

THE
Farish
- STREET -
PROJECT

FAMOUS BARGAIN STORE

TUF-NUT, WORK CLOTHES

ONE HOUR
PARKING

FAMOUS BARGAIN STORE





"The Black Mecca of Mississippi"

A PORTRAIT OF A COMMUNITY

Picture this: throngs of people, mid-stride on sidewalks. Men neatly suited and top-hatted, women outfitted in crisp skirts and smart hairdos. Cars wedged bumper to bumper along the streets, men running errands, women making social calls. A couple strolls by Hunt & Whitaker's Loans while shoppers cross to the Jungle Food Store.¹

It's 1947. And this is Farish Street, in Jackson, Mississippi, during the post-World War II boom. This photo and others in the series portray Farish Street when that neighborhood served as a cultural and business hub for the African American population of central Mississippi. Born during Reconstruction, the Farish Street District was forged by black Mississippians searching for spaces to call their own. In its mid-twentieth century heyday, Farish Street was the largest economically independent African American community in Mississippi.

¹Mosley Jr., Charles C. "Farish Street in 1947." *Jackson Free Press*. 16 Jan. 2014. 7 Mar. 2014: Online.

Blues scholar Scott Barretta writes that “much of the crowd then consisted of country folks who took special buses to Farish Street to stock up on dry goods and visit the cafes on the street, where beer flowed inexpensively and jukeboxes blared out the latest R&B sounds. The records themselves could be bought at several local furniture stores, including one that contained a recording studio and nationally distributed label, while moviegoers could choose from the selections at the Amite, the Booker T and the Alamo; the latter also hosted prominent out-of-town touring bands.”²

The Farish Street Historical District is not so vital today. A stroll today down the nine blocks of Farish Street, bounded by Amite Street to the south and Fortification Street on the north, reveals collapsed roofs, toppled facades, broken windows, and faded signs. Without upkeep and reinvestment, significant structures have shuttered and then decayed, leaving nothing more than crumbled foundations behind. Were it not for commemorative markers lining the sidewalk—documenting the existence of Jackson institutions like the Alamo Theater and Trumpet Records—it would be nearly impossible to envision that the district was once prosperous and lively.

Since the earliest Farish Street revitalization efforts led by Dr. Alfredteen Harrison in 1979, former residents, concerned citizens, various community organizations, and city officials have attempted to execute various rehabilitation plans. There is little to show for the work, but there is plenty of blame to go around for the poorly conceived plans, mismanaged budgets, building permit refusals, and construction overruns. The root cause of these problems can be located in the city’s complex and racially charged history. The weight of that past still presses down on Jackson today.



²Barretta, Scott, “Farish Street Blues: Rebuilding A Music Town.” *Jackson Free Press*. 26 Feb. 2004: Online.

“Built by and for the descendants of slaves,” the Farish Street district was carved from Jackson estates in the 1870s and 1880s.³ Almost immediately after Reconstruction, the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* Supreme Court decision codified Jim Crow practices. The court held that businesses and institutions could be separate as long as the accommodations were equal. Under that edict, self-reliant and insulated African American communities soon sprang up across the nation. Neighborhoods and districts such as Houston’s Fourth Ward, Greenwood in Tulsa, Walnut Street in Louisville, and Jackson’s Farish Street became havens for African Americans in the early to mid 1900s, serving a separate black population in as equal a manner as the constricting social mandates made possible.⁴

Many black businessmen, tradesmen and professionals, excluded from working in white-controlled areas of Jackson, safely practiced their trades on Farish Street. Businesses in the district ranged from legal firms to loan companies, from doctors and dentists to jewelers and banks, from retail stores to hospitals.⁵ A 1904 *Daily Clarion-Ledger* article recorded the prosperity of Farish Street as it grew from 1890 and 1904:

*“the negroes were never so prosperous as now and more of them are launching business concerns than ever before...They are buying their own homes, thus putting themselves on independent footing. The established banking institutions are carrying more deposits made by negroes than ever before in the state’s history and the assessment rolls show that they are entering all classes of business.”*⁶

Civil Rights activist Myrlie Evers -Williams remembers Farish Street as a “composite of everything, every way of life to Negroes, as we were called then.” For Evers -Williams, “it was this composital community, where you come together, where you could be treated with dignity and where you could learn entrepreneurship with the hope of spreading further.”⁷

Mike O’Brien, author of *We Shall Not be Moved: The Jackson Woolworth’s Sit-In and the Movement it Inspired*, argues that, “because the blacks were not really welcome on Capitol Street,” downtown Jackson’s business and shopping center, “they created their own business district, right off of Capitol Street, on Farish Street. Farish Street intersects with Capitol Street, and there was about a six to eight block area on Farish Street that was equally as prosperous and industrious, full of activity and shops...restaurants, and churches for the black community...So many blacks would shop there because they knew their dollars were welcome and they knew who they were dealing with, people from their own community.”⁸

For Jackson City Councilman Melvin Priester Jr., African Americans succeeded on Farish Street because they “were in charge of their destiny and carving out an independent space to tell their own narrative.”⁹ It was quite a narrative.

³ Jackson State University, “Inventory of the Farish Street Historic District “A Neighborhood Discovery” Oral History Collection.” [Oral History Inventory]. Henry T. Sampson Library, Special Collections, Jackson.

⁴ “Plessy V. Ferguson,” *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow: Jim Crow Stories*, PBS, 7 Mar. 2014: Online.

⁵ National Register of Historic Places, “Farish Street Historic District,” Jackson, Hinds County, Mississippi.

⁶ “The Negroes Prosperous,” *Daily Clarion-Ledger*, 24 Sept. 1904, p. 3.

⁷ Interview with Myrlie Evers Williams, October 10, 2013.

⁸ Interview with Mike O’Brien, March 23, 2013.

