**United States Department of the Interior**
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: WGPR-TV
Other names/site number: William V. Banks Broadcast Museum and Media Center
Name of related multiple property listing**:**
20th Century Civil Rights Sites in the City of Detroit, 1900-1976
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing

## 2. Location

Street & number: 3146 East Jefferson Avenue
City or town: Detroit State: Michigan County: Wayne
Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

**___national ___statewide ___local**

Applicable National Register Criteria:

**_X_ A ___B ___C ___D**

| |
|---|
| **Signature of certifying official/Title:** **Date**<br>**State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government** |
| In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.<br>**Signature of commenting official:** **Date**<br>**Title :** **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government** |

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register

___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:) _____

_____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

| | |
|---|---|
| Private: | X |
| Public – Local | |
| Public – State | |
| Public – Federal | |

### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

| | |
|---|---|
| Building(s) | X |
| District | |
| Site | |
| Structure | |
| Object | |

WGPR-TV
Name of Property

Wayne County, Michigan
County and State

**Number of Resources within Property**
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

| Contributing | Noncontributing | |
|---|---|---|
| 2 | | buildings |
| | | sites |
| | | structures |
| | | objects |
| 2 | 0 | Total |

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

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**6. Function or Use**
**Historic Functions**
(Enter categories from instructions.)
COMMERCE/TRADE: Specialty Store
COMMERCE/TRADE: Business: Television Station
COMMERCE/TRADE: Business: Radio Station

**Current Functions**
(Enter categories from instructions.)
RECREATION AND CULTURE: Museum
COMMERCE/TRADE: Business: Radio Station

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)
LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Commercial Style

### Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK, GLASS BLOCK

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

### Summary Paragraph

WGPR-TV, now known as the William V. Banks Broadcast Museum and Media Center, consists of two circa-1920s commercial buildings on East Jefferson Avenue in the city of Detroit, Michigan. The buildings are located in the middle of the block bounded by Jefferson Avenue to the north, Walker Street to the east, Woodbridge Street to the south, and McDougall Avenue to the west. The east building is a one-story, Commercial Brick structure faced in buff brick and the west building is a two-story, Commercial Brick structure also faced in buff brick. A boxed canopy extends across the front of both buildings, and the store fronts are infilled with glass block with paired entry doors in the center. They both extend to Woodbridge Street on the south side with common brick elevations and garage doors. While exterior integrity of the building could not be determined (and it is not being nominated under Criterion C), the interior television studio retains a very high degree of integrity, including television rigging and equipment on the ceiling.

## Narrative Description

*Site*

WGPR-TV (present day William V. Banks Broadcast Museum and Media Center) consists of two circa-1920s commercial buildings on East Jefferson Avenue in the city of Detroit, Michigan. It is located on the south side of East Jefferson Avenue between McDougall Avenue and Walker Street. To the south is the Detroit River. Jefferson Avenue is one of the main thoroughfares of Detroit, and has been since it was laid out as one of Judge Augustus Woodward's radial streets following the fire that devastated the city in 1805. As Detroit expanded in the early 1800s, Jefferson Avenue was the first location of the mansions of its elite citizens. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as the wealthy classes began moving to Brush Park and farther north, Jefferson Avenue gradually converted to a primarily commercial corridor, although some large mansions and residential apartment buildings remain east of downtown. In the early to mid-twentieth century, portions of East Jefferson Avenue passed through the area just south of Detroit's dense and segregated African American neighborhood, Black Bottom, which ended around St. Aubin Street, about five blocks west of WGPR-TV. Black Bottom was largely demolished during urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s, replaced by present-day Lafayette Park and Elmwood Park.

The area around WGPR-TV is a mix of commercial, retail, and residential. Formerly, the blocks between East Jefferson Avenue and the Detroit River were primarily industrial, but many of the industrial buildings in the immediate vicinity have been demolished or converted to residential and office use. East Jefferson Avenue is lined on either side with a variety of buildings ranging from late nineteenth and early twentieth century mansions and high-rise apartment buildings, to early to mid-twentieth century commercial buildings, to more recent office and commercial buildings. The immediate area's topography is relatively flat, and vegetation is generally limited to street trees and some small areas of lawn in front of buildings or in vacant lots.

The two buildings that make up WGPR-TV are located in the middle of the block bounded by East Jefferson Avenue to the north, Walker Street to the east, Woodbridge Street to the south, and McDougall Avenue to the west. East of WGPR are two 1920s era buildings that have been combined into one furniture store. West is a vacant lot, and beyond that is the final building on the block, a mid-century commercial building currently being used by the Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences. The lots are long, narrow parcels with their short sides facing East Jefferson Avenue and their long sides extending back to Woodbridge Street. Both buildings are built out to the lot lines. They abut the sidewalks on the north (East Jefferson Avenue) and south (Woodbridge Street). The east building shares its walls with the adjoining buildings, while vacant lot adjoining the west building surfaced with asphalt for parking.

*Construction History*

The two buildings appear to have been built in the early 1900s. The 1897 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map shows the two lots as empty. City directories up to 1906 do not record any businesses at the addresses historically assigned to these buildings. The first listing for the buildings appear in 1906 for 3146-48 East Jefferson Avenue, the easternmost building, and 1913 for 3134-3140 East Jefferson Avenue, the western building. Both hosted a variety of businesses, mostly automotive related, until the middle part of the twentieth century. In the 1922 Sanborn Map, 3134-40 is depicted as a masonry building with a two-story sales building in the front (north) and a one-story garage in the back (south). Next door at 3146-48 was a one-story brick garage that only took up the front half of the lot.

Around 1947, the Peninsular Distributing Company, an appliance dealer that had been founded in 1945, moved into 3146-3148 East Jefferson Avenue. A 1949 aerial image and the 1951 Sanborn Fire Insurance map show this building considerably altered, work which may have been undertaken by Peninsular. The 1951 Sanborn map shows the building on the front half of the lot, while still a one-story brick building, now extended out to the north lot line. Added to the south, extending out to the rear lot line, was a one-story concrete block addition. It is unclear if the original building at this address was replaced, or simply modified when the rear portion was added. The *Detroit Free Press* reported in August 1959 that Peninsular Distributing was dedicating its "new building" and that "(t)he new building adjoins Peninsular's original site, and by combining the two buildings, the distributor of marine, appliance, and electronics supplies more than doubles its previous facilities." Comparison of the 1951 Sanborn map and the 1956 and 1961 aerial photos does not show any alterations to 3134-3140's footprint or basic configuration. It is possible that "new building" merely refers to the acquisition of that building and the company's expansion into it.[1] Peninsular Distributing Company occupied the building until at least 1971.

*Exterior*

The east building is one story high with a lower area towards Jefferson Avenue and a higher volume at the rear. Both have flat, composition roofs. The front (north) elevation is faced with buff brick with raised brick courses at the corners. A painted boxed canopy extends the length of the façade over the storefronts, with the brick façade rising several feet above the canopy, topped by stone coping. The storefront stretches across nearly the entire length of the façade. It has been infilled with glass block. In the center is a paired aluminum and glass entry with a clear glass transom above. The higher volume towards the rear of the building has seven clerestory windows across the front where it extends above the adjoining roof. The east and west elevations of this building are covered by the adjoining buildings. The south elevation is also sided with buff brick, without any raised courses. At the east end is a single-leaf steel entry door with a small metal canopy. At the west end is a steel garage door. Two window openings between the doors have been infilled with lighter colored brick.

