The Houston Review

OF HISTORY AND CULTURE

Civic Leadership in Houston

Volume 1, Number 2 Summer 2004

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON • CENTER FOR PUBLIC HISTORY

From the Editor

This is the second issue of *The Houston Review of History and Culture*, and we continue to learn by doing. We have improved the design of the magazine while including more photographs to illustrate the articles. We will continue to make adjustments needed to produce a professionally researched and written journal on Houston's history that appeals to a broad audience.

This issue focuses on civic leadership in Houston. At a time when our city faces a variety of challenges, history provides a useful context. For more than 150 years, civic leaders in our region have grappled with the problems produced by economic growth, a growing population, geographical expansion, and racial and ethnic diversity. The demands on leaders changed dramatically as the region's population increased more than one hundred-fold during the 20th century, but the need for determined, creative leadership remained constant. This issue looks to the past to understand more fully the region's present and future.

Future issues of *The Houston Review* will continue to make ties between the past and present. The winter 2004 issue will discuss the evolution of the Texas Medical Center into a major force in the world of medicine and in the Houston economy. The summer 2005 issue will explore Houston's memory of World War II. Ideas for future issues include disasters in the region's past, the experience of migrants to Houston, and historical preservation in our city.

We invite ideas and contributions from our readers on future issues. Indeed, we welcome support of any kind, from the submission of articles, to help in building subscriptions, to donations of time, expertise, or funds. As we find our voice and our audience, we remain convinced that Houston needs a greater sense of its own history. We are committed to building *The Houston Review* into a publication that recaptures the city's past while serving as a meeting place for those interested in Houston's history.

ON THE COVER

Jesse Jones greets Clem Shaver, Chairman of the National Democratic Party, at the opening of the Democratic National Convention in Houston in June 1928.

Courtesy Houston Endowment, Inc.

The Center for Public History at the University of Houston

For more than twenty years, the Center for Public History at the University of Houston has trained students to apply the skills of the professional historian outside the university. Our former students work throughout the region in jobs in government, business, historical societies, preservation groups, archives, libraries, professional associations, and public interest groups. Under the direction of Martin Melosi and with the input of other faculty members, students at the Center have produced an array of studies of various aspects of Houston's history. Much of what we know about our city's past has been a result of the Center's work.

At the heart of the Center is the Houston History Project, which contains a number of projects ranging from a study of slavery in Texas to a soon to be published volume of essays on the environmental history of Houston. Current initiatives of the Center include the publication of *The Houston Review of History and Culture*, the organization of a comprehensive project on the oral history of Houston, and the expansion of efforts to identify historical records for inclusion in archives.

For more information about the Center for Public History, contact Martin Melosi at mmelosi@uh.edu or visit the website at www.class.uh.edu/publichistory.

This issue is dedicated to the memory of J.H. Freeman (1916-2004), a friend who loved Houston and its history.

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VOLUME 1, NUMBER 2

EDITORIAL POLICY

The Houston Review of History and Culture is published twice a year by the Center for Public History at the University of Houston. We welcome manuscripts, interviews, and photographic essays on the history and culture of the Houston region, broadly defined. All correspondence should be sent to The Houston Review, University of Houston, Department of History, 524 Agnes Arnold Hall, Houston, TX 77204-3003 (713-743-3088 or 713-743-3087). The web site is www.class.uh.edu/TheHoustonReview. We also welcome ideas for topical issues; these can be sent to the above address or to joepratt@uh.edu.

Subscriptions are $10 per year for students, $15 per year for individuals, and $25 per year for institutions. Single issues and back issues are available for $10.

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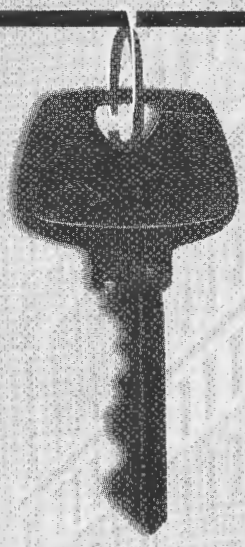
8F and Many More:



Business and Civic Leadership in Modern Houston

by Joseph Pratt*

In January 2001, Ken Lay was the poster boy for civic leadership in Houston. He had built Enron into a leading company in a dynamic industry, bringing thousands of jobs to the city. He had helped keep major league baseball in Houston by pushing through a new downtown stadium aptly named Enron Field. He, his company, and his foundation led the league in corporate giving. He enjoyed easy access to political figures at all levels of government, and rumors flew in 2000 of a cabinet office in the new Bush administration or a run for mayor in Houston. Only a year later, Enron lay in ruins. Bad jokes about "Chapter 11 Field" made the rounds. His harshest critics asked just whose money Lay had been giving away to charities. Politicians asked "Ken who?" as they dodged media questions about political influence.

Such criticism took on an especially hard edge because Lay had become "Mr. Houston" at the turn of the twenty-first century, the latest in a line of powerful business/civic leaders who shaped the city's modern development. The *New York Times* ran a profile of his local influence under the headline, "In Houston, the Lines Dividing Politics, Business and Society Are Especially Blurry." The article noted that Lay "was only the city's latest kingmaker. A generation before, the leadership had been a close-knit group of financiers and businessmen known as the 8F Club."[1] This reference was to suite 8F of the Lamar Hotel in downtown Houston, which Herman and George R. Brown (of the giant Houston-based construction firm Brown & Root) rented and used as a meeting place for a wide variety of like-minded Houstonians in the boom decades after World War II. The *New York Times'* attitude toward the "city building" activities of this "8F Club" is captured in its use of a quote from *Texas Monthly* magazine: "Maybe it's a classic Texas story to push things to the limit."[2]

Or maybe not. "Especially blurry" lines dividing politics and business are hardly unique to Houston. By acquiring economic power and wealth, businessmen in all capitalist societies often become first among equals in civic and political affairs. Other less powerful citizens in Houston and other American cities have never quite known what to make of the influential businessmen who have played such a prominent role in shaping our society. In good times, we react to their power with admiration tinged with envy; in bad times, with skepticism tinged with anger. But at all times, we have looked to them to push our cities and our nation forward.

First and foremost, we have wanted them to create jobs. This has been particularly important in Houston. Not many of us came here in search of beautiful scenery or a mild climate; we came seeking jobs for ourselves and expanded opportunities for our children. Once business leaders have delivered jobs, we also have expected them to help build the cultural institutions (including higher education) common in a mature metropolis. Most of us have not been surprised

Unless otherwise noted, all photos in this article are courtesy Houston Endowment, Inc.

The Lamar Hotel was home of suite 8F where Houston's business and civic elite frequently gathered.

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when business leaders have taken an active and self-interested role in politics, but we have expected the best among them to have a vision of the needs of the city that extends beyond their immediate personal and corporate interests.

After more than twenty years of studying the history of business/civic leadership in Houston, I have well-developed opinions on the topic. Indeed, I can say with absolute confidence that I hold the key to what the *New York Times* referred to as the "8F Club" and older Houstonians at times call the "8F crowd." Naurice Cummings reached in his desk and gave me his after I interviewed him in the mid-1980s. Cummings had been a regular visitor with his own key to 8F, where he made kings with Herman and George R. Brown. But by the time of my interview with Cummings, the historic Lamar Hotel had fallen victim to the vision of unfettered progress of its most celebrated inhabitants; it had been demolished to make room for an important new parking lot. I thus faced a historian's dilemma. I had the key to all power and influence in Houston, but the lock in which it fit, the door opened by the lock, the suite, and the entire building no longer existed. What follows is my effort to reconstruct suite 8F, placing the Brown's generation back into the world they inhabited. This requires establishing the historical context in which they operated and comparing them to other business/civic leaders who shaped Houston's development both before and after them.

Captain Baker's Era—1880s–World War I

Despite the historical emphasis placed on the 8F crowd, in my opinion, the single most powerful business/civic leader in the history of Houston was Captain James A. Baker. He was the midwife at the birth of the modern city. He and his law firm (which is now known as Baker Botts) stood at the center of a cluster of lawyers, bankers, and businessmen who led Houston from the 1880s through World War I. During these years, Houston grew from a raw, rowdy town of less than 20,000 to a small, but bustling city of about 130,000. When Captain Baker and his father, Judge Baker, arrived in Houston in the 1870s, the city was about one tenth the size of New Orleans, which served as the center of regional trade and commerce on the Gulf Coast. By the time of Captain Baker's death in 1941, Houston was the clear leader of industry and finance on the Gulf Coast, and it was well on its way to national prominence as the energy capital of the nation. Because of his broad involvement in the life of Houston during those formative years, Captain Baker is a logical historical symbol of those who transformed a town with big aspirations into an emerging metropolis.[3]

With good reason, Houston found leadership among its lawyers and bankers in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century. To grow, the region needed to forge solid connections with the

Downtown Houston in the 1880s

Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

The Bakers of Houston and Baker Botts

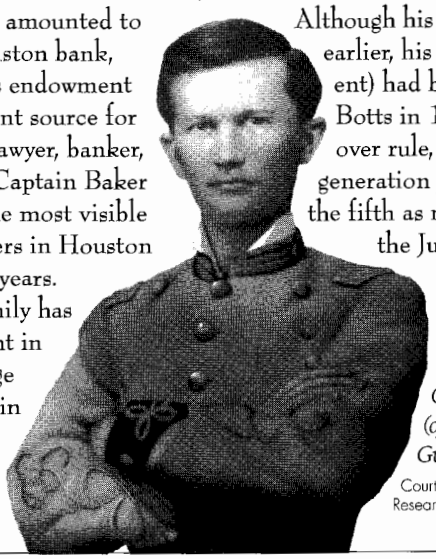
Captain Baker's father, Judge James A. Baker, who moved to Houston from Huntsville, Texas, in 1872, was a railroad lawyer at Baker Botts, as were other prominent partners in the firm. From the 1880s forward, the firm managed the giant Southern Pacific Railroad's (SP) legal affairs in Texas, smoothing the way for the railroad's unified operations throughout the state. This line and others connected Houston firmly into national markets, vaulting the city ahead of Galveston in the race for regional preeminence and laying the foundation for the city's economic expansion. Baker Botts greatly benefited from its growing reputation in railroad law. One of its early partners, Robert Scott Lovett, embodied this tie. He grew up in rural Texas north of Houston, took a job digging stumps out of the right of way of the SP, moved on to become a lawyer at Baker Botts, and went on to become the head of the Southern Pacific.

After joining his father as a partner in Houston's major corporate law firm, Captain Baker became deeply involved in key sectors of the city's economy. As a director and, for a time, president of one of the city's largest banks, Captain Baker was a lawyer or a banker for many of city's businesses. He also was an officer in the local natural gas company and numerous other local enterprises. As chairman of the Rice board, Baker headed what amounted to another major Houston bank, since the Institute's endowment became an important source for real estate loans. Lawyer, banker, and businessman, Captain Baker remained one of the most visible business/civic leaders in Houston for almost seventy years.

The Baker family has remained prominent in Houston since Judge Baker arrived here in 1872. Five generations of James Addison Bakers have worked for Baker Botts and for the good of the city. The original Baker, "Judge" (1821-1897), received his distinctive title from his brief service as a judge in the Confederacy. He practiced with Baker Botts from 1872-1897. His son, who remained at Baker Botts from 1877 to 1941, became known as "Captain" Baker (1857-1941) after service under that rank in the Houston Light Guard, a ceremonial military organization that ultimately became a part of the Texas National Guard. Ironically, Captain Baker's son, who was a captain in the real army during World War I, spent his long, productive life in Houston (1892-1973) and at Baker Botts (1919-1973) known as "Junior."

An even greater irony came with the next generation, "Secretary" James A. Baker (1930-present). As one of the most prominent Houstonians in the last half of the twentieth century, Secretary Baker served two presidents as chief of staff, Secretary of Treasury, and Secretary of State. Yet until his return from Washington in the 1990s, he could not serve at Baker Botts. The firm had passed a strict antinepotism rule in the late 1930s, so Secretary Baker pursued his legal career as a partner in the Houston-based firm of Andrews & Kurth. When he returned to Houston after his distinguished career in government, the antinepotism rule still seemed to block his hiring by "the family firm." Although his father had died years earlier, his son "Jamie" (1954-present) had begun working at Baker Botts in 1985. Reason prevailed over rule, and in 1993, the fourth generation James A. Baker joined the fifth as members of the firm of the Judge, Captain, and Junior.

—*Source: J. H. Freeman,* The People of Baker Botts *(Houston: Baker Botts, 1992), 19.*



Captain James A. Baker (of the Houston Light Guard) in 1879

Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

booming national economy. Good local lawyers were needed to carve out legal space for giant railroads and nationally active industrial corporations in a Texas legal system designed for a rural society. The farmers and ranchers who had written the laws of Texas had set numerous legal traps for large corporations. The big businesses that emerged in the northeastern United States in the late nineteenth century could not function smoothly under the restrictions imposed by these Texas laws. As one of the largest corporate law firms in one of the major cities in Texas, Baker Botts represented many "foreign" (that is, non-Texan) companies, rescuing them from these legal traps, repairing the damage if possible, and finding ways to remove other traps from the legal landscape.

Captain Baker and other corporate lawyers helped organize and manage the local banks that solidified ties between Houston and the national economy. Although strictly enforced state unit banking laws restricted the growth of Texas banks, Houston banks nonetheless forged important correspondent relationships with much larger "money center" banks in New York City and Chicago. Through these ties flowed capital critically important to the region. The local bankers who directed this flow into the city came to assert considerable influence. Captain Baker cemented his own connections in the east by spending summers in the New York area, tending to vital business connections as his family escaped the Texas heat.

New York City figured into Baker's involvement in one of the best examples of city building in this era, the creation of a major university in Houston. William Marsh Rice had made a fortune in Houston before returning to New York City in the late nineteenth century. To show his gratitude to his adopted home, Rice provided a $200,000 endowment in a will written in 1891 for the creation of an institute of higher education in Houston. From the original charter until his death in 1941, Captain Baker served as chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Rice Institute. While planning the opening of Rice, Baker had to go to New York City in 1900 to fight and win a highly publicized legal battle to void a second Rice will. In the twenty-one years from the chartering of Rice to its opening in 1912, Baker and the rest of the board

steadily built the Rice endowment. This enabled them to create an institution with the resources to become a first-class university, despite its location in a relatively small city far away from the traditional centers of academic excellence in the East. As a magnet attracting able and ambitious young people to Houston and a source of civic pride for Houstonians, Rice became a symbol of a city on the move. As such, it attracted broad support from the city's business community after its opening.[4]

Along with other lawyers such as Frank Andrews of Andrews & Kurth, Captain Baker prepared the way for the integration of Houston into the national economy. They created legal, financial, and transportation connections to the national economy that could be used by others to build industry and trade. By World War I, such ties had enabled Houston to make important strides toward defining a profitable and distinctive identity for itself in the national economy.

