Introduction

Unveiling the Struggles for Equal Voice

The history of the relationship between African Americans and the cable television industry is complex and intriguing. Although Black Entertainment Television empowered many African Americans through its establishment in January 1980 and its listing on the New York Stock Exchange in 1991 as the first Black-owned corporation, many felt betrayed when its founder, Robert Johnson, sold the company to a white-owned major media conglomerate, Viacom, in 2003. Exploring the experience of African Americans with cable television systems unearths the development and under-examined history of their struggles for equal voice, or of the Black image in the Black mind.[1] In other words, the question is how to publicly share the images of African Americans as seen by themselves, not seen or imagined by whites, who have historically owned the means of image production in the mainstream and broadcasting media. In the idea of public access and cable television as the property of local communities and residents, a significant group of African Americans believed that communications technology would bring social and community justice and equality across color lines. Although such optimism has yet to materialize even to this day, many African Americans hoped that cable television would empower their neighbors. This new kind of televisual image production and consumption provided African Americans of the post-Civil Rights era, who had been disproportionately left unnoticed, erased, silenced, or marginalized in the broadcasting media, with the locus and opportunity to produce their own collective and communal memory, to realize self-representation, and to create a sense of community membership. Cable television was a vehicle of community justice for many African Americans in the second half of the twentieth century. Employing a comparative analysis using Boston, Massachusetts, and Detroit, Michigan

as case studies, this book argues that since the early 1970s African Americans in both cities possessed and exercised political and social agency and influenced the decision-making processes in their respective municipalities. These cities experienced many of the demographic and political changes many other urban areas underwent: the rise of ethnic communities, socioeconomic domination by the white population while their Black counterparts tried to obtain their agency, economic instability, and so on. By using cable television, both as a concept and as a technical means, they raised their self-esteem through empowerment, strengthened community ties, and reversed the negative images of African Americans that the media had disseminated in visual media-dependent American society.

The scholarly trend of examining network television and major movies and not focusing on narrowcasting visual culture such as cable television makes this study particularly important. In mainstream media industries, African Americans had little presence as producers. Production for Hollywood and network television that increasingly became popular in the mid-twentieth century required financial capital, technical and specialized education and training, equipment, and other resources to which very few African Americans had access. As a result, even as African Americans appeared more on movie and television screens in the mid-century, the images of African Americans on television often were simply reflections of the preexisting Black stereotypes in white minds.

In the film industry, especially during the 1970s, blaxploitation films such as *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971), *Super Fly* (1972), and *Blazing Saddles* (1974) embodied very subtle but enduring racism after the Civil Rights era. The 1980s and 1990s continued to witness numerous film representations of distorted Blackness. *The Cosby Show* (1984–1992) and other situation comedies, as well as the monumental series *Roots* (1977) and other more documentary-like shows, continued to portray African American images that were considered safe for white audiences. Although both film and television industries often depended on the disposable income of African Americans as a major source of their revenue, whites dominated the production part of the content and aimed to satisfy the white audience. J. Fred MacDonald explains that although television promised its African American audience to "[overcome] hatred, fear, suspicion, and hostility," the reality was "the tale of persistent stereotyping, reluctance to develop or star Black talent, and exclusion of minorities from the production side of the industry."[2] Similarly, Donald Bogle reminisces that during his childhood "[he] was aware, as was most of Black America, of a fundamental racism or a misinterpretation of African American life that underlay much of what

appeared on the tube."[3] Although Martin Luther King Jr. and a few other activists used network television as a political tool, such attempts were rather limited in the 1960s.

The development of cable television systems took place in this historical and social context. The Civil Rights era did not revolutionize the media industry. The relationship between media and African Americans was one way. In other words, serving as the masters' tool, media did not inherently serve for the interests for African Americans and other minority groups. Those who had been underrepresented and underserved, if not unrepresented and unserved, had to reconfigure the medium of their interest so that it could work for their benefit. The increasing concerns about distorted representations of African Americans that African American leaders and intellectuals shared coincided with the augmenting interests in and attention to cable television as a separate communication medium from television. The new technology seemed to have its own strengths and potential to materialize the promise "that television [was] free of racial barriers."[4] Unlike the industries with which African Americans experienced difficulty accessing the production side of the media, the new industry had the appeal of allowing African Americans to be a part of content production once the cable system was introduced to their community. Such an effort was their strategy to use cable television as a tool for social change during the time when many African Americans continued to be disappointed with the distorted images of themselves on television and struggled against geographic, psychological, occupational, and emotional segregation.

