Race, Place, and Family: Narratives of the Civil Rights Movement in Brownsville, Tennessee, and the Nation

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Abstract
This dissertation examines the Civil Rights Movement through the experiences of primarily two African American families with roots in Brownsville, Tennessee. This study, based on archival research and oral histories, chronicles three generations of citizens affiliated with the NAACP whose translocal civil rights struggles include both the South and urban North. It highlights various tactics individuals used to secure their rights and identifies African American entrepreneurship as a form of non-violent protest, focusing on the African American funeral home as a gateway enterprise which contributed to the establishment of other businesses or "staple institutions" that helped to sustain the Black community during segregation.

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Initially undertaken as a biography of Tennessee's foremost civil rights attorney, Avon Williams, Bobby L. Lovett expanded the scope of his work to include the breadth of civil rights activism in the state. Primarily focusing on the period between 1935 and the present, Lovett recounts the many avenues taken by the state's African-American residents to secure equal rights. In his introduction, Lovett identifies three distinct eras of African American activism in Tennessee. He discusses African Americans' post-emancipation attempts to participate more fully in the political process. The civil rights movement was driven by many of these small acts of courage. James Meredith at Ole Miss. The first black student to attend the University of Mississippi at Oxford (known as Ole Miss) after the Brown decision was James Meredith. Beginning in 1961 and inspired by the Brown decision, future civil rights activist Meredith began applying to the University of Mississippi. He was twice denied admission and filed suit in 1961. The astonishing power of the American civil rights movement was made visible on Aug. 25, 1963, when more than 250,000 demonstrators went to the largest public protest in American history in Washington, D.C. Speakers included Martin Luther King Jr., John Lewis, Whitney Young of the Urban League, and Roy Wilkins of the NAACP.