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Introduction (Watching Jim Crow: The Struggles Over Mississippi Television, 1955-1969.)

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Reconstruction

The broadcast complex that houses WLBT-TV remains today where it has always been, a few blocks outside the modest cluster of skyscrapers that defines downtown Jackson, Mississippi. Built in the 1950s a short distance from prominent businesses and seats of government, the center's managers have long enjoyed proximity to political and economic power. But as the years have passed, station planners have faced the problem of updating the center's aging physical plant and technologies. The architectural results are an eclectic mix — a layering of the new upon the old — as a consequence of repeated remodeling projects. While the station's original brick facade remains at the public entrance, behind it the furnishings have been dramatically changed to reflect contemporary needs and concerns. Familiar spaces remain but have been transformed: the cramped dressing rooms and viewing areas built to keep "Negro performers" apart from white audiences have been radically redesigned for contemporary uses. Traces of a past station remain, reconfigured for the present.

Much the same can be said for WJTV, Jackson's first television station. Broadcasts on WJTV began in January 1953, eleven months before WLBT, and the station remains at its original site, reconstructed to keep pace with contemporary audience and industry expectations. More than fifty years after their initial construction these communication centers continue their roles as powerful cultural institutions marked by manifold changes in ownership, business affiliations, personnel, and programming. The stations offer news, entertainment, and representations of the social world. They also serve as tangible reminders of a painful past.

Aligned at their conception with white supremacist and segregationist interests, as newborns WJTV and WLBT complemented an already

WLBT-TV and WJDX radio, Jackson, Mississippi.

intimidating white power bloc including prominent business leaders, bankers, politicians, clergy, and police departments determined to thwart integrationist or "black freedom" advances in the fifties. Facing the growing conglomeration of powerful cultural and economic institutions in Mississippi at that time, many civil rights activists opted to delay their tactical offensives. Others simply bypassed the state and its segregationist strongholds altogether, seeking more fertile spaces for social change.

But some did not — and in this book I focus on these agents of change and the discourses animating their bold campaigns, particularly on the fronts of television and public entertainment. I offer a detailed description of the civil rights activities targeting the segregationist programming practices of Jackson's television stations from 1955 to 1969, and examine their significance in terms of state regulation, racial politics, and cultural history.[1]

These campaigns defined late-fifties and early-sixties TV programming less as a "wasteland" than as a strategic battleground, and they stressed popular entertainment as crucial to social change. In 1955 Medgar Evers and the NAACP began seriously to confront the stations, petitioning the broadcasters and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for the inclusion of more (progressive) integrationist and African American personalities and perspectives in the stations' pro-

gramming. In the years that followed, resolute black Mississippians and activists allied with New York's United Church of Christ to work to alter local television. Eventually their efforts changed the programming of both WLBT and WJTV, as well as WLBT's ownership. Alongside these struggles, a small group of intrepid college students and staff enacted a "cultural and artistic agitation" campaign designed to isolate the racist coercions accompanying public segregationist entertainment. As I will show, this small-scale cultural offensive prompted a wider scrutiny of racist practices in Mississippi and provoked a segregationist backlash aimed at one of the nation's most popular television programs.

Federal regulators, activists such as Evers, and powerful segregationist institutions all recognized the power of televisual representations early in the civil rights struggle. For example, in 1962 the FCC took the unusual step of reprimanding eight Mississippi television and radio stations, including WJTV and WLBT in Jackson, for their "biased" coverage of the rallies and violent riots surrounding the event of James Meredith entering the University of Mississippi. While mindful of its apparent clash with First Amendment liberties, the commission pursued this regulatory course by asking each station to justify its relevant programming and detail its adherence to broadcasting's "fairness doctrine." Although they took no further substantive action against the broadcasters at the time, the regulators signaled the Kennedy administration's sensitivity to the multiple political concerns put in play via TV and radio.

During the Meredith admission crisis, Fred Beard, general manager of WJDX radio and WLBT-TV, exhorted his audiences to resist "the evil and illegal forces of tyranny." He went on to state: "Governor Barnett needs the support of every true and loyal Mississippian. I know that he will receive full support. We can all stand with him and say 'Never!' "[2] Medgar Evers, however, persistently attempted to rebut such remarks and add integrationist or African American perspectives to Jackson's broadcast editorials and reports. In May 1963 Evers lobbied, as he had many times previously, to appear on local television in an equal-time response to segregationist voices. He did so on May 20. Less than a month later Evers was murdered in his driveway by a man who had watched in the darkness for him to arrive at his Jackson home.

Mississippians close to Evers and his cause have long speculated, while not necessarily asserting a causal link, on the relationship be-

Medgar Evers delivers a response on WLBT-TV to segregationist Jackson mayor Allen Thompson on 20 May 1963. Evers states: "What does the Negro want? He wants to get rid of racial segregation in Mississippi because he knows it has not been good for him nor for the state. . . . But whether Jackson and the state choose change or not, the years of change are upon us." (Photo copyright Bettmann/CORBIS)

tween Ever's local broadcast appearance and his death. Jackson writer Eudora Welty is among those who have done so, penning a powerful story that places the reader in the point of view of Evers's killer. In Welty's "Where Is the Voice Coming From?" the assassin is clearly angered and inspired to kill by the sight of a black man's face on television, and he bitterly remarks: "His face was in front of the public before I got rid of him, and after I got rid of him there it is again — the same picture. And none of me."[3] Welty writes that she "knew" the murderer, "not his identity, but his coming about, in this time and place."[4] She certainly knew the impact of Evers on segregationist-managed television: the image of the eloquent, intelligent, and respectful black spokesman for integration, "entering" into thousands of segregated white living rooms in south-central Mississippi for the first time, was undeniably powerful and even shocking for some. It was a moment recalled by many I interviewed — a representation prompting powerful stories and memories that endure to this day.