Making good use of the railroads and the legal and financial networks they had helped create, lumber, cotton, and oil catapulted Houston forward after the turn of the twentieth century, drawing the capital, jobs, and leaders required for it to become a major city. The cotton trade brought M.D. Anderson and Will Clayton from Oklahoma City to Houston, which greatly benefited as an international center for the cotton trade. Oilman Joseph S. Cullinan migrated from Pennsylvania to Texas. After helping establish the new Texas oil industry at Corsicana in the late 1890s, he took a leading role in developing the giant Spindletop field near Beaumont before making Houston his home, as well as the headquarters of The Texas Company. Other oilmen, including John Henry Kirby (whose empire included timber and oil) and early leaders of Humble Oil (Ross Sterling, William Farish, Harry Wiess, Robert Blaffer, and Walter Fondren), established an influential presence in the city. Houston's cotton and oil-fueled prosperity fed a boosterism with roots deep in the city's past.[5]

A young Jesse Jones reigns as King Nottoc at the annual No-Tsu-Oh carnival in 1902.

Cotton rides the rails in turn-of-the-century Houston.

Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

The city's openness to "adopted sons" was readily apparent in these critical years. With its fast-moving economy, the city was too busy to wait for "old money" to take charge of civic affairs. Indeed, Houston had few old, established families and interests. It welcomed newcomers of ambition and talent, quickly harnessing their energies into the frenzied effort to build a major city out of the people and money drawn to Houston by the ample opportunities presented by oil and cotton. Jesse Jones, for example, migrated to Houston from Tennessee by way of Dallas in 1898 at the age of 24. Only four years after his move to the city, a youthful Jones presided as King Nottoc ("cotton" spelled backward) at the annual No-Tsu-Oh Carnival celebrating cotton's importance to the city. By that time, he and others who flooded the city after the turn of the century had already taken a place among Houston's civic leadership.

The climax of this era of city building was the dredging of a deepwater ship channel from Houston to the Gulf of Mexico. The cotton and oil industries had access to broader markets via rail and through the nearby port of Galveston, but they

Jesse Jones' Gulf Building under construction in 1928

wanted easier access to modern ocean-going vessels to expand their trade. The deepening of the channel required the support of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the city's elite went to work in the 1890s lobbying the federal government for this vital project. Closing ranks behind Tom Ball, the region's sole representative in the U.S. House of Representatives, Houston's business leaders finally sealed the deal in 1909 by creating a navigation district backed by the power to raise $1.25 million in private funds to match the Corps funding for dredging a deepwater channel. This "Houston plan" of providing private funding for public works on this scale had few precedents. More than any event in Houston's history, this episode became the symbol of the "can do" attitude of the city's aggressive business/civic elite. It became the story Houston boosters told to illustrate that their city was more ambitious and more innovative than others.[6]

By 1914, when President Woodrow Wilson pushed a button in the White House that traveled via telegraph and shot the canon at the official opening of the new ship channel, Houston was tightly connected into the national economy. The ship channel reinforced ties to national and international markets that the railroads had established in the late nineteenth century. An expanding pipeline system assured the flow of oil from fields throughout the southwestern producing regions to Gulf Coast refineries, from which refined products or crude oil could be shipped in tankers to markets around the world. The emergence to international prominence of Houston-based companies such as Anderson, Clayton and Company in cotton and The Texas Company in oil defined the region's new identity in the national economy.

Houston still had a long way to go before it could proclaim itself a mature city. Rice Institute had opened in 1912; in 1914 it remained little more than a symbol of the city's quest for education and culture. Civic leaders had constructed a civic center that could be used to host a variety of cultural events. Nina Cullinan (the daughter of Joseph S. Cullinan) and Ima Hogg (the daughter of former governor and Texaco investor James Hogg) had migrated to Houston with their families, but they had not yet emerged as leading patrons of the arts. The establishment of the Houston Symphony Society in 1913 provided a hint of things to come, but the creation of institutions of "high culture" would have to wait a while longer. The city's civic leaders had roads to pave and plumbing to move indoors before they could turn their full attentions to operas and museums.

But they were not too busy to address another challenge posed for them by history: the creation of a new social/racial order. Race was the most pressing social issue facing Houston's leaders at the turn of the twentieth century. A growing black population reached almost 24,000 by 1910, drawn to the city by opportunities for education and employment better than those in rural Texas and Louisiana. In this era, the city's white civic elite closed ranks around a Texas variant of the Jim Crow system imposed throughout the South. Legal restrictions blocked equal access by blacks to public accommodations, including schools. Jobs and housing remained strictly segregated by custom. Poll taxes and all-white primary elections (which in the single-party South effectively chose the Democratic candidate who usually would win without real opposition in the general election) severely limited the political power of blacks.

Jim Crow enjoyed the near unanimous support of Houston's white population, including its business/civic leaders. They embraced segregation as essential to progress, since in their view it would assure the social stability needed to foster economic growth. No white leaders stepped forward to oppose Jim Crow or to offer alternatives. Given the pervasive racism of the times, it is ahistorical to look back and expect otherwise.

It is also ahistorical, however, to ignore the long-run costs of segregation. Jim Crow took an obvious, harsh toll on individual black citizens while imposing high, yet less obvious, costs on society as a whole. Businesses paid the price of maintaining segregated labor markets and restricting the access of black customers to goods and services. All employers felt the impact on potential workers of the separate but unequal educational system. The society as a whole lost the initiative and energy of ambitious blacks who fled the region to less hostile places such as California in search of better social and economic opportunities. The city, the state, and the South as a whole bore the political costs of a stunted form of democracy in which a race-based single party political system consistently neglected the needs of disenfranchised blacks and poor whites. The economic irrationalities of maintaining a dual, race-based system of public accommodations and education proved increasingly costly as the city grew larger.

Yet believing in white supremacy and enamored by the short-term benefits of a cheap black labor force, Houston's business/civic leaders helped create and defend Jim Crow. As they put their shoulders to the economic wheel to build a dynamic economy, unfortunately they embedded in this economy an unjust and inefficient Jim Crow system that

remained a drag on the region's development for more than three generations.[7]

The Era of Jesse Jones—World War I to World War II

Jesse Jones stood astride Houston's civic elite in the interwar years. As a young banker/developer before World War I, Jones had helped collect the private funding that persuaded the Corps of Engineers to deepen the Houston Ship Channel. After the war, Jones became the symbol of Houston's rapid emergence as a major city. His background is discussed elsewhere in this issue, as are his efforts to bring the 1928 Democratic Convention to meet in the city. He left distinctive marks on Houston as a real estate developer and a political figure. As a developer, he built much of the city's growing skyline from the turn of the century until his death in 1956. As one of the first Houstonians to play a highly visible and powerful role in national politics, he made an even more lasting impression on history. A physically imposing man, Jesse Jones became "Mr. Houston" to observers throughout the nation and to younger civic leaders in the city and even in Washington, D.C.[8]

Houston rapidly industrialized in the interwar years. The land on both sides of the new ship channel from Houston to Texas City attracted an array of industrial enterprises, with giant oil refineries and petrochemical plants creating thousands of new industrial jobs. Oil-related manufacturing in other parts of the city added good jobs by the thousands. The opportunities presented by these new factories attracted a wave of migrants from rural Texas and Louisiana, as well as numerous professionals and managers from around the nation. By 1940, Houston had grown spectacularly to a population of almost 400,000, with a strong, dynamic industrial foundation for future growth.[9]

The surge of expansion down the ship channel corridor during these years confirmed a pattern that continued to shape Houston's growth into one of nation's largest cities in terms of geographical area. To the southeast, the Houston metropolitan area came to include such smaller "refinery towns" as Pasadena, Deer Park, Baytown, and Texas City. Even before World War II, Houston had begun to reach out and absorb once "outlying" areas in several directions.

Despite such geographical sprawl in the interwar years, downtown business leaders continued to shape the city's development. Lawyers and bankers, including Captain Baker himself, continued to take leading roles in civic affairs, as did those who owned and managed the region's sprawling complex of cotton and oil-related activities. Among the growing number of strong leaders in Houston in the 1920s, Jesse Jones stood out. When he returned to Houston from Washington, D.C. after World War II, he became a gray imminence in the city, serving as a role model for several generations of younger civic leaders. During his remarkable career, Jones had a hand in almost every civic project in Houston for more than half a century. Although he died in 1956, through his personal involvement and his impact on others, Jones' direct and indirect influence spanned most of the history of twentieth-century Houston.[10]

In the 1930s and 1940s, as Jones worked in Washington as head of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and Secretary of Commerce, a new generation of business/civic leaders emerged in Houston. These men represented the city's new industrial economy. As their expanding companies fueled the region's industrial growth, they began to identify a common interest in civic affairs. As World War II ended and the region moved into a sustained postwar boom, they were poised to assert leadership. Independently wealthy and relatively young, they had already built successful companies and they looked forward to the challenge of helping Houston move into the ranks of what they called the "major league cities."

The Era of 8F and Many More—World War II to the 1980s

In the postwar boom, this new generation of business/civic leaders did just that. Their various enterprises, along with the Houston-area operations of major corporations based outside the region, created a tidal wave of jobs that moved the economy forward. With their personal fortunes and energies, they built cultural institu-

Continued on page 31

A view of downtown Houston in the 1950s, with many of Jones' buildings filling the skyline.

Carter Wesley

and the Making of Houston's Civic Before the Second Reconstruction

by Amilcar Shabazz*

Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

Carter Wesley (1892-1969)

Like the proverbial nose on a spited face, Carter Wesley is an overlooked figure in the history of Houston and civic leadership in the U.S. South. The Bakers, Browns, Worthams, and other prominent white Houstonians have received ample treatment in the scholarly literature. Recently, worthy book-length studies have appeared on lesser known black community leaders like Lulu B. White and Eldrewey Stearns, as well as prominent national leaders who hail from Houston such as Barbara Jordan. But Wesley still has not attracted the attention he is due. This essay offers a glimpse of how life in and outside of Houston made Carter Wesley and how he, in turn, helped make the civic culture of modern Houston. It provides a thumbnail sketch of a complex and courageous individual whose life spanned the first two-thirds of the twentieth century. Wesley made a difference in the history of Houston. An account of his life points to some of the important historical events and themes that should be considered in a larger inquiry of the multiple centers of civic leadership in a southern metropolis such as Houston in the Jim Crow era.

Born April 29, 1892, Carter was one of three sons raised by Mabel and Harry Wesley in Freedmen's Town, Houston's earliest and most successfully established black neighborhood that abutted the downtown governmental and business core. Thirty years before Carter's birth, his mother was the firstborn child of enslaved Africans on a plantation in Montgomery County, Texas. Historians Patricia Smith Prather and Bob Lee note that Mabel Green had no commonly accepted "right to an education." By the time of Carter's birth, however, his mother had established a name for herself as a teacher in the schools of Houston. The type of education she knew stressed religious "character" training and basic preparation for farming or menial labor jobs. Schools taught humility and obedience, as well as manual labor and minor artisan trades. Mabel Wesley, however, knew education should and could serve to produce democratic citizens, free human beings who would rather die than live as slaves. Carter absorbed her modernist outlook, emerging as one of Houston's foremost civic leaders. He led the way in reshaping the civic culture that prepared the southern metropolis for the Civil and Voting Rights Acts of the 1960s and the mass black self-investiture in U.S. citizenship known as the Second Reconstruction.[1]

Wesley's story has its origin in his grandparent's exodus from slave plantation life. Located about forty miles north of Houston, Montgomery County had slightly more blacks than whites in the 1860 census. Postwar Reconstruction-era politics gave Republican black and white men dominance over the elected offices of the Black Belt county. By the early 1870s, however, white supremacists deployed tactics ranging from sporadic acts of violence, threatened harm, literacy tests, and the White Primary to effectively strip blacks of the vote and of virtually any efficacy in the political arena. The White Primary barred blacks from voting in the Democratic Party primaries as a means of establishing blacks as a separate and inferior race.[2]

The White Democratic Primary became the issue on which a young Carter Wesley would cut his political teeth. The same practices that spurred his grandparents' migration from Montgomery County to Houston propelled him fifty years later to challenge the White Primary as an unconstitutional, racist policy. The intergenerational tradition of struggle within the Wesley family, then, went from egress to education to direct political action by way of litigation and public agitation.[3]

By voting with their feet and moving to Houston, the Greens taught their daughter Mabel an important lesson about the necessity to resist the dehumanization of slavery. She took up education as a weapon of struggle and became one of the earliest students enrolled at the Gregory Institute in Houston's Freedmen's Town. At eighteen, she began building a record of achievement teaching at several educational institutions for blacks including Oats Prairie School, the Chaneyville School, and the First Ward School.

She so impressed school district officials that in 1917 they named her principal of the newly opened Crawford Elementary

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School. Without a college degree, she became the first African American woman to assume a leadership position that customarily went to men. Throughout this time she continued her post-secondary education by attending school at Prairie View A&M University, the sole state-supported college restricted by Texas law to blacks only. Studying in the summer months, she earned her baccalaureate degree in 1930.[4]

Carter Wesley's schooling proceeded more directly than his mother's. Shortly after graduating high school in 1911, he moved to Nashville to attend Fisk University, which held claim to a reputation as a leading private university for African Americans. He excelled at Fisk, and in 1917, was awarded a B. A. degree, magna cum laude. Wesley sought an understanding of himself and of his future as a person of African descent in a European-American-dominated world. His chief influence was Fisk's greatest alumnus, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois. After graduating from Fisk some four decades before Wesley arrived there, Du Bois had become the most widely known and respected African American man of letters. His classic book *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903) and his editorship of *Crisis*, the monthly magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), put him at the pinnacle of renown by the time Wesley matriculated at Fisk. As a young man, Wesley could read the April 1915 issue of the *Crisis*, Du Bois' essay on "The Immediate Program of the American Negro," and consider the future course of his life. Du Bois spoke for his generation when he wrote that "the American Negro demands equality—political equality, industrial equality and social equality; and he is never going to rest satisfied with anything less."[5]

Second only in importance to Du Bois in Wesley's emerging political consciousness was the lawyer turned poet, scholar, and writer, James Weldon Johnson. Wesley admired him and joined the NAACP when Johnson was the national secretary. Johnson's novel, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), stoked Wesley's desire to become a race man, with all the masculine implications of the term, who opposed racial injustice and worked to improve the conditions of African Americans through civic activism. The malevolent winds of war in Europe and racial violence in the United States, however, interrupted Wesley's plans even as they steeled his youthful idealism into a lifelong crusade.[6]

In June 1917, Wesley enrolled at a black officers' training camp located at Fort Des Moines, Iowa. After completing the program he received his commission as a first lieutenant, making him one of the first black junior officers since Colonel Charles Young led black troops of the 10th Cavalry into combat during "Black Jack" Pershing's Punitive Expedition in Mexico.

Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

Black soldiers at Camp Logan.

As Wesley trained to be a military officer, an event occurred in his hometown that tested his faith in Du Bois' "close ranks" appeal that wartime service marked the pathway to equal rights and justice in the U.S.A. and abroad. On August 23, 1917, a black soldier of the 3rd Battalion, 24th Infantry Regiment, stationed on the outskirts of the city to guard the construction of Camp Logan, encountered a Houston police officer mercilessly beating a black woman. When the soldier questioned what was the matter, the officer stopped beating her and billy-clubbed him before arresting and taking him to jail. At the police station, officials quickly released the soldier, but not before a black corporal, unaware of the soldier's release, went to check on his comrade only to be chased, shot at, pummeled, and locked up.