⁹ Interview with Melvin Priester Jr., June 19, 2013.



“Before integration, Farish Street was the black mecca of Mississippi,” says Geno Lee, Jackson resident and owner of the Big Apple Inn. “I’ve seen pictures. You couldn’t even get up the street. It was a two-way street back then, and it was wall-to-wall folks. It was just jam-packed: people shopping, people going to clubs, people eating, people dancing.”¹⁰

Farish Street was one of the largest African American districts in the South.¹¹ It thrived as a housing,

entertainment, and business center, forged in response to the social and economic constraints dictated by Jim Crow. When Civil Rights activists in the 1950s and 1960s began to claw away at institutionalized segregation, the seeds of change started to take root in Jackson. “The Jackson Movement” helped usher in a new reality for Farish Street, just as social movements similarly impacted neighborhoods across the South.

¹⁰Interview with Geno Lee, June 20, 2013.

¹¹National Register of Historic Places.



“Sit-ins, Swim-ins, Read-ins, Pray-ins”

THE JACKSON MOVEMENT

“Negro Citizens, please do not buy on Capitol Street until we are treated with decency and respect.” Civil Rights activists distributed flyers with that challenge in black Jackson communities.

From 1960 to 1963, “sit-ins, swim-ins, read-ins, pray-ins, marches and other protests erupted across the South.”¹² These protests employed nonviolent resistance, a strategy that came to characterize the American Civil Rights movement.¹³ The philosophical and practical tactics of peace were advocated by Civil Rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, who practiced the “Christian doctrine of love operating through the Gandhian method of

nonviolence.” That tack proved to be “one of the most potent weapons available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom.”¹⁴

Civil Rights activities in Mississippi had been sporadic and localized. But by the 1960s, blacks and whites within Mississippi and from across the nation joined the movement to secure voting rights, orchestrate sit-ins, and organize boycotts.

Major efforts included the Freedom Rides, which filled buses with integrated groups of college students traveling across the South, testing the efficacy of the Supreme Court’s ban on segregated interstate transportation. The first riders bound for Mississippi pulled up short when hit by violent attacks near Anniston, Alabama, but the second group reached Jackson on May 25, 1961. Freedom Riders continued to stream into Jackson through the spring and summer of 1961.¹⁵

¹²“The Sit-Ins—Off Campus and Into Movement.” *Civil Rights Movement Veterans. Tougaloo College*, 7 Mar. 2014: Online.

¹³Hartford, Bruce. “Nonviolent Resistance & Political Power.” *Civil Rights¹¹ Movement Veterans. Tougaloo College*, 2008. 7 Mar. 2014: Online.

¹⁴“Nonviolent Resistance.” *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Global Freedom Struggle. Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute*, 7 Mar. 2014: Online.

¹⁵Davis, Derron. “When Youth Protest: The Civil Mississippi Rights Movement, 1955-1970.” *Mississippi History Now. Aug. 20010*: Online.

The Freedom Rides overlapped with the 1961 arrest of the Tougaloo Nine, a group of black students who attempted to use a whites-only Jackson library. Myrlie Evers-Williams articulates the importance of this event, saying that for many Jacksonians, “the change of tide in Mississippi began with the Tougaloo Nine and the library sit-in.”¹⁶

Beginning in 1955, Medgar Evers encouraged African Americans to assert their economic power in downtown Jackson. As state field secretary for the NAACP, “Medgar Evers had been working in the state of Mississippi and in Jackson particularly for nine years,” says Mike O’Brien. “He had been trying to get something going for years, whether it was in voter registration or even public accommodations, whatever approach he could get to get the black populace in Jackson...to kind of stand up and say we’re entitled to these rights as well as the white folks.”¹⁷

In 1962 and 1963, Civil Rights activists decided to “put their money on strike” with organized boycotts of white-owned stores on State, Mill, and Capitol Streets, which they called the “economic nerve center” of Jackson. Students worked with Evers and the NAACP to distribute literature in black neighborhoods. “Don’t be second class, buy somewhere else not downtown,” flyers urged.

The F. W. Woolworth’s store became a target on December 12, 1962, where then Tougaloo professor John Salter (known today as Hunter Bear Gray), along with a group of students, announced the boycott campaign. Says Salter, “as far as I know, it was the first Civil Rights picket in the history of the state.”¹⁸ The decision by African Americans

to boycott white businesses demonstrated the power of black economic leverage in support of social demands. “When the boycott started, we closed down Capitol Street,” says Ruth Campbell, a Jackson native.¹⁹

Lunch counters like Woolworth had gained popularity as picket and sit-in locations for activists across the South. “The idea was lunch counters,” says Rev. Ed King, former chaplain at Tougaloo. “Not restaurants, but the lunch counters because they exist in most cities. And even in small towns Woolworth’s might have a twelve person lunch counter, with eight seats for whites and four for blacks.”²⁰

On May 28, 1963, Civil Rights activists staged a sit-in at Woolworth to divert attention from simultaneous picketing on Capitol Street. “Sit-ins were quite well known by 1963 in the upper South, parts of the middle South,” says Salter. “But there had been nothing like that in Jackson, or Mississippi generally.”²¹

What began as a peaceful protest at Jackson’s Woolworth by Tougaloo students Anne Moody, Pearlana Lewis, and Memphis Norman devolved into chaos. “We were well aware of sit-ins and organized this one on the assumption that people would be quickly arrested,” says Salter. But they weren’t. O’Brien explains that Moody, Lewis, and Norman weren’t immediately arrested because a recent Supreme Court ruling said police officers could no longer intervene unless invited in by the proprietors. “All of a sudden the police weren’t sure what to do and so they stayed out of the store and therefore allowed, kind of, the riot to take place,” says O’Brien. Taunts and jeers developed into violence

¹⁶“1961.” *Civil Rights Movement Veterans. Tougaloo College*, 7 Mar. 2014: Online.