Changing segregationist television in Jackson was not straight-

A Jackson *Clarion-Ledger* editorial response to Medgar Evers's May 20, 1963 televised address.
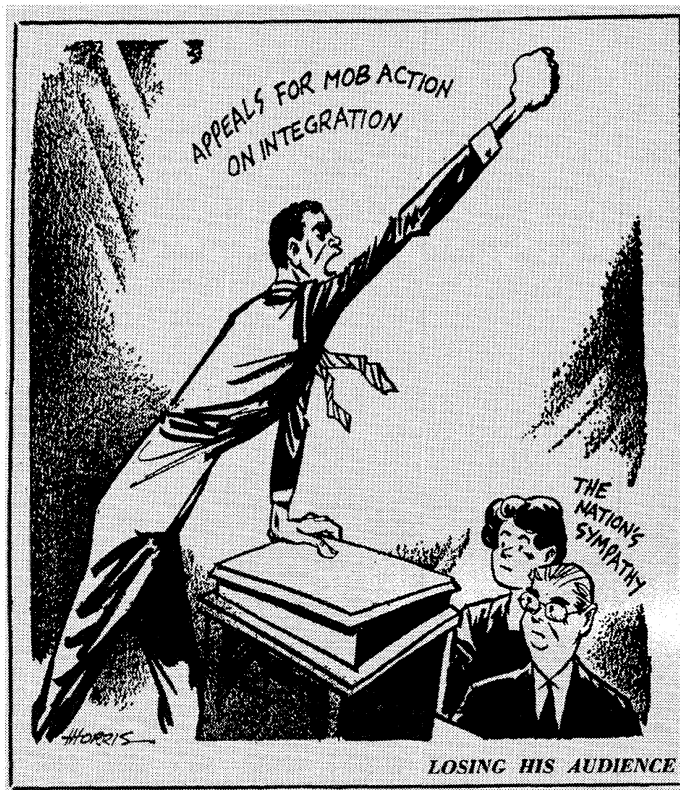
forward or easy. The intersecting activities of multiple, differently motivated agents and rights campaigns were necessary to prompt local television's transformations. The dramatic changes in television in Jackson, in full flower by the seventies, did not start within the industry, the FCC, or some enclosed circle of technological experts. Rather, they were sparked by the friction of race rights activists joined to liberal advocacy intervenors and some agents of state regulation. All were vitally motivated by larger social concerns. Then, as now, local television and popular entertainment performances were often recognized as crucial sites of political and racial struggle, where social identities and fundamental notions of human dignity were at stake.

During the period addressed in this volume, race and rights activism was explicitly connected to local television and entertainment practices as well as notions of a new "consumerism," prompting progressive social change alongside regulatory retrenchments. "Consumerism" was a key sixties trope, mobilized strategically by different interests in very different ways, and explicitly connected to broadcasting, race, and politics. For this reason, the concept receives considerable scrutiny in the pages that follow, where I am especially interested in showing, in

Michel de Certeau's words, "the models of action characteristic of users whose status as the dominated element in society . . . is concealed by the euphemistic term 'consumers.' "[5]

In line with the architectural metaphor outlined earlier, this book represents a layering of present over past — a reconstruction of sorts — employing the traces, interpretations, and constructions of the past to address enduring social problems. The struggle over representation on local television screens, and the rights of citizens to represent such concerns before the industry and state, today remain vital activities to democracy, even as they were decades ago. Basic representational issues, such as portrayals of difference and different cultural groups, as well as authority within the powerful state and corporate institutions of broadcasting, were not neatly resolved in a civil rights past but rather brought to the fore as issues of continuing concern and debate.[6] The divergent ways in which these concerns have been addressed reveal the disparate visions of democracy and social justice in conflict yesterday and today.

By echoing recent cultural studies scholarship I hope to persuade readers that television is more than a technical apparatus and/or a set of industrially produced texts. Rather, it is "something people do": a complicated set of social practices, both forming and formed through various modes of state and social regulation.[7] In this project I offer a close examination of these social practices at a particular time and place, and point to the ways in which federal broadcast regulation in the United States has been historically aligned with "white privilege," or what George Lipsitz calls our society's "possessive investment in whiteness."[8]

Rather than simply speaking of some distant past — "the sixties" — that harbors the racism of old, the stories offered here inevitably ask important questions of the present — questions that bring the dynamics of one historical moment together with another. As John Durham Peters has put it, paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, "the present becomes intelligible as it is aligned with a past moment with which it has a secret affinity."[9]

The dangers of the present are manifest in myriad ways, particularly concerning the concept of race. This project is written against the backdrop of these problems. In 1968 the Kerner Report — part of the study of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorder — concluded that social institutions, including broadcasting, were contribut-

ing to the creation of "two societies, one black, one white — separate and unequal." Thirty years later, a group founded to continue the commission's work concluded that the report's dire warnings had indeed "become reality."[10] The divisions of more sophisticated racisms continue, often growing wider and more complex.

I often heard this concern voiced while living in Jackson. For example, as I interviewed African Americans in the city during the 1990s I heard dispiriting comparisons of present and past challenges faced by black communities. Dr. Aaron Shirley, a physician deeply committed to public health among the city's poor, offered this perspective:

Shirley: I think the challenge before us now is greater than back then, with what's going on among young black males. I think the answers back then were just so obvious, but now . . . it's frustrating to get a map and plot out all the homicides that occurred in Jackson [last year] and the causes. It's just unbelievable. . . . All but three occurred in the same area. The ages, the incident, the spot, it's unbelievable.

Classen: What ages, are they young?

Shirley: The average . . . victim is twenty-seven, black, killed by someone he knew, or she knew. Killed by someone who lived in the same neighborhood.

Classen: Were drugs involved in a majority of those homicides?

Shirley: Could have been. Well, a majority were not related to drug transactions. They're likely to have drugs or alcohol involved in the condition of the victim or the perpetrator. The typical murder because of a drug transaction? Very few.

Classen: So whereas in the 1960s you kind of knew the foe, and knew what you had to do — in the nineties, you're not exactly sure who the foe is, and what the foe is?

Shirley: Way back in the forties, early fifties, Smith County was a place where a number of blacks were lynched. I was never afraid to drive through Smith County. To walk around Smith County, any time of the day or night. But now, the neighborhood I grew up in . . . I would find it difficult walking around that [Jackson State University] neighborhood. It's different, much, much different. I grew up in the Jackson State area.

Classen: Off Lynch Street?

Shirley: On Pascagoula. It was two blocks off Lynch . . . as junior high and high school youngsters, we walked to the movie and ice cream parlor. Didn't even have a lock on the front door, really. My mother

had a little screen door . . . and we bought another house and moved out of that house. We had aluminum siding, it was a two-story house. . . . After she sold it she moved out. I'd go over there quite often, we had a clinic for school children. And the people had pulled the aluminum as high as you can reach — got stripped. You see people picking up aluminum cans. That's not to beautify the area.

Classen: It's not an antilitter campaign.

Shirley: No . . . I find it difficult walking around in that neighborhood. I'd go over there in the daytime.[11]

Later in my fieldwork, I went to the home of the Reverend Willie Lewis. Lewis is a lifetime resident of the state and has spent years in a variety of professions, including work as an ordained Christian minister. When, based on my previous conversation with Shirley I explicitly asked him to compare the 1960s and 1990s, Lewis answered along the same lines as Shirley:

Lewis: Now the one place where you have it worse is, I'll tell you this now, in 1963 you knew your limitations. You knew you couldn't go but so far then. Because the sign told you — don't go there. Now . . . the sign is not there, so you are walking into it, but it is still worse than it was then, but you don't know.