When the news of the second incident reached Camp Logan, over a hundred soldiers took ammunition and weapons and marched into the city to "punish" the hated Houston police force. The death toll in the fighting claimed five policemen, two white soldiers, nine white or Latino civilians, and four of the black mutineers. At Fort Des Moines Wesley wondered about the fate of the soldiers who had revolted. Could they get fair trials? Would the long train of racist abuses that blacks, civilians, and soldiers alike had endured in what the Chamber of Commerce dubbed "Heavenly Houston," be taken into consideration at the sentencing of those court-martialed? In the fate of uniformed black men in his birthplace Wesley assayed the nature of the very American democracy he was training to defend.[7]

In November 1917, the army assigned Wesley to the 92nd Division at Camp Funston, Kansas, and on December 22, he and the world learned the court's decision. Out of sixty-three persons charged both with mutiny in a time of war and premeditated murder, thirteen men received the death penalty and hung until dead that day at Fort Sam Houston near San Antonio. Five men received their freedom, while the majority got a sentence of life at hard labor.

In the aftermath of the mutiny, Wesley not only felt concern for the legal predicament of the soldiers, but he also worried about the welfare of his family and friends in a city where already poor relations between the races had worsened. Despite the fact that Houston's civilian black community took no part in the day of fighting, the Houston police adopted a policy of collective punishment.

Somehow, Wesley had to overcome his

worries and get on with the bloody business in Europe. Serving in the 372nd Infantry Regiment under the command of the French Army, he fought in the Argonne and the Verdun region in World War I. After transfer to the 370th, Wesley took part in the battle of Oise-Aisne on September 27, 1918. When his captain received a severe combat wound, Wesley assumed command. The armistice that ended the war denied Wesley a chance at a significant combat command role and, in February of 1919, he returned to the U.S. That fall he enrolled at Northwestern University's law school in Illinois.[8]

Wesley's choice to join the legal profession, instead of following in his mother's schoolteacher footsteps, reflected Wesley's point of view that his people needed men and women educated in the law to fight for human and civil rights. He had for role models few African American lawyers and almost none in high-status, high-paying, influential positions. White politicians, lawyers, and judges combined to restrict the legal practice of African American attorneys to an all-black clientele, mostly in family and other civil law matters.

Materialist dreams of wealth, however, are unlikely sources for Wesley's decision to pursue a law degree. Wesley's mother had been enslaved and had committed herself to the promotion of learning among the children of Houston. Her son, however, was a pragmatic man of action in the grips of an ideology of black power. In the 1920s, the law offered a talented and risk-taking person a cutting edge lifestyle. It guaranteed a dynamic, exciting life spent helping people resolve their conflicts in an orderly way, or it meant nothing at all. Wesley, truly a man of the modern age, wanted to be in the center of things, leading society toward progressive change. He expressed an interest, not only for a seizure of personal status, but of power, especially of power vested in a historically constructed black identity.[9]

After Wesley's graduation from law school he moved to Oklahoma. Why he moved there raises interesting questions about his enactment of the race man narrative. Did he and Jasper "Jack" Alston Atkins, Wesley's friend from his Fisk University days who earned his law degree at Yale, start their practice of the law in Oklahoma from a desire to build black power? Atkins started his practice in Tulsa, a city that underwent a terrible race riot in 1921, one of the worst in U.S. history. Pooling their talent and resources in the face of intense racist terror and violence, Wesley migrated to nearby Muskogee and got Atkins to join him in setting up a law firm together. Their practice rapidly accrued financial success representing Creek freedmen who owned land containing crude oil. Local whites, acting as so-called guardians, had been taking the profits from these lands.

Wesley prospered, but personal as well as business factors pushed and lured him out of Oklahoma in 1927. Dodging complaints that he and Atkins had overcharged their Afro-Native American clients to amass personal fortunes, Wesley began planning a return to Houston to make a fresh start, career-wise.[10] He entered Oklahoma when people of color were at a nadir and brought quality legal expertise. Wesley, the race man, may have left the Sooner State a rich man, but he had not yet come into his own as a leader.

In Houston, Wesley entered a very different business, political, and social environment. He launched his career as an entrepreneur in the construction business, brokered land deals through the Safety Loan and Brokerage Company, and made a sizable capital investment in Clifton F. Richardson's *The Informer*, a black community newspaper. In 1931, his law firm with Atkins added a third partner, James Madison Nabrit, Jr., a Northwestern University School of Law honors graduate. Like Wesley and Atkins, Nabrit shared solid legal training and a commitment to public interest litigation. This new Houston law firm had 15% of the black lawyers in Texas, since in 1930 there were only twenty black lawyers in the entire state. The field was wide open to make a mark.


The Informer
TEXAS AND FREEMAN
VOL. 33—No. 2 HOUSTON 1, TEXAS, SATURDAY
Cashes Two
Man Arrested For Attempting Third Forgery
Heman M. Sweatt Our "Man Of Texas"
HEMAN SWEATT
College Of Pacific Official Denies Race Gridster Was Left Behind
Asphyxiation Victim Buried In Kilgore
Courtesy The Informer

Among Wesley's many undertakings, his involvement in The Informer *made him one of the most influential black civic leaders in Texas.*

Wesley, the native Houstonian in the firm, quickly became a major player in black Houston's social, political, and economic renaissance. Before their arrival, Francis Scott Key Whittaker had the main black law office in the city. A Harvard University law school graduate, Whittaker opened his office in 1923. When Wesley and Nabrit entered the black struggle in Texas for full voting rights, other lawyers—both black and white—had unsuccessfully litigated numerous lawsuits from Beaumont to El Paso. Wesley, however, was egotistical enough to believe that he could bring a case before the United States Supreme Court and change history.

The NAACP, however, from its headquarters in New York, considered itself the pioneer and leader of the constitutional law fight for the rights of African Americans. Although Texas activists and the NAACP national office shared common goals of wanting to defeat white supremacist laws and practices in the courts, the leadership issue became a thorny and recurring problem. Wesley and his partners did not flinch from head-on collisions with the NAACP legal team. They particularly objected to the NAACP's reliance on white lawyers in the early years of the legal campaign, when capable black lawyers like themselves were available. Partly as a result of their objections, the NAACP's national office would come around to hiring the Dean of Howard University's law school, Charles Hamilton Houston, an African American graduate of Harvard University, to direct its legal campaign. From that step toward embracing diversity and supporting a greater

African American presence at the bar, Charles Houston's own student, Thurgood Marshall became the NAACP's chief counsel and, in later years, the first African American U.S. Supreme Court justice.

The conflict between Wesley and the NAACP extended to the area of legal tactics and strategies in the fight against the whites-only primary elections, but ultimately unity prevailed. After almost a quarter century of lawsuits, black Texans finally won the battle in 1944 with the *Smith v. Allwright* decision. In this case named for Lonnie Smith, a black dentist in Houston, Wesley and Marshall worked together to get the Supreme Court to rule that blacks could not be barred from voting in the Democratic Party Primary in Texas or in any of a number of states where white party officials practiced such exclusion. It was in Wesley's office that he and Marshall prepared the brief that convinced the Court to strike a blow for the voting rights of African Americans. Wesley worked with Marshall on the lawsuit as a consultant and as a political and financial backer.

Nearly a decade before the *Smith* ruling, Wesley reduced his practice of law to become more involved with *The Informer*, stepping on the back of Clifton Richardson to become the main owner with editorial control of the paper. He started as the paper's auditor in 1929, moved the next year to become vice president, followed by general manager and treasurer before the end of 1932. After an acrimonious feud over the journalistic and financial policies at *The Informer*, Wesley bought out Richardson's interest in the paper.

In 1933, another aspect of Wesley's life changed. He married Doris Wooten and soon had two newborn infants in his household. Wooten had been his partner in running the newspaper after 1932. Thus, when Atkins left Houston in 1936 to join the faculty of Howard University's law school, Wesley had become more a publisher than a lawyer.

Whether liking him or not, black Houstonians came to recognize Wesley as a civic leader. Lorenzo Greene, a traveling salesman of Carter G. Woodson's books and publications, provides a firsthand account of Wesley's public stature. During his pass through Houston in 1930, Greene recorded in his travel diary notes on his meeting Carter Wesley. He stated that he was deeply impressed that a man in his thirties was so business-minded, successful, and prominent. Marveling over what a "progressive young man" Wesley was, he stated that the publisher "made a fine publicity man for me" by telling others about him. In trying to sell his books, he observed that Wesley "finally succumbed when I appealed to his ego. [I] told him that his name listed [among the purchasers] would induce others to do likewise." Greene's comments about Wesley suggest a pompous streak, but also acknowledge him as a recognized leader.[11]

Wesley's civic activities were wide ranging. His paper and the publicity it generated placed him in a prominent position in Houston's black community. He took part in campaigns as diverse as getting blacks to pay their poll taxes and to vote, opposition to capital punishment and racial injustice in the courts or at the hands of the police, lawsuits against Jim Crow laws and racial segregation, trade union organization, and raising funds for the city's junior and, later, senior college for African Americans. His own organizing and capacity-building work included a local council of black organizations, a statewide group called the Texas Council on Negro Organizations, the NAACP at the local, state, regional, and national levels, plus other regional and national associations concerning newspaper publishing, advertising, educational equalization, and interracial alliance-building.

John Gunther, a best-selling author of travelogues from around the world and across the United States, took notice of Wesley in his 1949 book *Inside U. S. A.* In a passage commenting on the "Negro issue" in Texas, he wrote:

> The most interesting Negro in Texas...is probably a moderate named Carter Wesley, the publisher of a string of newspapers including the *Houston Defender* and *Informer*, the *Fort Worth Mind*, the *Dallas Express*, the oldest Negro paper in the state. All told Wesley's papers have a circulation of about sixty thousand; they are intelligently edited and vigorously outspoken on most issues. Wesley is now fifty-three.[12]

The height of Wesley's influence and success as a newspaper publisher and civic leader came in the period following the Smith victory and the end of the Second World War. Besides the cities Gunther noted, Wesley also published papers or local editions in San Antonio and San Diego, California, and as far to the east as New Orleans, Louisiana, Mobile, Alabama, and Memphis, Tennessee. Moreover, in 1945 Wesley's paper was the largest black-owned business in Houston in terms of the number of people it employed, its gross income, and property. At the national level, Wesley was a founder of Associated Publishers, Inc., a black advertising business; a recognized leader in the National Newspaper Publishers Association; and among an elite group of black newspaper editors who met during the war with President Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the White House. In 1948 the U.S. government sent him and ten other black publishers to Germany to investigate the racial discrimination claims of black servicemen. Closer to home, however, Wesley's major campaign was for African American access and equity in education.

The "all-out war for

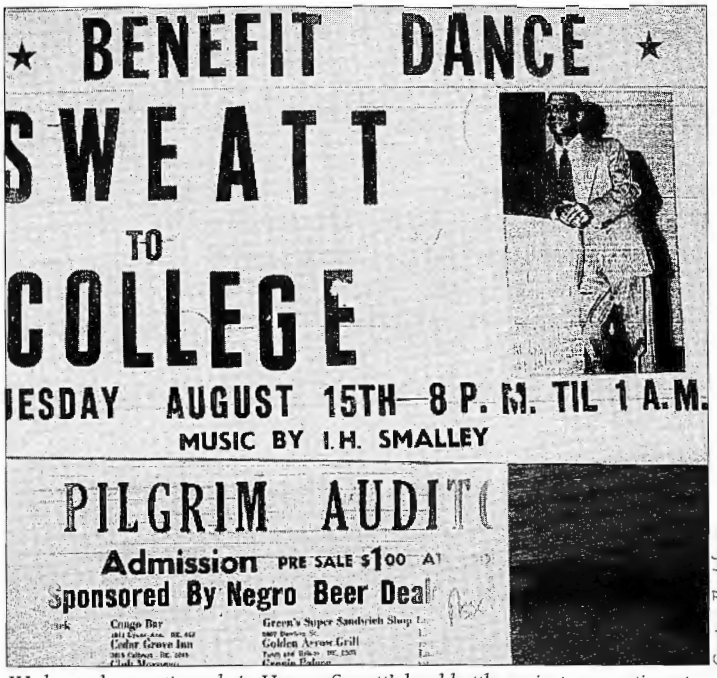
democracy" in education, as he and other blacks described their struggle, was multifaceted and complex. In a word, Wesley wanted the state to equalize the educational opportunities and resources it afforded to whites with that afforded to blacks. In principle and in the long run, he supported integration of the races, but in practice he demanded immediate improvements to and increased resources for the schools the state restricted to black students only. In 1945, at the postsecondary level, that meant the college at Prairie View.

Two contradictions arose in working exclusively for an increase in state funding for Prairie View. First, the state constitution for more than seven decades had promised the creation of a second university for blacks that would be equivalent to the University of Texas at Austin. The state never acted to fulfill its constitutional mandate and black Texans never forgot the original promise. Secondly, a limited campaign to get state legislators in Austin to improve Prairie View consistently met with failure. The state refused to heed pleas for funding increases regardless of whether they came from blacks or from white State Department of Education officials. The legislature concerned itself with the improvement of white institutions of higher education and cared nothing at all about the needs of the state's disenfranchised black minority.

In response to this state of affairs, Wesley advocated a two-pronged strategy. He supported a direct assault on segregation while at the same time pleading, demanding, and taking whatever financial gestures could be wrung out of the lily-white state legislature for the benefit of Prairie View or towards the creation of the long-promised black UT. He recognized that the direct assault on the whites-only admissions policy could push whites toward finally appropriating the finances to upgrade black schools. Along the first line of attack, Wesley put his money where his mouth was and helped raise thousands of dollars for an anti-segregation lawsuit. Through news articles and his columns, he influenced public opinion, especially in making the black community believe that it could force black bodies into white spaces.

Wesley also personally supported the man who would file the major test case against segregated higher education. Heman Sweatt, who qualified in every way for admission to UT's law school except that he was racially identified as a Negro, filed suit in 1946. While the suit worked its way to the Supreme Court, Wesley placed Sweatt on his payroll as an *Informer* employee. No one, besides men and women like Sweatt who braved white reaction by applying to universities whites banned them from, did more for the struggle to eradicate segregation in Texas education than Carter Wesley.

As he built his reputation as an enemy of segregation, Wesley was also one of the greatest backers of the Texas schools where the actual educating of African Americans took place. The state's black college at Prairie View, the Houston College for Negroes (established as a municipal junior college in 1927), and the eleven black, private colleges across the state had no better friend than Wesley. His papers boosted the image of these institutions by recording and trumpeting their successes and victories, however big or small. He personally donated time and energy toward various projects, especially major fund-raising campaigns. Wesley was a relentless and incisive critic of the state and its white majority for hypocrisy, duplicity, inertia, and apathy toward the black institutions that did so much good work for the well-being of all Texans. He fought for black colleges in the pages of his newspapers, at the state capitol, and in courtrooms. Although intimately familiar with the relative inadequacy of resources and standing of many black colleges, he recognized that they provided higher education to the majority of African American undergraduates and would continue to do so throughout his lifetime and beyond. He foresaw that black schools would continue to be the only institutions available to most black students for however many years it would take to bury the Supreme Court's 1896 *Plessy* decision, which sanctioned racial discrimination across the United States on the basis that "separate but equal" treatment did not violate the equal protection clause of the U.S. Constitution's 14th amendment. Wesley refused to demonize black colleges and universities to win converts to the crusade to put black faces in white spaces.



Courtesy *The Informer*

Wesley took an active role in Heman Sweatt's legal battle against segregation at the University of Texas law school.

