BUS RIDE TO LIBERATION: A HISTORICAL VIDEO DOCUMENTARY
OF THE ACRES HOMES TRANSIT COMPANY
IN HOUSTON, TEXAS

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Doris Childress, B.A.
Denton, Texas
May, 1994
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The Acres Homes Transit Company in Houston, Texas is Texas' first African American owned and operated bus company. Some say it is the first in the South. The company was developed during the height of the civil rights period. It serves as an establishment of economic empowerment during the oppressive civil rights era. The video is a historical visual documentation of the bus company from its beginning to its end.

An accompanying written profile describes the research process, the pre-production, production and post-production stages, as well as future proposals for the documentary.
When many people think of the civil rights period, visions of riots, boycotts and violence come to mind. These actions seemed to be the only way African-Americans could be heard when it came to the struggle for civil freedoms. Events in places like Montgomery, Birmingham and Atlanta illuminated the period of civil rights. It was in these places that police dogs attacked citizens, police officers brutalized black residents, black citizens exercised civil disobedience, and national African-American leaders spoke out and were slain. This is the dominant picture that has been attached to the civil rights movement as it unfolded in southern states during the 1950s and 1960s. However, it is not, a picture that encompasses every city and state in the South. A variation on the theme occurred in Houston, Texas.

Houston was plagued like all southern states with the problems of segregation, racial conflicts, prejudice, and the denial of civil rights to African-Americans. Houston throughout much of the period remained quiet or in other terms passive in the midst of an intense era. There was no Rosa Parks, there were no sensational riots or high profile marches from city to city. When compared to activities in cities in Mississippi and Alabama, Houston's could be seen as a "step-child" to the movement.

But there are stories to tell about Houston's involvement with the civil rights movement; a significant one concerns Acres Homes, a small black community that fought in this era for economic and social freedom and empowerment.
As a native Houstonian, and of Acres Homes, I made decision to document on tape for the first time the history of Texas' first and only African-American owned bus company, the Acres Homes Transit Company.

Acres Homes is one of many black populated neighborhoods in Houston. Unlike it's inner-city neighbors, Third and Fourth Ward (the first all black neighborhoods in Houston), Acres Homes was a rural community. (Roger Ward, videotape interview, 9 December 1993) But both rural and urban black neighborhoods faced the same racial delimmas in Houston. Segregation during the early civil rights movement touched every part of life for black Houstonians. The walls of segregation were up in schools, housing, politics, public transportation, and the job market. Segregation in Houston had been institutionalized by the beginning of the 1920's; at that time, black Houstonians found themselves struggling against inequalities that went hand and hand with segregation, and against segregation itself. (Beeth and Wintz 236) In 1922 a city ordinance was enacted that included a new law that sanctioned segregation. (McComb 110) According to the ordinance, blacks could only use park facilities designated for them, and cohabitation between races was unlawful. (McComb 111) It was also during the Twenties that the city experienced it's only lynch and the first outward signs of the Klu Klux Klan movement. (McComb 113) There was an absence of racial mob violence throughout much of Houston's segregation and civil rights period. Black Houstonians fought segregation and injustice in three major areas: the voting booth, the schools, and public transportation.

Texas, unlike many other southern states, never completely denied blacks their civil right to vote. (Beeth and Wintz 158) However, their political power was stifled by a political loophole developed by the white majority. From 1921 until 1940 black leaders
were embroiled in constant court battles attempting to overturn a resolution by the City Democratic Executive Committee of Houston. (McComb 109) The resolution, condemned as a violation of the constitutional rights of black citizens, prohibited blacks from voting in all primary elections. Blacks could, however, vote in the general election. With the help of attorney Thurgood Marshall, several black community leaders filed suit in federal court against the committee. The official filing was on behalf of Dr. Lonnie Smith, a local black dentist, who was denied the right to vote in the Democratic Primary. (Beeth and 158) It was with the winning of this case in a decision by the Texas Supreme Court on April 3, 1944, that Houston blacks started on the road to voting freedom.

On the education front segregation was also alive. Houston blacks never physically forced themselves through the doors of all-white school buildings. Instead they fought to ensure that the "separate but equal" rule was really equal. (Beeth and Wintz 159) The community protest in early moments of segregation was for better teacher salaries. "As a matter of policy, black teachers were paid only about 60 percent as much as white teachers, even though they taught the same curricula and performed the same duties." (Beeth and Wintz 160) It was again through legal efforts that a battle against segregation was won. In 1943 a group of elementary school teachers threatened the Houston Independent School District with a lawsuit. As a result of the threat black teacher salaries were raised to the level of white teachers (Beeth and Wintz 160). Later, in the Sixties, the actual desegregation of schools began, without riot or boycott. The school district took things one step at a time, integrating first the elementary schools before expanding to the high schools.

