded \$1 million to study the psyches and biology of thin people over the next five years.

For years, Dr. Dan Bessesen has overfed fat rats, put them on diets and on small exercise wheels, and studied why they repeatedly gained and lost weight. What caught his interest were the skinny rats. They seemed to know to eat less.

"The obesity-resistant rats, they overeat for a day and they seem to get it. They

reduce their food intake by the third day," he said. "And they reduce their food intake not only to where it was before but down lower to compensate for overeating. It's a natural phenomenon."

He decided to study whether some people humans also have something innate that makes them prone to remain thin. "If there is something different about their metabolism or their genetics, that would be interesting to know," Bessesen said.

The National Institutes of Health gave him \$1 million

toward his research.

"We spend so much time studying obesity, maybe we ought to study thinness," Bessesen said.

His goal is to find about 200 men and women between the ages of 25 and 35, about half of whom are obese and half of whom are thin and what he calls "weight stable."

Bessesen plans to figure out how much the study subjects normally eat and then feed them 40 percent more for three days. Then, researchers will watch who does what in the following days.

Obesity has long been a

popular research topic. Sixty-five percent of the country's adult population is overweight, said Dr. James Hill, director of the Clinical Nutrition Research Unit at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center.

Now scientists are starting to look at what makes people skinny, rather than what might make them fat, he said. "By knowing early on who's susceptible (to obesity), it allows us to target intervention efforts," Hill said.

The research also could one day lead to more effective drugs for obesity, he said.

Good Samaritans were apparently the wrong color

By Ed Wiley III
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Three Seattle teens who came to the rescue of an elderly Chinese woman were arrested and jailed, apparently because a bystander felt they were the wrong color to be good Samaritans.

Rico Ford, Ken Woo and Yi Ming Lin said they saw an old woman being robbed on a Seattle street and tried to save the day.

"We heard a woman cry, like someone cry and we look over," Woo told a CBS news reporter.

"And this guy was running off. We went over there to help her. Ken chased after

the guy," Ford chimed in.

The young men's teachers and others described them as "respectful" and "the nicest kids" around. But a witness, who said he watched the incident, told police that they had mugged the woman. Without speaking to the victim, Police cuffed them and hauled them off to jail, where they spent the night.

"We thought we'd probably just be cuffed for a while, you know, handcuffed for a while until they figured things out," Woo said.

The woman spoke no English, only Chinese, so rather than having a trans-

lator speak to her — which is standard police practice — officers took the word of the bystander.

"The information at the scene was more than sufficient to base an arrest upon," Deputy Chief Clark Kimerer of the Seattle Police Department told CBS.

Not only did the arrest of the three brown-skinned boys bother those who knew them, but even the respective bail amounts seemed "color-coded." Bail for Rico, the darkest of the trio, was set at \$25,000; 20,000 for the slightly lighter Ken; and \$10,000 for Yi Ming, the lightest of the group.

Seattle eventually did send a translator to speak to the victim. Her comments: The young men had rescued her, not mugged her.

The city dropped all charges. As for an apology and reimbursement for the thousands in legal fees they incurred from the ordeal, they got neither.

Historic school site nearly finished

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TOPEKA, Kan. — As the 50th anniversary of the landmark Brown vs. Board of Education case approaches, work on the former segregated elementary school that plaintiff Linda Brown attended is nearing completion.

National Park Service staff began moving this week from their temporary quarters into Monroe School.

"It feels good to be home," said LaTonya Miller, the historic site's spokeswoman and education director.

Once one of four Topeka elementary schools set aside for black children, Monroe Elementary was established in 1992 as a National

Historic Site in the National Park Service.

Linda Brown was a student at the all-black school. In 1951, her father, Oliver Brown, tried to enroll the 9-year-old in an all-white school that was closer to their home. His request was denied.

The lawsuit that he and several other black Topeka families filed, along with three similar suits from Delaware, South Carolina and Virginia, resulted in the landmark decision that overturned the doctrine of "separate but equal."

The Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site will open to the public on May 17, 2004, the 50th

anniversary of the case.

By Jan. 12, the remaining sawdust and scaffolding should be swept clear on the first floor. Then, installation of the audio visual and media displays will begin.

Miller said the displays will feature audio recordings of interviews with original plaintiffs in the case, video footage and computer programs to teach visitors about the historic desegregation case and race relations in the United States.

The second floor of the school will house the park service offices, the Brown Foundation offices and a classroom containing 40 high-tech, interactive computers, Miller said.

Kids advocate for other children and themselves

Every child wants a home," says 12-year-old Cronetta. "So help the children in the world because everybody needs a parent."

Cronetta and her brother Robert, age 10 are spokespeople for children in foster care who are waiting for adoptive families in Mecklenburg neighborhoods. They know what it feels like to be waiting — they are waiting for parents to adopt them.

"Cronetta is insightful, engaging, and outgoing — she has a strong sense



Cronetta and Robert are two of many children waiting to be adopted in Mecklenburg County.

of responsibility, appreciates guidance, and has a positive outlook on life," says long-time friend Evelyn Dillard. "Robert has an engaging smile, pleasant personality and has a special interest in music." Both Cronetta and Robert sing

in the church choir together.

"I love my brother, he's always been part of my life," states Cronetta. "I want to be adopted into the same family with Robert."

If you are interested in finding out more about Cronetta and Robert or other children awaiting adoption, call Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services at 704-336-KIDS (5437).

Communities for Families & Kids
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