Lulu Belle White, an educator turned activist and a friend of Wesley's through the many years of the fight against black exclusion from the Democratic Party primaries, took issue with the publisher's two-line strategy regarding black educational advancement. Consistent with the position Thurgood Marshall and the central leadership of the NAACP advocated in the late 1940s, White adopted the view that segregated black schools were no more than monuments to Jim Crow racism. Herself a graduate of Prairie View, she rejected the state's compromise measures of increased funding to black higher education that arose in response to Sweatt's lawsuit. They amounted to gestures that were too little, too late. A militant race woman from her college days, the fight against fascism in Europe and Asia concomitant with the battle for human rights inside the U.S. propelled White to go beyond a service role in the black freedom struggle. She accepted a leadership position as the executive secretary of the NAACP's Houston branch. In 1943, she was the only woman in the South to hold such a full-time salaried position.

When the difference between Wesley and Marshall on political tactics crystallized, White put her "acid-tongue" behind the NAACP position and against Wesley.

She lambasted him before members of the movement and in broader public discourse as clinging to the posture of yesterday's Negro, the stooping, eyes to the ground, hat in hand, Step N. Fetchit-type Negro. Wesley never had been such a man and his tremendous ego did not allow him to suffer such an ignominious characterization passively. He never accepted white men who disrespectfully honked their horns at black women as they walked in their neighborhoods. He did not accept their addressing black women without using the courtesy titles of "Miss" or "Mrs." as they customarily addressed other women. He never accepted whites calling an adult African American man "boy" or white soldiers in the U.S. military refusing to salute black officers who outranked them. So when Lulu B. White portrayed him as a "sell-out" to his race over a tactical dispute, he tagged back.

Wesley charged White and the NAACP generally with wanting to monopolize the battlefield for equal rights and justice. Most damningly, he claimed that they were fomenting division within the united front that leaders of black organizations in Texas had forged since the 1930s. Added to this, in the postwar period marked by anti-Red hysteria, Wesley wailed that White was a communist and sympathetic to Marxism-Leninism.

Marshall, as NAACP chief counsel, joined in the attack on Wesley and expanded the conflict into a national brouhaha for a period of several months. Ultimately the Wesley-White feud ended in defeat for White, and the rhetorical shoot-out between Wesley and Marshall resulted in a draw. In June of 1949, White resigned from her position with the Houston branch of the NAACP. Soon thereafter the NAACP national leadership focused its public statements more on the side of the benefits that would accrue to society from the elimination of segregation and refrained from wholesale condemnations of historically black colleges and universities.

For his part, Wesley never wavered in his full and overt support for Sweatt's right to attend UT and the fight against segregation. On July 2, 1949, shortly after White's resignation, he maintained in his column, "The Ram's Horn" that: "Even if Sweatt enters the University of Texas, we will not want to get rid of Texas State University for Negroes...the Texas Constitution decrees separation provided it is equal, why shouldn't we make them carry out the Constitution and equalize Texas State University in toto with the University of Texas?" A year later, the Supreme Court ordered Texas to admit Sweatt into the UT law school. African Americans began entering UT in the summer of 1950, but only in graduate programs and professional schools. W. D. McClennan, a faculty member at Austin's Samuel Huston College, entered its doctoral program in mathematics and John Chase, who later became a major Houston-based architect, entered the architecture school.

Courtesy *The Informer*

The Informer *provided a forum for writers and artists alike to challenge the racial status quo.*

UT officials continued, however, to refuse black applicants to its undergraduate programs until the middle of the decade following the Court's landmark ruling in the *Brown* case. Even with that decision, which overturned *Plessy* and seemed to strike at the white supremacist doctrine of racial hierarchy it legitimized, the state of Texas did not mandate the elimination of race as a requirement of admission at all its state-supported institutions of higher learning until 1965.

Wesley was a pivotal figure in the social revolution that brought on many changes in Texas and beyond. He acted behind the scenes to help blacks take school districts and other state universities and junior colleges to court either to equalize black institutions or to admit blacks into schools whites barred them from. He demanded educational equity while constantly declaring that legally enforced separation of the races was a crime against humanity.

In 1969, when Wesley passed on, Houston lost one of its most important civic leaders. He, more than anyone in the 8F crowd of white businessmen, spurred the desegregation of Houston. Critically, he challenged the rhetoric and reality of white racial hierarchy. Imaginatively, he popularized the vocabulary for speaking into being a new civic culture. His tocsin came not from a trumpet but a ram's horn. Ultimately, the civil rights movement Wesley sounded into action modernized the southern system of racial hierarchy, helping save it from itself.

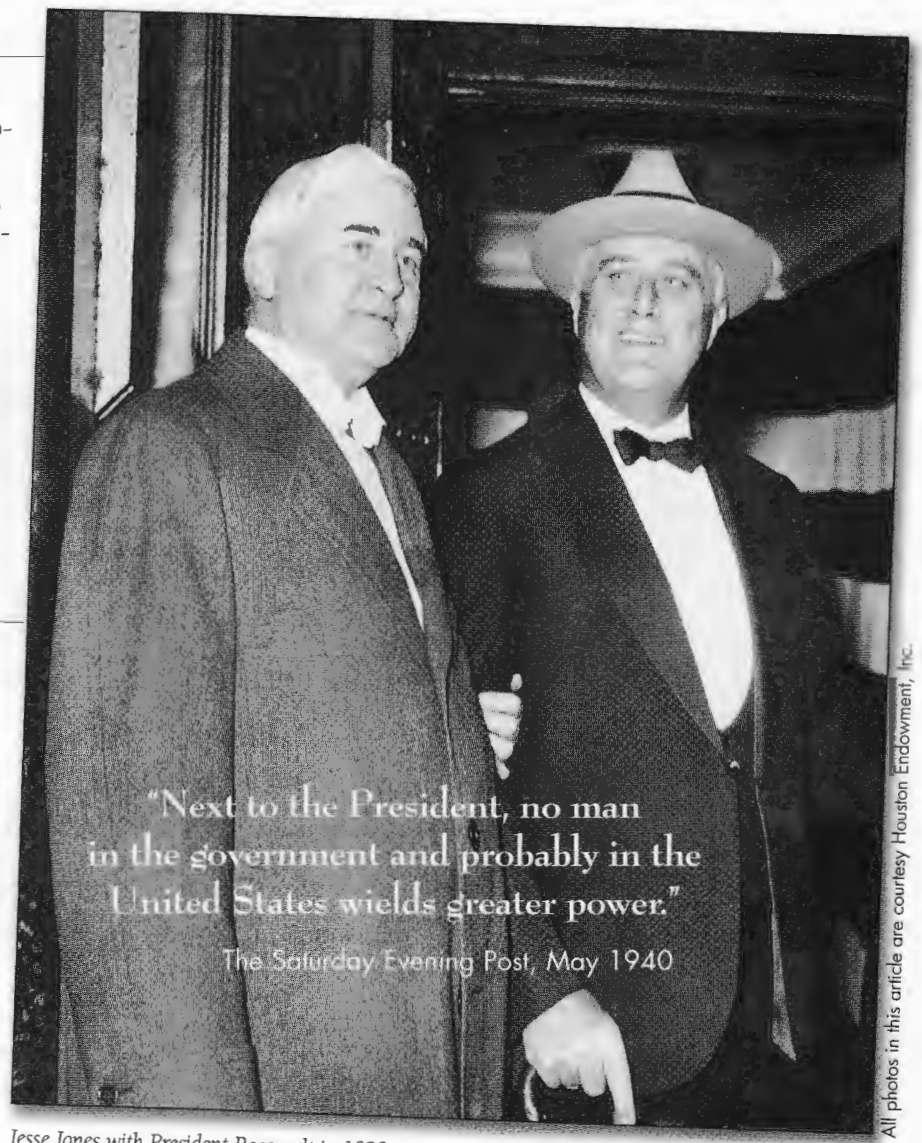
The movement pushed a racial state to demonstrate its obedience to the rule of law, to become less opaque, more rational and insidious. Wesley recognized and was deeply troubled by the potential for a civil rights movement focused on changing white spaces into public spaces open to African Americans. This might amount to a reform of racial caste arrangements in the U.S. rather than a transformation of it. His solution centered on black people sustaining a collective ethos of independence and self-reliance. He never backed down from his two-line approach despite attempts by his adversaries to malign him as a sell-out to his race and to marginalize him as a civic leader. Perhaps Wesley is a minor player in the public memory of the twentieth-century South and Houston because historians continue to worry about defending the South and its tradition-laden past, or obsess over dreams of integration that scarcely ever result in tangible improvements in the lives of most African Americans. Perhaps a deeper remembering of Carter Wesley and what he stood for might foster the imagining of a freer Houston. ■

Jesse Jones:

A Conversation about "Mr. Houston"

Steven Fenberg is community affairs officer at Houston Endowment Inc., a philanthropic foundation established by Mr. and Mrs. Jesse H. Jones. After assembling an archive, conducting an oral history project, and producing a permanent exhibit about the Joneses for the foundation, Mr. Fenberg wrote and was executive producer of the Emmy award-winning PBS documentary, *Brother, Can You Spare a Billion? The Story of Jesse H. Jones*. Mr. Fenberg is currently working on a biography about Jesse Jones.

Joseph Pratt sat down with Mr. Fenberg to talk about the film, his years of research, and the man in question—Jesse Jones.



Jesse Jones with President Roosevelt in 1939.

All photos in this article are courtesy Houston Endowment, Inc.

JP: Steven, let's start with the basic question: What do you see as special about Jesse Jones? Then we can talk about how you came to study him.

SF: As chairman of the federal government's Reconstruction Finance Corporation during the Great Depression, Jesse Jones established massive agencies to combat the catastrophe. While helping millions of citizens and thousands of businesses he made money for the federal government during one of the nation's most disastrous events. His accomplishments have great relevance today, and I wanted to learn how he did what he did, why he was so successful, and what could be applied to today's pressing issues.

I first discovered Jones' forgotten role in history while I was assembling his archives at Houston Endowment, the philanthropic foundation he established with his wife, Mary, in 1937. I began working at the foundation in 1992 on the annual report, and I was supposed to be there for just three months. At that time, the foundation was in the process of moving from the Bankers Mortgage Building, which Mr. Jones had originally built in 1908 for the Texas Company. Most of Mr. Jones' business and personal papers had been stored in boxes and safes in the building, and they had never been organized or preserved until the foundation's new president, Joe Nelson, and grant officer Ann Hamilton, realized how important they were. After I completed the annual report, I was asked if I would like to assemble an archive with architectural historian Barrie Scardino. I quickly agreed and often found myself sitting alone on

the fifth floor, where Mr. Jones' office used to be, unfolding these amazing documents, reading them and discovering just who Jesse Jones was.

That's when I started to realize the magnitude of his contributions both locally and nationally, that he was instrumental in saving capitalism during the Great Depression and in militarizing industry in time to fight and win World War II. I also began to see how he embodied the best of capitalism as I noticed how he used the economic system not just to increase his personal wealth but to also consciously and simultaneously improve the common good.

JP: *At the RFC, Jones put to work for the government the banker's skills he had learned in Houston. He had the responsibility of picking which companies were worth saving and which were not. Many who lived in Houston in the 1930s recall that he was particularly good to Houstonians. Do you see any evidence that Houstonians had a friend at the RFC?*

SF: Houston did have a friend in Washington, D.C. But I can't say that other places were neglected because he had an allegiance to Houston. He distributed RFC funds to every congressional district in the United States and, as a result, congressmen were beholden to Jesse Jones. Most citizens appreciated his efforts,

Jesse Jones built (clockwise from the top left) the Bristol Hotel, The original Texas Company Building, and the Houston Chronicle Building between 1907 and 1909. At ten floors, they were Houston's tallest buildings.

During the Great Depression, Jones and the RFC reopened closed banks, saved farms, homes, and businesses and built, dams, aqueducts, and bridges throughout the United States. In 1936, Jones visited and inspected the new San Francisco Bay Bridge.

Jesse Jones launching the "Mirabeau B. Lamar," Houston Shipbuilding Company, 1942. Jones and the RFC placed many shipyards and chemical plants along the Texas Gulf Coast to help build Roosevelt's "Arsenal of Democracy."

whether he and the RFC were saving banks in Detroit, paying teachers in Chicago, or bringing electricity to remote farms in Appalachia.

Even so, his government service clearly had a great impact on Houston, especially during World War II. The petrochemical industry is a great example. He located many plants in the area during World War II, most notably to manufacture butadiene and synthetic rubber, an industry the RFC developed from the lab to preempt the almost certain loss to the Japanese of the natural rubber supplies in the Pacific. Maybe he chose those sites because he was a Houstonian and knew that the Gulf Coast was the safest and most logical location because of the proximity to the petroleum industry and to international shipping facilities. I don't think that he favored Houston for any selfish motive or overlooked other places because he wanted to give Houston or his interests the upper hand. I've never seen any evidence of that.

The scope of Jones' roles during the Great Depression and World War II is unprecedented, especially for an unelected, appointed official. Congress never once turned down his request for an RFC appropriation, and he created and ran dozens of agencies, some of which exist today, including Fannie Mae and the Export-Import Bank. He was able to do so much because he was decisive, he knew how to delegate, and he was trusted. He picked the best people he could find to do the job and let them do their work. In the midst of dealing with the national economic and social meltdown, Jones also served as chairman of the Texas Centennial Commission, which was created in 1926 to celebrate the 1936 centennial of Texas's independence from Mexico. The San Jacinto Monument is probably the most apparent result of his efforts. He designed the monument and decided where it should go. In addition to the San Jacinto Monument and parts of Fair Park in Dallas, the commission placed smaller monuments throughout Texas that commemorate significant battles and events.

Before Jones took the microphone for a national radio broadcast, Vice President John Nance Garner introduced him saying, "He [Jones] has allocated and loaned more money to various institutions and enterprises than any other man in the history of the world."


ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

TORIAL SECTI

SPECIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

ST. LOUIS, SUNDAY MORNING, MAY 15, 1938.

Controls More Money Than Any Other Man in Country

JESSE JONES, Fourth Branch of Government

Makes Own Rules for Lending Huge Sums Through R F C

JP: Help me remember. Was the San Jacinto Monument a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project?

SF: The monument cost about $1.5 million, of which $300,000 came from the State of Texas, $400,000 from the $3 million appropriated by Congress for the celebration of the Texas Centennial, a small amount came from the City of Houston, and the balance came from the Public Works Administration (PWA) and the WPA. President Roosevelt went to the battlefield with Mr. Jones prior to the selection of the site and approved the expenditures for the monument.

JP: So, Jones attracted your interest, and you have spent more than a decade of your life learning more about him?

SF: As I began assembling the archive, I realized people were still around who knew Mr. Jones, so I proposed and initiated an oral history project at about the time the foundation was moving from the Bankers Mortgage Building into its new offices in the Chase Tower. Provisions had been made in the new offices for an exhibit about Mr. Jones, so I also began to extract interesting materials from the archive as I was assembling it. I ended up curating and producing the foundation's exhibit and doing the oral history project. I collected approximately 45 interviews, and some of

Edith Wilson and Mary Gibbs Jones Selling War Bonds during World War II.

those I spoke with have already passed away, including Harris Masterson, Stanley Marcus, and Harvey Wheeler, who broadcast the 1928 Democratic convention in Houston from the roof of the Rice Hotel for KPRC.