Public transportation represented another battle for Houston blacks. "City fathers argued that the Jim Crow laws pertaining to public transportation served to forestall conflicts on streetcars and buses caused by the more intimate contact of the races, but
many local blacks objected to abusive treatment they received from white conductors and drivers as well as to the manner in which public transportation failed to serve the community adequately." (Beeth and Wintz 184)

Transit buses first appeared on the city streets in 1924, prior to that time electric streetcars were the main mode of public transportation. In Beeth and Wintz's accounts of the period, "Houston blacks observed the Jim Crow respectfully because it was the law, but on occasions emotions flared, as in the case when a white conductor slapped a black female for not moving to the back of the coach." Beeth and Wintz note that blacks avoided confrontation during the segregation period of transportation by using jitney services. Houston historian Roger Ward (video taped interview 9 December 1993) explains that jitney cars were illegal taxi services run by either individuals or organized groups having its start in the mid-Twenties. On all forms of city-supported transportation, blacks were treated as second-class citizens. They were either assigned to the back, given only limited amount of usage, or denied service altogether. Black leaders appealed to city leaders to obtain bus services either using separate buses or equal but separate compartments (Beeth and Wintz 184). Beeth and Wintz note that the city took no action until after 1931, when the residents of River Oaks (an upper-class white neighborhood in central Houston) filed a petition with the city council to allow the bus companies to provide special services to their maids and servants so they could get to work on time. George McElroy, editor of the black-owned Houston Informer, (phone interview 3 February 1994) says the paper published an article stating that if services were given to blacks to work in white homes, they had to be given equally to all black citizens. "In a debate between the city and black leaders, in 1932 the Houston City Council decided to amend the city's Jim Crow ordinance providing for segregation on buses." (Beeth and Wintz 185) In a quiet move Houston blacks gained a seat on the bus, even though it was it was a segregated seat.
In 1930 Houston's population tallied at 292,000. Blacks, the largest minority group, made up 22 percent of the population. By 1960, the census total was 938,000, and the black population was 39 percent of that number. (McComb 85) Roger Ward explains that with the growth of the population came new demands and classes. Ward notes that while blacks originally were segregated to the areas of Third and Fourth ward only, the new population growth moved the city's blacks to suburbs and subdivisions in the northwest, east, and southeast area of the city. He states that the period brought a new visible black middle class, a class of people who now wanted more than had been offered to Houston blacks and blacks nationwide. According to many economists segregation was the catalyst for the formation of many African-American businesses. Jawanza Kunjufu writes in Black Economics: Solutions for Economic and Community Empowerment that "...segregation created a concept called enclaves in the African-American community ...it creates a situation where the people are dependent on each other as providers and consumers" (18). Blacks in a sense wanted their own businesses for two reasons; economic advancement, and also respect and equal treatment in return for their hard earned money.

The Development of the Acres Homes Transit Company

Acres Homes is in the northwest section of the city of Houston. Until 1968 it was outside of the city limits. The community was, prior to annexation by the city, a large tract of land that could be bought easily and cheaply. According to my own family history land was said to have been purchased for as little as $10.00 an acre. The original name of the community was Acreage Homes, because the residents bought land by the acre, settled and built homes. Later the name was shortened to Acres Homes. The land was unrestricted and brought opportunity for entrepreneurs to make a dollar without permits and restrictions from the city (Inez Elmore video taped interview 25 February 1994).
For the most part the community was agriculturally based. Even by the late 1960s residents still farmed and raised livestock in what were considered residential areas (Roger Ward video taped interview 9 December 1993).

With the rapid growth of the city as a whole came growth in the rural Acres Homes community. The population in the area grew rapidly from 1950 to 1960, from nearly 10,000 to 20,000 residents (see Appendix A). As the community grew, changes came. The rural farm community now boasted a new breed of residents, the middle-class, and with this new middle-class population came the growing trends towards Jawanza Kunjufu's 'enclave economic empowerment' (18).

One area of economic empowerment during Houston's civil rights period, was the development of the Acres Homes Transit Company, black-owned and operated from 1958 to 1968 in the community (Ward 1993). Not much has been recorded on the Acres Homes Transit Company. It has not been highlighted in the many books on Houston history that were consulted for this project. Historical data has been gained primarily through personal interviews with historians, members of the community, and founders of the Acres Homes Transit Company. Roger Ward, says bus service in Acres Homes until 1958 was provided by the white-owned Yale Street Bus Lines. Black citizens were unhappy with the segregated terms of the service and decided to drive Larry Rush, the owner of Yale Street, out of the community. A group of citizens, mainly composed of ministers and educators (the growing black middle-class) formed an organization to found a public-owned transit system, the Acres Homes Transit Company.

According to Ward, J.C. Cole, a minister and subsequently the first president of the company, was among those who organized a jitney service while Yale Street was operating in Acres Homes. The jitney cars, as stated earlier, were illegal taxis that held no permits from the city. The Yale Street Bus Line began to lose passengers and in turn
revenue because of the jitney "boycott." With things falling apart for Larry Rush, he decided to discontinue service without notice (Ward 1993).

It was in December 1958 that Yale Street stopped service to Acres Homes. In early 1959 the Acres Homes Transit Company members petitioned the city for the franchise, but to their surprise Larry Rush also applied to run a different franchise in the area. In the court hearing, Cole recalled that the judge granted both he and Rush a license to run the Acres Homes route, the notion being "may the best man win" (J. C. Cole video taped interview 2 February 1994).

Cole says the bus company had a hard beginning. The company was ordered to run five buses every hour on the downtown route. This schedule would prove to be a problem for the company because the buses they obtained were second-hand school buses purchased for $300 each. The courts, however, allowed Rush to run the same route with only one bus and a flexible schedule (Cole 1994).

While the bus company was getting under way, the jitney service was the only dependable form of transportation for the community. By July 1959 the buses of the new Acres Homes Transit Company began servicing the community. Members of the community who remember the buses say the ride was only twenty-five cents. And for that small sum the buses covered a route from Acres Homes to downtown daily. The buses ran along the main road of West Montgomery and only picked up passengers in Acres Homes (Ward 1993).