[1] "A.F. School Opened by Burroughs," *Detroit Free Press,* August 9, 1959, 46.

The west building is two stories high with a higher volume at Jefferson Avenue and a lower section at the rear. Both have flat, composition roofs. The front (north) elevation is faced with buff brick with raised brick courses at the corner and across the upper façade above the second-floor windows. A painted boxed canopy extends the length of the façade over the storefront. The storefront stretches across nearly the entire length of the façade. It has been infilled with glass block. In the center is a paired aluminum and glass entry with a clear glass transom above. The second story has a rectangular horizontal window bay with two tripled and two paired windows separated by stone panels. The tripled windows are at the outer edges while the paired windows are in the middle. All are single-light fixed wood units. The east elevation is covered by the adjoining building. The west elevation is faced with common red brick. Toward the south end is a steel entry door with a corrugated metal canopy. A concrete accessible ramp leads to the door. The south elevation is sided with brick painted dark red. There is a rollup garage door at the west end with a single-leaf steel entry door to the east of the garage door. Paired aluminum windows are located on the first and second floors, two sets on the first floor and four sets on the second. At the east end on both floors are single rectangular windows. All the windows are single-light fixed aluminum units. These appear to be more recent additions.

A State of Michigan Historical Marker spans across the two buildings at the first-floor level and contains text on the history and significance of WGPR-TV.

*Interior*

The building's interior is divided into two main spaces. At the north end, adjacent to Jefferson Avenue, is the WGPR-FM radio studios. The main entry lobby and waiting area is on the east side of the building; it has a tiled floor, plaster walls, and acoustic tile lay-in ceiling. South of the waiting area is an office area with carpeted floors, plaster and wood panel walls, and acoustic tile ceiling. Partial height panel and glass partitions create separate offices. Behind (south) of the office area is a kitchenette with linoleum flooring, wood panel walls and an acoustic tile ceiling. On the west side of the building's north end are the recording/broadcasting studios. These have carpeted floors and walls and acoustic tile ceilings. At the rear (south) of the building is the former television studio, now a broadcasting museum. This is generally one large open space with wood laminate floors, brick/concrete walls covered with wood panels, and an exposed ceiling. Museum exhibits are affixed to the walls and to freestanding exhibit walls. Broadcasting rigging and equipment remains affixed to the ceiling, including lighting and curtain tracks, lighting fixtures, and other pieces of rigging.

*Integrity*

Because these are relatively modest commercial buildings, and because most historic photographs of the television station focused on the interior studios, no information was found as to when the storefronts were replaced with glass block. The interior studio space retains a high degree of integrity. The exhibits do not detract from the open character of the space, and some of them recreate the historic studio sets in the building. The television station equipment on the ceiling adds to the authentic character of the space.

## 8. Statement of Significance

**Applicable National Register Criteria**
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [x] A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [ ] B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [ ] C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**
(Mark “x” in all the boxes that apply.)

- [ ] A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- [ ] B. Removed from its original location
- [ ] C. A birthplace or grave
- [ ] D. A cemetery
- [ ] E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- [ ] F. A commemorative property
- [x] G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

**Areas of Significance**
(Enter categories from instructions.)
Ethnic History
Social History
Communications

**Period of Significance**
1975-1995

**Significant Dates**
1975

**Significant Person**
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

WGPR-TV is significant under National Register Criterion A, at the national level, as the first black-owned and operated television station in the United States. Debuting in September 1975, WGPR-TV aired original programming, including a black-focused newscast, a dance show, and public affairs features. In addition to providing an African American perspective on news and current affairs, it also afforded career and training opportunities behind the camera for blacks. The station was sold to CBS in 1995 when it transitioned to general programming and changed its call sign to WWJ. The interior studio space retains a high degree of integrity from the television station era and has been turned into a broadcast museum. The period of significance for the station is 1975 to 1995, the period during which it operated. Because its period of significance extends to less than fifty years ago, it must meet National Register Criteria Consideration G. It meets the requirements because WGPR-TV was exceptionally significant as a pioneering broadcasting station that provided African American centered programming at a time when white-dominated media-controlled broadcast television.

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

WGPR-TV is nominated under the Multiple Property Submission (prepared concurrently) for 20th Century African American Civil Rights Sites in the City of Detroit, Michigan, 1900-1976. It meets the registration requirements for the property type of Buildings, subtype Commercial Buildings for that cover document under Criterion A, at the national level. The Multiple Property Documentation Form is organized according to four periods of significance identified in the National Park Service's *Civil Rights in America: A Framework for Identifying Significant Sites*. WGPR-TV's significance falls under the final period identified in the framework, entitled "Second Revolution, 1964-1976." This period was characterized, nationally and in Detroit, by the efforts of African Americans to capitalize on the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in enforcing and expanding gains made earlier in the century. Nevertheless, African Americans still faced significant discrimination and barriers to equal access in all areas of their life and work. In the late 1960s and 1970s, this gave rise to the Black Power Movement and Black Nationalism, in which African Americans demanded self-determination, control over black institutions, and pride in their race, heritage, and achievements. The MPDF identifies media and communications as a significant theme in the civil rights history of Detroit under "Finding a Voice: Detroit's African American Community and the Media, 1900-1976," noting that "Excluded from traditional sources of communication, African Americans established black-owned newspapers, radio stations, television stations, publishing houses, newsletters, and bookstores to promote black life and culture and provide an Afrocentric point of view." WGPR-TV was the first television station

to be owned and operated by blacks, and it satisfied a demand for programming that portrayed African Americans as more than stereotypes or tokens. It was also an important source of African American perspectives on news and current affairs, and afforded career and training opportunities behind the camera for blacks, many of whom went on to careers at other stations in Detroit and nationwide.