Classen: You still what?

Lewis: It's just as bad or worse now, but the sign is not there. If you walk in, you understand, but you've still got the same arms against you, and you don't know they're against you. How would you like right now if you go on out that door and know somebody's got a gun, and is going to shoot you? Well, you'd be kind of scared about going out that door. But you think, ain't nobody got a gun, why not walk out? And the time you walk out you get shot, that's what we got going now. The better we are now, we got more opportunity opened up to us now than we had in those days. Because you have such things like salesmen and managers. We didn't have nothing like that. . . . That is better, but the worse part about it is that some of the folks that got those opportunities have turned their backs on from whence they came.[12]

While the observations of Lewis and Shirley highlight the continuing problem of racism, they also point to the different forms racism takes relative to those most evident in the sixties. They refer to a racism that is not overt or publicly "signed," but rather what Stuart Hall terms

"inferential"[13] — that which insidiously advances the discourses of white supremacy, by, for example, subtly recoding racial meanings. As Lewis remarked, "you've still got the same arms against you, and you don't know they're against you." In speaking of an innocent person walking out of a door only to be gunned down by an unknown, unexpected assassin, Lewis uses an illustration chilling in its realism. What he dramatically calls attention to are discourses of the present that hide racist signs of the past.

While "modern" or "inferential" racism manifests itself in multiple, ever-changing ways, it most often looks and sounds very different from the vulgar racism of Jim Crow; operates along axes that are not simply black/white; and continues to be powerfully racist in effect — in part precisely because its crass heritage has ostensibly been jettisoned. Often couched in claims of neutrality, equality, or race blindness, such practices routinely pronounce an antipathy or hostility toward the political agendas and leaders of people of color, alongside the claim that racism is a problem of the past and no longer inhibits achievement.[14]

Conservative backlash against affirmative action as well as other legacies of the sixties freedom movement has been prominent and powerful since the seventies. On the terrain of law, years of conservative Supreme Court and federal administrative agency rulings have disassembled important formal safeguards for people of color and narrowed the rights and legal recourse of citizens of ordinary means.[15]

Conservative-fueled state referenda, such as California's Propositions 187 (also known as the "Save Our State" measure) and 209, have aimed at the elimination of affirmative action programs and the denial of important state services to immigrants, employing arguments regarding the "costs" of illegal immigration to "ordinary" citizens. Steeped in myths of rugged individualism and nostalgic meritocracy, as well as the formal language of race blindness or neutrality, such race-sensitive lawmaking has been a sorry hallmark of recent years, cynically mobilized by xenophobic political campaigns. As Roopali Mukherjee has shown, such policy events point to the "ways in which the public policy process served [and serves] as a critical site for the production and legitimation of particular [racialized] knowledges."[16]

Many of these racially coded campaigns and initiatives are "known" to Americans primarily via television and electronic media journalism. More precisely, audiences "know" about these political activities in large part due to the representational work of television stations and

journalistic operations that increasingly are bureaucratized arms of enormous commercial corporations. But by federal government measures, in the midst of the recent trend of corporate concentration and conglomeration, "minority" ownership and control of television properties over the past decade has not only not increased but actually decreased. The U.S. Department of Commerce's Year 2000 National Telecommunications and Information Agency report on broadcast ownership concludes that "minority" ownership of television stations in the United States is less than 2 percent — the lowest level measured in the last decade. The document solemnly underlines concerns about the loss of diverse sources of information relevant to minority communities and the lack of outlets for local issues.[17]

Within this context, this history is motivated by a desire for a reinvigorated democracy that truly engages more citizens and stimulates progressive change, particularly in the sphere of American race relations. If such change is to happen, certainly the histories and practices of key state and cultural institutions, and different understandings of these institutions, must be more widely debated. Perspectives and voices long marginalized must be more thoughtfully heard. It is my hope that some of these voices are heard here, and that because of these voices the historical yet enduring strategies of racial supremacy and marginalization are further scrutinized. In turn, this might lead to what Kobena Mercer has described as "the construction of a wider system of alliances and equivalences that [strengthen] . . . new forms of democratic agency."[18]

SCHOLARLY RECONSTRUCTIONS

The 1960s were a heady time for those on the liberal front of U.S. broadcast reform. As media historian Willard Rowland Jr. has summarized, during these years many believed the promises of "social responsibility" approaches to U.S. radio and television broadcasting were being revitalized in a series of legal regulatory and activist challenges to the status quo.[19] Key among these challenges were those aimed at Mississippi broadcasting. Thus, scholarly stories regarding Jackson television, particularly WLBT-TV during the 1960s, have been written elsewhere, and this is understandable given the dramatic, important issues and players involved. In these narratives, civil rights,

broadcast policy, consumerism, and identity politics all explicitly or implicitly intersect and interact.

During the fifties and sixties the popular media institutions of Mississippi and the South were sites of pitched warfare. What conservative forces within Mississippi and other states perceived as a cultural invasion was fought against with determination and dedication to the status quo and a particular southern "way of life." Segregationist politicians, business people, and civic leaders recognized broadcast stations as key fortresses against this "invasion," and fought long and hard alongside like-minded media managers. On the other side, citizen rights activists faced tremendous institutional obstacles, threats, and resources but in the end prompted significant changes in broadcast representation as well as other aspects of everyday life.

Particularly in fights surrounding the licensing of WLBT-TV there were dramatic performances involving racial politics and state regulation. Significant changes in federal broadcast licensing regulation, as well as federal administrative agency law addressing citizens' legal status, were outcomes of the station's licensing fight. Because of this, it is common to find a few paragraphs regarding the "WLBT landmark" in undergraduate texts addressing broadcast history or policy and regulation. These historical summaries point to WLBT-TV as involved in a long-lived, precedent-setting legal case in which the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia repeatedly ruled against the Federal Communications Commission and finally vacated the station's license in 1969.[20]

For decades the court of appeal's oft-cited arguments and rulings have had an impact far beyond the city limits of Jackson or the state of Mississippi. In the years immediately following the protracted WLBT licensing fight, citizen activists used these legal precedents, in concert with other lobbying efforts, to launch numerous broadcast licensing challenges. In 1969, for example, black citizens in Texarkana, Texas, with the assistance of the Office of Communication of the United Church of Christ (UCC), negotiated an agreement with local station KTAL-TV that addressed concerns including programming and news coverage, as well as black employment. This was just one of the first local campaigns explicitly modeled on the WLBT license challenge, including the strategies of station monitoring and the filing of a formal "petition to deny" relicensing. Scores of similar citizen actions followed. What some observers termed the "broadcast reform move-

ment" was born, due in no small part to the success of strategies first employed in Jackson.