Theories from African American Studies serve as useful platforms for examining the history of African American involvement in the cable industry. The idea of "the Black image in the Black mind" embodies the continuum that connects the existing historiography in African American Studies and modern mass communication technology. In 1971, George M. Frederickson published his seminal study titled *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817–1914*. In 2000, Mia Bay wrote *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1830–1925*. In the same year, Robert M. Entman and Andrew Rojecki published *The Black Image in the White Mind: Media and Race in America*.[5] These scholars analyze dimensions of Black life through the lens of what W.E.B. Du Bois called "double consciousness."[6] As these scholars untangled the binary between Black identity and "American identity," this study also attempts to understand this intricate history of the African American experience. The dualistic idea promoted by Du Bois and others still endures and serves as a fundamental framework in African

American Studies scholarship. In one of his most representative works, Ralph Ellison wrote, "[y]ou ache with the need to convince yourself that you do exist in the real world, that you're a part of all the sound and aguish, and you strike not with your fists, you curse and you swear to make them recognize you. And, alas, it's seldom successful."[7] In Franz Fanon's words, "not only must the Black man be Black; he must be Black in relation to the white man."[8] Although it is true that African Americans have often negotiated their identity vis-à-vis white American society, there also has been a series of attempts to separate the African American consciousness from it.

This study is, in a certain way, Afrocentric in orientation. It does not, however, fully follow Molefi Kete Asante's theory. It rather is influenced by Alice Tait and Todd Burroughs' idea of Afrocentric media, or "media created by and reflecting the worldview of people of African descent." For them, Afrocentricity in the African American context "involves a systematic exploration of relationships, social codes, cultural and commercial customs, mythoforms, oral traditions, and proverbs of the peoples."[9] Especially because what is arguably the largest television station catered to African Americans, Black Entertainment Television, is actually owned by a white media conglomerate, Viacom, and the distinction between what is Black and what is white is no longer straightforward in media, it is important to explore Black media history with such Afrocentric perspectives.

Because this project focuses on "local" African American experiences, culture, and values, it not only looks at the conventional political discourse but also at more community-based movements. Attention to "bottom–up" politics and "infrapolitics" deserve as much, if not more, attention than how city officials, including mayors and chairs of relevant committees, influenced citizens in a traditional top–down manner. Bottom–up politics refers to the active involvement of African Americans in the municipal decision-making processes. This is particularly important because Boston was led by a white mayor and a superficial analysis of the city politics risks duplicating existing researches examining how white officials affected Black lives. I argue that Black citizens influenced opinions and the decisions made by the white mayor. Simply picturing the cable-related politics as white-led efforts is to dismiss African Americans' rich history of community building and infrapolitics.

James Scott and Robin D. G. Kelly make convincing arguments concerning infrapolitics. They use the term to emphasize the influence of what often is invisible to the public eye on what is more visible. As I demonstrate in this work, African Americans were never mere consumers of cable television. The fact that we seldom read about their contribution to the

development of this new form of media does not suggest the lack of Black involvement. Kelley argues, "the political history of oppressed people cannot be understood *without* reference to infrapolitics, for these daily acts have a cumulative effect on power relations."[10] The magnitude of such activism by African Americans merits scholarly attention.

Previous scholarship has neglected African American infrapolitics in cable and network television history.[11] Not only is the scholarship on Blackness from African American perspectives limited, it also has often overlooked the relationship between African American empowerment and the media. Even recent scholarship that has successfully examined how white perceptions of Blacks changed after the emergence of African Americans in movies, comedy shows, talk shows, music entertainment, news programs, and other television programs, insufficiently study these social movements in relation to African Americans history.

Starting with Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, and other early twentieth-century African American thinkers, many scholars have published historical analyses on the various economic, professional, and legal implications for African Americans. Much of this scholarship shared the concerns about the emotional and psychological impact on African Americans. Once more African American actors and actresses began to appear on the screen in the mid-twentieth century, television stations hired more African American producers. More Black characters with whom the general African American public could identify emerged. The involvement of national Black organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People (NAACP) increased. Despite the body of scholarship on those topics, few have realized the fact that grassroots African American citizens, leaders, and organizers made proactive commitments to make such shifts happen. This study is one of the first to examine two actual cases of such grassroots movements.