*African American Representation in Media before the Kerner Commission*

Throughout the twentieth century, African Americans in the United States faced significant challenges both in terms of their representation in the media and their ability to own and control broadcasting facilities. To varying degrees, African Americans suffered from racial prejudice in media coverage. Where they appeared in the news, it was typically in the context of criminal activity or racial unrest, while in entertainment programming their roles were restricted to servants or comical characters. As late as 1943, radio stations often as a matter of policy denied African Americans the dignity of titles like Mr., Mrs., or Miss, as whites were given.[2]

In print media, African Americans had circumvented lack of representation by publishing their own newspapers and journals. Among the most successful of these was the *Chicago Defender*, founded in 1905, which was for decades the most widely read African American newspaper, serving as a *de facto* national newspaper for blacks. It was influential in promoting northern cities to African Americans in the South, resulting in the Great Migration that brought hundreds of thousands of African Americans to cities like Detroit in the early to middle decades of the twentieth century. During the same period, Detroit supported two major African American news weeklies. The oldest, the *Detroit Tribune*, had been founded in 1935 but ceased publication in 1966. The *Michigan Chronicle* was first published in April 1936, as an offshoot of the *Chicago Defender*. The *Chronicle*'s first editor, Louis Martin, had been sent to Detroit by Lucius Harper, editor of the *Chicago Defender*, to start a weekly newspaper; Martin would later return to Chicago as the editor of the *Defender*.[3]

Publications like the *Chicago Defender*, *Detroit Tribune,* and *Michigan Chronicle* provided an important counterbalance to the white-dominated media nationwide and in Detroit, covering people, events, and topics ignored in the major media and documenting discrimination and bias. In broadcast media, however, there was less opportunity. Although a Detroit station, 8MK, now WWJ-Radio, received the first federal license to operate as a radio station in 1920, it would be decades before there was a black-owned station anywhere in the United States. African Americans faced high barriers in attempting to break into broadcast media. The United States Congress created the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in 1934 to regulate broadcasting; under the Act, the FCC had the power to issue licenses for broadcast stations. Because the over-the-air broadcast spectrum was limited, the FCC only issued a set number of licenses within any regional broadcast area, to prevent overlapping signals. In cases where there

[2] Ivy Planning Group, LLC, "Historical Study of Market Entry Barriers, Discrimination, and Changes in Broadcast and Wireless Licensing," Report prepared for the Office of General Counsel, Federal Communications Commission, December 2000.
[3] "Michigan Chronicle Turns 80: A Look Back," *Michigan Chronicle*, April 16, 2016.

was competition for a license, the FCC held comparative hearings to determine the best qualified applicant.[4] Racial diversity was not among the factors considered by the FCC prior to 1974. Another hurdle was the inability to secure the capital to cover the high costs of founding a station. Lending institutions openly discriminated against African American applicants and the white-dominated advertising industry was uninterested in marketing to an African American audience. A final factor was lack of experience: in a white-dominated industry, blacks were able to gain very little experience in the technical and business aspects of running a broadcast station.[5]

It was not until the late 1940s that African Americans began to make gains in radio broadcasting. In 1947, WDIA-AM in Memphis, Tennessee, became the first radio station to devote all its airtime to black programming. Two years later, WERD in Atlanta went on air as the first African American-owned radio station in the United States. Owner Jesse B. Blanton, Sr. had purchased an existing station and was thus able to transfer the broadcast license on what the FCC termed the secondary market. In Detroit, there was some African American programming on white-owned stations such as WJLB and CKLW, which sold time blocks to African Americans for featured programming, mainly sermons and gospel music from the leading churches and clergymen. WJBK played black artists like Nat King Cole and hired black disc jockey Van Douglas to host "Harlem on Parade" and "Harlem Nocturne" in the late 1940s.[6] Five years after WERD in Atlanta began broadcasting, the Federal Communications Commission granted a license to WCHB, the Detroit area's first black-owned radio station. While WERD had been an already existing station that changed format when it was acquired by its black owner, WCHB was, according to historian Ken Coleman, the first to be built from the ground up by African Americans. Its owners, dentists Wendell Cox and Haley Bell, had to acquire the land, build a studio, and construct an antenna for the station, which began broadcasting in 1956.[7]

Although the first television stations and commercially produced television sets appeared in the 1920s, the medium did not become widespread until after World War II. Nevertheless, African Americans were represented on television as early as June 14, 1939, when actor and singer Ethel Waters hosted a one-hour variety special on NBC, making her the first African American to star in her own program on television. Eleven years later, when the radio comedy *Beulah* was adapted for television, Waters starred in the titular role from 1950 to 1951 (she was subsequently replaced by Hattie McDaniel and then Louise Beavers). *Beulah* was joined in 1951 by another adapted radio comedy, *Amos 'n' Andy*. In that case, white actors had portrayed the characters on the radio, but were replaced by an all-black cast for the television show. Both programs were criticized by civil rights organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for stereotyping blacks and were soon cancelled, *Beulah* in 1952 and *Amos 'n' Andy* in 1953.

[4] KPMG LLP, "History of the Broadcast License Application Process," Report for the Federal Communications Commission, November 2000.
[5] Ivy Planning Group, LLC, "Historical Study of Market Entry Barriers, Discrimination, and Changes in Broadcast and Wireless Licensing," Report prepared for the Office of General Counsel, Federal Communications Commission, December 2000.
[6] Ken Coleman, "Detroit's First Black Radio Star: Before Martha Jean, Mojo, and Mason, There Was Van Douglas," *Michigan Chronicle*, February 2, 2016.
[7] Ibid.

Over the next twenty years, a few African Americans broke out of these stereotypical roles on television. Superstar singer Nat King Cole followed Ethel Waters' lead by landing a variety show in 1956, but the program struggled to find a sponsor and was cancelled within a year. In 1963, Cicely Tyson became the first African American to star in a television drama, for *East Side/West Side*, and two years later Bill Cosby was cast in a leading role in *I Spy*. *Star Trek*, which began airing in 1966, was notable for the diversity of its cast, including African American Nichelle Nichols, who two years later shared television's first interracial kiss with co-star William Shatner.

Despite these firsts on the small screen, blacks struggled to translate it into success behind the camera. It remained difficult for them to find any but menial jobs in stations, and when they did, they often faced segregation in the workplace, such as separate restrooms.[8] African Americans interested in purchasing or starting their own stations still faced insurmountable barriers, particularly access to capital. While the FCC issued a policy statement in 1965 that articulated two primary objectives in holding comparative hearings, namely "best practicable service to the public" and diffusion of control in regional markets, it still did not consider minority ownership as a factor. As a result, African Americans were largely shut out of determining how their images and issues would be represented on television, particularly in the context of journalism.

*The Kerner Commission and its Aftermath*

Following the rebellions and civil disturbances in cities across America during 1967, including Detroit, President Lyndon B. Johnson formed the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders to investigate the causes of the unrest. Informally known as the Kerner Commission, its final report in 1968 concluded that the United States was "moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal" and laid the blame squarely on white society for isolating and neglecting African Americans. Among the many causes, the Commission pointed to the media, which, in its opinion, had not only sensationalized the disturbances, but had:

> "failed to analyze and report adequately on racial problems in the United States and, as a related matter, to meet the Negro's legitimate expectations in journalism...the media report and write from the standpoint of a white man's world."[9]

In most cases, the only context in which whites saw blacks in the media was disorder and unrest, not as a matter of routine or normality.

[8] Erskine Faush, interviewed in Ivy Planning Group, LLC, "Historical Study of Market Entry Barriers, Discrimination, and Changes in Broadcast and Wireless Licensing," Report prepared for the Office of General Counsel, Federal Communications Commission, December 2000.
[9] Kerner Commission, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968).