After 10 months of operation the bus line began to experience problems with the jitney drivers. The drivers had agreed to stop service when the Acres Homes Transit service became available however, they continued to run. They caused the bus company to lose revenue, just as they did earlier with the Yale Street Bus Line (Cole 1994). This time, according to Ward, the jitney drivers were in battle with the black-owned bus company. Acres Homes Transit is said to have gotten an injunction against the jitney
drivers and hired a detective service to flush them out for the authorities. After about two years the jitney problem was said to be relieved by the arrival of legitimate taxis service in Acres Homes.

This was not the end of problems for the company. Buses continued to break down and passengers filed claims for alleged injuries. Inez Elmore, a former stockholder in the company (video taped interview 25 February 1994), says the company had cash flow problems and had to gain more capital to continue. As a result, Elmore says a new branch of the company was developed called the "Investors." The bus company was originally organized with a ten member board of directors. The board made all decisions and financed the company's start out of their own individual pockets. The investors was a group of black citizens financially able to back the company. When the company began to have financial problems in the early Sixties this group of citizens came forward to help increase the cash flow. But with their funds they want a voice in the operations of the company. The 23 member investors group became a financial and advisory support for the Acres Home Transit Company. But the development of this branch, though intended to be an aid, became a focus of conflict. Cole, said "the investors group excluded the original members because they were not wealthy enough to hold by decision making power." As a result of a constant struggle for control, Cole decided to sell his shares of the company to the investors.

While the company continued to service the community, some residents in the mid-1960s approached Bernard Caulkins of the Houston Rapid Transit Line and asked him to run his service in the area. Caulkins opposed the idea at the time (Ward 1993). Many people were not content with the service of the Acres Homes Transit Company. The buses had gained the nickname of "Acres-shakers" because the ride was so rough, and many times the buses were not clean and were often late.
Ward maintains that the end of the company came with the development of the area. In 1968 under President Johnson's "Great Society", neighborhoods like Acres Homes began to reap federal funds for improvement. Houston's Mayor, Louie Welch, channeled federal funds for annexation projects, and Acres Homes was one of the annexation sites. (Ward 1994) Now under the umbrella of the city, Acres Homes gained city services and restrictions. It had become a site for more businesses to develop and expand. Caulkins, who had earlier turned down the opportunity to expand in the area now saw it as a viable venture.

In the Spring of 1959 the president of the Acres Home Transit Company sold the line to Caulkins and Houston Rapid Transit for the sum of $5,000. With this sale came the end of the era of the Acres Home Transit Company.
CHAPTER II

PRODUCTION

Working as a Producer on a weekly local series, calls come in daily with suggestions for stories. Many times these calls are nothing more than people wanting publicity for some rare talent they can't seem to get an agent to back. However, in November 1993 I received a call concerning a historical story about Houston, one that had not been documented by any of the local television stations. My interest piqued, a return call was made to Roger Ward, a local historian. He explained he had been researching what he thought was the only African-American owned and operated bus company in the south. As the conversation went on the location of this historical event was disclosed. To my surprise, it happened in the neighborhood I grew up in, Acres Homes.

After two phone conversations with Ward, the information was sent to the managing producer for a prospective story on our weekly series about the Houston community (the show is cleverly titled "Community"). The managing producer agreed it would be a great story, but nothing more than a four-minute story or five at the most. Because of my personal interest in the story, I talked with Ward about possible funds that could be raised to support a 30-minute documentary, when outside money is available a minor project at PBS becomes major. Ward maintained that $5,000 could be found and raised if the project is a go.

Ward was in the final stages of research for his Masters thesis on the Acres Homes Bus Company. When informed of my decision to produce a documentary on the company as my thesis project Ward became possessive of the historical moment.
In succeeding conversations he would often refer to the project as his documentary and became bent on the title of co-producer.

In the meantime, the station (Houston Public Television) was reviewing a written request to use all footage from interviews and the studio facilities for the completion of my thesis project, without charge (see Appendix C). Approval was granted by the station. Later it was decided that Ward, if the project became a 30-minute broadcast documentary would be credited as a Research Consultant (see Appendix D). The title was settled for the station, permission was granted for use of the tapes and facilities, and verbal approval to start was given by Steve Fore.

The production stage of the video documentary on the Acres Homes Transit Company started with an interview with Roger Ward on December 9, 1993 at the Acres Homes Multi-Purpose Service Center. Ward was a very animated interview. The questions of the interview had to be restructured, as Ward began directly the answers to a personal essay on himself (see Appendix E). During this interview Ward provided some photos from the period. While visiting with Ward the crew (photographer and audio technician) continued to shoot photo stills. A week following the interview Ward called while I was shooting a story in Dallas. He informed my managing producer that his pictures had been ruined and he wanted to know what Channel 8 was going to do. Ann Liefeste, the managing producer, told Ward the matter would have to wait until I returned from Dallas. In the meantime, Ward calls Liefeste again saying the pictures were ruined by "two white guys." Upon returning from Dallas I talked with both Liefeste and Ward. A phone conversation would not be satisfactory to Ward; a trip had be made to see him in person. The photos could be restored and the station planned to take full responsibility and cost for the incident. However Ward seemed to think the taped photos were some deliberate action. It took about two weeks to restore a working relationship with Ward.
Four scheduled days were given free of charge by the station to shoot the project, which would also produce a five minute story for the station. However, other days were given when other shoots were cancelled. A break was taken in December because of the winter holidays. Production resumed in January with a phone interview with George McElroy, a 72-year old editor for the Houston Inform, he declined a video-taped interview. Through his interview some insightful fragments of the period were gained, but McElroy tends to wander a little and finds his own jokes more interesting than the subject at hand. The next interviews were with J.C. Cole and Inez Elmore, both original members of the transit company. Neither was delighted to find that the other would be interviewed about the company. Elmore contended that Cole wanted to sue everyone and Cole maintained that Elmore and her investor group were a bunch of thieves. Both came across as very charming and funny individuals. During each interview B-roll was gathered of photo stills from the period and of the company.

