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AN INTERVIEW WITH FCC COMMISSIONER HOOKS

FRANK McGEE: The viewers around the nation are not the only ones interested in the new television season. So are the seven members of the Federal Communications Commission, the government agency that regulates broadcasting. The newest member of that commission has a special interest. He's Judge Benjamin L. Hooks of Memphis, Tennessee. He was named by President Nixon last spring as the first black member of the FCC.

We will talk to Commissioner Hooks now about equal employment and other problems facing the broadcasting industry as well as the FCC. He is in our Washington studio with Today Washington Editor Bill Monroe.

Gentlemen?

BILL MONROE: Good morning, Frank.

Judge Hooks, Chairman Burch has asked you to keep a special eye on problems of equal employment in the broadcasting industry. That applies to equal employment in sex as well as to minorities. What is the status of equal employment in broadcasting? Has there been enough progress? Or not enough progress?

JUDGE BENJAMIN L. HOOKS: Well, we have really two problems, very briefly. One is the internal problem. Washington is not itself -- in all of its governmental agencies, has not really been the best example of an equal opportunity employer. In the FCC itself, with over 1,500 employees, we don't have any blacks in grades 16, 17, or 18, and only one or two in grade 15. We have a substantial employment rate in the lower Civil Service grades. And this is true of Washington generally. And there's got to be a massive effort to get this done. So that I think that our commission, luckily for me and for minorities, is very well attuned and sensitive to this problem and I don't anticipate too much trouble in moving forward.

Now, the second part of the question deals with the

broadcast industry and -- and the other things which we regulate. And I don't think broadcasting is necessarily behind American industry generally, but they're certainly not ahead. And they're just -- you know, if I could go over the statistics: there's 220 public television stations in America with not a single black manager or minority manager. You have 693 television stations, or somewhere in that number -- commercial stations, and no blacks own the TV stations and no black -- and only one black manager down in Jackson, Mississippi. You have about 7,000 radio stations, and maybe 20 owned by blacks.

So you see we have a long way to go. And when you look in terms of news directors and the people who really have an input into local stations, there are very few black people involved -- or minorities, so far as that's concerned.

And then the final -- so that we have a -- we have a real job to do. But I enjoy the challenge of trying to work for change.

MONROE: Judge Hooks, recently President Nixon more or less came out against the idea of quotas in terms of setting standards for minority employment. What about quotas? Do you agree that they don't make too much sense if they're specific?

JUDGE HOOKS: Well, it doesn't bother me too much. You know, we got -- we have people who just make a business of crying over anything that the President says, whether it's, you know, on one side or the other.

And my personal feeling is that the black people have been artificially held back throughout their history in America, so there would be nothing wrong in giving them special aid. I believe along with the late Whitney Young that there should be a domestic Marshall Plan for black people that would help to give them the opportunity to compensate for past handicaps. And I think this nation will finally have to come around to that conclusion, that you simply cannot expect people who've been handicapped and hobbled for 100 years or more in freedom and 200 years of slavery before that to come out now on the track and compete equally.

While I don't go to horse races now, I do know there's such a thing as a handicap. And some horses carry 110 pounds and others only carry 100 pounds.

So at some point in time American industry and the government will have to recognize that. However, I'm not too upset about the statement about quotas, because you start off with the fact that the Civil Service Commission has said, and has not retreated from their position, that numerical goals can

be important.

Now, there is something about quotas that the Jewish people feel very strongly about, because there was a time when the quota was -- was -- was against them and against minorities, only two here, three there, so historically they have a reason to be upset. But I hope they don't let their preoccupation with that prevent them from -- from continuing to fight, as they have in the past, to see for the advancement of blacks and other minorities who have not as yet entered the mainstream of American life.

MONROE: At a panel discussion here in Washington involving broadcast news men, a discussion held before white and black high school students, a white girl asked the panel this question. She said, "If I were applying to a broadcast station, I would feel that I would be at a disadvantage today if I were applying simultaneously with a black girl." Now, what would you have to say to a white girl who was concerned about being discriminated against in terms of wanting a job and feeling that she might be at a disadvantage?

JUDGE HOOKS: Well, that -- that always bothers me. And I don't want to appear in these few seconds to be a black racist, because I'm not. I have many reasons to be bitter. I was born and raised in the South. I know all about segregated restrooms, segregated water fountains. I've driven across this country, not been able to use hotels. And people, you know, think it's a fairy tale. I lived through that. When I started practicing law, when I walked into a courtroom nobody ever called me lawyer or even Mister; it was by my first name. And I guess I still have a hang-up about that, even after all these years. But I've rid myself of the bitterness that would have accompanied that, because I recognized that we can't really make progress as long as we stay mad and angry.