¹⁷Interview.

¹⁸*Ibid*; Interview with John Salter (Hunter Bear Gray), October 25, 2013.

¹⁹Interview with Ruth Campbell, June 12, 2013.

²⁰Interview with Ed King.

²¹Interview.

when Central High, the nearby white school, adjourned for lunch and Woolworth flooded with antagonistic students.

With a riot underway, the Woolworth manager refused to close the store and instead roped off the lunch counter and turned off the lights. “Some of these young kids first grabbed the ropes and began making like little hanging nooses and attempting to throw them around the necks of the three demonstrators,” says O’Brien of the violence at the lunch counter. “Imagine what that must have felt like for the demonstrators: a sense that, you know, this could be a lynching if it got out of hand.”²²

Norman was knocked out and viciously beaten by Benny Oliver, a former cop in the crowd. Norman and Oliver were arrested by an undercover agent at the scene, while Moody and Lewis were repeatedly knocked off their stools.

Joan Trumpauer, a white Tougaloo student, and Lois Chafee, a white assistant professor at Tougaloo, both worked as spotters at a demonstration up the street from Woolworth’s. When the picketing shut down, they headed to the lunch counter to check on their colleagues. Surprised at the extreme hostility at Woolworth’s, Trumpauer and Chafee joined the sit-in as the first white participants. The mob exploded. “My hair was up in a bun, and that just made a good handle for someone to grab,” says Trumpauer.²³

Rev. Ed King, a spotter at Woolworth, called Medgar Evers and informed him that the sit-in was getting

out of hand. John Salter, Georgia NAACP Youth Council secretary Mercedes Wright, and Jackson State student Walter Williams drove to the lunch counter to assist. They were then joined by George Raymond, an activist working for the Congress of Racial Equality in Canton, and Tom Beard, a busboy at the nearby H. L. Green five and dime.

Says O’Brien, “Medgar also wanted to come down, but Salter immediately recognized that that would not be a good idea. Medgar was the most well known Civil Rights activist in the state. If he were to appear at this scene, it would in all likelihood turn much more violent and Medgar’s life would be in danger, as would everybody else’s.”²⁴

“For all of us, it became an endurance contest,” says Trumpauer.²⁵ The demonstrators prayed, read from the Bible, and sang Freedom Songs. Salter describes “a huge mob gathered, with open police support, while the three of us sat there for three hours. I was attacked with fists, brass knuckles and the broken portions of glass sugar containers, and was burned with cigarettes. I’m covered with blood and we were all covered by salt, sugar, mustard, and various other things.”²⁶

The mob continued to pelt the demonstrators with anything they could find. “Placemats, knick-knacks, and other paraphernalia went flying through the air, sometimes hitting, sometimes missing the human targets,” writes O’Brien.²⁷ Only with the intervention of Adam Beittel, then Tougaloo’s president, did the riot begin to diffuse and disperse. Called by Rev. Ed

²²Interview.

²³Interview with Joan Trumpauer Mulholland, March 23, 2013.

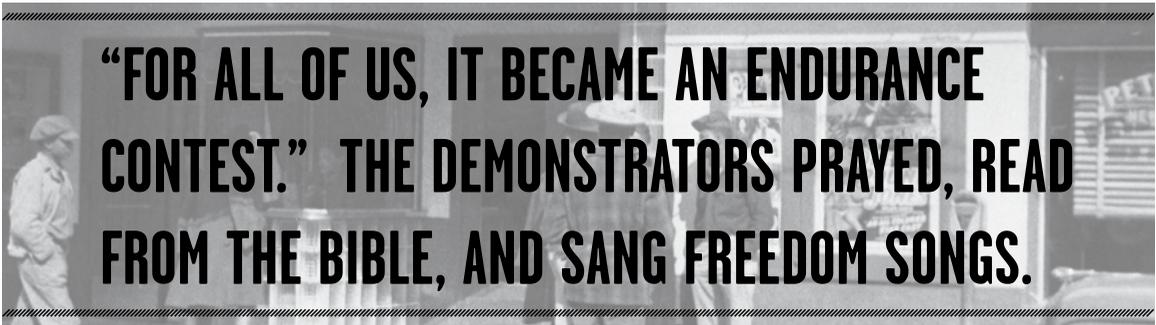
²⁴Interview.

²⁵Interview.

²⁶“The Sit-Ins—Off Campus and into Movement.” *Civil Rights Movement Veterans. Tougaloo College*, 7 Mar. 2014: Online.

²⁷O’Brien, M. J. *We Shall Not be Moved: The Jackson Woolworth Sit-In and the Movement it Inspired*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi (2013). 143.

²⁸*Ibid*, 144.



“FOR ALL OF US, IT BECAME AN ENDURANCE CONTEST.” THE DEMONSTRATORS PRAYED, READ FROM THE BIBLE, AND SANG FREEDOM SONGS.

King for help, Dr. Beittel negotiated with Woolworth manager Harold Braun. Finally, after nearly three hours of taunting and physical attacks, the sit-in demonstration came to a close.²⁸

The Jackson Woolworth sit-in was one of the most violent and publicized efforts of the 1960s. Photos of the event appeared in papers across the nation. A Tougaloo Southern News article recapped the afternoon:

“The demonstrators were sprayed with paint and heaped with quantities of mustard, ketchup, water, sugar and abuse by a fair-sized mob of whites. Memphis Norman was badly beaten by a former policeman. Annie Moody and Joan Trumpauer were carried from their stools at various times. Mr. Salter was beaten around the head and shoulders; and Walter Williams, a Jackson State College student, was knocked unconscious by a flying object. After three hours the store closed; and the demonstrators with the exception of Memphis Norman, who was arrested and later taken to the hospital, went home.”²⁹