In the wake of the Kerner Commission report, the Federal Communications Commission took steps to foster equal employment opportunities among its licensees, issuing rules in 1969 and 1970 to forbid discrimination on the basis of race and require licensees to report on their efforts to ensure equality of employment.[10] In 1974, the District of Columbia Court of Appeals issued an opinion that minority stock ownership could be a relevant consideration in FCC comparative hearings where it facilitated broader community representation and when it was likely to increase diversity of content.[11]

Among the first responses in Detroit to the Kerner Commission Report were the inauguration of two black-focused programs on existing stations. Detroit Public Television began airing "Black Journal" (now American Black Journal) in 1968, and WWJ-TV debuted "Profiles in Black" in November 1969. The latter was hosted and produced by Gilbert Maddox, who observed that

> We black people are moving in the direction of establishing identities, of gaining political, economic and social control of the black community. We are not opposed to the white community, but we want to make our own community as viable as possible.... The series will show the full range of people comprising the black population—the professionals who have succeeded, ADC mothers with their problems and hopes, young students, conservative and militant clergymen....[12]

It was one of the first instances of African Americans being able to define their own identities, and establish control over their own narratives in the broadcast media. However, like the black radio blocks of the 1930s and 1940s, these programs were hosted on television stations that were still dominated by white-focused programming and run by white managers and producers.

The black broadcasting community continued to push for more representation. The National Association of Black Media Producers (NABMP), whose president, Tony Brown, was from Detroit, submitted a list of demands to Detroit's television and radio stations in April 1970. The NABMP accused the stations (excluding the black-owned radio stations) of racism in their programming and advertisements, failure to provide programming for blacks and other minority groups, and failure to provide recruitment and training opportunities for blacks. Brown specifically cited "Profiles in Black" as "counter-productive because the blacks seen on the program are artists and rich people and do not represent the black community." Detroit was only one of several major markets to be challenged by black activist groups, with challenges also being presented in Washington, DC, and Atlanta.[13]

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[10] Federal Communications Commission, "Statement of Policy on Minority Ownership of Broadcasting Facilities," Public Notice dated May 25, 1978, https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-78-322A1.pdf. The latter two provisions were instituted after WGPR-TV obtained its license. The "distress sale" policy was overturned by the U.S. Court of Appeals in 1987 and the tax certificate policy was repealed by Congress in 1995.

[11] In the court case on which this case was based, black stockholders were not a majority of the station's ownership.

[12] Quoted in Alice A. Tait and Robert L. Perry, "African Americans in Television: An Afrocentric Analysis," In Janice D. Hamlet, ed. *Afrocentric Visions: Studies in Culture and Communication* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1998).

[13] Bettelou Peterson, "Black Broadcaster Accuse Detroit Stations of Racism," *Detroit Free Press,* April 29, 1970.

*William V. Banks and the Development of WGPR-TV*

It was within this context that Detroiter William V. Banks created the first television station by and for African Americans. Banks, a native of Geneva, Kentucky, was born on May 6, 1903. Growing up as the son of a sharecropper on farms in Kentucky, Banks lived under a system of segregation and discrimination that directly affected his family, such as the time his father was arrested and convicted of larceny after being falsely accused by his white employer following a dispute, where Banks later observed that "…the word of the wealthy white landowner could not be impeached by a black man."[14] Throughout his time in the south, both as a resident and later a visitor, Banks reported instances where he or family members were forced to leave their homes when their lives were threatened as a result of racism. When his mother was robbed while the family was living in St. Louis, Banks observed that the police would not help them: "This was the usual conduct of the police where only blacks were concerned…This is why I believe Blacks must have Black officials."[15]

While a student at the Lincoln Institute of Kentucky, a secondary boarding school for African Americans, Banks spent a summer working in Detroit as an electrician at the Dodge Brothers automotive manufacturing company. After graduating from the Lincoln Institute in 1922, Banks moved to Detroit to work and attend Detroit Junior College (which would eventually become part of Wayne State University) and then the Detroit College of Law. Banks earned his law degree in 1929 and went into private practice, where he worked in Inkster and Pontiac before returning to Detroit to head Detroit's branch of the International Labor Defense (ILD). ILD was the legal arm of the Communist Party and provided legal services and support for labor and political prisoners, including well known cases such as those of anarchists Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, one of the most controversial murder trials in United States history, and the "Scottsboro Boys," nine young black men who had been wrongfully convicted of the rape of two white women in Alabama in 1931. Despite Banks' observation that, even in the north, "race was almost always the determining factor in the judge's decision," he was, according to his own account, very successful in the defense of his clients for the ILD.[16] In his memoirs, Banks claimed to have only learned "much later" that the ILD was dominated by the Communist Party, and while he joined the party when it was made clear it was required in order to continue heading the Detroit office, he eventually fell out with the party over the issue of signing political statements, and left the organization.

After fifteen years in law practice, Banks decided to pursue a career in the church and attended the Detroit Baptist Seminary, being ordained in 1949. The following year, he founded the International Free and Accepted Modern Masons (IFAMM), an African American fraternal organization, and was elected its first leader. Banks put most of his energy into building the IFAMM, and its companion organization for women, the Order of the Eastern Star, over the next

[14] Sheila T. Gregory, ed., *A Legacy of Dreams: The Life and Contributions of Dr. William Venoid Banks* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1999), 39.
[15] Ibid., 52.
[16] Ibid., 85.

two decades. In 1964, the IFAMM decided to invest in black broadcasting, likely at the direction of Banks, who noted in his memoirs that "I have always believed that Black-owned broadcasting stations are important to the community and to Black people. Without them, there can be distortion and lack of vital information to both minority and majority communities."[17] Banks and the IFAMM purchased WGPR-FM, a white-owned radio station founded in 1961. Banks retained the callsign, which had originally stood for "Grosse Pointe Radio," but altered it to stand for "Where God's Presence Radiates" and changed the format to focus on African American programming, chiefly gospel, soul, and rhythm and blues.

By the early 1970s WGPR-FM was doing so well that Banks felt it was time to found a black-owned television station. While Banks saw a television station as a means to reclaim the media narrative for African Americans, it was also true that the market for African American characters and shows on television had never been so strong. The late 1960s and early 1970s saw an unprecedented number of television shows featuring black central characters and/or casts. Among these were variety programs like the *Leslie Uggams Show* (1969) and the *Flip Wilson Show* (1970-1974), the dance show *Soul Train* (1971-2006), situation comedies *Julia,* starring Diahann Carroll (1968-1971), the *Bill Cosby Show* (1969-1971), *Sanford and Son* (1972-1977), and *Good Times* (1974-1979), and the drama *Room 222* (1969-1974) which featured a diverse cast including central characters played by African American actors Lloyd Haynes and Denise Nicholas. They were joined later in the 1970s by blockbusters like the long-running *The Jeffersons* (1975-1985), which ran for eleven seasons, and the mini-series *Roots* (1977), still one of the most successful in television history.

Banks and the IFAMM applied for a license for the station from the FCC in 1973. The station's application estimated that its construction would cost $882,000, with first year operating costs estimated at $400,000 and revenue at $500,000.[18] In fact, Banks would later write that the IFAMM had been told they should set aside at least $2.5 million to get the station off the ground. The IFAMM applied to local banks for a loan to cover the cost, backed by the organization's assets, but the banks only agreed to cover $500,000 of the cost, while they would hold a lien on the entire project cost. The IFAMM declined, and liquidated a number of its assets to fund construction.