How have African Americans tried to obtain access to cable television in order to improve their self-image in the future? This work seeks to answer this multilevel question. This inquiry is important because African Americans have not only been exposed to the statistical evidence of their disadvantaged social condition in the United States, as introduced in Tavis Smiley's radio and television shows or the annual publications of the National Urban League, but also have been surrounded by negative messages distributed by mainstream media, as was made even more apparent in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, as Michael Eric Dyson presented.[12] Additionally, from the Jena Six controversy in 2007 to Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s "break-in" incident in 2009, media have portrayed African Americans

in ways that forces critical thinkers to reassess how far American society has left to go in its racial politics. It is for this reason that it is particularly important to put emphasis not on how media treat African Americans, but rather on how African Americans designed and reconfigured media. Analytical emphases must be placed on how African Americans in Boston and Detroit affected and interacted with cable television, rather than on how cable television affected the lives of African Americans. This is not just a matter of semantics.

My study analyzes the proactive engagement of African Americans in media, whereas many previous scholars have focused on their reactions. As is discussed more extensively in Chapter 1, there was an obvious color line in the media industry. On the one hand, many studies have examined the images of Blacks on television. Since whites have dominated the broadcasting industry, such scholarship has studied how whites viewed Blacks and how the perspectives of whites affected African American self-images.[13] When a scholar criticized a racist portrayal of an African American on television, he or she conventionally focused on the cause of racism in the white mind and society, rather than on its impact on the Black mind. Black psychologists such as Na'im Akbar, Wade W. Nobles, Claude Steel, and others, have analyzed these dimensions. They, however, rarely recorded how African Americans actively responded to these expressions of racism and attempted to establish a new media form that portrayed them in a fairer manner. On the other hand, this work explores the history of African American agency, the act of both tangible and intangible resistance based on their personal, communal, ethnic, and racial experiences, and its application in the municipal to community-level politics, via their use of cable television.

When exploring African American history in such social contexts, historians must ask numerous questions to fulfill the aforementioned goals. Some of these questions are basic. How has white-dominated American society made it difficult for many African Americans to achieve high self-worth? What are some of the ways in which African American leaders have sought to reverse this trend to empower their peers? What kinds of roles did African Americans expect media to play in relation to African American self-esteem and empowerment? What has been the common relationship between African American leaders and community organizers, and media technology? How have Black communities and community members felt they would benefit from and be hurt by cable television?

More geography-specific questions will provide an avenue to the understanding of the history of cable television in the two cities. What did African American leaders and community organizers in Boston and

Detroit know about cable television once such technology became available? How did they look at the potential of such media? What were the implications of cable television for African American communities? How influential were African Americans in the political arenas of the two cities? What were community leaders' reactions to their city's decision to study and adopt cable television? How did they influence the municipal decision-making process for its cable television franchise agreement? What was the relationship among city officials, African American leaders, and African American community members like as they discussed the introduction of cable television? How did franchise candidates attempt to appeal to local African American communities and citizens? How much did the cities listen to the needs and requests of local African Americans? What kind of service did the franchisee provide African Americans? How did community members obtain public access and produce content to air? How did the introduction of cable television empower African Americans and affect their self-esteem? How did Black communities change after the arrival of cable television?

Chapter 1, "The Black Image in the White Pathology," provides the historical overview about the relationship between African Americans and their presence in American media. This chapter challenges the persistent view that Blacks suffer from a cultural pathology that prevents them from social advancement. This chapter shows that if such a thing as cultural pathology exists, it was in the white mind, which systematically denied and neglected the value of African American cultural contribution. Indeed, I show that broadcasting visual media frequently deprived African Americans of their agency on one level. Aspiring actors, for example, had to face a conundrum of becoming successful in a national arena or remaining loyal to their racial background and roots. It is, of course, important to remember that being successful meant two different things for whites and Blacks. To appear on a screen was often more than a success for many African American actors, whereas it was less so for their white counterparts. Although this is not to say that African American artists were fully deprived of agency, their efforts were just not as impactful as they wished.