White-controlled media in Jackson denounced the lunch counter protestors. One article, with the headline, “Tougaloo Prof Joins Pro-Red Organization,” labeled Salter “Mustard Man.”³⁰ The reaction from the white community to the Woolworth

sit-in helped mobilize African Americans to take part in the Jackson Movement. “This thing was all over the radio, all over the TV that day, so everybody knew it was going on,” says O’Brien. “And it was a major turning point in the kind of ‘Battle of Jackson,’ as they called it, because the black community finally, and without hesitation, came out in support of what Medgar Evers was trying to do.”³¹

Salter remembers, “the response by Jackson’s black community to the sit-in and its violence was tremendously positive. The mass meeting that night was the biggest yet—despite the hordes of hostile city and state police and sheriffs’ forces surrounding the church: close to a thousand people attended. Our initial picket demonstration on Capitol Street on December 12, 1962, had launched the Jackson Boycott Movement. And our Woolworth sit-in now transformed the boycott movement into the massive Jackson Movement.” That movement continued with new protests nearly every day for the next two weeks. But as O’Brien reports, “the cost was significant...Exactly two weeks after the Woolworth sit-in, Medgar Evers is assassinated and it has a major demoralizing effect on the movement.” What followed was a “negotiated settlement... with the mayor,” whom O’Brien describes as “rather intransigent.”

²⁹“Demonstration,” *Tougaloo Southern News*. 73.6 (1963). Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

³⁰“Salter led Jackson Agitation: Tougaloo Prof Joins Pro-Red Organization.” *Jackson Daily News* 25 Sept. 1963. Accessed from online database at Mississippi Department of Archives and History

³¹Interview.

³²*Ibid*; Interview.



“Equal Service in Places of Public Accommodation”

THE CIVIL RIGHTS ACT OF 1964

“Farish Street was the place to be and the place to go. We come to 70 years later and Farish Street’s a ghost town.”

-Geno Lee, Big Apple Inn

For President John F. Kennedy, the increasingly violent displays of racial discrimination embarrassed the United States on the international stage. Supporting racial equality might also prove politically expedient for a savvy politician who understood that the success of his party hinged on courting African American voters in the South. Regardless of his motivations, the President could no longer ignore the escalating civil rights protests across the region.

On June 11, 1963 Kennedy addressed the nation from the Oval Office. His speech was prompted by

the forced integration of the University of Alabama. When Vivian Malone and James A. Hood attempted to enroll, Governor George Wallace initially blocked them. Ross Barnett’s response to James Meredith’s enrollment at the University of Mississippi was similarly intransigent. At his inauguration six months earlier, Barnett had pledged, “In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever.”³³

Directing a federalized Alabama National Guard, Kennedy forced Wallace aside that day and addressed the nation that night, saying, “I hope that every American, regardless of where he lives, will stop and examine his conscience about this and other related incidents. This nation was founded by men of many nations and backgrounds. It was founded on the principle that all men are created equal, and that the rights of every man are diminished when the rights of one man are threatened.”³⁴

³³Wallace, George. “Inaugural address of Governor George Wallace, which was delivered at the Capitol in Montgomery, Alabama.” 14 January 1963. *Alabama History Education Initiative, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, AL.*

³⁴“Primary Resources: Civil Rights Announcement, 1963,” PBS. 7 Mar. 2014: Online.

Reflecting a growing urgency from Americans across the country, Kennedy called for legal protection and equal rights for all American citizens. He reasoned, “it ought to be possible for American consumers of any color to receive equal service in places of public accommodation, such as hotels and restaurants and theaters and retail stores, without being forced to resort to demonstrations in the street, and it ought to be possible for American citizens of any color to register and to vote in a free election without interference or fear of reprisal.” Kennedy planted the political seeds of the comprehensive 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act that ultimately became his enduring legacies. But he saw neither enacted.³⁵

The Kennedy assassination on November 22, 1963 sent shockwaves across the country. The movement intensified and accelerated under the leadership of Kennedy’s successor, President Lyndon Johnson. Johnson’s political acumen, coupled with his rhetorical portrayal of Kennedy as a martyred leader, enabled the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which he signed into law July 2, 1964.

Title II of the 1964 Civil Rights Act directly impacted the Jackson Movement. It declared, “All persons shall be entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, and accommodations of any place of public accommodation, as defined in this section, without discrimination on the ground of race, color, religion, or national origin.” The new law mandated the desegregation of public spaces, obligating restaurants, hotels, schools, and other places of public accommodation to serve all Americans. The fallout from the act extended to every corner of the

nation. The Jim Crow system, so long the standard in the South, was legally overturned, and every community had to recalibrate in accordance with the new social norms.³⁶

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 has been widely celebrated as watershed legislation, yielding numerous advancements for all Americans. But these same opportunities came with consequences that were unforeseen and far-reaching. One of the best places to examine these ramifications is contemporary Farish Street.

Geno Lee will tell you what happened to a now depressed Farish Street. “Desegregation was great for the black race,” Geno says. “But it was horrible for the black businessmen.”³⁷ African Americans, eager to take advantage of new consumer opportunities, began spending money outside their traditional neighborhood stores. They began shopping and eating and socializing at white-owned businesses that were once beyond their reach.

Lee is the fourth-generation proprietor of the Big Apple Inn, a mainstay on Farish Street since 1939. In its heyday, the Big Apple was a community hub, selling smoked sausage sandwiches, pig ear sandwiches, and tamales. Lee’s great-grandfather, Juan “Big John” Mora, came to Jackson in the mid-1930s from Mexico City, and soon began selling hot tamales on the corner of Hamilton and Farish streets.

In 1939, Juan and his son Harold bought an old grocery store, moved the hot tamale operation inside, and dubbed the restaurant the Big Apple Inn, after the popular “Big Apple” dance. The

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶“*The Civil Rights Act of 1964.*” *Recess Reading: An Occasional Feature from the Judiciary Committee. United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary.* 7 Mar. 2014: Online; “*Title II of the Civil Rights Act (Public Accommodations).*” *The United States Department of Justice.* 7 Mar. 2014: Online.