As mentioned earlier, each shoot consisted of the producer, a videographer and the audio technician. No special equipment could be requested for the production. The bare minimum was used: a SONY BETACAM, an audio mixer, an 816-mic, tripod, and a basic light kit. Since the station had been cutting back on shoots and crews, it was a rule that limited equipment and crew members would be assigned to all projects. This did not prove to be a problem since most of the shoots consisted of a basic interview and B-roll of photo stills. On two shoot days B-roll was gathered of the present day configuration of the Acres Homes community.

After going through ten tapes I decided it was time to transcribe the information. Initially it seemed as though there were enough photos to complete the piece but as more information came in it became clear that more B-roll material was needed. That began the search for more photos and possible film footage to be used in the project. During the first off-line edit session, where bites were just strung together, the
script changed. Originally the script opened with the bus company's development. That opening seemed too abrupt, so a turn was taken in the writing. It deemed necessary to build the event on the period in which it took place, the civil rights era, and how Acres Homes Transit was connected to that part of history (see Appendix F).

The on-line sessions had been worked out through favors from a friend with connections at Warner Cable. However, a week before the session was to begin the arrangements fell through and the facilities along with all of its special DVE gadgets were now gone. In an emergency effort I made plans to edit in KUHT's on-line A suite. Off-line editing was within my expertise but on-line was a battle in itself. The station had given approval for use of the facilities, but only on my own time and no use of crew members during station hours. At this point I began to check my savings account for funds to pay an editor and graphic specialist. I made arrangements with two crew members to work outside of office hours. The graphics, after a detailed layout of the look I wanted only took one day and $20. The editing schedule was the problem. We could only work after 5 p.m. or on weekends. Looking at the month I only had four days the editor would be available. The editing would end up costing $300.

I had a big concern with the look of the project going into on-line editing. My B-roll consisted of black and white photos, color interviews generic color B-roll, and black and white film footage. During editing I made the suggestion that we manipulate the color video to black and white through the chroma key to blend the look of the film, photos, and the color beta footage. At the beginning of the first session I was still waiting for calls from contacts on B-roll. At the eleventh hour and no response from my sources I called the programing department for information on copyright use of materials for educational purposes. The programming unit informed me that I would not be in violation of copyright laws if I used footage from the "Eyes on the Prize" series. Since my project, at this point was only for educational use the film could be used. However, if accepted as
a special by the station, the programming department would need to go through clearance channels for its use. With the new footage the beginning of the documentary was now taking form. After an off-line session and extensive paper edits the on-line session went smoothly. The four days proved to be adequate for the editing and packaging of the documentary.
CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

It wasn't until the off-line session and conversations with major professors Steve Fore and Ben Levin that I realized the level to which this project could be taken. My goal originally had been to complete the story for the weekly series at Channel 8, complete my requirements and try for a local 30-minute documentary broadcast. Topics like the Acres Homes Transit Company, according to Levin are in demand by national PBS documentary departments. With some additional funding for extra production time, the documentary could be worked into more than a local broadcast.

The most disappointing fact throughout the work on this project was the lack of published materials on a significant event in Houston's civil rights history. No consulted work for the project mentioned the bus company. With six books on Houston's history in hand, I found it disturbing and negligent that this historical fact was omitted. From this point alone I realize the importance this project will play in the history of African-Americans and to the nation's history at large.
APPENDIX A

POPULATION GRAPH OF ACRES HOMES
1950 Harris County and City of Houston by Census Tracts (Acres Homes only). *

* Research and Analysis Division, City of Houston Department of Planning and Development, 1992.
BUS RIDE TO LIBERATION

THESIS

SUBMITTED BY
DORIS CHILDRESS
NOVEMBER 1993
BUS RIDE TO LIBERATION

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The proposed 10 minute mini-documentary will profile an economic empowerment movement by blacks in the Acres Home Community located in Houston, Texas.

Throughout much of the civil rights period, blacks in Texas remained quiet and as some say passive in the intense era of our history. There was no Rosa Parks, water hose riots or marches from city to city to display their concerns for civil rights. In the civil rights period, Texas blacks were step-children to the cause when compared to their counterparts like Mississippi and Alabama.

But now decades later, there is a note in Texas history about how one small black community fought a fight for economic freedom and empowerment....and won.

The goal of the project is to document on tape for the first time the history of the Acres Home Transit Company.

FORMAT AND PRODUCTION OUTLINE

The actual production time for the project will take about two months. Preliminary research of the topic as been done for the purpose of submitting the proposal.

The project will be researched, written and produce by me as a final project for completion of the UNT RTVF Master's program.

Rough outlines of the scripts will be submitted to the supervising professor, Dr. Fore approval before completion. Transcripts of taped interviews will be submitted for proof of work by the student. Dr. Fore will be invited to come to observe one of the sessions.
ACRES HOME TRANSIT COMPANY

The Acres Homes Transit Company operated from 1959 to 1968. It has been noted as the first black owned bus line in Texas and maybe in the entire South.