Political support for the station came from an unexpected source: President Richard Nixon. According to Ken Coleman, "African-Americans don't necessarily associate opportunity for themselves with President Nixon, but quite frankly, Nixon took it upon himself to do everything he could to make sure that Dr. Banks was successful in launching WGPR-TV."[19] Nixon's 1968 campaign and early presidency had included support for minority business enterprises, and the IFAMM's application for the first black-owned television license apparently came to Nixon's attention. Banks was invited to the White House for a state dinner, likely on July 25, 1973, as

[17] Sheila T. Gregory, ed., *A Legacy of Dreams: The Life and Contributions of Dr. William Venoid Banks* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1999), 135.
[18] "TV Applications," *1973 Broadcasting Yearbook*, A-101.
[19] Stephanie Steinberg, "New Detroit Museum Honors WGPR, Blacks in Broadcasting," *Detroit News*, January 17, 2017.

Banks reported that the Shah of Iran was also at the dinner. At the event, Nixon spoke to Banks, expressing his support for WGPR's license application. Although Banks remembered that Nixon also confided to him that he was appointing the first black man to head the FCC, Benjamin Hooks had already been appointed the previous year, in 1972, as one of five commissioners. Hooks remained in the position until 1977, where he used his position to address issues of minority representation in broadcasting, including station ownership, equal employment, and the image of blacks in the media. Hooks reportedly provided Banks with a letter of support that enabled him to solicit advertising pledges from businesses in Detroit.[20]

In fact, it appears that when Banks attended the White House dinner, he already had his license in hand. *Jet,* a national African American weekly magazine, reported the previous month, on June 28, that the FCC had unanimously approved IFAMM's license application. The full page article quoted Banks as saying that "WGPR-TV will be the one station especially dedicated to serving the Black community and other minority groups…(t)he program schedule will provide in-depth penetration into the problems, goals, aspirations and achievements of Blacks…" Vice President for Programming George E. White noted that "(o)ur priorities will be altogether different than general television."[21]

Despite support from Washington, Banks struggled for the next two years to bring the station to fruition. Although he had secured advertising commitments from General Motors Corporation, Ford Motor Company, Chrysler Corporation, Sears Roebuck, and K-Mart, not all of the promised advertising revenue materialized. The process also required him to reach out to his political contacts in the city. Because Banks was building the station in two converted commercial buildings on East Jefferson Avenue, just east of downtown, the signal would extend to Canada, requiring rewriting of the international treaty governing signal interference. Banks worked with Detroit's black members of the United States House of Representatives, Charles C. Diggs, Jr. and John Conyers, Jr. to accomplish this task. Also due to its location, the station signal was blocked by the General Motors building, requiring Banks to work with the city government, then headed by the newly-elected black mayor Coleman A. Young, to increase the antenna height. [22]

Several months before its opening, the station's Vice President of Sales James Panagos expressed his ambitions for the station, believing that "(i)f an all-black station can work, it'll work in Detroit." He felt that Detroit's black community was an "untapped market" and that the

[20] Sheila T. Gregory, ed., *A Legacy of Dreams: The Life and Contributions of Dr. William Venoid Banks* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1999), 141-144; Linda Charlton, "The Shah and Empress of Iran Are Feted at a White House State Dinner," *New York Times*, July 25, 1973, 8; James Phillip Jeter, "WGPR-TV, 1975-1995: Rest In Peace," *Proceedings of the History Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual Convention*, Anaheim, California, August 12, 1996, 171.
[21] "First Black TV Station to Broadcast in Full Color," *Jet*, June 28, 1973, 29.
[22] Sheila T. Gregory, ed., *A Legacy of Dreams: The Life and Contributions of Dr. William Venoid Banks* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1999), 145; Annie Laurie Sullivan, "WGPR-TV Detroit: Building Black Media Infrastructure in the Postrebellion City," *The Velvet Light Trap*, Number 84 (Spring 2019), 37; James Phillip Jeter, "WGPR-TV, 1975-1995: Rest In Peace," *Proceedings of the History Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication Annual Convention*, Anaheim, California, August 12, 1996, 172.

station could capture sufficient advertising revenue to fund its operations. The programming mix was ambitious, with a goal of ninety percent original, local programming, to include the first black soap opera (to be taped in the studio), a live variety show, a children's show, senior citizen's forum, and local news.[23]

WGPR-TV debuted on September 28, 1975. By the time the station went on air, managers had admitted that ninety percent original programming was too ambitious, and scaled back plans to sixty percent local content. However, the broadcast included several hours of locally-produced programs including *Morning Party* a talk show; *Big City News*, a half hour news program; *A Time to Live*, the soap opera featuring local actors; *The Candy Store*, a children's show; and *The Scene*, a live dance show. *Big City News* and *The Scene* proved especially popular, with the latter serving as the local answer to *Soul Train* with young Detroiters offered the chance to display their musical and dance talents. Its popularity brought the station additional advertising revenue from big record labels including CBS, Motown, RCA, and Atlantic.[24] Later, WGPR-TV added the *Arab Voice of Detroit*, a public affairs show that was the first weekly Arabic television program in the United States, recognizing Detroit's significant Arab-American community, as well as other ethnic programming.

The inauguration of the first black-owned and operated television station drew national attention, with coverage in the *New York Times* and *Newsweek* and the national network news stations. *Billboard*, the national music industry trade publication, covered the anticipated inauguration of WGPR in August 1975, focusing on the dance show *The Scene* and other music-based shows, with George White, vice-president of programming, noting that "(m)usic is approximately 50 percent of the station's programming…"[25] On its first day on air, the station ran a pre-recorded congratulatory message from President Gerald Ford. The opening was also covered in the *New York Times*, which noted that the station was important as "a highly visible symbol of successful black enterprise," and that its programming would "provide an alternative to the portrayal of blacks in American culture that emerges on television generally." In the same article, Banks criticized national network shoes like *Sanford and Son* and *Good Times* as presenting "a burlesqued view of black life, usually in a comedy setting," harkening back to the stereotyped portrayal of blacks on early 1950s shows like *Beulah* and *Amos 'n' Andy* as being the only acceptable way for whites to see blacks on television. Instead, Banks expressed his hope that WGPR would present "a more truthful picture" of everyday black life.[26]

An important aspect of WGPR's mission was to offer African Americans opportunities behind the camera in learning or honing their skills in producing, directing, and technical fields. Indeed, historian Annie Laurie Sullivan suggested that WGPR received its license in part because Banks promised to provide on-the-job training for minorities. This was not an easy commitment. The station at first struggled to find enough qualified African American technicians and, when it

[23] "First Black TV Has High Hopes," *The Herald-Palladium* (Benton Harbor-St. Joseph, Michigan), June 16, 1975, 28.
[24] Jean Williams, "WGPR-TV Revenue from Labels Rising," *Billboard*, December 4, 1976, 27.
[25] Jean Williams, "They'll be Dancing in Detroit 6 Days a Week Over WGPR-TV," *Billboard*, August 9, 1975, 55.
[26] William K. Stevens, "Black TV Station Opens in Detroit," *New York Times*, September 30, 1975, 75.