Beginning in 1969 and on into the early seventies, the "number of media reform groups mushroomed," according to Kathryn Montgomery, as did the number of station licenses challenged.[21] Montgomery has traced the dramatic increase in formal licensing petitions, and she states: "In (fiscal year) 1969 two were filed; in 1970, 15 petitions [to deny licensing] were filed against 16 stations; in 1971, 38 petitions were filed against 84 stations; and in 1972, 68 petitions were filed against 108 stations. Though very few stations actually lost their licenses, the 'petition to deny' became a powerful weapon of intimidation."[22] In 1971 the industry organ, *Broadcasting* magazine, snipped: "It is hard to find a community of any size without its organizations of blacks, Chicanos, Latinos, liberated women, activist mothers, or other concerned types negotiating for stronger representation in broadcasting."[23] Mindful of the WLBT and KTAL precedents, many of the stations challenged entered into KTAL-type agreements in exchange for withdrawal of formal petitions.[24] While management concessions regarding employment and programming were often modest, and certainly reformist, the changes achieved were significant and the empowerment of the underrepresented was made tangible, thus sparking wider activism.[25]

Many ethnically and racially defined groups fought during this period for more progressive broadcast representation. The NAACP and Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) continued to pressure the networks and local affiliates. The National Latino Media Coalition, La Raza, Justica, and the League of United Latino Citizens fought to address the concerns of Mexican Americans and Latin Americans, and antidefamation groups, such as the Italian-American League and German-American Antidefamation League, challenged televisual representation. Importantly, these actions opened opportunities for "minority" employment, and were a catalyst for FCC equal employment initiatives.

However, the moment for this grassroots activism was short-lived. By the mid-seventies it was declining in scope and power as the victim of multiple countervailing trends, including increasing industry resistance, FCC intransigence, and a rising technocratic ideology, in addition to the inherent limitations of its reformist vision.[26] The movement had never sought to fundamentally change broadcasting structures but rather just to work within them. The movement's significant gains,

made, for example, in employment, suggested to many that existing systems "worked" and more radical alternatives need not be considered. And, as indicated by Robert Horwitz, without altering such structures "media reform will usually be short-lived."[27]

Willard Rowland Jr.'s excellent study of broadcast reform makes exactly this point, briefly noting that the WLBT licensing challenge was itself the product of converging social concerns, rising "out of the spreading civil rights movement." Rowland further observes that the focus of the rights movement had at the time of the station challenge expanded to become closely identified with "the anti-war movement, countercultural expression, and consumer rights."[28]

In this project I take some of Rowland's cogent observations and ground them in the pluralistic memories and practices of longtime Jackson residents and activists. At the same time, I recognize the pitfalls of personalist or formal explanations for various historical and legal decisions, because such explanatory schemes obscure important social patterns and configurations of power. Broadcasting in Jackson did not change simply because of the actions of heroic individuals or groups of dedicated activists, although both were necessary. Rather, powerful social discourses, joined to multiple agents and institutions, prompted significant change in local practices. Rather than asking which personal or legal qualities or actions brought about historic ends, I aim to examine the relationship of specific social and cultural forces to changes in television, regulation, and representation.

Along the same lines, segregation and racism are poorly explained if they are simply attributed to a few individualized subjects. Thus they are examined here not primarily as character traits but as sets of historically reproduced ideas and practices. Racism promotes particular interests "that are always racial but never purely so, and that function by putting racial difference into practice."[29] Assigning the title of "racist" to certain champions of white supremacy may be accurate but it lacks explanatory value, and it too neatly individualizes and isolates that which is fundamentally social. Such a derogatory title affixed to a particular state, such as Mississippi or Alabama, also homogenizes diverse populations and pays too little attention to the ways in which discourses articulating race, gender, class, and other social differences work across a variety of formal geographic boundaries.

Although scholarly treatments addressing the broadcast station battles claim to have a primary concern for, and focus on, the cultural

welfare of black Mississippians, most simply reproduce histories that highlight the perspectives of northern activists or powerful industry and government officials. In doing so, these studies provide further, sadly ironic, evidence that the voices and everyday perspectives of black Mississippians have too rarely been deemed worthy of further investigation. In contrast, African American voices are a point of focus in this work. Attempting to address past historiographic omissions, in this study I underline the importance of placing the "official" accounts of the station challenges that are offered by scholarly and legal institutions against the "unofficial," or "official" yet marginalized, stories of local African Americans.

I also focus on Jackson-based civil rights activists and their supporters rather than on FCC regulators, attorneys, or those who stood with white segregationist campaigns and activities. Certainly the opposing camps in the station fights did not divide neatly along racial lines, and among the bravest of all Mississippians in the civil rights struggle were the white Mississippians who fought for integration and racial justice. These activists offer concrete demonstrations of how whites can take a stand against white supremacy and privilege. With this focus, I hope to offer a better understanding of how those in the historical struggle against white supremacy and privilege understand and interpret a particular past.

WRITING HISTORY AND LAW

Detailing the struggles surrounding television in Jackson requires that points for narrative beginning and ending be marked, voices be selected, and spheres of discourse be chosen for focus. Chronologies and histories, like the physical plants of the broadcast stations, are constructed within the dynamics of particular cultures, times, and places — layering present interests, anxieties, and concerns over the always interpreted traces and fragments of the past. As Nancy Partner has explained, "history is a hermeneutic of fragmentary present texts which makes them yield something intelligible and larger than themselves. The hermeneutic necessarily involves layers of figurative interpretation, creating of present odds and ends a metaphoric world called 'evidence,' and then working out within its confines intricate patterns which force silence and time to take form."[30]

As self-evident as the "truth" of any particular paper trail, historical document, or record may appear, such texts have meanings that are dynamic, variable, and socially contingent — meanings that are articulated and naturalized by history's architects at their moment of interpretation. Historical truth is not simply passed whole and intact through some timeless apolitical channel, but, like a television studio, is built piece by piece within particular times and places, based on what is deemed most relevant, interesting, and important. So, for example, most histories dealing with sixties Mississippi and WLBT tell a particular type of lawyerly story focusing on central legal characters and federal court rulings, introducing and concluding these dramas with explicit discussion of the salient legal precedents established.