But you know, for -- as I said a minute ago, for 100 years white people had no problem telling blacks "You're not wanted. You're not needed" and -- and even lying: "We're not hiring anybody." Now, all of a sudden, the white people may get a little taste of it; they go to pieces. I just think it's silly. I mean, this is still the white man's country. Nobody's going to really be able to discriminate against the majority anywhere for any long period of time.

And it bothers me that these people, you know, all of a sudden now, become all concerned about the fact -- "I may be at a disadvantage." I say, "What the devil? So you're at a disadvantage temporarily -- only for a moment or two. And I don't really believe it anyhow."

I think that this is a time, however, on the other hand, I'd like to say, where young black people have the best

opportunities they've ever had. And as I go round this country talking with people, I try to emphasize to my young black brothers and sisters that they must prepare themselves, be ready for it. And I advise them and warn them not to get too excited about another country, because with all of its imperfections America is the greatest country I know anything about; it gives the best opportunities to move forward. And I like it because I can get on this show and say whatever I want and, you know, go on back to my office and not worry about being put in jail or followed.

I think it's a great country, with marvelous opportunities for all people. But so far as black people are concerned, it has not been the land of opportunity that it has been for white people. And this is what I'm working for, that it becomes really the land of opportunity for all -- black and white, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, Spanish-speaking, and women, who have been notoriously discriminated against in this country of ours.

MONROE: Judge Hooks, there is a controversy over the first half hour of prime time. As you know, the FCC decided that that first half hour should not be programmed by the networks, that the local stations ought to decide what programming went into that first half hour. Since that came into effect, many people have decided that -- felt that the policy was a mistake, that it has not improved programming, and perhaps should be abandoned. What is your view on it?

JUDGE HOOKS: Well, I don't think it's really been tried. I -- I think that -- I -- first of all, I'm in favor of broadcasting industry making enough money -- I'm committed to the profit -- profit-making motive -- so that they can be imaginative, creative, and innovative. And they have not been. Television has not lived up to its promise.

And that brings me to another question. This whole question of balancing. The black people have been shortchanged. And I have a real grave indictment against television, both network and local, because they have not zeroed in.

I have a little grandson. And when that boy grows up and watches television, he'll spend more hours watching television, perhaps, than he will in school. I want him to be able to choose between models. Every black man cannot be a great singer. Every black man cannot be a great athlete. And it's stupid and silly to think that because you are a great singer or great athlete that you know about economics and sociology, philosophy, and anthropology. White people don't make that mistake. When they deal with blacks, the best way to get on television is to be a great singer or something of that sort, or a fist-waving, gasoline-carrying militant.

There are thousands of black lawyers and doctors and teachers and college presidents who are involved in the business of trying to make this a better world. But you never see them on television. It's possible to sit down before the half hour national news show and an hour of local news and never see a black man in a meaningful role. And to the extent that they do this, whether consciously or not, they are robbing 25,000,000 black people of their great heritage, and -- and they're not being fair. And if I spend seven years on the commission, I will be spending seven years trying to break through this type of almost unconscious conspiracy that keeps a balanced black program from being shown.

MONROE: You don't see any...

JUDGE HOOKS: And I'm not opposed to the athletes and entertainers. They've paid their dues; they're entitled to be featured. But white people, by the very nature of the power they exercise as senators and governors and congressmen, get on television. But -- but who knows about the black appellate judges, the black -- 300 black judges in this country, the doctors who are fighting sickle cell anemia, those who are engaged in the problem of trying to correct criminal injustice and the -- and the system of oppression? They don't get a chance to talk -- and who are working within the system.

MONROE: You don't see any change in that picture over the last 10 years?

JUDGE HOOKS: Not enough to talk about. Television, however -- I'm not condemning everything television does. I think it's a great medium. And I'm not one of those elite intellectuals who say that you, you know, you -- you got a "vast wasteland." I think you satisfy my needs quite well most of the time. But I'm talking about that extra percent you could do to make it really a meaningful contribution to it.

Now, I sort of got off the question you asked me directly about prime time. But I wanted to get that thought in. I think that...

MONROE: What do you...

JUDGE HOOKS: ...the half time on -- on -- that has been allotted to the stations ought to be used in a meaningful way to focus in on the problems of the local community. And I think it can be done. And I hope it will be done.

MONROE: Thank you very much, Judge Hooks, for being with us this morning. The new member of the Federal Communications Commission, Judge Benjamin Hooks. Now back to Frank in New York.

McGEE: And our thanks too.