opened, only had about sixty-five percent black employees (this was still far above the industry average of thirteen percent). Banks hired whites with a stipulation in their contract that they would train black employees who could then take positions on new shows as they were added. The station also partnered with black colleges and universities to offer internships, and opened its facilities to young people to produce non-station programming so they could gain technical experience.[27]

*WGPR-TV's Twenty Years on the Air*

Despite its promising start, WGPR struggled during its first year of operation. Aside from a few opening day glitches, the main issue was undercapitalization, which led to cutbacks in staff and programming. As Sullivan has noted, "Detroit's economic infrastructure…precluded black business participation…a white corporate landscape did not unilaterally view black media as a viable investment." While support from large corporations like the big three automakers and department store K-Mart helped, the station found it difficult to sell advertising to white-owned businesses.[28] A number of the locally-produced shows originally planned, including the soap opera, were cut. Banks plugged some of the financial and programming gap by selling blocks of time to local churches, who filled their slots with religious programming that appealed to the strongly religious African American community in Detroit.

By the summer of 1977, WGPR had worked out most of its early problems and had finally reached the break-even point. Shows like *Big City News* and *The Scene* were particularly popular.[29] The station was also expanding its reach. In early 1977, cable operators Gerity Broadcasting in Adrian, Michigan, and Buckeye Cablevision in Toledo, Ohio, successfully petitioned the FCC to carry programming from WGPR-TV on the grounds that such programming was not readily available in their existing lineup. Buckeye Cablevision noted that "…carriage of the Black ethnic programming of WGPR-TV would provide a new source of information and programming to the Black population Buckeye serves and would benefit the general public by increasing program diversity and providing other groups with additional exposure to the culture and views of the Black community." Buckeye's application to the FCC noted that at the time, twenty-eight percent of WGPR's total weekly hours and nearly twenty-three percent of its total weekly primetime hours were devoted to religious or Black-oriented programming. Among the programs listed were:

> a dance program featuring local Black dancers; a sports program featuring a Black host who interviews athletes, approximately 95% of whom are Black; a news program featuring a Black news team which concentrates on news of interest to the Black community; a program

[27] Annie Laurie Sullivan, "WGPR-TV Detroit: Building Black Media Infrastructure in the Postrebellion City," *The Velvet Light Trap*, Number 84 (Spring 2019), 38; "First Black TV Has High Hopes," *The Herald-Palladium* (Benton Harbor-St. Joseph, Michigan), June 16, 1975, 28.; Sheila T. Gregory, ed., *A Legacy of Dreams: The Life and Contributions of Dr. William Venoid Banks* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1999), 150;
[28] Annie Laurie Sullivan, "WGPR-TV Detroit: Building Black Media Infrastructure in the Postrebellion City," *The Velvet Light Trap*, Number 84 (Spring 2019), 38;
[29] Howard Rontal, "Channel 62 a Year Later" *Detroit Free Press,* August 22, 1976; Jim Neubacher, "Black TV Station Making It After Months of Problems," *Detroit Free Press*, July 17, 1977, 82.

> which features a panel of Black teenagers from Detroit high schools discussing the problems of Black teenagers; a program produced in Washington, D.C., which focuses on governmental issues of interest to the Black community...[30]

As the first broadcasters to successfully open a black-owned television station, Banks and his team were now nationally visible. In 1977, Ulysses Boykin, the station's vice president of civic affairs and public relations, testified before the Senate Subcommittee on Communications at the FCC's Minority Ownership Conference. The previous year, the FCC had expanded its requirements to include the presentation of programming that responded to community interests, including those of minorities. At the conference, Boykin advocated for more aggressive measures to promote minority ownership, including facilitating access to capital to fund minority licenses and investigating the role of rating services. As a result of the conference, the FCC concluded in its report the following year that adequate minority representation in broadcast media could only be achieved by facilitating minority ownership of radio and television stations, noting that "(d)espite the fact that minorities constitute approximately 20 percent of the population, they control fewer than one percent of the 8,500 commercial radio and television stations currently operating in this country" (emphasis in original). Among the measures instituted by the Commission were the use of tax certificates to defer capital gains and permitting licensees who were facing revocation of their licenses to transfer them at a "distress sale" price to license applicants with a significant minority ownership interest.[31]

The same year that Boykin participated in the Minority Ownership Conference, William Banks was among the founders of the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters (NABOB), for broadcasting facilities with more than fifty-one percent black ownership. Noting that around this time, there were only thirty African American-owned broadcast facilities, the twin goals of NABOB were to increase the number of black-owned facilities and improve the business climate in which they operated. Banks was appointed to the first board of directors of NABOB, which remains in operation today. [32]

Over the twenty years that WGPR-TV was on the air, the station created important opportunities for a generation of on-air talent and behind the scenes professionals. As Joe Spencer, program director from 1981 to 1994, noted, "They'd come in here, get their first year or two under their

[30] "Ethnic Waivers Granted for WGPR-TV Carriage," *Broadcasting*, February 21, 1977, 77; United States, Federal Communications Commission. "In re Applications of Buckeye Cablevision, Inc et. al. For Certificates of Compliance," FCC Record, Second Series, Volume 63, March 11, 1977 to April 22, 1977, Pages 184 to 187, report 1978; Washington D.C.. (https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc306656/: accessed June 30, 2019), University of North Texas Libraries, Digital Library, https://digital.library.unt.edu; crediting UNT Libraries Government Documents Department.

[31] Annie Laurie Sullivan, "WGPR-TV Detroit: Building Black Media Infrastructure in the Postrebellion City," *The Velvet Light Trap*, Number 84 (Spring 2019), 41; Federal Communications Commission, "Statement of Policy on Minority Ownership of Broadcasting Facilities," Public Notice dated May 25, 1978, https://apps.fcc.gov/edocs_public/attachmatch/FCC-78-322A1.pdf. The latter two provisions were instituted after WGPR-TV obtained its license. The "distress sale" policy was overturned by the U.S. Court of Appeals in 1987 and the tax certificate policy was repealed by Congress in 1995.

[32] Lynette Clark, "Black Broadcasters Unite," *The Atlanta Voice*, July 2, 1977, 1. See also the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters website, http://nabob.org/.

belts, learn how to operate a camera, perform before the camera and write for TV. Then other stations would snap them up."[33] Many WGPR alumni went on to careers at other Detroit television stations and across the country, such as David Roberts, currently the vice president of network content at cable sports channel ESPN, who began his career at WGPR in 1978.