³⁷*Interview.*

restaurant became a local institution, feeding resident professionals, artists, musicians, and neighborhood kids, and providing space for Civil Rights gatherings. Medgar Evers presided as the field secretary for the NAACP in an office above the Big Apple, and often held meetings in the restaurant.

Today the Big Apple Inn is the last surviving business of Farish Street's heyday. "We have stayed down here," Lee says, but "it's definitely not because of the money. It's because of our dedication to Farish Street."³⁸

Gene Lee, father of Geno Lee, echoes his son's appraisal of the district. "After integration came," Gene says, "we [African Americans] figured we had to spend our money with another group of people and all it did was hurt our mom-and-pop stores and our family-owned black businesses in the Farish St. area."³⁹

The neglect suffered by Farish Street businesses was unintended. A major social and economic horizon had opened for African Americans, but the cohesive communities once necessary under the Jim Crow regime slowly dismantled. Businesses couldn't support themselves, and people moved away from Farish Street towards more promising locations.

Dorothy Stewart, who went to school and church in the Farish Street district says, "It didn't work both ways. We wanted the open access and we got the open access, but no one came back to do anything with the places. We almost threw the baby out with the bath water. And so when we left everything fell apart."⁴⁰

The Lees and Dorothy Stewart speak to an understudied shift in communities in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement. Desegregation was supposed to break the barriers of once-exclusive and racialized spaces to provide equal access and opportunity for African Americans. Rev. Ed King suggests that fully realized desegregation would entail more than African American admittance into white circles. In a 1980 interview, King said, "It's time for some whites to live in black communities...Integration can't always mean blacks just coming to whites."⁴¹

In Jackson and in other cities across the country, some blacks moved into white neighborhoods. But many whites migrated outward to colonize new spaces and form new communities. Mike O'Brien contextualizes this: "It's kind of one of the sad fallouts from progress, that no longer did blacks have their own stores, they began assimilating, which is kind of what the idea for integration was, but as a result, I think there is a large body of thought...that the black community in particular lost something of value to them...through the integration process."

"If you look at downtown Jackson as a whole, too, it has hollowed out," says City Councilman Melvin Priester Jr. Priester cites "the donut hole theory" of urban decay, which holds that, as white families dispersed to settle on Jackson's rims, the city fell away from the inside out.⁴² These white-flight migration patterns left "a hole, like the hole at the center of a donut." The social reaction to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 still resonates in Jackson: The Farish Street Historic District has holed out.

³⁸York, Joe. "Smokes & Ears." Online video. Vimeo. 2010. 7 Mar. 2014.

³⁹"Preserving our History: The Big Apple Inn: A Lasting Legacy." 24 Sept. 1998 Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

⁴⁰Interview with Dorothy Stewart.

⁴¹Interview of Ed King by John Jones. November 20, 1980. Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Jackson, Mississippi.

⁴²Interview; "Doughnut City." *Urban Attributes*. Andalusia Center for Contemporary Art. 7 Mar. 2014: Online.



"Child Don't That Look Nice"

"It takes money and traffic, and buying and selling to revive a street. You can't just put something up and say 'Child don't that look nice?'" - Jess Wright⁴³

Efforts to revive Farish Street have been plagued by conflicting visions. What to save? To raze or rebuild? How to renovate? What businesses can be attracted? For many Jacksonians it seems that for every positive step taken toward revitalization, the district suffers two steps backwards. Geno Lee speaks for residents who see Farish Street caught in a permanent spiral: "I think when businesses started to leave in the '70s, they thought that was the rock bottom. Until next year, when four or five more businesses closed. And the next year, when four or five more businesses closed. And it would just continue and continue and continue and here we are now....And there are

probably three businesses open in the whole Farish Street district. So as far as a rock bottom, we are still experiencing a rock bottom every year." The "rock bottom every year" routine is especially exasperating, given Farish Street's thirty-year road to revitalization that has amounted to conspicuously little.

The first efforts to save Farish Street began in the mid 1970s, when anxiety over the deteriorating district swept through Jackson. Articles from the late '60s and '70s decry a Farish Street beset with drugs and prostitution. Dr. Alfredteen Harrison spearheaded early attempts to revive Farish Street. A history professor at Jackson State University and director of the Margaret Walker Center, Harrison conducted National Register of Historic Places inventories of the homes, businesses, churches, and other cultural resources on Farish Street. In 1980, the Farish Street Historic Neighborhood District was added to the Register, offering a temporary reprieve from the ongoing demise.

⁴³Wright, Jess. "You Can't Eat Historical Integrity." *Jackson Advocate*. 30 July 1986. Accessed from Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



Initial renovations were spotty and fragmented. Jackson's first African American public school was reborn in 1984 as the Smith-Robertson Museum, and the Alamo Theater, which had become notable for screenings of black feature films like *Shaft* and performances by entertainers such as Nat King Cole and Duke Ellington, was renovated and reopened in 1996. But twelve years elapsed between these two important restorations. And while sporadic funding went to saving these structures and a handful of others, significant buildings and businesses closed and crumbled.

Jackson residents who remembered and understood Farish Street's significance wanted better for the district. Many were devastated by the deterioration. One observer, Jess Wright, wrote, "the idea that Farish Street could be even partially brought back

to those warm summers when my feet raced up and down it with a quarter in my hand, and I was going to buy some ice cream from 'Boss Man,' a Black man named Cleveland who operated his shop near the corner of Farish and Church...and I was going to take a dime of it for a hamburger at Reed's Cafe, or Fred Scott's Chicken Shack...and if I knew I had a nickle [sic] left to buy some candy (for dessert) at Jones' Candy Kitchen near the corner of Farish and Monument, I'd lead the parade for the restoration of Farish Street."⁴⁴

By 1992 four Farish Street rehabilitation task forces had come and gone. Nearly two million dollars in private and public funds, in addition to untold man-hours, had been poured into revitalization.⁴⁵ Opinions on Farish Street's future polarized as the luster wore off of the National Register designation.

