

2017

# Television (From The Mississippi Encyclopedia)

Steven Classen

George Fox University, [sclassen@georgefox.edu](mailto:sclassen@georgefox.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/comm\\_fac](http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/comm_fac)

 Part of the [American Material Culture Commons](#), [Broadcast and Video Studies Commons](#), and the [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Classen, Steven, "Television (From The Mississippi Encyclopedia)" (2017). *Faculty Publications - Department of Communication, Journalism, and Cinematic Arts*. 23.

[http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/comm\\_fac/23](http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/comm_fac/23)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Communication Arts at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - Department of Communication, Journalism, and Cinematic Arts by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact [arolfe@georgefox.edu](mailto:arolfe@georgefox.edu).

*Art* (2006); Liz Lindsey, "Sarah Mary Taylor: Identity in Context" (master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003); Maude Wahlman, *Signs and Symbols: African Images in African American Quilts* (1993); Maude Wahlman and Ella King Torrey, *Ten Afro-American Quilters* (1983).

---

## Television

---

Television came relatively late to Mississippi and several other southern states. Following a federal freeze on licensing new stations by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), television stations came on air in 1953 in Mississippi, Arkansas, and South Carolina. Over the next three years Mississippians built six stations—first WJTV and WLBT in Jackson and WCOC in Meridian and later WCBI in Columbus, WDAM in Hattiesburg, and WTVV in Tupelo. Anticipating WJTV's first broadcast, Pres. Dwight D. Eisenhower's January 1953 inauguration, the station's general manager, John Rossitor, told city leaders and educators that television would "bring the world into your home and accent friendliness among neighbors in this city and state."

While business leaders and other Mississippians expressed great interest in the new medium's potential, local television was quickly confronted by questions regarding the televised representation of racial integration and civil rights struggle. Deeply committed integrationists and African Americans attempted to attract the attention of the national television networks and use local outlets to criticize segregationist myths and practices. Local stations in Mississippi responded to these pressures differently. Some stations included controversial news and public affairs topics and personalities in their regular programming, while other outlets, among them WLBT, chose the road of resistance to integrationist appeals, in alliance with powerful segregationist organizations such as the Citizens' Council and Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission.

During the 1960s WLBT was enmeshed in legal fights stemming from challenges to its segregationist practices. In both 1966 and 1969, the District of Columbia Court of Appeals reversed FCC licensing decisions, inviting public participation in federal hearings and effectively terminating the station's relicensing. In 1980, after years of interim nonprofit management, the station's license was awarded to TV-3, a largely local Jackson group that was 51 percent African American and headed by Aaron Henry. These challenges and court decisions had a wide-ranging impact, encouraging citizen licensing challenges and broadcast reform efforts in local markets across the United States and establishing an important legal precedent regarding the participation

of consumers and citizens in federal administrative agency hearings.

Noncommercial television was first broadcast from within Mississippi in 1970. In that year, what evolved into the Mississippi Public Broadcasting network began airing from Jackson's WMAA, owned and operated by the Mississippi Authority for Educational Television, which focused on educational and distance-learning initiatives.

Commercial stations in the state have garnered multiple prestigious George Foster Peabody Awards. This highly competitive national award, recognizing "distinguished achievement and meritorious service by television stations," has been given to WLBT (1976) and to Biloxi's WLOX (1989, 2005).

Since the 1990s television in Mississippi and throughout the United States has been restructured by media conglomeration and consolidation. Small-market stations, often owned and operated independently at their inception, have increasingly become integrated parts of larger broadcast station groups and media corporations. For example, by the second decade of the twenty-first century, Raycom Media owned or operated more than sixty television stations nationwide, including three Mississippi outlets (WLBT, WLOX, and WDAM). Among the state's oldest stations, one exception to this trend is WTVA (formerly WTVV, serving Tupelo-Columbus-West Point), which has been owned and operated by the Spain family since the mid-1950s.

Steven Classen  
California State University  
at Los Angeles

Steven Classen, *Watching Jim Crow: The Struggles over Mississippi TV, 1955-1969* (2004); Kay Mills, *Changing Channels: The Civil Rights Case That Transformed Television* (2004); George Foster Peabody Awards website, [peabodyawards.com](http://peabodyawards.com).

---

## Tennessee Valley Authority

---

Congress passed the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) Act on 18 May 1933, during the first one hundred days of Pres. Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration. The act chartered a federally owned corporation to improve navigation, flood control, electricity generation, fertilizer manufacturing, and social and economic conditions in the Tennessee River Valley. Although the Tennessee River watershed includes only the northeastern corner of Mississippi, on 7 February 1934 the city of Tupelo became the first municipality to receive TVA power. As the nation's largest producer of electric power, largest user of coal, and the leading investor in nuclear