The station also represented a significant opportunity for black women. Emmy Award-winning journalist Shaun Robinson, who was for sixteen years the co-host of *Access Hollywood,* started as an intern at WGPR before becoming a full-time employee. She credited much of her success to her time at WGPR. "This afforded me the opportunity to go out every single day, learn what being a journalist actually meant, and it taught me writing skills, my anchoring skills, it gave me such an incredible foundation that I might not have been able to get in my hometown at the time."[34] Amyre (Porter) Makupson, who took a significant pay cut to join WGPR, debuted alongside Pal D'Que as Detroit's first all-woman anchor team and later anchored WKBD-TV's 10pm newscast from 1985 to 2002. William Banks' daughter, Tenicia Gregory, was the first black woman to manage a radio and television station, while news director Karen Hudson Samuels now serves as the Executive Director of the William V. Banks Broadcast Museum and Media Center in the former WGPR-TV studios.

In the early 1980s, the station added more sports-oriented programming, and in 1982 it scored a big coup as the exclusive broadcaster of the University of Michigan's Bluebonnet Bowl game, which enabled it to charge the highest advertising rates in its history.[35]

William V. Banks died in 1985, and for a time, control of the station was tied up in a legal battle between his widow and the IFAMM.[36] The IFAMM, led by Banks' successor George Mathews, eventually prevailed, but by the early 1990s, the station was struggling. Local television critics considered its offerings uneven, and the equipment and sets that had been new fifteen years before were beginning to look dated.[37] The station had always fought to reach a larger audience due to its underpowered transmission signal, and it found it difficult to compete with the new cable television market, especially the Black Entertainment Television (BET) channel. *The Scene* went off the air in 1987, and *Big City News* in 1992. By the early 1990s, the station was mostly showing reruns. 1992 was a particularly difficult year, with the layoff of the entire news department and other labor issues, culminating in the National Labor Relations board citing the station for unfair labor practices.[38]

Still, when it was announced that CBS was going to purchase WGPR-TV in 1994, it drew controversy from the black community, which felt strongly that the station should remain under African American ownership. Lansing, Michigan, developer Joel Ferguson formed Spectrum

[33] Stephanie Steinberg, "New Detroit Museum Honors WGPR, Blacks in Broadcasting," *Detroit News,* January 17, 2017.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Patricia Chargot, "Bluebonnet Coup," *Detroit Free Press*, December 31, 1981, 1.
[36] "TV Station Control Tied in Legal Battle," *Lansing State Journal*, June 22, 1987, 12.
[37] "WGPR's Still a Mixed Bag," *Detroit Free Press,* June 9, 1989.
[38] "Battle Lines Drawn in WGPR Labor Dispute," *Michigan Chronicle,* December 2, 1992, A1.

Detroit, a partnership that included retired Hall of Fame basketball player, businessman, and future Detroit mayor Dave Bing, retired football player and automotive dealership owner Mel Farr, and Sam Logan, publisher of the *Michigan Chronicle*, to purchase the station, and Congressman John Conyers, Jr. petitioned the FCC to reject CBS' ownership application, saying that "(e)mpowerment of the African American community must not be lost."[39]

When the issue came before the FCC in July 1995, Spectrum cited the "loss of one of the nation's few minority-owned and controlled television stations" as one of the reasons the FCC should reject the license reassignment. However, the FCC cited the local marketing agreement between WGPR and CBS in approving the transfer. Under the terms of the agreement, WGPR manager George Mathews retained control over programming, staffing, and finances during a two-year transition period, from 1994 to 1996. In denying Spectrum's argument, the FCC wrote "we note that the minority-controlled licensee here…(WGPR)…has authorized the change to a network/syndicated format, a matter that is within its discretion as a licensee."[40] The sale of WGPR was finalized on July 25, 1995. Two months later, WGPR-TV became WWJ-TV, and its content gradually moved away from the African American focus that had made it a pioneer in television—and African American—history.

The loss of WGPR-TV was just one in a series of setbacks for minority representation and ownership in the media. While the number of black-owned television stations had climbed from one to ten in the wake of the FCC's minority ownership policy of 1978, there remained considerable barriers to access.[41] The same year that WGPR changed format, Congress eliminated the FCC's tax certificate program, and the United States Supreme Court overturned a previous decision that had upheld the constitutionality of the FCC's minority preference policies. The following year, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 lifted ownership caps, raising the barriers to minority ownership even higher.[42]

*Conclusion*

Today, the legacy of persistent discrimination in broadcasting lingers. While ownership numbers fluctuate, African Americans own approximately two percent of all commercial broadcast licenses, and six percent of commercial television stations…numbers that are little better than

[39] Dan Holly, "The Battle to Keep Detroit's WGPR," *Black Enterprise*, March 1995, 19, 23.
[40] Federal Communications Commission. "In re Application of WGPR, Inc. (Assignor) and CBS, Inc. (Assignee) for Assignment of License of WGPR-TV, Detroit, Michigan." FCC Record, Volume 10, No. 16, July 24 - August 4, 1995, Pages 8140 to 1849, book, August 1995; Washington D.C. https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc2074/: accessed June 30, 2019), University of North Texas Libraries, Digital Library, https://digital.library.unt.edu; crediting UNT Libraries Government Documents Department.
[41] Kristal Brent Zook, "Blacks Own Just 10 U.S. Television Stations. Here's Why," *Washington Post*, August 17, 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/08/17/blacks-own-just-10-u-s-television-stations-heres-why/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.ebed36b2173e
[42] Ivy Planning Group, LLC, "Historical Study of Market Entry Barriers, Discrimination, and Changes in Broadcast and Wireless Licensing," Report prepared for the Office of General Counsel, Federal Communications Commission, December 2000.

after the passage of the FCC's minority ownership policy over forty years ago.[43] In light of the enduring barriers to minority participation in broadcast media, WGPR's achievement in lasting in the market nearly twenty years is remarkable. The establishment of WGPR-TV was a milestone in the history of African American media, representing the first time that blacks were able to control their own identities and narratives in a comprehensive manner on broadcast television. Its founding came at a time, in the midst of the black nationalist and Black Power movements, when African Americans were demanding self-representation in the media; and in a time when the national government, through the Kerner Commission and the FCC, was finally acknowledging that minority ownership was crucial to improving the condition of African Americans and relations between the races. It was also instrumental in expanding African American participation in the broadcasting profession, through its active training programs that were consciously designed to give experience that would enable alumni to move beyond the station itself. WGPR-TV, as the first black-owned and operated television station in the United States was, as William Banks expressed it, "a symbol of the hopes and aspirations of Blacks everywhere in America."[44] Its achievements are commemorated in the William V. Banks Broadcast Museum and Media Center, housed in the former studios on East Jefferson Avenue, and by a display at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture on the National Mall in Washington, DC.

*Period of Significance*

The period of significance for the station is 1975 to 1995, the period during which it operated as a black-owned and operated station. Because its period of significance extends to less than fifty years ago, it must meet National Register Criteria Consideration G. It meets the requirements because WGPR-TV was exceptionally significant as a pioneering broadcasting station that provided African American centered programming at a time when white-dominated media-controlled broadcast television.

