

Project title: Ira Harkey: The Challenges of Publishing and Editing the Pascagoula Chronicle During the Desegregation of Ole Miss in 1962

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Project summary:

The study documented how defiance of the entrenched system of white supremacy in Mississippi by Ira Harkey and his Pascagoula Chronicle in 1962 illustrates the challenges and dangers of publishing a newspaper while adhering to the press theory of social responsibility: “providing a truthful and comprehensive account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning; providing a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism; projecting a representative picture of constituent groups in society; clarifying the goals and values of the society; and providing access to the day's intelligence” (A Free and Responsible Press, 1948). Harkey's challenge was to provide coverage of Mississippi's African-American population as they struggled for educational equality at the same time that he openly defied a white supremacist power structure that rejected the concept. The Pulitzer Prize-winning editor was extensively interviewed for the project during May and June 2005 at a nursing home in Kerrville, Texas, where he resides. Following the interviews, the transcribed material was placed into historical perspective utilizing archival materials.

The study advanced the PI's field of scholarship in the area of civil rights struggles and the media, and added to the body of knowledge regarding the practical application of press theories. The study will be submitted for presentation to the national journalism educator's convention (AEJMC) in 2007, and to Journalism Studies, a peer-reviewed, internationally distributed journal. It will also develop into a chapter for a book being written by the PI on race relations in the South.