Acres Home was not within the city limits so travel for those residents was difficult. No public transportation serviced the people in the area.

Prior to 1958, the Yale Bus Co. provided transit for the Acres Home community. It was white-owned but the company hired black drivers.

Acres Home had a growing middle class which meant the demand for transportation was growing.

Until 1958 the community came up with a form of transportation called the "jitney" cab. It was an illegally run taxi company. As a result of the jitney service, the Yale Bus Company lost enough business for them to go out of business.

The residents of Acres Home petitioned City Hall for bus services. They got service and the opportunity to run it themselves. With a few dollars, a handful of friends formed the Acres Home Transit Company. The first black-owned transit system in the state.

The bus line incurred enormous cost while in operation. The buses were average school passenger buses that were not equipped to handle eight to ten trips a day from Acres Homes to downtown. The buses' interior suffered a great deal of wear and tear by its riders. With Acres Homes still not in the city limits, people used the bus as a means to travel with produce and animals.

In 1968, the company sold to Bernard Calkin of the Houston Rapid Transit Company. Calkin had earlier purchased the Galena Park transit line. The Acres Home bus line was purchased for $5,000. Calkin still works with Metro today.

The story of this bus line during the peak civil rights period shows how a people oppressed by their surroundings still found assertiveness to empower their community.
TO: ANN L.
FROM: DORIS C.
RE: MASTER THESIS PROJECT
DATE: 12-17-93

HELLO ANN,

THIS IS A FOLLOW UP TO THE CONVERSATION WE HAD ON YESTERDAY ABOUT MY FINAL PROJECT FOR COMPLETION OF THE MASTERS PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS.

AS I STATED, MY FINAL SEMESTER IS SPRING 1994. MY ACTUAL COURSE WORK HAS BEEN COMPLETED SINCE SPRING 1990. DURING THIS SPAN OF TIME I HAD BEEN WORKING ON A MASTERS THESIS ABOUT TELEVISION’S PORTRAYED IMAGE OF BLACK AMERICA. HOWEVER, I’VE LOST MY INTEREST IN WRITING THE PAPER AND THE ACTUAL WORK ON IT HAS STOPPED. BUT THE PROBLEM I AM FACED WITH IS I NEED A FINAL PROJECT OR THESIS TO COMPLETE MY DEGREE PROGRAM.

HERE IS WHERE I AM IN MY QUEST FOR A FINAL PROJECT. I TALKED WITH MY PROFESSOR ABOUT A VISUAL PRODUCTION PIECE. HE HAS AGREED TO LET ME DO A 30 MINUTE DOCUMENTARY. MY TOPIC I SUBMITTED WAS THE ONE IN MY OLD NEIGHBORHOOD, THE ACRES HOME BUS COMPANY. WE ARE IN THE MIDST OF DOING A COMMUNITY PIECE. SINCE I HAD A VERY BIG INTEREST IN THIS TOPIC HE AND I THOUGHT THIS WOULD BE SOMETHING I COULD COMPLETE AND ENJOY. I TALKED WITH ROGER WARD THE CONTACT FOR THE STORY AND THE ORIGINAL RESEARCHER ON THE ACRES HOME BUS COMPANY. WHEN I TOLD HIM ABOUT MY INTEREST IN HIS RESEARCH FOR MY FINAL PROJECT HE ASKED WHETHER OR NOT CHANNEL 8 WOULD BE INTERESTED IN MY PROJECT AS A PIECE TO AIR. I INFORMED HIM THAT FUNDING WOULD BE A GOOD START TO SHOW SOME COMMUNITY INTEREST IN THE TOPIC. I TOSSED OUT THE AMOUNT OF $5,000. MR. WARD IS CONFIDENT THAT HE CAN RAISE THE MONEY IF WE ARE INTERESTED IN MAKING THE DOCUMENTARY FOR AIR.

MY SCHOOL PROJECT HAS TO BE COMPLETED BY APRIL OF THE COMING YEAR TO BE SUBMITTED FOR A POSSIBLE MAY 1994 GRADUATION.

I WILL BE CALLING MY PROFESSOR ON MONDAY NIGHT TO TALK MORE ABOUT MY FINAL PROJECT.
MEMORANDUM
Houston Public Television

PRODUCTION DEPARTMENT

TO: Leon Collins
FROM: Miriam Korshak

DEPARTMENT:
DATE: 01/11/94

SUBJECT: Doris' thesis project

This is in reference to our conversation about the project by which Doris will complete work on her master's thesis, and simultaneously deliver a piece for Community.

The attached memo from her to Ann describes in detail how this will come about, as well as the content of the story about Acres Homes Bus Company.

In summary:

1. Doris will gather material for the Community story.
2. She'll cut a Community story, using KUHT facilities and editor.
3. She'll use the field tapes to cut a longer version for her academic needs.
4. The thesis tape will be cut by Doris, herself, using our cuts-only equipment, but not our crew.
5. After both the Community piece and the thesis piece are complete, we'll evaluate the potential for a long-form story for broadcast.

As I explained to you, I have okayed this project through item #4, above. If we go for a long-form program, it'll first go to the Proposal Committee for approval to use KUHT crew for another edit.