Chapter 2, "Cable Television in the Past and Present," discusses African American agency in the media industry. Across the color line, scholars and researchers have examined African American representation in television and media (or popular culture) studies. Despite the systematic, technological, economic, and operational differences between broadcast television and narrowcast television systems, this chapter benefits from the historiography pertaining to both types of media as both share the apparatus in the family room and later in bedrooms, interact with their audience aurally and visu-

ally, and ascribe to the common technological root. It shows how historically researchers, professionals, and policymakers have discussed cable television and minority interests. The relationship between broadcasting and narrowcasting is especially important because the latter emerged and developed as the remedy to the problems encountered by the former, not only in its technological inadequacy but also in its social shortcomings.

Chapter 3, "The Incubation Period of Cable Television," examines the interests of city officials, community leaders, and residents in cable television. They viewed cable television as possibly something beneficial for African Americans. This section covers the period between the initial discussions about the future introduction of cable television in the Black neighborhood and the issuing of the request for proposals (RFPs). The RFP was the official document issued by the local municipal office or committee in charge of arranging the franchise agreement. Calling for applications, the RFP outlined all the requirements applicants were expected to meet. The RFP serves as an optimal source to understanding what each municipality expected from its cable system, what it tried to achieve through it, and how the cable system should benefit its residents. A turning point in the relationship between African Americans and televisual images came in 1963 when news programs and documentaries featuring African American civil rights struggles politicized the nation. More specifically to Boston and Detroit and their use of narrowcasting media as a political tool, the history goes back to the late 1960s and the early 1970s. This incubation period ended in August 1980 in Boston and in August 1982 in Detroit when the RFPs were issued. At the time, African Americans were not only aware of the potential of cable television, but also expressed their interests and participated in discussions regarding whether or not cable television would be beneficial to the city and local communities. Their interests existed more than ten years prior to the release of the RFP. There are numerous examples of the involvement by African Americans in casual and unofficial discussion meetings on cable television with other citizens and city officials, in study groups to examine its feasibility in their locality, in the formation of the RFP, and other major moments.

The years covered in this chapter were dynamic. Once the cities determined to officially examine the feasibility of cable television, they established cable communications commissions. African Americans both in Boston and Detroit were heavily involved in their respective commissions. When the cities finalized their decisions to introduce the cable television system in the cities, each city established a formal committee to work toward the introduction of cable systems. Public involvement increased. The commission

selection process was more serious. The discussions became more intense. Commission members strove to secure independence from the mayor or other parties that could assert their power over the commission. African Americans were not mere witnesses to such a dynamic period in history, but a major part of it. To explore the lively engagements by African Americans, this chapter particularly benefits from publications by aforementioned study groups, letters written by residents to city officials, and memos distributed in the city office and feasibility study groups.

Chapter 4, "Drafting of Democratic Communication Media," focuses on the short period of time between the release of the RFP and the submission of final applications by franchise candidates that took place in February 1981 in Boston and in December 1982 in Detroit. Although African American citizens had little time to intervene with potential service operators during this period, a review of corporate efforts to meet the needs and wants of local African American residents reveals the actual impact of African American grassroots movements on corporations and municipal politics. A close examination of the proposals shows that different operators specifically attempted to serve local African Americans and suggests that without the presence of African American infrapolitics, the cable television systems in Boston and Detroit would have been different. Proposals were specific about production training, equipment, and facilities that would be available to community members once the cities and their bid winner signed the franchise agreement. They elaborated on public access channels, financial assistance, and other intangible resources for the communities. While both the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) and the RFPs required that bidders include information about aforementioned issues in their application, content analyses of the proposal reveal that potential operators attempted to appeal to the cable communications commissions with their interests in public and communal engagement in content production more than they were required to. The applications are the most informative documents in this chapter. Relevant documents such as the addendum to the application, revisions to the original document, and newspaper articles evaluating the candidates will supplement the proposals.