⁴⁴ Wright.

⁴⁵ "Repost: Over \$21 Million Spent on Farish Street Revitalization." *Jackson Jambalaya*. 21 Oct. 2013. 5 April 2014; Online.

⁴⁶ "Farish Street Historic District." *10 Most Endangered List 1999* Mississippi Heritage Trust. 7 Mar. 2014; Online.

⁴⁷ "Farish Street Housing." Pamphlet from the Farish Street Historic District Neighborhood Foundation. Located at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

⁴⁸ Ballou, Howard. "Taking Back Our Neighborhoods: Farish Street Houses Razged." *MS News Now*. 11 Nov. 2013. 7 Mar. 2014; Online.

The effects on the district's appearance and vitality were perceived as minimal. The *Clarion Ledger* asked whether to tear it down or shore it up.

Farish Street's inclusion in the Mississippi Heritage Trust's 1996 roster of the "11 Most Endangered Historic Places" revived concern about the future of the district. The specific concern was "the threat to what is the largest concentration of shotgun row houses (circa 1930-1950) central to a surviving African-American neighborhood."⁴⁶ A concerted effort by the Farish Street Historic District Neighborhood Foundation went into restoring thirty-six shotgun houses in 1999.⁴⁷ The idea was to maximize the neighborhood's housing potential, responding to a low-income housing shortage, while saving the architecturally significant vernacular housing. Also in the plan was a museum, the Scott-Ford House, commemorating the midwifery tradition on Farish Street.

The project flopped. Funding sources proved incompatible with local needs. Infrastructure could not sustain neighborhood residents. *Mississippi News Now* reported in 2013 that "vagrants set fires inside [the shotgun houses], nearly burning some of them down; weeds and brush took over. All of it eventually auctioned off; sold to a private investor."⁴⁸ In November 2013 the historic shotgun houses were razed.

The energy that coalesced behind the Smith-Robertson Museum, the Alamo Theater, and the shotgun restorations spoke to Jackson's high hopes for Farish Street. But disjointed efforts over a twenty-year period did not sustain the district. By the

late 1990s, the effort shifted to conceptualizing the district as a cohesive entity, focused on entertainment.

The failure to rebuild Farish Street has been magnified by the perceived success of Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee. In many ways, the story of Beale Street mirrors that of Farish Street: a robust African American community of the early 1900s, populated by shops, clubs, churches, and restaurants, well known as a showcase for musicians. Like 1960s Farish Street, Beale Street patronage plunged from the late 1950s through the early 1960s. Memphis residents decried the decline of Beale Street.⁴⁹

Beale and Farish diverged in the late 1970s, when Memphis took action to renovate and rebrand Beale as an entertainment district. The city bought property along Beale Street and extended a redevelopment lease to John Elkington and Performa Entertainment Real Estate. The first new club opened in 1983. Since then, the Beale Street Entertainment District has carved out a place for itself in Tennessee's tourism market to become one of the state's biggest attractions.⁵⁰

The success of Beale Street offered stark contrast to Jackson's inability to reclaim, rebuild and reinvigorate its historic African American district. If Memphis could transform a blighted area of cultural significance into a successful tourism site, why couldn't Jackson follow suit?

John Elkington's Beale Street development story charmed the Jackson City Council. In 2002 the Council decided that a Performa entertainment

⁴⁹"About Beale Street: History and More..." WMCTV. 5 April 2014: Online.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*

⁵¹Barnes, Dustin. "Consensus: Candidates Back Farish Redevelopment." *Clarion Ledger*. 2 April 2014. 5 April 2014: Online.

⁵²Taylor, Ayana. "Hello, Farish." *Jackson Free Press*. 3 Nov. 2004. 7 Mar. 2014: Online.

⁵³Fleming, Erik. "Farish Street: Light Show or Legacy?" *Jackson Advocate*. 29 May 1997. Accessed at Mississippi

district was what Jackson needed. An entertainment district had the power to establish Jackson as a destination, not just a stopover between Memphis and New Orleans. Construction on Elkington's plan was set to be completed by 2007. The revamped Farish Street would cost over one million dollars, create some 700 jobs, and feature chains like Wet Willy's, Funny Bone, and the King Biscuit Café.⁵²

Critics of the City Council's plan argued that the two-block renovation simplified the district's historic function. Erik Fleming, writing in the *Jackson Advocate*, argued that reshaping and touting the community as an entertainment district unfairly elevated one dimension of Farish Street's rich history while ignoring its community function. "Farish Street had a different mission," Fleming noted. "Our beloved Farish Street was a lifeline of the African American community here in Jackson in a time when the doors of opportunity were slammed shut to us. It was here that we could shop without discomfort, eat without distraction, and find professionals such as doctors and lawyers that were not disrespectful. When you needed a prescription filled, there was Dr. McCoy's pharmacy. When you needed a picture taken, there was Mr. Beadle's studio. From hospitals to funeral homes, churches to hotels, Farish Street is also the home of the Crystal Palace and the Alamo Theater, so it was also our entertainment district."⁵³

Despite detractors who saw the plan as "severely lacking" and recognized that the redevelopment would build on outside businesses, not local businesses, Performa assumed development and management of Farish Street. Elkington encountered a number of hitches, stalling the project for years. These included funding delays, a run-in with a state statute banning

alcohol sales near the Mississippi College campus, organizational miscommunications and contract complications, not to mention the discordant visions for Farish Street held by a succession of mayors. Many of these problems were rectified with the district's resort designation in 2008, though projected business openings came and went.⁵⁴

In 2008 the city transferred the lease to Jackson-based Watkins Development. David Watkins had rebuilt the King Edward Hotel, an historic structure that reopened in 2009 after sitting vacant since 1967.⁵⁵ Watkins, a retired lawyer, was local, familiar with Jackson politics, and arguably more knowledgeable about the desires of Jackson residents.