Please share with Jeff as you deem appropriate.

cc: Doris Childress, Ann Leifeste
APPENDIX D

LETTER TO ROGER WARD
February 11, 1994

Mr. Roger Ward
7950 North Stadium Dr.
Houston, Texas 77030

Dear Mr. Ward:

Thank you for bringing a very enlightening part of Houston’s history to our attention. This letter summarizes our plans in regard to the photographic research material you are generously providing, as well as information about original sources.

(1) We want to move forward on a Community profile of the Acres Home Transit Company. As I stated earlier, Community is comprised of four to five features in each weekly show highlighting people, places and events around town. In March, a segment on the history of the transit company will be in our line-up. Although we first considered airing the story during Black History Month, I discovered the February broadcast schedule was already complete.

(2) In addition to the Community story I will be producing a video tape thesis to fulfill requirements for a Master’s Degree. This is a purely academic project, not intended for broadcast.

(3) Once the thesis is finished, I plan to submit a proposal for a 30-minute broadcast documentary to the KUHT Program Proposal Committee, using the video thesis as a sampler. Houston Public Television cannot make a commitment to produce and broadcast a documentary until presented with a full proposal and production budget. At minimum, a complete re-editing will be required. If approved, a fund raising effort can then begin.

Unless you prefer another term, we will credit your contribution to these projects as “Research Consultant.”

I look forward to continuing my work on this exciting topic. Please indicate your understanding and approval of our plans in the space below. Please return one copy of this letter to me. The other copy is for your own records.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Doris Ester-Childress, Producer
Houston Public Television

cc: Miriam Korshak, Director of Broadcast Production
Ann Leifeste, Managing Producer
APPENDIX E

PARTIAL TRANSCRIPT FROM WARD INTERVIEW
WS AND I REMEMBER THAT HERE IN ACRES HOMES WE HAD A BUS COMPANY THAT WE CALLED THE "ACRES SHAKERS" THAT OPERATED, I LATER DISCOVERED FOR ALMOST TEN YEARS AND TURNED OUT TO BE QUITE AN INTERESTING IDEA FOR ME TO WORK WITH FOR MY GRADUATE THESIS.

BUS RIDE TO LIBERATION
MASTER THESIS PROJECT
PRODUCER/STUDENT : DORIS ESTER-CHILDRESS
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS
DEPARTMENT OF RADIO-TELEVISION -FILM

*****THE DOCUMENTARY OPEN IS STILL BEING DEVELOPED.***************

[MUSIC OPEN: COLLAGE OF PHOTOS FROM 1950S AND 1960S OF CIVIL RIGHTS MOMENTS.]
[AUDIO NARRATION BLEND WITH MUSIC AND OLD FOOTAGE OF BUSES]

NARRATION:
"THERE SEEMS TO BE A CONNECTION BETWEEN TRANSPORTATION AND THE FIGHT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS WHEN COMES TO THE STRUGGLE AFRICAN AMERICANS HAVE BEEN FIGHTING IN AMERICA. SOME SAY SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AS A SEAT HAS LEAD TO CIVIL FREEDOMS"

[TITLE SLATE FULL SCREEN: BUS RIDE TO LIBERATION]
[MUSIC UP]
[MUSIC FADING IN WITH AUDIO OF FIRST SOT]

SOT: TAPE  I  TC: 02:05:54:06

ROGER WARD : RESEARCHER

" IN MONTGOMERY ALA. ROSA PARKS, WHEN SHE WAS ARRESTED IN DEC. OF 1955 WAS BAILED OUT BY REV. NIXON, WHO HELPED TO ORGANIZE THE COMMUNITY INTO A SINGLE PROTEST UNIT. THE VERY YOUNG AND UNTESTED MR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. WAS INVITED DOWN TO MONTGOMERY TO LEAD THE BOYCOTT. FROM ALL OF THIS WE SEE THAT THE BLACK COMMUNITY IN MONTGOMERY DID NOT RIDE THE BUSES. THEY RODE TAXIS, THEY RODE IN WAGONS. THEY RODE MULES. THEY WALKED THEY DID NOT RIDE THE BUSES."
NARRATION:
"BOYCOTTS LIKE THE MONTGOMERY STAND STARTED TAKING PLACE IN MANY PARTS OF THE SOUTH FROM BATON ROUGE TO TALLAHASSEE. IT BECAME A VIABLE WAY BLACKS COULD BARTER FOR THE FREEDOMS THEY DESERVED AS BEING AMERICANS."

SOT: TAPE 2 TC: 02:06:32:15 WARD
"...THE ECONOMIC LOSS TO THE MONTGOMERY TRANSIT SYSTEM WAS A CONSIDERABLE FACTOR IN WANTING TO END THE BOYCOTT.

NARRATION:
MANY TIMES THESE BOYCOTTS DID LITTLE MORE THAN GIVE BLACKS A BETTER SEAT ON THE BUS. ULTIMATELY THINGS WERE STILL IN THE CONTROL OF THE WHITE MAJORITY. MANY LEADERS FELT MORE WAS NEEDED IN THE WAY OF LONG TERM SOLUTIONS.

[NATS/B-ROLL TRANSITION WITH MUSIC]

NARRATION:
"IN A SMALL COMMUNITY IN HOUSTON, TEXAS A NEW TWIST ON THE BUS BOYCOTTS EVOLVED. THE ACRES HOME COMMUNITY -- KNOWN AS NOTHING MORE THAN A RURAL BLACK NEIGHBORHOOD-- DECIDED 'JUST NOT RIDING THE BUS WAS NOT AN ANSWER'. HAVING THEIR OWN BUSES SEEMED TO BE A CURE-ALL.