As "new historians" and critical theorists such as Hayden White have observed, the process of writing history inevitably involves placing a chronological and teleological framework on a fragmented, plural reality.[31] Moreover, recognition of history writing as an always interested, and contingent, exercise of power recommends modesty, honesty, and self-reflexivity on the part of the historian. The historian should not hide behind the past the present that produces and organizes it; rather, historiography should be an explicit building of "genealogies" — histories of the present — examining the past for insights today.[32]

Writing this particular history of the present has required dialogue with various texts, memories, and people that all resist abstract categorization. This resistance, moreover, has prompted me to make changes in my research scope and conceptualization, and more fundamentally, in my understandings of race, politics, and writing. Such interactions inevitably prompt change, because we always depart from an honest, engaged dialogue somehow different from when we entered. Certainly this has been true for me. Oral history telling and sustained conversation are potentially radical enterprises for the parties involved, and such a project can only touch on the richness of the dialogues experienced and the changes prompted.

While this work started as an examination of a broadcast licensing challenge, my varied conversations continually underlined the point that life is not lived within limited research conceptualizations — which are always inadequate and partial. Dialogues prompted my consideration of wider social contexts and of the relationship between racial representation and what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has termed "habitus." Habitus, in Bourdieu's conception, points us to the dynamic,

everyday intersections of structure and action, society and the individual.[33] In distinction to traditional materialism, it refers both to the conditions in which one lives, and to the ways in which one lives within these conditions — looking at how people and practices within social conditions act on those conditions and vice versa.[34] And while such contextualizations are admittedly partial, they offer perspectives and potentials less narrow in my mind than when I started this work.

In previous examinations of the WLBT challenges, the federal government and its official legal processes are the narrative center around which the broader context of watching Jim Crow television has been placed.[35] But if television is something that people do, a complicated social activity of everyday life rather than something constructed and contained within official, legitimated understandings, then such narrative foci are rather obscure and backward. This fact became particularly clear to me as I engaged longtime Jackson residents in their oral histories. My understandings of Jackson television, abstracted from policy and history texts, often were received as strange or irrelevant by those who had "lived" local television. A different, more richly textured view of television is available when its practices are contextualized within everyday routines, rhythms, and memory making.

Like the writing of history, the writing and articulation of law is always political, involving the construction of a particular frame or point of view through which reality, life, and human behaviors are viewed. "Law" is best understood as a complex of interdependent social practices — an inevitably human and thoroughly social enterprise.[36] Thus, the boundaries and redefinitions of "law" are never secure or finally established but rather are fundamentally social and dynamic, and the continuous renegotiations of these borders (often evident in popular texts and practices) are a key concern and focus of energy. Within an increasingly pluralistic society including disparate cultures and senses of history, it is inevitable that differing notions of history and law — their purview, purposes, and meanings — are produced and performed. Legal "truth," like historical "truth," comes out of specific cultural and social contexts, and exhibits a power contingent on its relationship to time and place. Thus it comes as no surprise, for example, that African Americans less than two centuries removed from legally legitimated and supported slavery would in many instances hold conceptualizations of law at odds with dominant, predominately white, courts and governmental agencies.

Viewed through these lenses of context and history, law has been and continues to be a key site for social and cultural conflict. What is deemed lawful, true, and trustworthy is defined as such within a particular discursive context. Although formal institutions continually invoke the "blind neutrality" and political independence of procedures and outcomes, law and its varied operations have no life independent from the discourses that constitute their authority and status. And certainly the same can be said of the vital components, such as evidence and testimony, of legal procedure and decision making. The relative importance and definition of these components are historic and dynamic.

Key to the maintenance and legitimation of state law's authority is its proclaimed detachment from the hurly-burly of political power. In a manner similar to official policy making, law is most often declared to be qualitatively different from politics. Mainstream discourses of law associate it, at least in the ideal, with rational, controlled, disinterested decision making, expert knowledge, and a concern for the general welfare. Law's autonomy is pronounced in its tidy detachment from other related social phenomena. Aligned with science, rationality, neutrality, and predictability, law is juxtaposed to a politics defined as narrowly partisan, uncertain, and self-interested. This is a pervasive construction that, according to Alan Hunt, "sees in the doctrine of separation of powers the most powerful ambition of liberal legal theory, namely, to ground and to secure a firm separation between law and politics."[37] On the other side, it is claimed, is politics, with its play of the wills, constant compromise, lack of expert insight, and privileging of special interests over the larger social good.[38]

Contemporary liberal discourses extract policy making and law from their historical place and reify processes that have demonstrated marked patterns of interest. These discourses fail to recognize law and policies as built within the frames of particular times and places, and instead encourage understanding of policy making and law as somehow escaping the dynamics and implications of social power. As I demonstrate here, within such discourses public claims are made regarding law's apolitical consistency, rationality, and objectivity that collapse under their own weight.[39]

Within recent years critical race scholarship has worked to circulate alternative understandings of history and law. At their foundation, these understandings break away from dominant legal liberalism

through an embrace of counternarratives or "outsider" knowledges. They accept the standard teaching of street wisdom: law is essentially political.[40] Perhaps even more important, these practical, experiential knowledges are accompanied by a refusal to separate the politics of law from the politics of race, class, gender, and everyday life. In other words, law is recognized as more than the sum of its formal institutions — the sets of rules, courts, attorneys, bureaucracies, commissions, and policing and coercive state agencies. It is conceptualized as of a piece with dominant social formations, regulations, and practices that work in the exercise of social power.

Critical theorists of race and law such as Patricia Williams, Derrick Bell, and Kimberlé Crenshaw make the point that, in Crenshaw's words, "rather than providing some kind of firm ground to challenge racist institutional practices, formal notions of equality, objectivity, neutrality, and the like [have tended] to obscure the way that race is experienced by the vast majority of African Americans in this society."[41] To the degree such notions and grounding positivisms position African American stories and understandings as "subjective" and consistently "outside" the realm of "objective" legal frames, they operate as limiting knowledges and discourses. These critics point out that in the articulation of rulings and procedures privileging race or color blindness, contemporary liberal institutions fail to recognize the covert, as well as overt, social practices that constitute racism and instead offer formal alibis for a refusal to confront white supremacy.[42]

Critical theorists of race also argue that law as a dominant, legitimating narrative of omission and marginality cannot be ignored or left to its internal devices. Rather, progressive agents, employing strategic counternarratives, must undertake the decentering challenge of interrogating its privileged discourse.[43] Such an interrogation cannot be substantial without a fundamental rethinking of law and its contemporary conceptualizations, and this is where scholars from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines have focused their efforts. As Williams and Bell repeatedly point out, and as my project concretely demonstrates, what is "inside" and "outside" of law is one of the most fundamental and significant questions of legal study and analysis. Indeed the central, continual task of American legal and regulatory institutions is the legitimation of "law" via its redefinitions and delimitations. As mentioned earlier, the boundaries and definitions of "law" and "the legal" are always at stake.

