

The Rise and Fall of Farish Street in Jackson, Mississippi

The Farish Street District, also known as the Black Mecca of Mississippi, was one of Jackson, Mississippi's most prominent pillars of the African American community from Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movement. The Farish Street District served as the home of Black communities during Reconstruction. By the mid-twentieth century, Farish Street boomed socially and economically with Black-owned restaurants, hospitals, entertainment centers, and more. Through the 1960s, the Farish Street Historic District was the largest economically independent Black community in Mississippi. Amid Jim Crow laws and the Supreme Court ruling *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) that discriminated against Black consumers, Farish Street thrived as a center of commerce and community for African Americans.

In the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, a Black man Homer Plessy refused to sit in a Black-only train car. In response, the court ruled that businesses, transportation, schools, and other facilities could legally separate Black consumers from White consumers as long as the accommodations were "equal." Following this ruling, Jim Crow laws sprouted and grew into a series of laws that denied African Americans basic rights such as voting, education, and employment. After decades of repression, the Black outcry resulted in protests, boycotts, and other forms of civil rights activism.

Due to discriminatory treatment and denial of services, African American consumers boycotted Capitol Street businesses in late 1962 and 1963. Headed by civil rights activist Medgar Evers, African Americans boycotted White-owned businesses in hopes of gaining equal treatment and services. They demanded to be treated like their White consumer counterparts.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on July 2, 1964, implemented a crucial change in history. This act states, "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." This law called for the racial integration of all businesses. Although this was a major victory for the equality of African Americans, it caused the gradual economic collapse of Farish Street. Black consumers began to spend their money at businesses closer to where they lived and worked. Businesses on Farish Street did not get the support they needed to survive, which caused them to move off Farish Street or close completely. Save the Big Apple Inn, there are no surviving businesses on Farish Street from this time. Although there have been many efforts to restore Farish Street to its former glory, factors such as finances and politics have prevented plans from moving ideas into reality.

Subject that can be addresses in this digital archive:

- Farish Street
- Jim Crow laws
- *Plessy v. Ferguson 1896*

- The Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Segregation
- Integration

Curricular Connections: Below are key standards featured in this Learning Lagniappe.

Mississippi Studies

MS.7 Examine the economic, political, and social changes in the Jim Crow era Mississippi from the end of Reconstruction through World War II. 3. Analyze reforms that contributed to social and economic changes after the Civil War (e.g., Jim Crow, poll taxes, literacy tests, segregation, etc.).

MS.8 Evaluate the role of Mississippi in the Civil Rights Movement. 2. Discuss the significant strategies used within the Civil Rights Movement. 4. Evaluate the lasting impact of the Civil Rights Movement on Mississippi.

MS.9 Analyze the economic characteristics of modern Mississippi. 4. Analyze the causes of Mississippi’s past and present-day struggle with poverty.

US History: 1877 to Present

USH 1 Westward Expansion and the New South: Trace how economic developments and the westwards movement impacted regional differences and democracy in the post Reconstruction era. 5. Evaluate Reconstruction Amendments, black codes, Jim Crow, disenfranchisement, sharecropping, *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896), and the rise of early civil rights activists as a response to the injustice such as Booker T, Washington, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and W.E.B. DuBois.

USH 11 Civil Rights Movement: Evaluate the impact of the Civil Rights Movement on social and political change in the United States. 2. Trace the federal government’s involvement in the modern Civil Rights Movement (including the abolition of the poll tax, nationalization of state militias, *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954), the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965). 6. Describe the accomplishments of the modern Civil Rights Movement (including the growth of the African American middle class, increased political power, and declining rates of African American poverty). 7. Evaluate the effectiveness of major non-violent demonstrations and events on the Civil Rights Movement (including Montgomery Bus Boycott, sit-ins, Freedom Rides, the March on Washington, and Selma March).

African American Studies

AAS.3 Differentiate between African American life and cultural contributions through 1860. 3. Trace the development of African American institutions, including religion, education, and benevolent organizations and possible constraints against their development (e.g., AME Church in Philadelphia and other “Invisible Churches,” Prince Hall Masons, etc.).

