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*

- Th Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Segregation
- Integration

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?

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?

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?

Directions:

You will be using the MDAH Catalog to locate your items. To find the Farish Street Interview: "An Interview with Carlia E. Oatis, Jr.,", use the following instructions: 1. Click the link to go to the MDAH Catalogue Page: Mississippi Deptartment of Archives and History catalog (state.ms.us). 2. Type in Farish Street in the search bar. 3. Scroll down until you see "An Interview with Carlia E. Oatis, Jr.," and click on it. 4. To view the interview, click the link that says Link to Electronic Resource for Transcript.

Use the Farish Street Interview: "An Interview with Carlia E. Oatis, Jr.," to answer the following questions.

1. Why does Carlia E. Oatis, Jr. refer to Farish Street as the "Black Mecca"?

2. If you were the interviewer, what questions would you ask Carlia E. Oatis Jr.?

3. Although Farish Street is no longer a thriving area as it once was, 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?