Still, the question of what is inside or outside of law, or the closely related query of what is official or unofficial, is more complex than some theorists suggest. In part this is due to the nature and everyday operations of official legal institutions that produce complicated hierarchies of acceptance, inclusion, and power. As this study demonstrates, the binary oppositions of inside/outside and official/unofficial, while perhaps rhetorically effective and strategically important, also obscure as many legal power dynamics as they reveal. For example, as I investigated FCC materials and the volumes of papers deemed part of the agency's "official" report on WLBT-TV I found, not surprisingly, that not all official knowledges, or voices considered "inside" the formal hearings and judgments of the commission, were equally valued. Indeed, many African American voices were included in the official FCC dockets and station reports yet were almost entirely ignored, literally marginalized by relegation to document appendices or used only insofar as they legitimated commission decisions. While deemed "official" and "inside" the procedures and hearings of a dominant legal institution, such voices and perspectives were clearly marginalized in other ways. They may be considered "outsiders" allowed "inside," the unofficial become official, only to find that, as one media historian has put it, that "entrance is not acceptance," and further, "that acceptance itself is a problematic concept insofar as it requires an authority — that is, someone that can confer acceptance upon the supplicant."[44]

The histories surrounding Jackson television point to this enduring problem, as well as to the deeper racial dynamics at play. The dismissals or silencing of African American counternarratives and testimony described in this volume connect with other local instances today, calling attention not only to the elite, technocratic nature of state policy making and law and efforts to police their boundaries and definitions, but also to their historical whiteness.[45]

"DO YOU HAVE A FEAR OF KNOWING NOTHING ABOUT US?"

Although a central goal of this project is to broaden participation in the telling of historical stories and the making of contemporary cultural assessment, such a goal makes historiography more complex. Certainly not all of the stories offered to me aligned neatly with one an-

other, which prompted difficult editorial decisions. Further, stories offered sometimes clashed with the documents stored in local archives, which prompted further editorial as well as evidentiary considerations. In making these historiographic decisions, I chose to highlight themes and concerns that converged in my reading of oral materials alongside long-ignored or marginalized sections of official documents. But in terms of where they disagree, both the archival document and the oral account offer productive perspectives on important pasts. Both reflect the disparate concerns and visions that must be addressed in a fuller understanding of race and politics in the contemporary United States. The search for common or converging themes should not obscure the value of studying such differences.

In recognizing my own role in the construction of the histories presented here, I have often reflected on how notions of racial progress informed my own perceptions and writing. Within post-Enlightenment Western cultural contexts such notions are commonly bound up with historiography and certainly with oral histories, because these projects necessarily speak to perceptions of the present, the past, and the ways in which change has occurred or "progressed." Still, as present/past comparisons of racial relations are foregrounded by white writers in dialogue with African Americans, it must be recognized that such comparisons are located within a longer history of whites asking blacks to assure them that things are indeed "getting better."

Certainly I could have been viewed as yet another historian looking for the reassurance of progress in American race relations. Undoubtedly this is a dynamic running through my project and the conversations that I represent here. Some interviewees told me forthrightly that I would receive historical accounts very different from those exchanged within the black community. In making such comments they highlighted, among other things, the dialogic dynamics of oral historiography.

What was striking to me was that even as a white outsider who might be viewed as one seeking reassurances of racial progress, I often did not receive them. Most often I was told that although the forms of oppression had changed and some opportunities had opened, the evidence of better times for African Americans was uneven and at times nonexistent. And, I was pointedly told, racial struggle continues. I frequently heard remarks made along the lines of those cited earlier by Aaron Shirley and Willie Lewis. Another interviewee, Henry Kirksey,

was one of several black Mississippians who told me that although today racism is more dignified and "palatable," or not so much "out in the open," it is "like a cancer that's growing like hell and eating away and ultimately it will have a devastating effect, and it is already having that. . . ." Remembering his boyhood, Kirksey remarked, "It was difficult in those times for blacks, almost as difficult as it is today, and that's saying a hell of a lot."[46]

Kirksey, a former Mississippi state senator, underlined the fact that racial struggle continues today. He linked such conflicts, past and present, to a variety of contemporary institutions, including television — remarking, for instance, how poor blacks watch television with its advertisements for the middle class and "want some of what they see." And although lacking education and jobs, he continued, "there is another way — you can get a gun and you can get it." Again, he pointed to how the poorest neighborhoods of Jackson reap the violent consequences of representations not of their own making.

Kirksey also reminded me that local television's racist representations and practices were, and continue to be, thoroughly integrated with other experiences in everyday life involving employment, education, housing, voting, and economics. Instead of reassurances regarding the passing of old racisms and problems or discrimination, what I took away from my conversations with Henry Kirksey and others was an increased awareness of racism's complex and dynamic nature. Those who have long borne the brunt of racist power live with its subtle yet devastating appearances today, and they point to its presence. Others say that the United States, with a few exceptions on the extremes, is no longer plagued by systemic racism, and they point to the abolishment of legal segregation and other formal rules as proof. For many, the dominant myths of racial progress ring true, as do understandings of racism as monolithic — as something unchanging, obvious, and crass. But such understandings are, at best, dangerously naive. And listening to those who have experiences speaking to the consequences of fluid, dynamic, inferential racism is one way such understandings might be changed.

Talking with relative strangers at length regarding the past is a rewarding and taxing activity, fraught with historiographic and political problems, some of which I discuss in chapter 5. It is a most productive way of not only broadening historiography but also of widening the

line of questions prioritized. I quickly discovered that the very best and most productive questions would come not from me but from those I interviewed; I then used these queries in subsequent conversations.