[43] National Association of Black-Owned Broadcasters, http://nabob.org/; Kristal Brent Zook, "Blacks Own Just 10 U.S. Television Stations. Here's Why," *Washington Post*, August 17, 2015. https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/08/17/blacks-own-just-10-u-s-television-stations-heres-why/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.ebed36b2173e

[44] "Historic Black TV Debut Here," *Michigan Chronicle*, October 4, 1975, 1.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

____ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
____ previously listed in the National Register
____previously determined eligible by the National Register
____designated a National Historic Landmark
____ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #_____
____recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

**Primary location of additional data:**

____ State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
____ University
____ Other
Name of repository: _____

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____**

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property Less than one acre**

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)**
Datum if other than WGS84:_____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: -83.010055 Longitude: 42.202484

2. Latitude: Longitude:

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

**Or**
**UTM References**
Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

WGPR-TV is bounded by East Jefferson Avenue on the north, Woodbridge Street on the south, and the lot lines of the adjoining parcels on the east and west.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes the entire footprint of the buildings, which are built out to the lot lines.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Saundra Little, Architect, and Ruth Mills, Senior Historian,
organization: Quinn Evans Architects
street & number: 4219 Woodward Avenue, Suite 301
city or town: Detroit state: Michigan zip code: 48201
e-mail rmills@quinnevans.com
telephone: 313-462-2550
date: July 1, 2019

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

**Photographs**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Photo Log**

**WGPR-TV (William V. Banks Broadcast Museum and Media Center)**
**Detroit**
**Wayne County, MI**
**Photographer: Quinn Evans Architects**
**Date Photographed: February-May 2019**

Description: North and west elevations looking southeast
0001 of 0018

Description: North elevation looking south
0002 of 0018

Description: South and west elevations looking northeast
0003 of 0018

Description: West elevation looking northeast
0004 of 0018

Description: South elevation looking northeast
0005 of 0018

Description: South elevation looking north
0006 of 0018

Description: South elevation looking north
0007 of 0018

Description: South elevation looking northwest
0008 of 0018

Description: Main lobby looking south
0009 of 0018

Description: Office area looking southeast
0010 of 0018

Description: Radio station lobby looking west

0011 of 0018

Description: Radio station studio, typical
0012 of 0018

Description: Radio station office area looking south
0013 of 0018

Description: Museum looking south
0014 of 0018

Description: Museum looking south
0015 of 0018

Description: Museum looking north
0016 of 0018

Description: Museum looking east
0017 of 0018

Description: Museum hall looking south
0018 of 0018

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).
**Estimated Burden Statement**: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

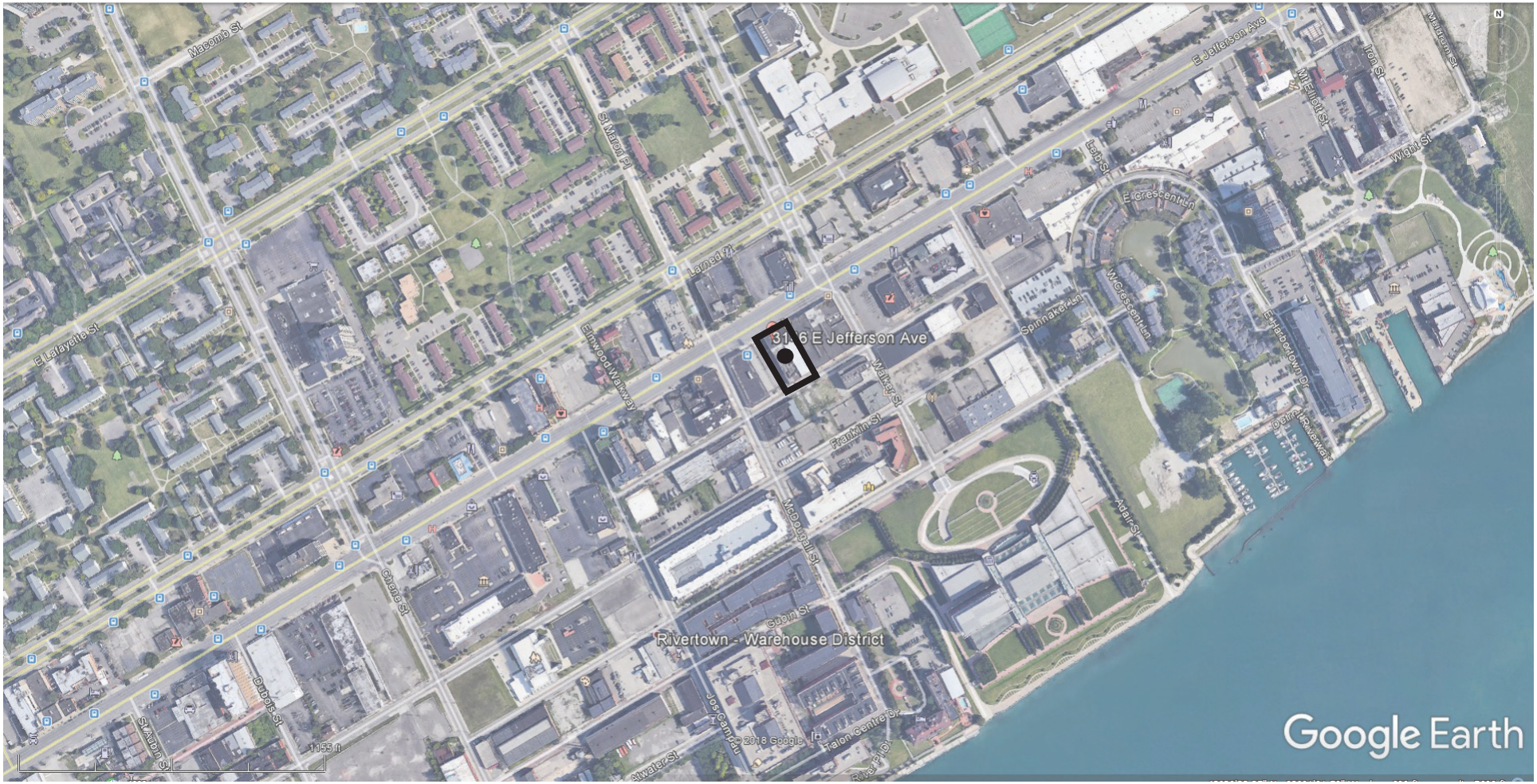
**WGPR TV (William Banks Broadcast Center),** 3146 East Jefferson Avenue
National Register of Historic Places Nomination
**Location Map 1**

Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan
February 2019


N

Boundary

Geographical Coordinate
Latitude: -83.010055 Longitude: 42.202484




N

Boundary

Geographical Coordinate
Latitude: -83.010055 Longitude: 42.202484


WGPR TV (William Banks Broadcast Center) Boundary

2 Contributing Buildings

N


313-259-8862
the NEW
107.5 fm
WGPR
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35


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the NEW 107.5 fm
WGPR
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EXIT


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it'll work in Detroit.
losophy, and
ar."
– James Panagos
WGPR-TV Vice President of Sales
EXIT


WGPR-TV FOUNDING PIONEERS
MEDIA PERSONALITIES MADE IN DETROIT


PIONEERS IN BLACK MEDIA OWNERSHIP