

Everett C. Parker, public rights defender in media, dies at 102

by [William Winslow](#) in the [October 14, 2015](#) issue

Everett C. Parker, former head of the United Church of Christ Office of Communication and an advocate for the public's rights in broadcasting, died September 17 in White Plains, New York. He was 102.

A radio producer, reporter, and advertising agency head, Parker had a reputation as a defender of freedom of speech.

"His commitment to the groundbreaking work on ensuring that every marginal voice would have access to the airwaves not only mattered, not only matters still, but was something almost every other justice advocate missed," said John C. Dorhauer, UCC general minister and president.

Parker is linked to a 1966 legal decision in which a federal circuit court ruled that citizen groups have the right to be heard before government regulatory agencies such as the Federal Communications Commission. After the ruling, groups in hundreds of communities, helped by the church office, negotiated with stations for better programs and news coverage.

In 1962 WLBT-TV of Jackson, Mississippi, refused to broadcast lawyer Thurgood Marshall. Black leaders in Mississippi appealed to Parker as head of the UCC Office of Communication.

Parker knew that a broadcast licensee is required to serve its viewers in the "public interest, convenience or necessity," so he orchestrated a study of the station's programming and found that it didn't comply. Parker wrote in the *Christian Century* in 1964 that the UCC's office petition charged that the television stations "present only one side of the civil rights picture," excluding African Americans from programming. (Parker wrote many news reports for the *Century*, especially in the 1960s.)

"Everett's lifelong clarity and insistence that ethics, accessibility, diversity, and social justice are central to, not peripheral to, a fair and effective media forever changed the landscape of broadcast journalism in this country," said Bennett Guess,

a UCC national officer.

Parker directed the Office of Communication until retiring in 1983. One of its most successful PR campaigns led to the exoneration of the Wilmington Ten, nine young black men and a white woman, who were falsely convicted of arson and conspiracy during racial turmoil in Wilmington, North Carolina.

Parker produced children's Bible radio and television series, as well as TV series such as Tangled World, exploring ethics in contemporary life.

"Early on, Everett saw the institutionalization of racism and classism in the communications industry and went about disrupting unequal practices through public policy change," said M. Linda Jaramillo, executive minister of the UCC's Justice and Witness Ministries.

Parker graduated from the University of Chicago and Chicago Theological Seminary. From 1945 to 1957, he taught at Yale Divinity School. —UCC News