It became apparent through these efforts that there was real interest in Mr. Jones and that his place in history deserved to be remembered. I thought a documentary film would reach the most people because, if done right, it would be seen by students in schools and by millions of people on TV. Houston Endowment's board agreed to fund the project through KUHT-TV, and I served as executive producer and writer. I developed a script and Eric Stange, who I had hired as producer and director, helped put it into television language. The end result was *Brother, Can You Spare a Billion: The Story of Jesse H. Jones.* I'm pleased to say it was broadcast nationally on PBS.

In addition to having the honor of preserving and presenting information about Mr. Jones, I am also community affairs officer for Houston Endowment. I write and produce the foundation's annual report, maintain its Web site, respond to media inquiries, assist grant recipients with press releases, and provide appropriate parties with exhibition materials. In other words, I haven't devoted the last dozen years solely to Mr. Jones, because I've also had the privilege of reporting about the wonderful activities of the philanthropic foundation he established. Houston Endowment is a prime example of Jones' use of capitalism to improve the common good and is one of his most shining legacies.

JP: Let's talk some about the process of making that film. You say you had to "put it in television language" for PBS. How difficult was that to do?

SF: The greatest challenge was telling Mr. Jones' monumental story in 55 minutes. We had to decide which stories to tell and which ones to leave out. For instance, The Woodrow Wilsons and the Joneses were extremely close friends. Edith Wilson and Mrs. Jones played bridge and studied Spanish together. Because there were no pensions for ex-presidents, Mr. Jones and three other men provided a pension for President Wilson after he left office, but there was no time to mention any of that. After President Wilson's death in 1924, Edith Wilson accompanied the Joneses to most major political events.

As far as putting it into what I would call "TV language," that means writing brief, active sentences that move the film forward and make viewers want to stay tuned to see what happens next.

JP: What about the visual part? How do you find photographs and motion pictures?

SF: The motion pictures are in archives throughout the United States and, unless they are in the public domain, they are very expensive to use. They charge by the second! Surprisingly, as prominent as Jones was during the Great Depression and World War II, he didn't show up in very much film. Even though he enjoyed mostly positive coverage in newspapers and in all of the major magazines, I wondered if he was purposely trying to stay out of Roosevelt's limelight. Did he want to avoid annoying Roosevelt? Jones and Roosevelt had a very tenuous relationship, probably because Jones was considered by many to be, next to Roosevelt, the most powerful person in the United States. The *Saturday Evening Post, Fortune,* and *Time* all ran laudatory cover stories on him. After the RFC was granted a large appropriation in 1934, *Time* reported, "As is the case of all governmental authority under the New Deal, RFC's new potency naturally fell into President Roosevelt's strong grip. But everyone believed that the President would continue to delegate RFC's power of life & death over U.S. finance and industry to one man, and one man alone." FDR delegated that unprecedented power to Jones

Walter Cronkite with Fenberg. Cronkite, who lived in Houston in the 1930s, narrated Brother, Can You Spare a Billion? The Story of Jesse H. Jones.

According to Jones, "The Rice Hotel was...a bold and somewhat doubtful venture at the time. Fortunately it was built far ahead of the demand both in capacity and quality, and is a modern hotel today."

throughout his four terms, even though he sometimes called him "Jesus Jones" behind his back.

JP: Did you have recordings of Jones' voice to work with?

SF: Some of his speeches were recorded on aluminum disks. They are so authentically from his time. Thick graphite needles and turntables are required to hear them. I had them transcribed to tape, and all the crackling and scratching noises from the aluminum record going around is very apparent. His voice is a little thin, but he's quite expressive. We were able to find some film with sound, and the scenes are a bit hokey. But again, they are so real and of the time. In one part of the film he invites the Democratic Party to hold its national convention in Houston, and he says, "There will be no east. There will be no west. There will be no south. There will be no north. It will be one for all and all for one in 1928 for the Democrats." I loved that. I thought it was so folksy and real. At first Eric [Stange, Producer] thought it was awkward and did not want to use it. But I prevailed in this instance. Jones wasn't a polished perfect person. He was sophisticated, to be sure. But he was also warm and human. He wasn't trained as an orator, and he was a bit stiff, but he did a very nice job with what he had.

JP: How did you convince Walter Cronkite to narrate?

SF: I was so pleased that he agreed to participate. He liked the script and the story and agreed to be a part of the project. We filmed the introduction in his office, and as the camera started to roll I enjoyed a sublime moment when I realized Walter Cronkite was saying what I wrote! After filming the introduction, we went to a recording studio and he read the script almost without stopping from beginning to end. His assistant told us, "You know, his nickname is One Take Walter." I asked what that meant, and she told me, "He is so good, he does everything in one take." And she was right. He did the entire film in one take and only changed one word. He changed "kids" to "children."

JP: He has such a great voice. It almost carries the show!

SF: I think it is so appropriate that somebody with Walter Cronkite's stature narrated this story. Besides, he grew up in Houston and really knew about Jesse Jones.

JP: In my opinion, you did better than most have done in dealing with one problem with television documentaries, the use of one "talking head" after another.

SF: I hired nationally-known producer Eric Stange because his films always have a little something extra about them. The Jones film, for the most part, is a conventional documentary but it does have a couple of unusual features. For example, at first I preferred not to use dramatic recreations because I was concerned about credibility. Eric suggested that I think of them more as "evocations." I agreed, and they worked very well, especially Jones' niece's search for meaningful information about her uncle and the evocation of the 1931 Houston bank rescue, where Jones prevents the city's banks from failing during the Great Depression.

When it came to the interviews, I asked Eric to please avoid placing someone in an easy chair next to a table and a lamp because it seems that interviews are staged that way in almost all documentaries.

I suggested that we place some kind of large iconic photograph with the speaker, so that he or she is seen in some kind of relevant context. So he

back lit these large, evocative images and placed them behind the person being interviewed. We had about a dozen of them made and always had great fun debating about which ones to use. I think they were very effective.

JP: How was the response to the film?

SF: The response was so great that PBS aired it nationally as a freestanding film instead of including it as part of a series. I am also proud to say that it won many first place awards, including a regional Emmy for best documentary and a Gold Apple from the National Educational Media Network.

JP: Do you still distribute it to high school teachers?

SF: It's available on many school districts' television networks and is frequently shown on the local PBS and municipal channels. We also developed a teacher's guide because the film is a great way to teach about aspects of both world wars and the Great Depression. In addition, each branch of the Houston Public Library has at least one copy, and a section of the PBS Web site is dedicated to the film.

JP: Instead of making other documentaries, you have decided to write a biography of Jones. How does that differ from the task of making the film?

SF: In a book I can include more of the interesting details and relationships that couldn't fit into the film. I can develop and show more fully how Jones used capitalism to enhance the common good, both locally and nationally. But writing the book will be more difficult because now I have more room to tell his story, which means, in order to get my arms around the material, I have to stay very focused on themes and my intentions.

JP: Another thing you can do more fully in the book is examine Jones' relationship to his adopted city, Houston.

SF: Jones nurtured a reciprocal relationship with Houston. He developed his businesses during a time when most of the primary industries—banks, newspapers, insurance companies—were locally owned, and he understood he would prosper only if his community thrived. For instance, Jones and others knew Houston's growth was limited without access to the sea. So he raised Houston's half of the funds to build the channel in one of the federal government's first public/private partnerships, and he was the Houston Harbor Chairman for the first three years after the channel's opening. He had also built buildings in anticipation of its opening—including the Rice Hotel—and once the channel was in operation, his hotels, office buildings, and movie theaters were filled to capacity. Houston was internationalized almost overnight and the economy of the entire southwest region improved. Houston flourished and so did Jesse Jones.

JP: He wouldn't have been more than 40 years old then.

SF: That's right. He was chairman of the Houston Harbor Board from 1914 until 1917 when Woodrow Wilson finally convinced him to come to Washington to serve in his administration. His role in World War I, as director general of military relief for the American Red Cross, elevated Jones from a local leader to a player on the national and international stages.

After his uncle M.T. Jones died, Jones came to Houston in 1898 as one of his executors. M.T. Jones had been one of the state's most successful lumbermen. He owned tens of thousands of acres of east Texas timberland, sawmills in Orange, and retail outlets throughout the state to sell the finished products. Back then he was known as "double-ender." Today we'd call him "vertically integrated."

Jesse, who was 24 at the time, had been managing M.T.'s yard on St. Paul Street, which is now in the heart of downtown Dallas. When he arrived in Houston he set up an office in the 6-floor Binz Building, then the tallest building in town, and lived across the street at the Rice Hotel. As an executor of M.T. Jones' estate, he had landed in the midst of Houston's civic aristocracy and at the top of the lumber industry. With cotton flowing in from the west, lumber pouring in from the east, and Spindletop about to erupt, Jones had arrived in a boom town.

I think he quickly realized that Houston had potential. Within a few years, he acquired quite a few of his own lumber yards and began building small houses south of downtown, which he sold on unique installment plans. Within ten years of his arrival he was building the city's tallest buildings, including the Texas Company Building, which helped make the petroleum industry a permanent part of Houston's business community, and the *Houston Chronicle* building, which brought

Interior of the Metropolitan Theater, 1930s

Homecoming float built by the first Prairie View A&M Jones scholarship recipients, 1946

him a half-interest in the paper.

After he returned from World War I, he began the most ambitious phase of his building career and filled up Main Street with the city's most ornate movie theaters, its tallest office buildings, and its grandest hotels. He also built four of Fort Worth's tallest buildings and a dozen skyscrapers in mid-town Manhattan, many of which still stand.

JP: *How would you characterize his relationship to the other Houston, the black Houston that at the time was a growing community but segregated under law?*

SF: I interviewed August Waites, one of Mr. Jones' drivers. He told me about driving Mr. Jones to the San Jacinto Inn in the 1940s for a meeting. Neither of the men had had lunch and they were both hungry. Mr. Jones said to August, "Come on in and have lunch." August replied, "Well, Mr. Jones, you know, I can't go in there. They won't allow me." And with that, Mr. Jones arranged for August to sit in the center of the restaurant at a table of his own.

After Mr. Jones returned from Washington D.C. in 1946, he and his wife, Mary, began to focus on philanthropy. They established large scholarship programs for men and women in colleges and universities throughout the state and included a $50,000 program at Prairie View A&M. Mr. Jones also served on the board of the United Negro College Fund and was a Tuskegee Institute trustee. On the other hand, he didn't have blacks on his boards or in executive positions, so I'd say he was a person at least a little ahead of his time.

JP: *How would you describe his relationship to the 8F crowd of Herman and George Brown and others?*

SF: Mr. Jones' nephew, John T. Jones, Jr., told me that Mr. Jones didn't participate in 8F. The suite was in the Lamar Hotel, which Mr. Jones owned. He lived in the penthouse, on the 16th floor, and John Jones told me if the 8F crowd wanted to see Mr. Jones they went up to see him. He didn't come down to see them. He was the venerated, elder statesman and was treated as such.

JP: *There is not much historical speculation about Jones' role in electoral politics. Was he a big supporter of candidates at the local, state, or national levels?*

SF: He was very involved with the Democratic Party almost all of his life. He once said his father was a Democrat, so as a kid he guessed he was one too. But his affiliation went much deeper than that. Woodrow Wilson's progressive policies ignited Jones' enthusiasm and admiration, and the florid correspondence between them is both touching and interesting. Jones became the national committee's finance chairman in 1924 and in 1928 persuaded the Democratic Party to bring its national convention to Houston.

Jones endorsed Roosevelt in all of his bids for the presidency, but there was a bit of controversy over the fourth term. George Butler, who was married to one of Jones' nieces, was part of a group called the Texas Regulars, who opposed Roosevelt's reelection. I don't think Roosevelt was ever sure if Jones was with them or not. Jones claimed that he wasn't, even though after he left Washington in 1946 he said he thought the Democrats had been in power too long. I think that may have had something to do with his bitterness over being very casually replaced as Secretary of Commerce in 1945 by his arch-rival, Henry Wallace.

Jones was touted by many for vice president in 1940, and Eleanor Roosevelt and one of her sons both said they would endorse him if he decided to run. When Roosevelt made it clear he preferred Henry Wallace, Jones withdrew his name from consideration.

JP: *Well, you sound like you've had a good time working on your various Jones-related projects, including the archives, the oral history, the film, and now the biography. What part have you enjoyed the most?*

SF: I can't say I enjoyed one project more than the other because they've each been unique, challenging, and very fulfilling. What I enjoyed most was discovering that Jesse Jones, a mythic figure in Texas, succeeded by using capitalism to improve the common good for everyone, not just a few. That somehow gives me hope. ■

Parley of Prominence: The Houston Democratic National Convention of 1928*

by Jon L. Gillum**

ON JANUARY 13, 1928, the residents of Houston, Texas, awoke unexpectedly to news that they would be hosting the Democratic Party National Convention. In a stunning move the day before, Jesse H. Jones, prominent Houston businessman and Democratic Party leader, almost single-handedly secured the convention for his beloved city. For the first time since before the Civil War, a national party convention was coming to the South.[1] During the convention six months later, Alfred E. Smith became the first Roman Catholic nominated for president by a major political party. In addition, his running mate, Joseph T. Robinson of Arkansas, became the first southerner on a major party ticket in more than half a century. Aware of the media attention for Houston from around the country, local residents felt assured that their city would emerge from the political parley with a national reputation.

As Democratic Party leaders prepared to convene in early January 1928 to decide the location of their next presidential nominating convention, the city of Houston was on the move. The city had finally eclipsed long-time rival Galveston as the premier urban center of the Texas Gulf Coast, and with a population increase of 111% over the decade of the 1910s, Houston was quickly surpassing San Antonio and Dallas as the largest, most populous city in the state. Fueled by a lucrative oil industry and flourishing ship-channel trade, Houston was experiencing a construction boom. A new municipal airport had recently been built, and the city's skyline was rapidly expanding with thirty-five million dollars in new buildings alone. Still, the city's population of nearly 300,000 earned it a place among the thirty most populous cities in the country that was tenuous at best. New Orleans even kept it from the title of largest metropolis in the New South. Thus, despite the city's rapid growth and increased prosperity, most Houstonians felt, as one historian discerned, "plagued by a nagging suspicion that no one was paying attention." Unknown to most, Jesse Holman Jones was about to put Houston on the national map, bringing the recognition and respect city residents had craved for so long.[2]

Jones had played a key role in Houston's recent economic expansion. A wealthy businessmen, industrious builder, and owner of the *Houston Chronicle*, Jones was undoubtedly the city's most influential leader, and the burgeoning center of downtown was, as one journalist noted, "practically his private fiefdom."[3] Yet Jones was not a man of one dominion. As Finance Chairman of the Democratic Party National Committee, Jones had earned the unconditional admiration of other Democrats by rejuvenating their party's finances in the years following the disastrous 1924 convention at Madison Square Garden. At that convention, delegates had to cast 103 ballots before nominating John W. Davis in a race thought to be exclusively between Alfred E. Smith and William Gibbs McAdoo. When Jones was named to the Party subcommittee charged with hearing bids for the 1928 convention, he clearly commanded respect as a man of local and national stature. As the subcommittee went about its business, Jones combined his knack for corporate wheeling and dealing with a touch of down-home southern hospitality to stage one of the greatest upsets in Democratic Party history.

On January 11, Jones invited the subcommittee members to prepare their

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*This article was previously awarded the Mary Hayes Ewing Publication Prize in Southern History by the Rice University Department of History. It originally appeared in the 1997 edition of *Touchstone* and has been republished in *The Houston Review of History and Culture* with the permission of the Texas State Historical Association.

