

ENTERTAINMENT

Jackson jury selection chided

LOS ANGELES (AP) - When the law speaks of defendants being entitled to a jury of their peers, it's obvious no one contemplated Michael Jackson's place in the justice system.

The millionaire pop music star, who is charged with committing lewd acts on a child, is in a class of his own.

But should his lawyer decide to challenge Santa Barbara County's jury-selection process as skewed against him, it would be possible to do so on one issue: whether it systematically excludes racial minorities. That issue already has been a subject of legal challenges in Santa Barbara County.

One of those cases is pending before a state appeals court. A judge found that Hispanics were being excluded from juries because of the manner in which jurors were summoned for service.

For Jackson, the problem is compounded by the lack of Blacks in Santa Maria, where his case would be tried. Census figures show Blacks represent just 2.3 percent of Santa Barbara County's population.

The issue under consideration by the appellate court is a lack of follow-up to jury summonses by the jury commissioner's office.

The commissioner sends out questionnaires to prospective panelists but does not

follow up if they are not returned, said Santa Barbara attorney James Herman, a past president of the state bar. "You wind up with a self-selecting jury pool," he said.

The lack of follow-up results in "a volunteer jury," said Los Angeles criminal defense attorney Steve Cron, who is familiar with the procedure.

He said many Hispanics in the agricultural areas around Santa Maria are farm laborers who might not return the jury summons because they can't afford to take time off work for jury service.

Loyola University Law School Professor Laurie Levenson said the Jackson case could provide an unexpected twist: that Santa Barbara County residents who normally would not answer a jury summons may do so now with the high-profile trial looming.

Jackson's arraignment on seven counts of performing lewd or lascivious acts on a child under 14 and two counts of administering an intoxicating agent is scheduled for Jan. 16. Until then, all warrants and affidavits in the case will be sealed.

Cron said the law guarantees defendants a jury taken from a cross-section of the community in which they live. But that cross-section in Santa Maria would have few

Blacks. Los Angeles defense attorney Harland Braun said there is no question Jackson would have a better chance with a multiracial jury. "Blacks still tend to regard him as a hero," he said. "Whites look at him as a weirdo."

Braun suggested the defense should try to move the case out of Santa Barbara County to a more urban, racially diverse area such as Los Angeles or San Francisco.

But he said the legal argument for change of venue should not be racially based.

"I would challenge on the basis of the district attorney having polluted the potential jury pool in Santa Barbara County with his pretrial comments," Braun said.

District Attorney Tom Sneddon was criticized for his sometimes sarcastic demeanor after authorities issued an arrest warrant for Jackson in November.

In rejecting suggestions that he timed the arrest to coincide with the release of Jackson's latest album, Sneddon said, "Like the sheriff and I are really into that kind of music."

He later joked with assembled reporters that the Jackson case would bring money into the county, saying "we need your sales tax to support our offices."

Rawls weds girlfriend of 2 years

LOS ANGELES (AP) - Lou Rawls, the velvety voiced blues and jazz singer best known for his 1976 hit "You'll Never Find (Another Love Like Mine)," married his girlfriend of two years on New Year's Day in Memphis.

The 70-year-old crooner wed Nina Malek Inman, a 33-year-old flight attendant, at midnight after performing New Year shows at the Liberty Bowl and the Peabody Hotel.

Shelby County Mayor A C Wharton performed the ceremony before a handful of people in a small room at the hotel, Rawls told The Associated Press in a telephone interview.

The couple was engaged, but hadn't planned to marry on New Year's, he said. Rawls has been married twice before.

"We just looked at each other and said, 'Let's do it.' So we went to the city hall in Memphis and got the license and our security guard knew the mayor real well so he called the mayor," Rawls said.

The couple lives in Scottsdale, Ariz. Rawls, who has won three Grammys in his 50-year career, released the album "Rawls Sings Sinatra" in September and will soon begin a tour called "Rawls Sings Sinatra, Rawls Sings Rawls," said his manager, David Brokaw.

Musical on Sammy Davis Jr. planned

NEW YORK (AP) - Auditions will be held in Chicago, New York and Los Angeles next month by producers casting a new musical about the life of entertainer Sammy Davis Jr.

The show will be called "Mr. Bojangles: The Ultimate Entertainer," said JTR Entertainment. Producers are looking for two performers - "who can sing, dance, act and do impersonations, all at the same time" - to portray Davis.

"The show will focus on Sammy's triumph over his own doubts and fears, and will

recreate the once-in-a-lifetime experience of seeing Sammy live," Gerry Dederer, the show's director, said in a statement Monday.

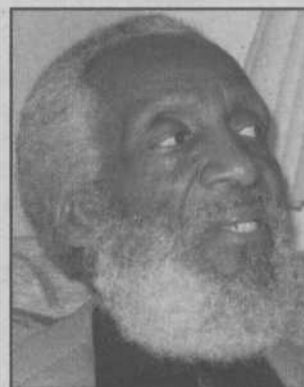
Davis died in 1990. His hit songs included "Mr. Bojangles," "I've Gotta Be Me" and "The Candy Man," and his films included "Porgy and Bess," "Ocean's 11," "Robin and the 7 Hoods" and "Sweet Charity."

Auditions are set for Jan. 10 in Chicago, Jan. 17 in New York and Jan. 24 in Los Angeles. The show will open in early 2004 and will tour major casinos across the country.

Gregory supportive of singer

Activist-entertainer just ended 40-day fast

BOSTON (AP) - Having just ended a 40-day fast to show support for Michael Jackson, comedian Dick Gregory says he's resolved to do what it takes to prove his friend is innocent of child molestation charges.



"I would leave a child of mine with him, sure I would."

— Dick Gregory

Gregory, the 71-year-old entertainer-activist, says he has known Jackson for more than 20 years.

"I would leave a child of mine with him, sure I would," Gregory said in a telephone interview from his hotel room in Alexandria, Va.

"If you had a choice between leaving a child with him or Crocodile Dundee, who would you pick?" Gregory said, referring to television's "Crocodile Hunter" Steve Irwin, who was videotaped recently holding his month-old son while hand-feeding a crocodile.

For the past 40 days,

Gregory, who lives in Plymouth, lived on a daily diet of a gallon of water mixed with eight lemons, and a cup and a half of maple syrup.

His weight dropped from 159 pounds down to 124 pounds.

To further show his support for Jackson, Gregory planned to head for Los Angeles on Wednesday, where he hoped to encourage fans the world over to hold vigils and prayer ceremonies in the singer's support.

"If you believe he's inno-

cent, then join us in the prayer vigil and pray that the truth will come out," Gregory said.

Gregory said when he started the fast, his doctors were worried because he had just overcome lymphoma that invaded his lower stomach, upper lung and spleen.

Jackson, 45, was arrested on Nov. 20 and booked for investigation of child molestation by the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Department.

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