Watkins purchased the Farish Street redevelopment lease from Performa for \$425,000, and agreed to assume Performa's \$1.5 million debt. Watkins' domain stretched from Amite Street to Griffith, and included a projected thirteen venues. Developers installed corrective water and sewer lines, repaved streets, and reconstructed building facades. Watkins also began the work of securing future tenant leases for restaurants, clubs, and bars like B.B. King's Blues Club, Itta Bena Room, and Zac Harmon's Blues Club.

But Watkins soon encountered obstacles of his own, beginning with the discovery of a missing foundation for the proposed site of B.B. King's Blues Club, the centerpiece of the planned entertainment district. Estimates to repair the missing foundation ran between \$1.4 million and \$1.7 million, and would require the help of additional partners.⁵⁶ Furthermore, Watkins failed to close on a five million dollar New Market Tax Credit, which would have secured a bond

⁵⁴ Cleveland, Tyler. "The Battle for Downtown, Part 2: What should Farish Become?" *Jackson Free Press*. 15 January 2014. 5 April 2014: Online.

⁵⁵ Stauffer, Todd. "King Edward Opens: 'Great Day for Jackson.'" *Jackson Free Press*. 17 Dec. 2009. 5 April 2014: Online.

⁵⁶ Carter, Ted. "Strike Two for Farish Street Development—Two Developers at Odds on What Unfolded But Agree Success Can be Achieved." *Mississippi Business Journal*. 15 Nov. 2013. 7 Mar. 2014: Online.



issue from the City of Jackson to fund much of the redevelopment. Mayor Chokwe Lumumba canceled the lease with Watkins on September 25, 2013.⁵⁷

That's where the timeline ends—as Geno Lee says, “a new rock bottom.” The future of the district is in limbo. Planners are back to square one. Farish Street stakeholders are once again searching for new ideas.

Many Jacksonians hold out hope for a Farish Street Entertainment District. Tyler Cleveland of the *Jackson Free Press* wrote in October 2013, “The consensus seems to be that even though the project is mired in decades of setbacks and controversy, an entertainment district is essential if Jackson is going to flourish.” Just a few months later Cleveland questioned that consensus in an article entitled “The Battle for Downtown, Part 2: What Should Farish Become?” Cleveland writes, “The good news for

folks who oppose turning Farish Street into a place where you can have a Beale Street-like experience is that the comparison between the two streets ends at the history.”⁵⁸

For some, talk of a possible entertainment district marginalizes the legacy of Farish Street. Erik Fleming recalls that “Farish Street was a haven for the African-American community, a haven that in turn became a part of our legacy here.” Fleming continues, “It is my hope that the allure of the quick buck does not allow us to lose that perspective, because our legacy deserves more than a light show.”⁵⁹ Perhaps the entertainment district roadblock offers a new opportunity to imagine a viable Farish Street rejuvenation.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Cleveland, Tyler. “Farish Street, Round Two (or Eight?).” *Jackson Free Press*. 16 Oct. 2013. 7 Mar. 2014: Online; Cleveland, Tyler. “The Battle For Downtown, Part 2: What Should Farish Become?” *Jackson Free Press*.

15 Jan. 2014. 7 Mar. 2014: Online.

⁵⁹Fleming, Erik. “Farish Street: Light Show or Legacy?” *Jackson Advocate*. 29 May 1997. Accessed at Mississippi Department of Archives and History.



“Build it and They Will Come”

“This patchwork quilt is stitched with blood and tears. This street is paved with martyred Black men’s flesh and bones.”

- from “A Poem for Farish Street”

by Margaret Walker Alexander

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 changed patterns of commerce in American towns and cities. African Americans could now spend their money on the white side of town. The results were often catastrophic for independent black-owned businesses. To further complicate the Jackson narrative, Farish Street didn’t suffer alone. A look at Capitol Street, the traditional nucleus of the white business community, reveals lost potential, too.

It is too easy, too convenient, to say that Farish Street died because of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Black Jacksonians didn’t need much of a push to abandon the neighborhood. Myrlie Evers-Williams speaks to this ambivalence: “Within me, I began to dislike

what Farish Street represented because it appeared to be a fence with barbed wire on it that would not allow me and my people to enjoy the rest of Jackson of which we worked so hard, and we took care of everybody else.” But Evers-Williams is quick to say, “I have such mixed emotions about Farish Street and I do today because I hope that there will soon be a revival of that area that will pay honor to it and homage to those who helped build it.”⁶⁰

Cities like Jackson have to decide how to interpret historic districts and cultural sites, even as some crumble from disuse. The real question is whether responsible and sustainable community development can balance the interests of past, present, and future.

Plans are underway to build the country’s first state-funded Civil Rights museum in Jackson. The \$90 million “2 Mississippi Museum Project” will open in 2017 with two side-by-side museums dedicated to Civil Rights and Mississippi history. While the new construction demonstrates hope for a dynamic downtown Jackson revitalization, Farish Street remains the elephant in the room.⁶¹

⁶⁰Interview.

⁶¹2 Mississippi Museums. *Foundation for Mississippi History*. 7 Mar. 2014. Online.



The 2013 election of Chokwe Lumumba, “America’s Most Revolutionary Mayor,” signaled a radical shift in the governmental leadership of Jackson.⁶² But soon after Lumumba settled into the hard business of rebuilding Jackson, he died unexpectedly on February 25, 2014.⁶³

Perhaps the stalled Farish Street redevelopment, and the loss of a visionary leader, offers an opportunity to reflect and reappraise. At a time when the prospect of a stand-alone entertainment district seems increasingly doubtful, the latest delay may offer an opportunity to reconsider the Farish Street visions and their viability.