Chapter 5, "Progress and Struggles in the Process of Franchise Decisions for Media Democracy," explores the municipal decision-making processes after the proposal submission. I examine how city officials came to their final decision to award their franchise agreement to Cablevision in Boston and Barden Cable in Detroit. Both in Boston and Detroit, cable communications commissions and cable operator candidates exchanged many letters and sat together for discussions after the submission of the

final application. Questions and answers were sent back and forth between the two parties. I critically analyze correspondences and face-to-face meeting records that took place after the submission of the application. This chapter covers the time between February 1981 and December 1982 in Boston and December 1982 and 1985 in Detroit. This period has ample examples of the African American involvement in decision making, reviewing of the applications, and drafting of the final decision. The decision makers made efforts to evaluate the feasibility of the public involvement expressed in applications, willingness of the companies to realize their promise, and the appropriateness and sufficiency of the proposed facility and equipment, as well as other forms of resources. The commission also emphasized the importance of minimizing the subscription fee for the basic service so that the financial burden would not be too great and thus made it more accessible to all. This chapter demonstrates how the involvement of African American community leaders encouraged decision makers some of whom were Black themselves, to balance the profitability of the system that would eventually benefit the city as the franchising fee, and the low entry barriers for local residents. Commissions' minutes, internal memos, and other commission member documents help reconstruct this part of the urban history.

Chapter 6, "From Agreement to Production: Period of Struggling," probes into the post-franchise agreement phase. For Boston, the period from December 1982 to the end of the 1980s is covered. For Detroit, the covered period is from 1985 to the end of the decade. A shift in the history of the cable television development occurred in both cities in 1989. Debated issues were no longer the way to get access to the technology or how to control the medium. Citizens were more concerned about making sure that promised services would be provided. During several years in the 1980s, the cities built production facilities. African Americans had initial contact with the technology, and were offered free training. Many other tactile changes took place in the cities. Even after the agreement was signed between the city and the cable operator, both parties continued the detail finalization process in which they discussed the exact service, facility, equipment and others provided to the local community. They also discussed how they could encourage community members to join training sessions, produce programs, and attract subscribers. Starting the system did not mean that people would know about the program or want to automatically join. Community organizers had significant responsibilities to maximize the positive effect that cable television could bring to the city. It was also during this time when community members expressed their frustration about the slow process. Some wrote letters of complaint to the municipal office or cable

commissions. Such letters vividly show, even twenty years later, the sense of excitement and expectation these citizens had for cable television programs.

"Conclusion: BET is not the Answer" amalgamates the historic lessons from the African American community experience within Boston and Detroit to establish an intellectual framework for the history of the post-Civil Rights movement period. It underscores the importance of these small-scale media outlets such as public access and local programming as a part of the larger discourse on media representation and African Americans. This section also suggests and outlines how African American communities will be able to continue to benefit from technology. I argue that African Americans influenced the development of cable television, determined what they could get out of the franchise, and remained intact as a community to create positive images about and for themselves. I suggest various potential ways to use media technology for community-building purposes. The prescriptive role of this chapter not only allows its readers to better understand about the history of urban Black communities but also gives a model of social change that can further be applied to future community formation efforts particularly in the era of communication technology development.

These chapters show what happened to Boston and Detroit after their mid-century "crises" when manufacturing industries moved to their suburbs. For the last decades, both have witnessed an increase in ethnic communities. As for Boston, the minority population ratio increased to the point where the city's population is more than 50 percent non-white, or minority majority. Comprising only 4.9 percent of the city's population in 1950, the African American population more than doubled by 1970, from 40,057 to 104,707, making up for 16.3 percent of the population. The numbers continuously increased. In 1980, there were 126,229 Blacks in Boston, or 22.4 percent of the city's population. In 1990, 25.8 percent of the population, or 146,945 residents, were African Americans.[14] It is also noteworthy that the increase partially took place while the city underwent the busing controversy in the early 1970s.

As for Detroit, white flight left the city predominantly Black. Although there were only 4,700 Blacks in the city at the turn of the century, the number had gone up to almost a half of the 1.5 million residents by the early 1970s.[15] In 1950, 300,506 Blacks made up for 16.2 percent of the central city's population. In 1960, the percentage went up to 28.8 percent, or 482,223 Blacks. As the number of whites decreased, the number of Blacks increased. In 1970, 43.6 percent of the population was Black with 660,428 residents. The 1980 census for the first time showed the majority Black condition of Detroit with 758,939 Blacks making up for 63 percent

of the population. In 1990, 75.6 percent of the Detroiters were Black. Between the forty years from 1950 to 1990, the number of whites decreased from 1,269,377 to 222,316, while that of Black more than doubled from 300,506 to 666,916.[16] In many ways, the memory of riots from 1943 and 1967 affected the cognitive map of many Americans about Detroit. These industrial and demographic shifts, however, were not unique to these two cities. Many other American urban cities have undergone similar changes. Chapter 3 briefly introduces some of the relevant urban Black history of the two cities that created an environment in which discussions on cable television implementation took place.