The questions asked by the interviewees demanded that I remain self-critical and reflexive in my interviewing. This was certainly exemplified when I first visited the home of Juanita Jefferson. Until her death Jefferson was a compassionate, strong figure in her neighborhood and local church, a longtime resident of Jackson who had worked alongside other black Mississippians in the sixties struggles. Her courage and commitment to her Christian faith, family, and social justice were clear from our first minutes of tentative acquaintance, and our mutual respect and friendship grew during the visits I made to Jackson. In 1992, after a few brief phone exchanges, we had the first of our long conversations in her living room, which ended with her inquiring about my position as a historian entering strange new homes:

Jefferson: You know I often wonder, and I'm serious, how do you all feel to come into our homes? Do you really feel comfortable or do you have a fear of knowing nothing about us? Can you kind of get a feel or imagination by talking on the phone to people or [do you have] fear of going into a home that you know nothing about? Now the reason I asked you that [is] because I have to kind of really talk to you to kind of get a feel before I feel comfortable to say "yes, you're welcome to come." See there has been a time that you received those calls, they were not good for you. And so I just wondered if you all as visitors to the state had that kind of feeling or felt that way, kind of go through a test.

Classen: Well, I think the main discomfort I feel is part of me . . . feels badly about coming into people's houses. Not so much because I'm afraid of being in their houses but because I wonder if it seems like an intrusion to them. You know a little bit of it . . . the history you're talking about, you know, where white people have often times kind of inserted their selves into black lives for bad purposes and I don't know if much of that exists any longer. But part of me feels like, here I am a historian coming and asking you to share part of your life with me. I'm saying I'd like you to tell me about your life and share your life with me. Well that's a pretty intimate thing.

Jefferson: A lot of them don't let you in do they?

Classen: Yes, some of them say no. . . . I say to people, "I don't want to steal something away from you that's precious, and if it feels uncom-

fortable for you, you shouldn't do it." And I don't know of any other way to write history other than doing this, but it has that risk involved of me saying "I'm going to take a part of your life," and that's the main thing I feel.

Jefferson: Well, you know, I admire you all's courage to go out to do this and the least I can do is share what little bit of knowledge I have about it with you, to let you know. Because you've never lived in Mississippi and you don't know what it's like to live here, and I have been here all my life. But as to that view, where are you from?

Classen: Wisconsin.

Jefferson: Wisconsin? How will the news get back there from somebody that has lived through it if somebody don't come in and ask for it? It has to be somebody to tell the news and it has to be somebody to pick up in Wisconsin and say, "Well I'm going to work to see that that does not happen here, we are not going to allow this to intrude and invade in on us and to crush people down as they have been in other states."[47]

I appreciated this bit of conversation at the end of a long interview, particularly for the generosity it made manifest. And this expression of goodwill epitomized much of my experience talking with Mississippians whom I did not know about a still-sensitive and painful past. Juanita Jefferson's desire to aid others at risk for "intrusion" and "invasion" outweighed the risk and intrusion that I represented coming to her home as an out-of-state stranger. We had talked on the phone on a few occasions until she felt comfortable inviting me into her home. She explained she had finally been able to imagine who I was, and had then felt comfortable making the invitation. She had imagined the relationship between two people of different ages, races, gender, and geography as one of alliance rather than opposition.

Looking at her question in retrospect, I did have more fear in those moments than I was willing to admit. Alongside my very awkwardly expressed fear of unethically appropriating the stories of others,[48] the stark poverty and physical conditions of some neighborhoods in Jackson also prompted my anxiety. I found the poverty in parts of Jackson startling, with its areas for public recreation and leisure in terrible disrepair. Many of those (although certainly not all) with upper-middle class or higher economic status left the city years ago. The suburbs, with their contemporary malls, new roads, and good public schools and well-funded private academies, welcomed the predominantly white profes-

sional upper-middle class as they moved away from Jackson. The consequences of such urban flight are sadly familiar across the United States, and Jackson is not exceptional in this regard, but such dynamics in an already poor state effectively further disadvantage those who have always been poor. This dilemma describes the material environment and situations for many remaining in predominately black west Jackson.[49]

When asked to compare the present to the sixties, Juanita Jefferson said "it's a lot better, but not what it could be, or should be." She talked about the problems outside her front door — including the crack dealers who would walk around outside her home and stand on a nearby corner, and the flooding that would occur periodically on her street and, just as routinely, be ignored by the city. She talked about how the high entrance fees to various fairs, clubs, and events continued to operate as a racial gate or point of discrimination, keeping African Americans outside even though such opportunities are ostensibly open to all. Jefferson's comments invited reflection on how "entrance fees" of various sorts discourage entry to various spaces, institutions, and properties. Thinking back on the lunch counter sit-ins of the 1960s, she remarked:

> Jefferson: They thought they were really going to stop it [the movement] if they were tough everywhere that blacks went to be served. But you know, it's not today what it could be, because so many places . . . you go in there, and we're not sitting together, and they will sell you the same food for one price and mine is another price, and my price is more than your price. Because I'm not wanted there, but they can't say "You can't come in," and they can't say, "You have to be served at the back door" anymore. There were many places, and I'm sure you've heard it from others, that you could not go to the front door to be served. You could not ride the city bus by going in the front door, you had to hand the driver your money and go to the back door to get on. . . .
>
> Classen: You say some of that still exists today? In terms of giving different prices to different people?
>
> Jefferson: Yes.
>
> Classen: So it's more subtle, but it still exists.
>
> Jefferson: Right, that's right. And in a lot of places the prices are so high — they know we can't afford to go there, because we don't have the money, because we don't make it.[50]

Having lived in Jackson's neighborhoods for almost fifty years, Jefferson's thoughtful comments, along with the others cited earlier, suggested to me that the substantive dialogue of whites and blacks regarding racial justice, while very rewarding in this instance, was not likely to occur in everyday life. Various segregations — economic, racial, and otherwise — continue to disincline citizens in Jackson and elsewhere to engage in dialogue across these social lines.

Such an observation underlines the dangers of the present, because interracial alliances and more substantive, frankly difficult, dialogues are vital to better address white supremacy and our nation's historical and contemporary investment in white privilege. And, before one reifies dialogue or attaches magical, salvific powers to the processes of human communication, it is paramount to recognize the historical position of whites as those who have listened too little and dictated too long the terms of interracial dialogue. Dialogue, for all of its positive and progressive potentials, can be thoroughly imperializing and oppressive. As Peters has remarked, communication is "more basically a political and ethical problem than a semantic or psychological one."[51]

In an admittedly partial way, I hope this project bears evidence of substantive dialogue and historiography that is synthetic — motivated by questions and concerns learned by listening and by encouraging consideration of media habituses very different from my own. Increasingly I am convinced that listening to historical stories that embed media practices within lives lived whole, and the contemporary questions they bring and prioritize — stories that connect television and industry practices to larger social contexts and recognized problems (e.g., poverty, crime, underemployment, healthcare access) — is one way that communication scholars and policy makers might evade some of the dead ends and limitations of existing historical and policy discourses. As I interpret some of the comments that follow in this study, they invite such conversations by questioning contested notions of racial identity and racial progress and by linking them to local broadcast ownership and programming responsibilities.[52]

Certainly such an approach cannot be disconnected from particular ends or goals. I am not proposing a "neutral" means of information gathering nor prioritizing such means over particular ends. As Ien Ang has reminded us, the scrutinizing of media audiences is never an innocent practice, and one "cannot afford ignoring the political dimensions of the *process* and practice of knowledge production itself."[53] On the

contrary, I am proposing that concerned citizens and activists find ways to escape the deadening and detached legal liberalism that espouses "neutrality" — so evident in the communications policy mainstream — and with the goal of social change place a more holistic focus on enduring problems.