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report on the various convention offers in the parlor of his Mayflower Hotel suite in Washington, D.C. While subcommittee chair John T. Barnett of Colorado and fellow members Arthur G. Mullen of Nebraska and Bruce Kremer of Montana were all well-acquainted with Jones, none had any idea that he planned to make a serious bid for Houston. In the days leading up to the meeting, Miami, Chicago, Detroit, San Francisco, and Cleveland, were the front-runners in a race where newspapers mentioned places like Atlantic City and Houston as only "[o]thers in the field." Each of these leading cities had offered sizable financial contributions to subsidize convention costs and to keep the Democratic National Committee from falling into further debt. They also possessed large convention halls capable of seating more than ten thousand people and an equal number of hotel rooms to boot. Nevertheless, as the subcommittee continued its work, Jones asked the other members to pardon him while he went to his bedroom. Behind closed doors, Jones hurriedly had his secretary compose a written bid for the convention on behalf of the city of Houston. To the offer, Jones attached a personal check of $200,000. He then immediately returned to the meeting where his impromptu proposal was met with surprise and amusement. Although the rest of the committee agreed to entertain Houston's bid, Jones had to wait until the general meeting of the entire Democratic National Committee the following morning before he could truly sell his city.[4]

National Party Chairman Clem Shaver called the general meeting to order the next morning at the Mayflower Hotel. Although Jones had announced Houston's offer at an earlier executive session, most of the Committee members were unaware that the anticipated showdown between San Francisco and Detroit was about to take an unexpected twist. After subcommittee chairman Barnett gave a brief oral summary of the offers of various cities, he announced that Houston had placed a bid of $200,000 and offered an auditorium capable of seating 6,500 people. San Francisco's chief advocate Isidore B. Dockweiler asked Barnett to loudly restate Houston's seating capacity. Feeling confident he had trumped Jones' last-minute proposal by pointing out the inadequacy of Houston's auditorium, Dockweiler felt certain that San Francisco was on her way to landing the convention. Still, representatives from each city had fifteen additional minutes to present their cases, and during these solicitations Houston's appeal began to skyrocket. Advocates from Detroit, Miami, and Chicago all read welcome letters and introduced distinguished speakers lauding their unique facilities, generous hospitality, and plentiful hotel accommodations. Miami proposed a $100,000 offer and a convention hall accommodating 15,000 people, while Detroit offered a bid of $125,000 with an auditorium seating 17,000. Chicago presented a check for $130,000 and a 15,000-person arena, but Cleveland attempted to top it with a bid of $150,000 and a convention hall seating 12,000. When it came time to sell Houston, however, the city's boosters made a convincing three-pronged appeal to the Party.[5]

Unless otherwise noted, all photos are courtesy Houston Endowment, Inc.

The Rice Hotel in the mid-1920s.

The first Houston backer to do so was Jed Adams, who mentioned nothing of Houston's large financial offer, but instead chose to praise the service and leadership Jesse Jones had provided as Chairman of the Party Finance Committee. Jones then continued the presentation by boasting everything from the world-class elegance of the Rice Hotel to the countrified merits of Texas fishing. As a railroad and steamship Mecca, Houston would offer convenient transportation options for convention visitors, and Jones assured the Committee that the city's hotels would not overcharge guests—indeed, he owned nearly all of them. Sensing that the city's existing municipal auditorium would not stand a chance against the offers of competing cities and increasingly driven by thoughts of the economic and publicity benefits Houston could reap as a convention city, Jones also announced that Houston would build a new convention hall to the Committee's specifications. He proclaimed that "Houston's hospitality will be a blank check. You can fill it in yourself for what you want," and backed-up his word by promising personal automobile service and private home accommodations for convention guests. To convince the Committee that the notorious Texas heat would not be intolerable in the early summer, he offered assurances that Houston's climate was actually "very comfortable" in June with "temperature ranges in the eighties and lower nineties." He also noted the added benefit of cool "gulf breezes" that made "light cover" necessary "for comfortable sleeping." Apparently impressed with Houston's ability to stage a successful convention, Jones' offer was met with thunderous applause.[6]

Largely convinced that they *should* pick Houston and confident that Houston could be picked, the Committee next heard Congressman Daniel Garrett tell them why they must pick Houston.

Garrett billed Houston as the leading city of the South—a region of the country that had faithfully "voted the ticket straight" but had been passed over for a convention since before the Civil War. Garrett warned the Committee that southern states were "getting a little bit weary of" standing behind a party through thick and thin that otherwise ignored their wishes for "expediency's sake." Garrett also took time to reinforce Jones' assurances about Houston's weather. He lightheartedly vouched that Houston would be "all right" in June and that a little warmth might, in any event, be "best for the party in the end."

Following Garrett's plea of political pragmatism, San Antonio Congressman John Boyle spoke on Houston's behalf to buy time for Texas Governor Dan Moody, whose train was running late. Boyle fused the arguments of Jones and Garrett, calling Houston the "fastest growing city in America" located in a state and region known for its unwavering loyalty to the Democratic Party. Despite Boyle's delays, though, Governor Moody failed to arrive before representatives of San Francisco made the last convention bid, offering a whopping $250,000, a facility seating 15,000 people, and an unrivaled number of hotel rooms. Moody did, however, arrive just in advance of the ballot call, speaking long enough to extend a Texas-size welcome from a state with "nine Democrats . . . to one Republican." With each city's offer on the table, the ballot process began only after Vincent Miles of Arkansas made a last-minute pitch for Houston. Miles whimsically advised Committee members to select Houston because "Mr. Jones owns the biggest hotel down there and if we get broke down there he will cash our checks, so we can go home."[7]

On the first ballot, Houston led the contest with 30 votes compared with San Francisco's 24, Detroit's 23, Cleveland's 13, Miami's 6, and Chicago's 5. Yet, four more ballots would be necessary for the city to secure a majority of Committee votes. On the fifth and final ballot Houston mustered 54 votes, defeating San Francisco by a narrow margin of six. Chicago and Miami had been eliminated after the first ballot, and Cleveland was removed from contention after the fourth. Detroit, however, managed to survive all five ballots but only received one vote in the last tally, lending credence to the idea that the city was too close to reserves of Canadian spirits for a party divided over Prohibition. Not wishing to exude an image of discord, the Committee moved to make Houston the Party's unanimous choice for the 1928 convention.[8]

As news of Houston's selection spread quickly, journalists and political commentators alike voiced explanations for the Democratic National Committee's unanticipated decision. Most analysts believed the Committee opted for Houston largely because of the regional issues Congressman Garrett had underscored at the meeting. While the selection of Houston did serve as a historical concession to the South, it also made practical sense within the political context of the time. Even though New York Governor Al Smith was expected to easily win the Party's nomination in June, his presidential candidacy was far from universally welcomed. A Catholic known for his strong ties to Tammany Hall and his adamant opposition to Prohibition, Smith threatened to alienate voters from the "dry," Protestant, and predominantly rural southern states in the November election. As a result, many Committee members realized that the summer convention would be more important as a litmus test of Party unity than as a forum for the selection of a candidate.

Jones and prominent Houston architect Alfred C. Finn examine plans for the convention hall.

To conclude that the Committee favored Houston solely because it was politically wise, however, would be to ignore the all-important role of Jesse Jones in the selection process. Although regional political concerns may have swayed the Committee to hold its next convention in the South, it was Jones who brought the national parley to Houston, one of the smallest cities to ever entertain a national political convention. With his own riches and reputation, Jones succeeded in landing the convention for Houston without the knowledge or support of Houston's city officials. Mayor Oscar Holcombe was just as surprised at the news of Houston's selection as the average local resident, having to call Jones personally to learn exactly what his city was expected to do. By choosing Houston, the National Committee was able to ameliorate southern disenchantment, reward Jones' years of loyal service, and simultaneously improve the Party's prospects for an Election Day victory.

Most Houstonians reacted to the news of their city's selection with outpourings of appreciation and euphoric excitement. Newspapers declared "Houston Goes Wild" as the entire city became "electrified" with the thought of hosting an event that would attract the "[c]ream of American newspaper talent" and bring "national distinction upon a new and rapidly rising city." Local officials were reported to be "humming" at the idea that Houston would assume "a new place among the big cities of the nation." Mayor Holcombe relished in the expectation that "money will almost flow like water," while

the Houston Fire Commissioner expressed his dumbfounded surprise with a simple "wow." Even hotel bellboys were "jubilant" in anticipation of the sizable tips they could expect from convention visitors. Houston celebrated even more on January 31 when Jesse Jones returned from New York to a hero's welcome. In what was hailed as "the greatest demonstration . . . in the city's history," throngs of admirers estimated at nearly 50,000 greeted Jones. A multitude of bands and a salute from the Texas Air National Guard rounded out the festivities. Although a vast road of pre-convention preparations lay ahead, no one seemed to mind taking a day off to celebrate what one journalist labeled "the greatest honor that ever yet has been conferred on any city of the New South."

Implicit in the city's enthusiasm was the assumption that the rest of the country would view Houston's selection positively—an assumption that proved to be largely incorrect. While most commentators from outside the region could swallow the political strategy leading to Houston's selection, the notion that the convention would be unaffected by scorching Texas heat seemed completely preposterous. The Springfield, Massachusetts *Republican* had little to say of the Houston convention except to advise delegates "to get the lightest weight summer clothing available." Newspapers like the *Nashville Banner* apparently did not consider reports of Houston's first snowfall in three years as any indication that the city's climate was mild, warning that temperate weather in Houston "remains almost an absurdity." In contrast, the *Ohio State Journal* took a more humorous approach, noting that the Republican convention host, Kansas City, also "apparently has convinced herself that personally she's a delightfully cool place in the summer." The *Indianapolis News* exuded a much harsher tone, however, labeling Houston's weather as "pretty mean for a National Convention." In a similar vein, the *Chicago Tribune* mocked the assurances of Houston officials, predicting that convention delegates would only experience a "gulf breeze" in their prayers. Finally, at least one newspaper tried to rationalize Houston's weather as a political advantage, remarking that the convention should be one of harmony for the "penalty for going more than five ballots will be death by heat."[9]

In the months following Houston's selection, external criticism did little to lessen the vigor of the city's pre-convention efforts. On the contrary, understanding that their city was "on trial" now more than ever, Houstonians rose to the challenges that a first-class political convention demanded. Financing the event proved to be the most immediate concern, for without adequate funds the new convention hall Jesse Jones had promised could not be built. Houston banker and oil magnate Ross S. Sterling took charge of the newly formed Finance Committee and immediately sought commercial contributions and private donations to raise the estimated $300,000 needed. When city-based contributions proved insufficient, the Committee canvassed the entire state, soliciting donations from judges, cities, and chambers of commerce as partners in what it billed as a truly Texas affair. With a similar strategy of inclusion, the Committee also initiated a massive button drive, peddling blue and white "Me Too" buttons on street corners and in house-to-house crusades. Designed to distinguish the true patrons of Houston from indifferent city residents, the button drive added $18,500 to the convention fund.

The Finance Committee's diverse efforts ultimately raised $356,907, but not without causing an embarrassing publicity blunder just before the parley began. In an attempt to assuage fears that the convention might not provide an adequate financial yield, convention hall chairman C. J. Kirk released an estimate of the rev-

Houston's growing skyline in the 1920s, with the Rice Hotel in the foreground; the convention hall nearing

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the Houston Fire Commissioner expressed his dumbfounded surprise with a simple "wow." Even hotel bellboys were "jubilant" in anticipation of the sizable tips they could expect from convention visitors. Houston celebrated even more on January 31 when Jesse Jones returned from New York to a hero's welcome. In what was hailed as "the greatest demonstration . . . in the city's history," throngs of admirers estimated at nearly 50,000 greeted Jones. A multitude of bands and a salute from the Texas Air National Guard rounded out the festivities. Although a vast road of pre-convention preparations lay ahead, no one seemed to mind taking a day off to celebrate what one journalist labeled "the greatest honor that ever yet has been conferred on any city of the New South."

Implicit in the city's enthusiasm was the assumption that the rest of the country would view Houston's selection positively—an assumption that proved to be largely incorrect. While most commentators from outside the region could swallow the political strategy leading to Houston's selection, the notion that the convention would be unaffected by scorching Texas heat seemed completely preposterous. The Springfield, Massachusetts *Republican* had little to say of the Houston convention except to advise delegates "to get the lightest weight summer clothing available." Newspapers like the *Nashville Banner* apparently did not consider reports of Houston's first snowfall in three years as any indication that the city's climate was mild, warning that temperate weather in Houston "remains almost an absurdity." In contrast, the *Ohio State Journal* took a more humorous approach, noting that the Republican convention host, Kansas City, also "apparently has convinced herself that personally she's a delightfully cool place in the summer." The *Indianapolis News* exuded a much harsher tone, however, labeling Houston's weather as "pretty mean for a National Convention." In a similar vein, the *Chicago Tribune* mocked the assurances of Houston officials, predicting that convention delegates would only experience a "gulf breeze" in their prayers. Finally, at least one newspaper tried to rationalize Houston's weather as a political advantage, remarking that the convention should be one of harmony for the "penalty for going more than five ballots will be death by heat."[9]

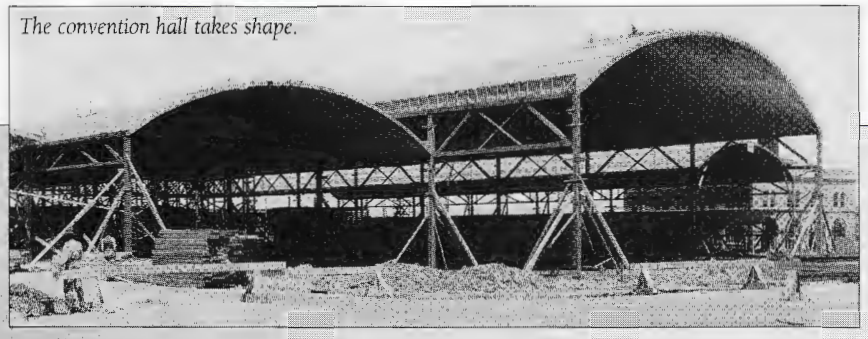
In the months following Houston's selection, external criticism did little to lessen the vigor of the city's pre-convention efforts. On the contrary, understanding that their city was "on trial" now more than ever, Houstonians rose to the challenges that a first-class political convention demanded. Financing the event proved to be the most immediate concern, for without adequate funds the new convention hall Jesse Jones had promised could not be built. Houston banker and oil magnate Ross S. Sterling took charge of the newly formed Finance Committee and immediately sought commercial contributions and private donations to raise the estimated $300,000 needed. When city-based contributions proved insufficient, the Committee canvassed the entire state, soliciting donations from judges, cities, and chambers of commerce as partners in what it billed as a truly Texas affair. With a similar strategy of inclusion, the Committee also initiated a massive button drive, peddling blue and white "Me Too" buttons on street corners and in house-to-house crusades. Designed to distinguish the true patrons of Houston from indifferent city residents, the button drive added $18,500 to the convention fund.