More residents are calling for a localized approach to Farish Street redevelopment. Proponents hope that an organic, neighborhood-centric strategy might nurture local businesses, entrepreneurs, and artists. Keeping Farish Street in the hands of Jacksonians, rather than privileging out-of-town chains, might showcase local knowledge and talent to entice both residents and visitors looking for a uniquely Jackson,

Mississippi experience.

“Instead of running it like a mall development, maybe it needs to be run more like a neighborhood,” writes Todd Stauffer, publisher of the *Jackson Free Press*. “What about a development of small shops, restaurants, and bars that all have Mississippi roots and flavors? How about some artist spaces and lofts? Live-work offices? Frequent street festivals? Food trucks? Artwalks? Craft fairs?”⁶⁴

City Councilman Melvin Priester Jr. agrees that a revitalized Farish Street will hinge on this kind of local involvement and supervision: “If we look at Farish Street over the next five years and it’s been a success, my bet is that what has happened is that we’ve let locals be in charge of those spaces. If we look at Farish Street in five years and it proves to not be successful, my bet is that we haven’t given enough opportunity for the people who live here, grew up here, breathe and live Jackson to control and manage the spaces.”⁶⁵

⁶²Mitter, Siddhartha. “In Mississippi, America’s Most Revolutionary Mayor.” *Aljazeera America*. 19 Sept. 2013. 7 Mar. 2014: Online.

⁶³JFP Staff. “Jackson Mayor Chokwe Lumumba, 66, Has Died; Tillman Acting Mayor.” *Jackson Free Press*. 25 Feb. 2014. 10 April 2014: Online.

⁶⁴Stauffer, Todd. “I Was Wrong About Farish.” *Jackson Free Press*. 15 Jan. 2014. 7 Mar. 2014: Online.

⁶⁵Interview.

In many ways, the story of Farish Street—and other communities like it—is a counter narrative to the celebratory accounts of the successes of the Civil Rights movement. To be sure, this chronicle of Jackson’s once-thriving African American neighborhood poses more complex questions than it answers, and speaks to larger issues underpinning Jackson’s social fabric.

During this 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, these questions are especially pressing: How far have we really come? What progress have we made, and what work remains to be done? How can we revitalize the district while empowering each and every member of the community?

It is our hope that as Jackson moves forward on Farish Street redevelopment, these questions are considered.

Signed,

Turry Flucker

Graduate Student,

Center for the Study of Southern Culture

Anna Hamilton

Graduate Student,

Center for the Study of Southern Culture

Kate Hudson

Graduate Student,

Center for the Study of Southern Culture

Andy Harper

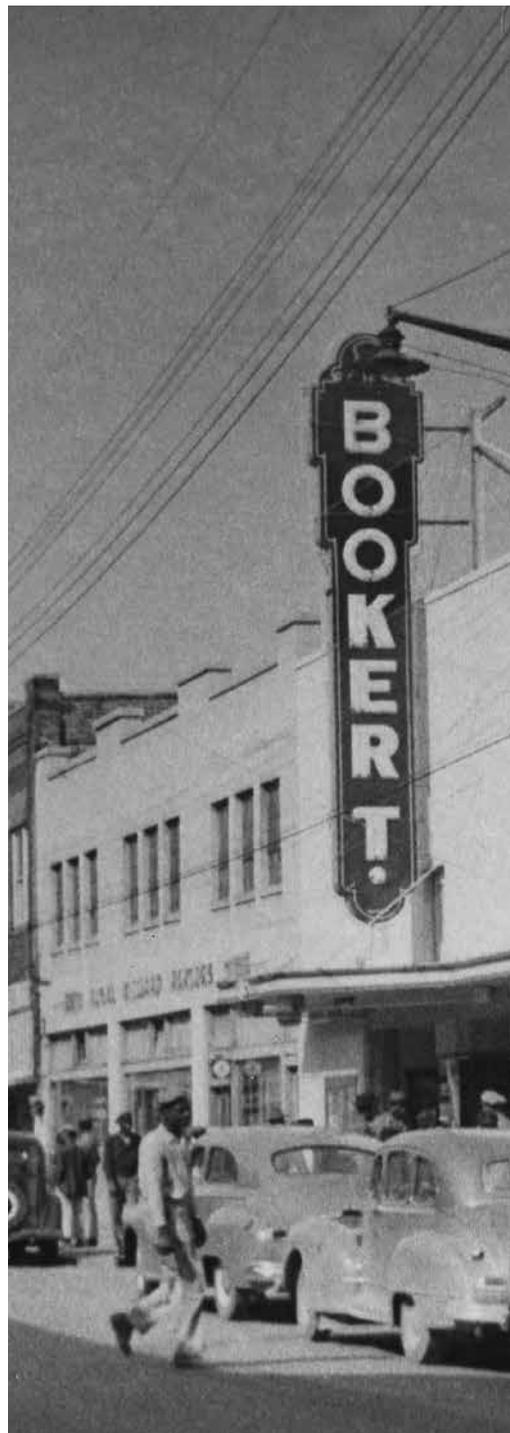
Director, Southern Documentary Project

John T. Edge

Director, Southern Foodways Alliance

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PARTIAL FUNDING BY THE LOUIS M. RABINOWITZ FOUNDATION

*All photos: Civil Rights Movement, Farish Street, Jackson
August Meier Collection, Margaret Walker Center, Charles Mosley Jr - Photographer
March 17, 1947*







A PROJECT BY THE SOUTHERN FOODWAYS ALLIANCE *and the* SOUTHERN DOCUMENTARY PROJECT, 2014

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