AAS.5 Analyze the rise of Jim Crow and its effects on the life experiences of African Americans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. 1. Assess the de facto economic and social impacts of Jim Crow laws on African Americans, including the Tulsa Massacre and Red Summer (e.g., poll tax, Grandfather Clause, *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, etc.). 3. Compare and contrast the political movements that developed in response to Jim Crow laws (e.g., the Niagara Movement, the NAACP, the Urban League, The Atlanta Compromise, The Farmers’ Union Movement, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the

Anti-Lynching Crusade, etc.).

5. Describe the development of African American institutions post-Reconstruction (e.g., religion, education, benevolent organizations, etc.).

AAS.8 Analyze the success and challenges of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. 3. Define various methods used to obtain civil rights (e.g., boycotts, demonstrations, sit-ins, marches, freedom rides, etc.). 5. Assess the extent to which the Civil Rights Movement transformed American politics and society (e.g., Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, Title IX, ADA, etc.)

Problems in American Democracy

PAD.8. Examine how and under what circumstances state governments and the federal government have expanded or constrained the civil and political rights of African Americans and other groups since the Civil War. 1. Trace the accomplishments and setbacks related to the enfranchisement of African Americans during Reconstruction. 2. Describe the social, economic, and political disenfranchisement of African Americans under the Jim Crow laws.

Pre-Reading:

<https://mississippiencyclopedia.org/entries/farish-street/>

<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/black-codes-and-jim-crow-laws/>

Directions:

You will be using the MDAH Catalog to locate your items. To find the Farish Street photograph, use the following instructions: 1. Click the link to go to [MDAH Catalogue Page: Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History](#). 2. Type in **Farish Street** in the search bar. 3. Scroll down until you see “Parrish [sic] Street/ 1939 [graphic] and click on it. 4. To view the graphic, click the Link to Electronic Resource.

Use the “Parish [sic] Street 1939” photo to answer the following questions.

1. This photo shows a business situated on Farish Street. Farish Street was renowned for a wide range of stores that catered to the needs of African Americans, offering them a variety of products and services. What kind of business do you think is being shown in the photo? **Possible Student Answers:** Potential answers may include a men’s clothing store, a loaning office, or an ammunition store. Students’ responses will vary but should convey an understanding of the material.

2. In this photo, we can see people sitting, standing, or walking on Farish Street. As mentioned in the lesson, Farish Street was considered a haven for African Americans during this time. What seems to be the attitudes of the people? What is the overall feel of the photo? **Possible Student Answers:** Answers may vary: The people in the photo seem to be comfortable, engaged, safe, happy, and peaceful. The overall feel in this photo makes Farish Street seem like a prosperous, comforting, family space for African Americans.

3. Because of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the events that led up to it, integration opened the door of economic access to African Americans. However, many businesses on Farish Street failed to stay open

because their Black patrons left for establishments closer to where they lived. Imagine you lived there during this period and had a business here.

What steps would you have taken to keep your business open? **Possible Student Answers:** Student answers may vary but should convey an understanding of the material.

You will be using the MDAH Catalog to locate your items. To find the Farish Street Interview, use the following instructions: 1. Click the link to go to [MDAH Catalogue Page: Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History](#). 2. Type in **Farish Street Interview** in the search bar. 3. Scroll down until you see “An Interview with Carlia E. Oatis, Jr., July 24, 1999/interviewed by Beatrice Cotellis,” [sound recording] and click on it. 4. To view the graphic, click the link to Electronic Resource for Transcript.

1. Why does Carlia E. Oatis, Jr. refer to Farish Street as the “Black Mecca”? **Possible Student Answers:** He refers to Farish Steet as the “Black Mecca” because the successful businesses on Fairish Street brought wealth, people, and art.

2. If you were the interviewer, what questions would you ask Carlia E. Oatis Jr.? **Possible Student Answers:** Answers will vary. Do you know what the protests were like on Capitol Street? Were there other minority communities that lived or had businesses on Farish Street? What was the major impact of Jim Crow laws and the *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) Supreme Court ruling?

3. Although Farish Street is no longer a thriving area as it had once been, it remains a significant historical location in Jackson, Mississippi. Do you think the history of Farish Street should continue to be shared? Why or why not? **Possible Student Answers:** Answers will vary but should convey an understanding of the material.