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SETTLEMENT REACHED AFTER FOUR DECADES IN KU KLUX KLAN MURDERS IN FRANKLIN COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

BOSTON, MA (JUNE 21) – In a landmark civil case, the families of two young men who were kidnapped, tortured and murdered by the Ku Klux Klan have reached settlement with Franklin County, Mississippi. The plaintiffs’ claim was that county law enforcement officials “aided and abetted the Ku Klux Klan in the kidnapping, torture and murder” of the two young men in 1964. The Franklin County, Mississippi Board of Supervisors approved the settlement reached by the parties on June 21.

The civil case, initially filed in August, 2008, was scheduled to go to trial in just a few weeks. In June 2009, the U.S. District Court in Jackson, Ms., ruled against Franklin County, finding that the three year statute of limitations for civil actions did not bar this action, and that the families should be able to proceed in seeking redress for the deaths of Henry Dee and Charles Moore. According to Prof. Margaret Burnham of Northeastern University School of Law and an attorney for the Plaintiffs, the case accused county law enforcement officers of wrongdoing in connection with Klan activities from the 1960s.

The civil case sought remedy for the deaths for Henry Dee and Charles Moore, both 19 years of age at the time of their deaths in 1964. Dee and Moore were kidnapped by the members of Ku Klux Klan on May 2, 1964, while the two young men were hitchhiking in Franklin County. They were taken by the Ku Klux Klan to the Homochitto National Forest and severely beaten. They were then carried into Louisiana in the back of a Klan member’s car and – still alive – thrown into the Mississippi River to drown. The remains of Dee and Moore were found months later and a federal investigation was begun.

The investigation was reopened by the Justice Department in 2005 and, after a federal grand jury indictment, Klansman James Seale was convicted in June 2007. Thomas Moore, a retired Command Sergeant Major with the US Army, and the brother of Charles Moore, encouraged the Justice Department to reopen the case. Seale is now serving three life sentences for kidnapping and conspiracy. It was during the course of Seale’s criminal trial that information surfaced that formed the basis for the civil case.

Thomas Moore said, “I am happy that we got as much closure on the case as we possibly could.”

Margaret Burnham, Director of the Civil Rights Restorative Justice Program at Northeastern University School of Law, represented the families of Dee and Moore, along with Robert McDuff of Jackson, MS., David Kelston of Boston, MA, and Charles Ogletree of Harvard Law School. Professor Burnham observed that “this was an historic undertaking. To my knowledge, this suit is the only one of its kind to have reached settlement. What we sought to prove was common knowledge at the time – that these crimes could not have persisted without the support of local officials. The result we achieved makes clear that justice delayed

does not always mean justice denied. There is no statute of limitations on murder, no expiration date on moral obligation, and there should be no impunity for human rights violators.”

The Civil Rights Restorative Justice Program at Northeastern University School of Law (CRRJ) conducts research and supports policy initiatives on anti-civil rights violence in the United States and other miscarriages of justice of that period. Located at Northeastern University School of Law, CRRJ serves as a resource for scholars, policymakers, and organizers involved in various initiatives seeking justice for crimes of the civil rights era. Please see <http://www.northeastern.edu/crrj/> for information on CRRJ’s on-going efforts to redress unresolved crimes and violence from the Civil Rights Era.