As the size of Black populations in each city increased, African Americans in Boston and Detroit continued their long tradition of organizing themselves for municipal political representation. In Boston, for example, local organizations helped strengthen community ties. African Americans being the largest minority group, Boston's Dudley area was a place of "low income, high crime, poor schools, burned-out buildings, acres of vacant lots used as dumping grounds, abandoned cars, and the night lit by fires."[17] The successful implementation of the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative in 1984, which enabled the "Don't Dump on Us" meetings, the "Development without Displacement" campaign, establishment of the Vine Street Community Center, and other programs to revitalize the area, is just one of the many examples.[17]

Although the racial tension in the city was high as the controversial busing case attests, African American residents reinforced their community strength through all-Black weekends and summer activities led by local churches.[18] In Detroit, religious institutions often provided political support to Black leaders. When Richard Austin became the first African American to win a mayoral primary election in the United States in 1969, his support base existed in Detroit's religious community, which reflected the rise in African American political representation in the city.[19] Churches not only provided political support, but also served as the "keepers of the fire" of African American self-help on the community levels.[20]

Despite these examples of municipal-level political and social participation by African Americans in Boston and Detroit, few studies on these cities focus on visual media as a tool to advance such objectives among Blacks. Many study psychological, economic, and political impact of media on African Americans. Scholarship on cable television with particular emphasis on local origination and community programming, however, has been missing. This study adds a new layer of understanding in the history of African American self-help, empowerment, and visual culture.

Boston and Detroit have their own particularities that make this study indicative. Boston resurged as a large service industry city. It is also a major hub of intellectualism with numerous universities and hospitals. In the history of cable television in Boston's African American communities, these academic institutions played significant roles. For example, Mel King, one of the major African American community organizers in Boston, taught at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). His successors, including Ceasar McDowell, Richard O'Bryant, and others, now teach at MIT, and Northeastern University and there have been strong cooperation efforts between the academy and the local community. By examining Boston, where scholars served as community organizers and where community leaders have taught in higher education classrooms, we are able to learn about different roles that intellectuals must play outside of academia.

Detroit's case, on the other hand, is indicative of the power of African American self-help particularly due to its heavy African American concentration. For example, the city has similar experiences to other urban areas such as its experience with rebellions, white flight, and industrial decline. Unlike Boston where most of the city officials were whites—a fact that makes the Boston study meaningful to other cities with whites dominating the municipal office—Detroit had African American decision makers, including Mayor Coleman Young. Although the number of African American mayors and high officials is still limited nationally, Detroit's case provides us with the actual case in which African Americans were fully responsible for the outcome of the cable television introduction. This is a representative case of African American self-sufficiency.

Boston and Detroit, respectively, have unique histories of their relationships to media. Boston, as a center of American intellectual community, witnessed nationally popular visual culture production. One such example is *Say Brother,* produced by the Public Broadcasting Service and WGBH, Boston's public television station. Started in 1968, the program is a "public affairs television program by, for and about African Americans" in which Maya Angelou, Amiri Baraka, Stokely Carmichael, Louis Farrakhan, Jesse Jackson, and many other prominent Blacks appeared. It was also a program that provided "an opportunity to expose the true facts about Black history through music, song, discussions, art, drama, fashion, and educational scholarship."[21] Similarly, Henry Hampton established Blackside Film & Video Production, the largest African American–owned film company at the time, while in Boston in 1968. Blackside's production portfolio includes the fourteen-part series *Eyes on the Prize,* which was on air in early 1987.[22]

In the early second half of the century, Detroit also experienced both positives and negatives in its relationship to media. On the one hand, radio and television worked against the city when it underwent the 1967 rebellion. Unlike the efforts made by Martha Jean, a popular disc jockey on radio station WJLB whose primary audience was African American to appease the rioter, most radio stations followed Damon Keith, an African American co-chairperson of the Michigan Civil Rights Commission to "observe the moratorium on riot news." Consequently, many African American residents unknowingly found themselves in a riot zone, although they would have stayed away if they had been informed. Additionally, ABC radio, a broadcasting radio station whose office was located in Detroit, transmitted the breaking news about the riot nationally and partially initiated a set of negative images the city suffers from even today.[23]

On the other hand, despite being the site for Director Arthur Marks' blaxploitation movie *Detroit 9000* in 1975, in September of the same year, WGPR, or the first full-time FM station in Michigan and the pioneer of a minority-owned radio station, successfully bought out Channel 62 to become the first minority-owned television station in the United States. This change allowed African Americans to obtain skills and exposure in television production regardless of their past experience. The station produced local programs such as *Access Hollywood* and *Strictly Speaking* with African American crews.[24] Such developments served as precursors to the rise of cable television in Detroit during the following decade.