SOT: TAPE 1 TC: 01:01:41:10
WARD
"...ACRES HOMES UP UNTIL 1968, WAS OUTSIDE OF THE CITY LIMITS. THE COMMUNITY WAS SERVICED BY ONE OF THE
LARGEST OF THE PRIVATELY-OWNED, SUBURBAN BUS COMPANIES CALLED "PIONEER." IT HAD A SUBSIDIARY CALLED THE "YALE STREET BUS COMPANY," IT WAS MANAGED BY LARRY RUSH

NARRATION: "IN DEC. OF 1958 THE WHITE OWNED YALE STREET BUS COMPANY STOPPED RUNNING IN ACRES HOMES MANY PEOPLE SAY NO REASON GIVEN.....THEY JUST STOPPED RUNNING. THE REASON, HOWEVER, WOULD OF COURSE EMERGE SOMETIME LATER.


[MUSIC TRANSITION UNDER NARRATION] NARRATION: AS A RESULT OF THE JITNEY STYLE BOYCOTT, THE YALE STREET BUS LINE LOST PASSENGERS. AND BY LOSING PASSENGERS THEY IN TURN LOST REVENUE WHICH LEAD TO THE END OF SERVICES TO THE ACRES HOME AREA.
BY THE SPRING OF 59' THE BUS SITUATION HAD BECOME RATHER DESPERATE AND THE PEOPLE OUT HERE SIMPLY COULD NOT GET TO AND FROM WORK.

NARRATION:
ACRES HOMES AT THE TIME WAS OUTSIDE OF THE CITY LIMITS, A RURAL COMMUNITY. BUT IN THE AREA WAS A GROWING MIDDLE CLASS WITH PEOPLE HAVING THE MAJORITY OF EMPLOYMENT IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA. EVEN THOSE WHO STILL MANY MUCH OF THEIR LIVING THROUGH AGRICULTURAL MEANS STILL NEED MORE SERVICE THAN WHAT THE JITNEYS COULD PROVIDE. THIS NEED BECAME THE CATALYST FOR THE ACRES TRANSIT COMPANY TO MOVE FORWARD.

THE COMPANY WAS COMPOSED OF ABOUT 20 OR MORE STOCKHOLDERS AND THEY SAW THE NEED FOR TRANSPORTATION IN THIS AREA.

WHEN ACRES HOMES BUS CO. MEMBERS PETITIONED THE CITY COUNCIL FOR A FRANCHISE TO OPERATE OUT HERE, THEY WERE COMPETING AGAINST LARRY RUSH, AGAIN, WHO WANTED TO OPERATE A DIFFERENT FRANCHISE OUT HERE IN ACRES HOME.

...WE GOT SOME STRICT ORDERS FOR FIVE OR NO LESS THAN FIVE BUS RUNNING AND 15 MINUTES APART...I GOT A COMMITTEE AND WENT TO AUSTIN. I CALLED FIRST.
HAD LEARNED THERE WAS SOME BUSES UP THERE FOR SALE AND WENT UP THERE. I BOUGHT FIVE BUSES, PAID CASH FOR 'EM AND BROUGHT EM IN ...CAUSE THAT WHAT THE CHARTER CALLED FOR. I HAD TO MAKE FIVE THE SCHEDULE 15 MINUTES APART. [BUMP TO BITE 00:04:38:02] SO WHEN WE DID HAVE A VOTE WITH THE COUNCIL AND THE JUDGE TOLD ME, HE CALLED AND SAID, "REV COLE,... THIS IS GONNA SEEM ODD TO YOU." I SAID, "WELL, THERE'S SO MANY THINGS...I CAN TAKE MORE......AND HE SAID," I WILL NOT...SEE, I'M GONNA GIVE YOU THE CHARTER BUT I'M GONNA GIVE MR. RUSH ONE TOO." I SAID, "HOW YOU GONNA DO THAT? GONNA BE TWO..." HE SAID, "THAT'S WHAT I TOLD YOU WAS GONNA BE ODD. SEE, I WOULDN'T JUST GIVE YOU A CHARTER AND A YOU BEING A BLACK MAN OVER A WHITE MAN SO I'M GONNA GET HIM. YA'LL GET OUT THERE AND HUSTLE FOR IT." [BUMP TO BITE 00:04:01:25] (LATE IN THE BITE)...HE HAD ONE BUS RUNNING WITH NO SCHEDULE, JUST ANYWAY HE COULD MAKE IT, AND THAT'S WHAT'S AGAINST US.

NARRATION:
THE BUSES' STARTED RUNNING IN THE FALL OF 1959. IT RAN A SIMPLE ROUTE ALONG THE MAIN THOROUGHFARE OF WEST MONTGOMERY ROAD. PASSENGERS WERE PICKED UP IN ACRES AND TAKEN TO DOWNTOWN WITH NO STOPS AFTER LEAVING THE ACRES HOME COMMUNITY. FOR THE 25 CENT BUS RIDE PASSENGERS GOT TRANSPORTATION AND A SENSE OF PRIDE.
Inez Elmore, Former Stockholder:

They were pretty. They were red and white and well, the first we bought seemed to have been older school buses but they soon wore out and we started getting the red and white buses.

Narration:

After about nine to ten months of steady operations, the Acres Home Transit Company began to have problems with the jitney drivers. The illegal jitney drivers would not stop operating and they were in turn causing the bus company to lose money just as the original boycott did with the Yale Street Bus Company.

