

0. LIFE in JACKSON, MISSISSIPPI - Story Preface

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During the Jim-Crow era, some African-American families were poor tenant farmers in the Mississippi Delta. This image depicts such a family. The photo is by Marion Post Wolcott, circa October 1939, entitled: "One of tenant families on their porch, Marcella Plantation, Mileston, Mississippi Delta, Mississippi." Original photo maintained at the Library of Congress; Reproduction Number: LC-DIG-fsa-8a40921 (digital file from original negative). Click on the image for a better view.

WARNING: THIS CHAPTER INCLUDES QUOTES FROM RACE-BAITING POLITICIANS WHO USED HIGHLY INAPPROPRIATE WORDS AGAINST AFRICAN-AMERICANS. PROCEED WITH CAUTION.

Jackson, the capitol of Mississippi (the 20th state to enter the Union), is situated on the Pearl River. A city of contrasts, it has been home to creators of great literature (like Eudora Welty) and race-baiting politicians (like Theodore G. "The Man" Bilbo, who twice served as Mississippi's governor).

Beautiful houses in Jackson's Bellhaven area (belonging to white people like Hilly Holbrook and her friends) are far different from those across the Woodrow Wilson bridge (occupied by African-Americans like Minny Jackson and Aibileen Clark).

A Confederate State, during America's Civil War, Mississippi is itself a land of contrast. With some of the best crop-growing soil in the world, its Delta area is also home to poverty-stricken people. Highly respected schools - like the University of Mississippi ("Ole Miss") in Oxford - attract well-prepared students while poorer school districts suffer from ongoing budget cuts.

After slavery was abolished, ending Mississippi's plantation way of life, some whites in the state still considered blacks in the state their inferiors. Segregation-encouraging politicians, like former-governor Bilbo - who also represented Mississippi in the U.S. Senate - fanned the flames of racial hatred with words like these:

...Old Lady Roosevelt [America's first lady] ... forced our Southern girls to use the stools and the toilets of damn syphilitic nigger women ... (July 1, 1946 issue of TIME Magazine, quoting Theodore Bilbo.)

Not content to make disparaging remarks against African-Americans, Bilbo also encouraged violence against people of color who wanted to vote:

I call on every red-blooded white man to use any means to keep the niggers away from the polls. If you don't understand what that means you are just plain dumb... (July 1, 1946 issue of TIME Magazine.)

It wasn't just loud-mouthed politicians, like Mississippi's Bilbo, who shamefully treated African-Americans. Even the United States Supreme Court - in racially based opinions like Plessy v Ferguson - agreed that black people could be treated with discrimination.

The majority called it "separate but equal," but Justice John Marshall Harlan - Plessy's lone dissenter - wasn't fooled. He criticized his colleagues - and the decision - with these words:

The present decision ...will not only stimulate aggressions, more or less brutal and irritating, upon the admitted rights of colored citizens, but will encourage the belief that it is possible, by means of state enactments, to defeat the beneficent purposes which the people of the United States had in view when they adopted the recent [13th and 14th] amendments of the Constitution.

Soon after Justice Harlan wrote those words, biased legislators passed various "state enactments" (otherwise known as "laws") against African-Americans. Although they were "free" - and no longer "owned" by their "masters" - black people lost their recently-granted, constitutionally-guaranteed rights.

Nowhere was life more difficult for blacks than in Jim-Crow-era Mississippi. White Citizens' Councils - first

formed after *Brown v Board of Education* (a 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision) ended segregation in public schools - numbered 80,000 Mississippi members by 1956.

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Questions 2 Ponder

Should “All the News” Always Be Published?

The year after WWII was over, *TIME* magazine quoted Theodore Bilbo’s shameful statement about keeping African-Americans “away from the polls.” Do you think *TIME*’s editors made the right choice to publish those words? Why, or why not?

What makes a piece of information “news?” Should “all the news” always be published? Why, or why not?

If “all the news” should not always be published, how do we decide what stories to make public?

Is Journalistic Self-Restraint the Same Thing as Self-Censorship?

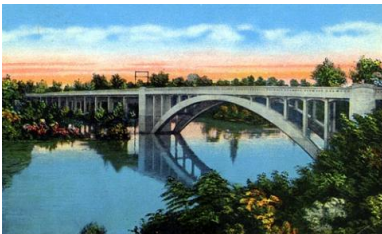
How would you define press responsibility? Do journalists get to publish anything they want—or—should they use self-restraint?

Is self-restraint responsible journalism or is it a form of censorship? What is the difference between responsible reporting and self-censorship?

When Does the Public Have a Right to Know?

Do you think “the public’s right to know” is sometimes used by news organizations to justify stories which really aren’t within the sphere of the “public’s right to know?” Explain your answer.

Media Stream



Woodrow Wilson Bridge - Jackson, Mississippi

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Bellhaven-Area Homes

Image online, courtesy Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

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African-American Homes in Jackson

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Jackson, Mississippi - Downtown Area

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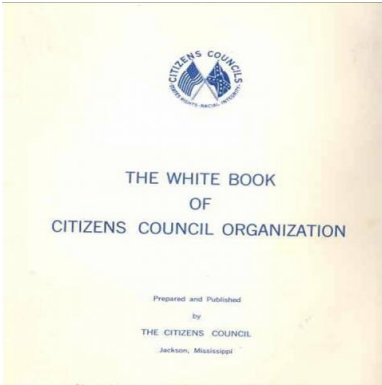
Homes in Jackson Near Greenwood

Photograph by Natalie Maynor, online courtesy Flickr.

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White Citizens Councils - Jackson, Mississippi

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