The Finance Committee's diverse efforts ultimately raised $356,907, but not without causing an embarrassing publicity blunder just before the parley began. In an attempt to assuage fears that the convention might not provide an adequate financial yield, convention hall chairman C. J. Kirk released an estimate of the rev-

Houston's growing skyline in the 1920s, with the Rice Hotel in the foreground; the convention hall nearing

enue local merchants could expect to receive during the convention. After taking every possible source of revenue into account from hotel bills to ice cream sales, Kirk found he was still $180,000 short of an acceptable return. In haste, he penciled in the shortage under expenditures for "wine and women." The comment immediately drew widespread censure from the press and especially from the Women's Christian Temperance Union, who expressed outrage at Kirk's insult of Southern women. In the end, Houston had financed its convention, but in the process it had called into question the city's budding national reputation.

As the Finance Committee mustered contributions, work began on the new convention hall. Plans to simply revamp Houston's existing Municipal Auditorium were quickly scrapped in favor of a world-class facility that would dazzle city visitors as much as it would serve the practical needs of the convention. Opting to build the temporary hall on land previously designated for a new civic center, city leaders announced that the chosen site was "so situated that no tall buildings will obstruct the Gulf breezes." Climate concerns, however, proved less troubling than razing the more than thirty houses that still dotted the property. Construction proceeded in sections during the mind-boggling engineering feat of completing Houston's new convention hall in only sixty-four working days. Designed to minimize heat and maximize the number of spectators, the hall's unique open ceiling perimeter allowed for ventilation as well as outside public viewing from a raised platform. The installation of enormous "Typhoon" fans made such open ventilation more effective, but they also required a giant amplification system to compensate for the resulting noise. With an expansive roof of yellow pine that towered fifty-eight feet above the ground, the hall also boasted an elaborate system of ceiling rods and arches that provided 80,000 square feet of open meeting space. City boosters proudly billed the structure as the "[l]argest floor area of any building on Earth under one roof" with its vast, nearly column-free expanse offering 33% more meeting space than the "gloomy, close, depressing" hall of Madison Square Garden.[10]



The convention hall takes shape.

completion in the center; and the skeleton of the Gulf Building under construction on the left.

During May and June, convention officials made additional touches to the interior and exterior of the hall, though not without a few setbacks. Emblazoned with white walls, a striped red and gray roof, and green and gold trim, the hall's exterior soon displayed flags and statues of American eagles, some with wing spans of twelve feet. The final enclosure of the building, however, caused a humorous delay when a flock of sparrows became trapped in what was called the "world's biggest bird cage." Extensive leaking after heavy downpours proved to be the worst problem, though, warranting quick repairs to insure that "wet" and "dry" did not take on added meaning in a convention soon to debate Prohibition. Despite sparrows and showers, preparations in the interior of the hall moved forward without further delay with the completion of a state-of-the-art press facilities, including soundproof radio booths, large telegraph stations, and exclusive office spaces for press agencies. An emergency hospital took its place in the hall, along with such amenities as lunch stands, scores of telephones, and eighteen Frigidaire water-cooling systems to provide liquid refreshment for thirsty convention guests. As a finishing touch, the interior walls were adorned with a large assemblage of American and state flags, while rows of seats were flanked with pots of crepe myrtle. Confident that their new temple would

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In the Name of Progress and Decency:

The Response of Houston's Civic Leaders to the Lynching of Robert Powell in 1928

by Dwight Watson*

Courtesy Craig Mason

In June of 1928, Houston prepared for its coming-out party as a major city. With the 1928 Democratic Convention in town and the eyes of the nation focused on their city, civic leaders hoped to project an image of growth and progress. Yet on June 20, the week before the opening of the convention, the lynching of Robert Powell challenged this progressive image.

National and local press coverage of the lynching contrasted this episode of racial violence in a strictly segregated city to the image of "heavenly Houston," a booming new South city that was a Mecca for black as well as white migrants.[1] The city's civic leaders responded immediately to the lynching with a strong and immediate condemnation of "lynch law." When questions arose about the possible involvement of members of the Houston Police Department (HPD) in the lynching, the city questioned police officers before moving on to the arrest of others for the crime. After the convention came relatively minor reforms in HPD. This response allowed the convention to go forward successfully while, at least for a time, raising fundamental questions about the nature and tone of Houston's Jim Crow racial order.

Lynching was the perverted marriage of racial hatred, distorted religious fundamentalism, paternalism, and psycho-sexual fear, which empowered mobs with the ultimate measure of social control and power.[2] Ida B. Wells, a black newspaper editor and anti-lynching activist, observed the hypocrisy of whites on this issue when she noted that church folk were "too busy saving souls of white Christians from burning in hell fire to save the lives of black ones from the present burning in the fires kindled by white Christians."[3] Despite the best efforts of Wells and others who fought for federal anti-lynching laws, a U.S. Congress dominated by southerners from the one-party South refused to pass such legislation.

By the 1920s, many whites in Houston and other growing southern cities viewed lynching as a pernicious rural "tradition" out of step with urban life. Although lynchings did occur in southern cities in the first half of the twentieth century, the need to maintain law and order in an urban setting undermined the continued acceptance of lynch law, and the mob rule it involved. In a booming city such as Houston in the 1920s, however, the perception of civic leaders could be starkly at odds with the attitudes of the tens of thousands of new migrants who came to the city from the surrounding countryside in search of opportunity. Houston's newspapers responded to the Powell lynching by lamenting that this was the first lynching within the city proper in anyone's memory. But Houston's population had exploded in the first decades of the twentieth century, growing from less than 45,000 in 1900 to nearly 270,000 in 1928, when its black population alone exceeded 50,000. Many of the new migrants who came to Houston in these decades had developed their racial attitudes in the small farming communities in east Texas and western Louisiana.[4]

Just beneath the surface of the Jim Crow system in Houston and throughout the South was the threat of violence against blacks who challenged the laws or the customs of segregation. In the small towns of the rural South, the enforcement of segregation was an intensely personal affair, with daily rituals played out in the fields and the town squares. In a city such as Houston, with large numbers of blacks and whites who did not know each other and who often did not live and work together, enforcement of Jim

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Crow fell more heavily onto the organized police force.

"Progressive" city or not, Houston shared the racial attitudes that had fed mob violence and bloody riots throughout the country from 1917–1921. Such riots had taken place in urban, not rural settings, and Houston had experienced its own bitter spasm of racial violence in 1917, during the Camp Logan Riot between black soldiers stationed in Houston and the Houston Police Department.[5] The dark web of human memory kept this tragic riot fresh in the minds of many blacks and whites, serving as a grim reminder of the death and destruction that could follow from the tensions created by Jim Crow life.

In Houston, the actions of the HPD attracted the scrutiny of economically independent black leaders. By the 1920s, the opportunities afforded to blacks in Houston's growing economy had fostered the growth of a black middle class eager to assert its voice in civic affairs and to legitimize its status within Houston by organizing groups such as a local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Newspapers written by blacks and for black readers reported a growing dissatisfaction with the racial status quo and a determination to fight for improved conditions. Houston's black civic leaders and newspapers aggressively protested the Powell lynching in a vocal, public way that would not have been possible without retribution in rural east Texas towns. Despite rigid barriers between blacks and whites, the lynching created a common link between black civic leaders and white civic leaders who fought to save the reputation of the "new" Houston they had proclaimed to the world.

These civic leaders were correct in their assessment of Houston's future prospects; their city was an emerging metropolis by the 1920s. Civic and business leaders worked diligently to make the city the South's poster boy for industry and progress. As a southwestern city, Houston's past and future looked in two directions. Many of its leaders voiced the sort of western imagery of rapid growth fed by free enterprise that subsequently came to symbolize the "Sun belt" cities. But much of its population remained firmly rooted in a rural southern past obsessed with the defense of Jim Crow.

Tensions heightened within the city's civic leadership. Most important was the class and status war being played out by the conservative leadership, black and white. Who would rule the city, those who feared that mob rule and lynching might undermine their city's future growth or Negrophobes who made racial segregation and social subordination their top priority and favored lynching and extra-legal violence as a means of social control?[6]

Among those who favored the first position was banker/financier Jesse Holman Jones. His influence and money helped Houston become the host city for the 1928 Democratic National Convention.[7] Jones pulled a rabbit out of his hat when his winning offer in the form of a certified check of $200,000 and a promise of new auditorium left San Francisco and Dallas in an angered daze.[8] On January 12, 1928, the *Houston Chronicle*, a major newspaper published by Jones, ran a special edition: "Houston Wins the 1928 Dem Convention."[9] More than a testament to Jones' clout and influence within the Party, this was also a victory for Houston. The negative publicity from the Powell lynching gave the city a very visible black eye just as it was dressing up in its Sunday best to impress the nation. But when Jones and other white and black leaders stood up to challenge the violence underpinning the Jim Crow system, they faced the wrath of racial traditionalists within the city who fought tenaciously to maintain the status quo. Particularly contentious was the role and responsibilities of the Houston Police Department.

In 1925 HPD had a total of 243 officers, including 178 patrolmen and even several black officers.[10] This number was woefully inadequate to meet the needs of a rapidly growing city. The force had its hands full, enforcing the law, protecting property, imposing social control, and enforcing racial segregation. Their zealousness in this last pursuit turned segments of the public against them. When black civic leaders joined forces with national civil rights organizations and local social reform movements to try to curb police abuses, HPD refused to hear such demands for change. Indeed, infused by elements of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, the Houston Police Department proved recalcitrant on this vital issue.

Blacks migrating to Houston to trade tenant farming for industrial jobs or to seek respite from the harsh demands of rural Jim Crow, courted the wrath of the HPD. Those sworn to serve and protect them—the police—were also strongly committed to maintaining the segregated racial order. For the flood of black migrants to Houston, urban Jim Crow's problems of overcrowded neighborhoods, police brutality, and inefficient city services were the trade-offs for escaping the sting of rural poverty and the bitterness of rural Jim Crow racism.[11]

Despite the growing rejection of the Klan by Houston's civic elite, the Klan maintained a strong hold on elements of Houston's white population and, for a time in the early 1920s, held firm control of parts of the county government. Important members of Houston society who joined the Klan from 1922–1925 included Harris County Sheriff Thomas A. Binford and former police chief Gordon Murphy. Historian Don Carlton notes that "booming Houston was the first Texas city to have a Ku Klux Klan chapter."[12] The Klan was neither secretive nor invisible in Texas as a whole. On October 23, 1922, "Klan Day" at the Texas State Fair attracted "151,192 persons."[13] Even

Houston mayor Oscar Holcombe briefly joined the Klan, but quit shortly afterwards because of its violent nature.

Colonel Billie Mayfield led the growth of the Klan in Houston.[14] The colonel was an officer in the Texas National Guard and had been a columnist for the *Houston Chronicle*. He made headlines in the 1920s with highly publicized attacks on those who opposed the Klan. One of these involved his efforts to arrest the editor of the *Houston Press* for criticizing the vigor of the Texas National Guard's enforcement of martial law against dock-workers on strike in Galveston. In the resulting court case, John H. Crooker, an attorney in the prominent Houston law firm of Fulbright & Crooker (later, Fulbright & Jaworski), successfully defended the publisher.[15]

Mayfield's Klan paper, *Colonel Mayfield's Weekly*, later increased his prominence within the local KKK, which fought hard to put its mark on Houston's development. At the height of the Klan's influence in Houston in about 1924, civic leaders who opposed its power fought back. Thus when two Klansmen sued the *Houston Press* for libel after its criticism helped defeat them in hotly contested local elections in 1924, Crooker again tried the cases, ultimately vindicating the editor of the *Press*.[16]

Courtesy Sherita Armstrong

After Oscar Holcombe quit the Klan, he became an open target for Klan-controlled factions in the city.[17] Mayor Holcombe's refusal to fire Catholics and blacks hurt him in the election of 1922, but not enough to prevent his reelection. The popular mayor's battles with the Klan in these years symbolized the ongoing efforts of many Houston leaders trying to come to grips with the racial tensions that threatened the city's future growth. Conservative and liberal factions emerged and challenged the Klan as being immoral and criminal, but most of all bad for the city's image.[18] Members of this group included the wealthiest of Houston elites such as Jesse Jones and prominent oilman Joseph S. Cullinan, the original president of Texaco. Cullinan, a Catholic, had helped found the Houston Anti-Klan Society in 1922. Violence and national scandals by the Klan caused other civic leaders to reject harsh Klan-like xenophobia as bad for business and out of step with the needs of a growing city.[19]

Elements of the Houston Police Department did not share such views. As the Democratic Convention of 1928 approached, HPD began to train its force "in order to line up in efficiency and appearance with the other police forces of the country."[20] Among the trainees were 116 new police officers "who were sworn in for the duration of the convention."[21] One hundred of the officers were temporary, and the final sixteen were kept as permanent mounted patrol officers attached to the traffic division. Many of these officers came from rural areas in east Texas and central Texas known for harsh racial bigotry and rigid enforcement of segregation. Many police accepted the stereotypical notion of blacks as inferior and prone to crime. They were trained to look for blacks in trouble spots of the city and to distribute "Jim Crow justice" swiftly and brutally.

Southern custom impacted police training and procedures on June 17, 1928. Early that morning two police officers did exactly what southern custom called for by asking a group of Negroes standing on a street corner near downtown Houston what they were doing out so late. When the two detectives, Henry Bradshaw and A. W. Davis, rousted the three black males, a gun allegedly fell out of the clothing of one of the suspects. When one of the suspects, later identified as 24-year-old Robert Powell, bolted and ran, Detective Davis pursued him on foot. During the chase shots were fired. Davis was killed by a shot in the head, and a bullet through the body severely wounded Powell.[22] After an aggressive search through the Fourth Ward area, the police found Powell at his mother's home and took him to Jefferson Davis Hospital, also in the Fourth Ward.[23]

There he lay for several days. Then in the early morning of Wednesday, June 20, a lynch mob took Powell from the custody of the Harris County Sheriff Department's watchman at the hospital. Witnesses reported that seven or eight armed white men charged in and took the black prisoner they believed had shot Detective Davis. According to *The Informer* (a newspaper written by and for blacks), the mob took Powell "several miles out of the municipal confines and treated to a practical demonstration of the celebrated pastime-Judge Lynch law."[24]

Around daybreak, Powell's tattered body was discovered hanging in the stale morning air from a bridge some six miles out from downtown Houston on Post Oak Road. This racially charged incident heightened suspicion of HPD's ability to professionally serve and protect blacks. Angry citizens across racial lines were appalled when eyewitnesses claimed that the police failed to take adequate measures to stop the lynching. Some witnesses even alleged that the police stood by and watched until the mob hanged the man.[25] In a macabre twist, the rope was too long and on the first attempt to hang him, Powell was left sitting at the bottom of a ditch alive. He allegedly cursed the mob for its ineptness. Unperturbed, his tormentors shortened the rope and successfully completed their gruesome task on the second attempt.[26] The city and the police department received considerable negative press from the lynching, and this bad publicity brought added pressure on

HPD to reform itself.

Led by C. F. Richardson, the owner and editor of *The Informer*, Houston's black press roundly condemned the cowardly act. Richardson had good personal reasons to denounce this act; he had avoided being lynched by the Klan in 1925 with the aid of blacks who guarded his home and the timely intervention of Mayor Holcombe, who personally threatened the Klan if any harm came to Richardson.