Rev. Cole:

The folks I was trying to help organized a jitney, what they called a jitney with automobile, and...and run on the same route. That was against the law but they wouldn't stop it up...they wouldn't stop it uptown.

Narration:

The Acres Home Transit Company was not going to be defeated by this tactic. They got an injunction against the jitney operators.

[Music Transition with Photo of Bus and Stockholders]
ACME DETECTIVE AGENCY, TO GET ...A CLAIMS, TO GET GET CHARGES, AGAINST THE JITNEY DRIVERS.[BUMP TO 01:10:20:16] AFTER ABOUT TWO YEARS OF THIS THE BUS COMPANY CEASED TO HAVE PROBLEMS WITH JITNEYS BECAUSE BY THAT TIME LEGITIMATE TAXIS BEGAN TO OPERATE ON THE ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE SO THAT EASED OUT THE JITNEY OPERATORS."

NARRATION:
AFTER WINNING THE BATTLE OVER THE JITNEY DRIVERS THE COMPANY BEGAN TO HAVE OTHER PROBLEMS MAINLY WITH THE BUSES AND FRAUDULENT ACCIDENT CLAIMS BY PASSENGERS.


[SOT: TAPE 4 TC: 00:10:26:01 LATE IN BITE REV. COLE] THE BUS JUST HAD A HARDER ROUTE AND THE ROUTE WHAT THEY GIVE US AROUND HERE IN ACRES HOME, STREETS WAS BAD. THEY'D PICK OUT THE BADEST STREETS TO IN ACRES HOME TO PUT ON MY ROUTE.

[SOT: TAPE 1 TC: 01:17:39:24 WARD] OFTENTIMES THE BUSES WERE NOT EXACTLY CLEAN; AGAIN OPERATION DIFFICULTIES AND PROBLEMS WITH FUNDING. OFTENTIMES THE SEATS WERE DAMAGED IN CERTAIN WAYS WITH LIKE TORN SEATS AND THINGS LIKE THAT.
The transit company was having such a difficult time in carrying on until they organized another part of the transit company called the investors. Money was set aside in the investor's part of the company. When they got in hard luck or had to buy more buses or something of that sort, the investors part of it would help out.

Narration:
In 1967 B.C. Elmore was elected chairman of the Acres home investors association. He and the 23 other investors saw the group as being as financial support to the Acres home transit company. This soon became a bitter conflict for some of the original members, namely Rev. Cole.

You had to put up the money that you put up to be a part of the Acres home, and some of the...some of four or five of the, I mean good folks, couldn't be investors. They were good folks but they didn't have the money. ...so that made...when they did that...I sold out my part.

In the early '60s a group of citizens not connected with the Acres home transit company approached a gentleman by the name of Bernard Calkins, and as you know Calkins was the president of the largest bus company here in Houston called
HOUSTON RAPID TRANSIT ....THEY ASKED
HIM," WOULD YOU CONSIDER EXPANDING
HIS EXISTING SYSTEM TO ACRES HOME. MR.
CALKINS OPPOSED BECAUSE OF THE FACT
THAT HE DIDN'T WANT TO BE ACCUSED OF
TAKING OVER ANY BODY'S BUSINESS.

NARRATION:
THE BUS COMPANY ITSELF CONTINUED TO
OPERATE WITH WHAT IT HAD. PROBLEMS
CONTINUE TO MOUNT. BY 1968 HOUSTON
WAS BEING ANNEXED BY IT'S CURRENT
MAYOR LOUIE WELCH. WITH COMING OF
CITY SERVICES ACRES HOME WITH IT'S
VAST LAND AREA BECAME ATTRACTIVE
TO BUSINESS ENTREPRENEURS.

[SOT: TAPE 1 TC: 01:14:08:15 WARD]
IT WAS ONLY NATURAL THEN THAT
BERNARD CALKINS WOULD EXTEND HIS
ROUTE OUT TO ACRES HOMES. IN THE
SPRING OF , I BELIEVE 1968 THE PRESIDENT
OF THE ACRES HOME TRANSIT COMPANY
SIGNED HIS NAME TO TRANSFER THE
OWNERSHIP OF THE TRANSIT COMPANY
OVER TO HOUSTON RAPID TRANSIT FOR THE
COST OF AROUND $5,000.
[BITE: 01:14:43:03] WITH THE TRANSFER THE
ERA OF THE ACRES HOME TRANSIT CO.
CAME TO AN END.

[SOT: TAPE 4 TC: 04:05:29:22 ELMORE]
WE REALIZED THAT THERE WOULD BE
DISAPPOINTMENTS BUT TO BE A GROUP OF
PEOPLE JUST TO HAVE A BRIGHT IDEA IN
OUR MINDS AND DEVELOPAND TO DEVELOP
IT AS WELL AS WE DID, I DON'T FEEL BAD OF
IT.
[MUSIC IN UNDER AUDIO]
NARRATION:
THE ACRES HOME BUS COMPANY WAS A
PRODUCT OF COLLECTIVE COMMUNITY
ORGANIZATION. A PRODUCT OF THE CIVIL
RIGHTS PERIOD. IT WAS A TIME WHEN
BLACK AMERICANS WERE REALIZING
THEY HAD A RIGHT AND A STAKE IN THE
AMERICAN DREAM.
[MUSIC UP FADE TO BLACK]
WORKS CONSULTED


McElroy, George. Telephone interview. 3 February 1994.