As is the case with any regional or local historical study, the arguments, discoveries, and achievements that surface from this study should not be overly generalized as a national trend. Although both cities have a history of municipal-level political activism involving African Americans and interactions with media, there are more differences than similarities between the two. Both Boston and Detroit have their own particularities that enabled, facilitated, and encouraged the materialization of certain objectives as well as those that hindered, slowed, or complicated others. The significance of this study exists in the similarity between the two cities in terms of the successful outcome of using cable television as a community empowerment tool, despite each city's differences and uniqueness in racial composition, municipal leadership, industrial background, social history, and other issues that affected Black communities in Boston and Detroit. Identifying what exactly allowed African Americans in two very different cities to use the same technology for their own benefit is a major objective of this study.

It is also important to remember that the value of this research that focuses on these two cities does not rise because they were pioneers in

the introduction of cable television or in African American engagement in its development. By the time Boston was first wired, the state of Massachusetts had twenty cable television systems serving 53,324 subscribers. William A. Lucas' report published by the Rand Corporation in 1973 makes an extensive analysis of the cable system in Boston's neighboring city, Somerville, Massachusetts. Additionally, out of fifteen population-dense cities around Boston, seven municipalities had a cable system or a franchise agreement by 1973.[25] As for Michigan, long before Detroit was wired, the state had 126,379 cable subscribers served by forty-nine systems. One of them was the system in Kalamazoo, the forty-second largest in the nation with approximately 13,000 customers.[26] The system in Kalamazoo was even considered the "best access center in the U.S."[27] Therefore, Boston and Detroit had years to learn from other neighboring cities' experiences while they planned for the system introduction. This is to say that Boston and Detroit are fit for this study not because they were pioneers in achieving fair minority representations through cable television or wiring their local areas so effectively that African American residents took full advantage of it without any troubles. In reality, both cities experienced many delays, controversies, disagreements, and other problems. All of these were common in other urban areas planning to wire the city with coaxial cables. Concurrently, when compared, the stories that these cities tell reveal how effective African Americans were in voicing their needs and wants and securing proper access to the technology.

This work benefits from diverse sources, including municipal study reports, economic analyses, legal documents, and technical reports that do not mention African Americans or even any ethnic or racial issues. Many documents, especially the ones that focus on financial or technical issues do not make direct reference to African Americans. It is, however, important to pay attention to the fact that in many cases, more encompassing words like so-called "minorities" or "economically disadvantaged" often included many African American residents. Although many African Americans in Boston and Detroit belonged to the upper middle class, there were many more African American residents that struggled economically. The lack of direct reference to African American residents, therefore, does not mean the process of cable introduction ignored African Americans.

In Boston, the non-Black minority population is rapidly increasing. There have been interracial community-building efforts since the mid-century. African American leaders, who are mentioned in this study, led some of these efforts. Although their struggles are significant and should never have been neglected, it is also an undeniable truth that no other ethnic or racial

group has been subject to collective racism and violence with a history as long as African Americans.

As Robin Kelley argues, scholars have so far paid more attention to *how* people are involved in a movement than to *why*.[28] By centering African Americans and closely examining their day-to-day struggles and activism, I attempt to unearth their discourse of resistance against white-dominated society and media. This approach will identify both why and how African Americans successfully reversed discrimination on television. My study seeks to be applicable to African American communities in other cities, as well as to other minority communities in the United States. One of the major contributions of this work is that it helps us understand not only the African American experience with media, local political entities, the cable industry, and others, but also the larger American experience through the contemporary history of Black resistance. Lila Abu-Lughod claims that resistance is "*diagnostic* of power."[29] This is because resistance does not exist exterior to the power.[30] By understanding how African Americans in Detroit and Boston reacted to whitestream society, we are able to obtain a macro-view about American racial experiences and history.