In the conclusion of *Television and New Media Audiences*, Ellen Seiter observes that social scientists, particularly anthropologists, have "bemoaned their lack of influence over policy matters," and she goes on to describe a series of recommendations to address this lack.[54] While Seiter's focus is on the connection of media ethnography and public policy, and while my project makes no claim to be social scientific or ethnographic, I share her interest in rethinking the relationship between reflective qualitative audience studies and policy making. Audience studies such as Seiter's, whether employing ethnography, oral histories, extended interviews, and/or other forms of substantive dialogue between the researcher and audience, represent the potential to revitalize and refocus "policy" research, prompting further investigation of alternative questions and perspectives. As she notes, media studies would be well served by adopting Clifford Gertz's research goal "to enlarge the possibility of intelligible discourse between people quite different from one another in interest, outlook, wealth, and power, and yet contained in a world where, tumbled as they are into endless connection, it is increasingly difficult to get out of each other's way."[55]

This project begins with an examination of specific civil rights and consumerist discourses in order to contextualize the early struggles over Jackson broadcasting. In the first chapter I provide a brief historical overview of early Jackson television and the cultural, political, and other institutions that influenced its construction, including the Citizens' Council (founded in Indianola, Mississippi) and the notorious Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. I also introduce the early petitions and efforts made to change local programming practices.

In the second chapter, "Consuming Civil Rights," I specifically examine how the disparate discourses of sixties consumerism intersected with concerns regarding race and civil rights in the legal challenges to, and court considerations of, WLBT-TV licensing. This examination of popular consumerist discourses and their articulation in a widely read 1966 U.S. Court of Appeals decision shows how conflicting consumerisms were mediated by legal institutions in an attempt to address in-

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creasing social and racial tensions. Further, it demonstrates how the dominant discourses of liberal consumerism, pronounced in the halls of lawmaking, formally displaced issues of race.

In chapter 3, "Trouble around the Ponderosa," the struggle over "consumerism" is moved from the spaces of federal courtrooms to the streets, fairgrounds, and performance halls of Jackson. In the chapter I trace the early years of the Jackson Movement, a local direct-action effort organized and carried out by activists primarily on the fronts of consumer rights and popular culture, including a discussion of the varied movement communication strategies. One campaign allied with this movement, which was initiated by a handful of Tougaloo College students and staff under the name the Culture and Arts Committee, receives particular attention as a grassroots intervention mounted with very limited sources and planning yet with significant impact, including dramatic consequences for local public entertainment, television advertising, and viewing.[56] For example, one production targeted by the Tougaloo activists was *Bonanza* — one of the most popular television series of the sixties — and this chapter describes how the program became a cultural touchstone for key political players and dialogues regarding changing race relations in south-central Mississippi. By focusing on these interventions I make the point that the legal challenges aimed at WLBT and WJTV were integrally connected with other struggles on the terrain of popular culture, and that television had considerable significance for integrationist efforts outside the narrow questions of journalistic representations and broadcast licensing.

Chapter 4, "Programming/Regulating Whiteness," moves chronologically to 1964 and to a specific discussion of WLBT's programming and the complaints that African Americans lodged against local television. Through an examination of these popular and legal texts, as well as formal and informal grievances, I offer a glimpse into the common, enduring strategies of white supremacy and supremacist representations of race. I also offer a critique of the official handling and dismissal of black complaints, through my examination of the Federal Communication Commission's official responses to the marginalized voices and perspectives of local African Americans. With this focus I demonstrate how ostensibly neutral, expert-centered policy making works as a technology for the constitution of race and racialized subjects.[57] A "genealogical" study is offered, explaining how institutions of law make thoroughly political decisions regarding the nature of evidence

and proof while formally denying considerations of everyday contexts, social power, and race by basing their rulings on assumptions that provide formal justifications for the dismissal of particular voices and perspectives.

Moving away from the examination of the "official" legal texts, in the next chapter I offer the memories, perspectives, and concerns of activist Mississippians regarding historical struggles on multiple cultural fronts, including those of local broadcasting. Chapter 5 is based on more than two dozen extended interviews and oral histories that I recorded in Mississippi primarily during the summers of 1992 and 1993. In light of these histories I offer a discussion of how African Americans watched white supremacist television, talked about it in their own communities, and viewed its evolution. While the questions I initiated were narrowly focused on local media practices, the subsequent queries and remarks of those I met are reminders that television and radio are but parts of a whole, a habitus, and that television is indeed not simply consumed but rather is actively made and remade within people's lives: that is, something that people do.

Chapter 5 begins with a discussion of popular memory, dialogue, and historiography. The interview excerpts that follow illustrate some of the dynamics attendant to oral history, but they also provide a glimpse into the historical contexts in which local television and popular culture became fronts for progressive social change. Memories of the WLBT challenge, the legal and FCC interventions, as well as the evolution of local television are foregrounded. Among the concerns raised is how racial identities are defined and connected to issues of property — particularly media properties and licensing. The voices in this chapter repeatedly remind readers how the past and present are thoroughly intertwined and imbricated within the other. Or, more poetically, as Mississippian William Faulkner penned: "The past is never dead. It's not even past."[58]

In chapter 6 I conclude by taking a brief look at the rapid changes and challenges in Jackson's local television market, especially in light of the problem of declining minority broadcast ownership. There, I return to a focus on the historical discourses of consumerism, looking at the implications of this activity more than three decades after the sixties consumer movement. In particular, I highlight the complexities and pitfalls within consumerist discourses, as well as the strategic employ-

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ments of dominant "consumer" nominations and discourses during the period, and the refusal to be limited or contained within them.

The stories of struggle surrounding Jackson television are multiple and rich with meanings, and they provide narratives of hope for progressive movements alongside clear acknowledgments of the barriers and obstacles to such change. And, amid their hopes and cautions, they consistently remind us how race and racialized identities are bound up with the practices that constitute U.S. television as we know it today.