On June 23, 1928, the *Houston Chronicle* joined the condemnation of the lynching with an editorial entitled "A Blow to Houston." Stating that "Houston has been shamed before the nation," the editorial laments that "[t]his revolting crime which has been committed in our midst comes to blacken the day of our joy and pride."[27] In an attempt to salvage the city's image and show that Houstonians disapproved of the barbarous act, Jesse Jones publicly condemned the act in even stronger tones: "the lynching is a blot on the good name of Texas that must be lived down." After asserting that "there is no section of the country where the two races have so little faction," Jones argued that lynching for revenge was not justified and "we all deeply deplore this one."[28] The editorial and Jones' interview put forward in strong language the pragmatic attitudes toward race that ultimately shaped civic policy in Houston for the next fifty years. Denouncing racial violence and mob rule, it said nothing about the Jim Crow system sustained in part by the threat of such violence.

Other local newspapers also quickly condemned the lynching. The *Houston Press* stated that "they [the lynch mob] are ghouls" and that Powell "was killed by a coward." Appealing to the pride of white Texans, it went on to say: "It was not men like these who died in the Alamo. It was not craven creatures like these who fought at the Battle of San Jacinto. Men of that low, vile character did not build the Texas or the Houston of today."[29] While the *Press* condemned the actions of the mob, it also vilified the three black men, inferring that they were part of a group of "unruly, surly, trouble-making Negroes in Houston."[30] One New York paper reported that a "citizen's committee," the "Houston Committee on Inter-Racial Co-operation, composed of men of both races," passed a resolution condemning "the inexcusable crime of violence which has so grossly reflected upon the good name of our city."[31]

With such condemnation of the lynching ringing in its ears, Houston's city council responded by appropriating $10,000 for the investigation of the crime. The NAACP offered a $1,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the suspects. Even Texas Governor Daniel J. Moody got into the act, putting up a $250 reward for information leading to the arrest of each of the culprits. A group called the "Loyalty to Law League" put up another $100. The lynching embarrassed the city and the state. Governor Moody had successfully challenged the Ku Klux Klan during Ma Ferguson's tenure as governor and it had provided a perfect segue to his election as governor.

HOUSTON'S HELLISH HUNS

...It is rather surprising that these Houston huns did not pull off their lynching bee inside or in close proximity to Sam Houston Hall, meeting place for the Democrats next week!

Looked at from another angle, Houston will lose considerable in prestige, and outside capitalists will be reluctant to invest their money in a mob-ridden and infested city.

In the face of the national parley of the Democrats, this lynching orgy will cause many to cancel their proposed visit to the city; and many of those who will come will live under a terrible mental strain and in constant fear of mobocratic demonstrations during the convention...

Headline and excerpt from The Informer, *June 23, 1928.*

The national press used strong language in discussing the lynching, including it in news stories about the Democratic Convention. On June 27, 1928, New York's *Amsterdam News* wrote that the "odor of lynching greets delegates to the Democratic National Convention."[32] New York's *Evening Post* took a similar tact: "Houston is meeting the vanguard of convention visitors with one hand and trying to solve its ugly lynching mystery with the other." Much harsher were the words of *The News* of New York City, which mocked the "crocodile tears" being shed by the Houston press over the "barbarous murder of a dying Colored youth." It went on that "Houston, Texas, like Dixie has been lynching Colored men in every way her fiendish, perverted brains conceived," noting that "colored citizens" in the South are lynched at the ballot box, "in inferior, degrading jim-crow schools...in jim-crow cars, in peonage, in forced prostitution, in race treachery."[33]

It was clear to Houstonians and Democrats alike that something needed to be done to stop the talk of the lynching before the opening of the convention. The city moved very quickly to "solve" the case. The day after the lynching, a grand jury called for testimony from several police officers about their possible involvement, since witnesses at the hospital had noted that at least one member of the lynch mob appeared to be wearing a policeman's uniform.

Only two days after the incident, a dragnet had produced five arrests and identified two other men believed to be involved. Three days before the opening of the convention, several newspapers listed the names of the five arrested suspects.

Thus by the opening of the Democratic National Convention on June 26, the lynching story had begun to subside. On the racial front, a more pressing concern arose regarding seating arrangements for black delegates or attendees. The southern wing of the Democratic National Committee initially threatened to leave if black delegates were not excluded from the convention. Frantically, the city and the national committee appeased southerners with a compromise that placed the black delegates and spectators in a separate chicken wire fenced area underneath the stage.[34] The *Amsterdam News* wrote that "the National Democratic Party in convention here will segregate those Negroes who for some reason or another, may desire to attend the session as spectators."[35] Such accommodations with the white southerners so vital to the success of the national Democratic Party of this era reflected the compromises being reached among Houstonians on the issues raised by race. How could an acceptably "gentile" version of the often violent, always discriminatory Jim Crow system be adapted to life in a changing nation and a growing city? How could the politics of the two major parties accommodate race? How could Houston prevent its inefficient, violence-prone racial accommodation from undermining its hopes for

Courtesy Sherita Armstrong

future growth and prosperity?

On the national level of politics, Powell's lynching provided fuel for continued attempts to pass anti-lynching legislation. Black civic leaders pressed hard for justice. Letters between local NAACP leaders and national leaders called for immediate action on the part of the government. White southerners responded to calls for anti-lynching laws as they had done for decades, with editorials and political diatribes challenging the constitutionality of federal anti-lynching laws. They vehemently argued that lynching was a state problem that required the effective enforcement of existing laws, not the writing of new federal laws. In the racially charged politics of the times, these proved to be winning arguments; anti-lynching laws were not passed at the federal level and failed to pass in Texas until 1949.[36]

Despite the untimely lynching, Houston had achieved its goal of improving its national reputation as an emerging metropolis. Even New York City Mayor Jimmie Walker applauded the police as being professional and the city second to none. Once the national spotlight turned away from Houston, none of the suspects arrested in the lynching were convicted. Their primary stated defense was that they were friends of the slain police officer; their unstated defense was that they were white. This outcome caused several national newspapers to print stories asking if the city had simply arrested the first available "mob" with assurances to the "suspects" that they would not be convicted.

The episode had raised doubts in the city about the operations of HPD, and the year after the lynching, a new police chief disbanded the mounted patrol unit in an apparent attempt to modernize the force. He then sold the horses and transferred the men to patrol duty within the traffic division.[37] Admitting no culpability for the lynching, HPD's disbanding of the mounted patrol was not in retaliation for the lynching. McPhail stated in the *Houston Chronicle* on April 17, 1929, that "from an efficiency stand point and from a humanitarian one, the abolishment of the mounted squad in my judgment is the proper thing."[38] Further, the department's immediate cause for the removal of the squad was that HPD had hired too many mounted patrol officers for the Democratic National Convention, and HPD wanted to mechanize and expand the motor patrol unit.

The 1928 Democratic Convention is frequently cited as a turning point in the development of Houston, a pivotal act of civic leadership by Jesse Jones and others that announced to the world that the booming city on the bayou had arrived as a major city. In sharp contrast, the lynching of Robert Powell remains a nearly forgotten historical footnote in Houston's history. Yet citizens of Houston in 1928 took the lynching seriously as a measure of the direction their city might take on the critical issue of race. Embarrassed by the lynching, the white businessmen who guided much of the city's development distanced themselves from racial violence as they had previously begun to distance themselves from the Klan, whose membership had significantly declined by 1928. Jim Crow remained unquestioned by these leaders, but they would seek a less violent, more orderly brand of racial subordination. Houston's Jim Crow system would be enforced in the future by a larger, better organized, and better-equipped police force, not by lynch law.

Just under the surface of this episode can be seen another important sign of change to come in the existing racial order. Black civic elites continued to grow and assert a louder voice in the city's affairs. The black newspapers, sustained by the tens of thousands of black citizens of Houston, played a key role in this process. Black leaders brokered their fragile power through gradual legal victories, the growing economic independence that segregation ironically provided, and the forming from time to time of bi-racial coalitions with whites whose interests were served through cooperation. National organizations such as the NAACP, which was only twenty years old in 1928, also took tentative steps into the lynching controversy.

Houston's surging black population took yet another dose of harsh realism when local courts exonerated all of the suspects connected to the Powell lynching. Yet they could take a measure of hope from the aggressive response to the lynching of newspapers, black and white, from the denunciations of racial violence by white civic leaders, and from the growing strength and volume of black voices raised in protest. Thirty-five more years would pass before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would make segregation illegal, but the lynch law that lurked just beneath the surface of the traditional Jim Crow system had been challenged. Even as early as 1928, it had become clear that Houston's business-oriented leaders stood willing to condemn the worst abuses of the Jim Crow system if such abuses seemed to threaten the city's image and its primary civic goal of economic growth. ■

tions worthy of a maturing metropolis that tripled in size from 1940 to 1970, passing the million mark in population while moving rapidly up the ranks of the nation's largest cities. In politics they lobbied aggressively for what they considered a healthy business climate marked by a minimum of government regulations, a weak labor movement, a tax system favorable to business investment, the use of government subsidies to spur business expansion, and a conservative approach to the expansion of public services. With substantial political clout and little effectively organized opposition in a single-party political system, they pushed the city hard in the direction they believed it needed to go. In the process, they shaped much of what was good and bad about modern Houston. They had obvious blind spots—notably on race and environmental quality—but they also shared a consuming passion for Houston and a vision that economic development could lift the city and its population.

The 8F crowd was the most visible group of business/civic leaders in Houston in this boom era. Indeed, "8F crowd" became synonymous with "power elite" in postwar Houston. This group of friends used the Brown brothers' suite 8F at the Lamar Hotel as a convenient place to relax, play cards, discuss the day's issues, and shape Houston's development.[11] With other like-minded business leaders, they shared a general vision of the city's future, and they had the resources, connections, and commitment to the city necessary to act on their vision.

"Membership" in this group was by no means fixed; individuals moved in and out of this circle of influence as their careers and interests changed. Perhaps the best way to provide a snapshot of the group is to make a distinction between the core group that met regularly over several decades and a broader group that came together on specific issues. The core generally included at least Herman Brown, George R. Brown, Judge James A. Elkins, Gus Wortham, Jim Abercrombie, Governor Will Hobby, Oveta Culp Hobby, and R.E. (Bob) Smith. Jesse Jones, who owned the Lamar Hotel and lived in its 16th floor penthouse, might be seen as the godfather of the 8F crowd; they generally went up to visit him, not vice versa.

A much broader collection of Houston businessmen and politicians at times visited suite 8F and at times cooperated with members of the core group on specific projects and issues. For example, oil man Claud Hamill, a business partner of Bob Smith, at times worked closely with friends in the 8F crowd. A list of other "friends of 8F" might be expanded to include William A. (Bill) Smith, Leopold Meyer, Lamar Fleming, Wesley West, George Butler, Charles Francis, Felix Tijerina, Leon Jaworski, Howard Keck, Judge Roy Hofheinz, and, at one time or another, most other influential business leaders in Houston in this era. Government officials such as Colonel E.O. Thompson of the Texas Railroad Commission and local, state, and national politicians also frequented the Lamar Hotel. 8F and friends included individuals with ties to most areas of the Houston economy, and they could often mobilize broad support from the like-minded people throughout the city and the state on issues of importance to the downtown Houston business community.[12]

Critics focused on the power of the 8F crowd, making it a symbol for a political and civic culture dominated by business interests. "There was talk in Texas in the 1940s and 1950s," wrote Texas historian George Norris Green, "that state affairs were handled by card-playing multimillionaires who convened in Herman Brown's suite."[13] Writing in the *Texas Monthly* in 1976, journalist Harry Hurt asserted that "Their rule was a virtually unchallenged and—they would emphasize—very 'civic-minded' gerontocracy."[14] James Conway's popular book *The Texans* concluded that "during the 1940s and 1950s they [8F] exercised a concerted influence in Texas that was unparalleled."[15]

Sociologist Joe Feagin's *Free Enterprise City* went so far as to construct a Houston model of development around a historical account of the role of the 8F crowd and other elites in the city's development. Feagin's account, which is still the only book that systematically analyzes the role of elites in Houston, asserts that 8F "appears to have been the most powerful elite in the city's history."[16] Feagin concluded that 8F's narrow, business-related definition of what was good for the city led Houston down a path characterized by underdeveloped public services, a mediocre educational system, harsh working conditions for labor, and government promotion—but not regulation—of business interests. Such critical accounts suggested a sort of soft conspiracy of a few powerful men to shape Houston in their own image. The populist *Texas Observer* popularized this criticism by poking fun at the quest for a healthy "bidness" climate.

Louie Welch, who as mayor of Houston was at times both a friend and a foe of the 8F crowd, put a much more positive spin on 8F's activities: "You'll hear, I'm sure, all about 8F, like that's some mysterious, sinister meeting place where people got together and figured out what to let the common people do. It wasn't anything of the sort." According to Welch, "they created the initiative and the locomotive to pull the train...They were movers and shakers, but they were not self-serving in anything that I ever saw them do."[17]

No doubt, those who were moved and shook took a somewhat less favorable view of the process of change. But in Houston's postwar boom, those who had the most reason to complain about working conditions and under-funded public services tended to come from rural sections of Texas, Louisiana, and Mexico where far worse conditions had pushed them to try their luck in Houston. As hundreds of thousands of migrants sought improved opportunities in the growing city, racial and ethnic tensions also blocked the rise of a unified, political movement in the region capable of challenging the power of business leaders. Even had such a voice been asserted, it was unlikely to be heard in the one-party, business-led politics of the postwar years.

Because of frequent criticism of the 8F crowd and the Brown brothers' close connections to President Lyndon Johnson, this small group has come to command more attention than it deserves. Houston in the 1950s and 1960s was not Cook County, Illinois, and Herman Brown was not Mayor Daley. It was not even very similar to Houston before World War I, where a smaller, more cohesive collection of lawyers and bankers had held sway. Indeed, in historical terms, business/civic leadership broadened dramatically in

postwar Houston compared to previous eras. This is true even if the 8F crowd is understood to refer only to the relatively small core group and even if it wielded all of the power accorded to it by critics.

But these simplifying assumptions about 8F simply do not describe Houston in the postwar boom. Notable by their absence from the list of either the core group of 8F or their close friends are numerous influential Houston business leaders of this era. Prominent among them were independent oilmen such as Hugh Roy Cullen, who was deeply involved in the growth of the University of Houston and the Texas Medical Center; Glenn McCarthy, who built the Shamrock Hotel; and John Mecom, who owned the Warwick Hotel and interests in local banks. Also missing from most discussions of 8F are numerous leaders of Humble Oil and Refining (notably Morgan Davis and Carl Reistle) and other major oil firms such as Texaco who remained quite active in Houston's civic affairs. After its move to Houston in 1970, Shell Oil quickly became a prominent corporate citizen.

Representatives of the giant natural gas pipeline companies headquartered in Houston quickly took their place among the region's civic leaders as their companies grew quickly after World War II. The Browns' Texas Eastern Corporation was one such company, but even more active in Houston's civic affairs was Tenneco and its leader Gardner Symonds. 8Fer Judge Elkins continued the tradition of the Baker era with his ties to a major law firm, Vinson & Elkins, and a major bank, First City National. But he was hardly the only prominent lawyer in Houston amid the postwar surge in both the size and number of corporate law firms in the city after World War II. Bankers not normally associated with the 8F crowd continued as in the past to take on important civic responsibilities. Kenneth Schnitzer, Gerald Hines, and Dallas-based Trammell Crow— Jesse Jones' successors as the leading developers in Houston— were not frequent guests at 8F, despite their role in building much of the approximately sixty million square feet in major office construction in Houston in the thirty years after 1955. In short, many of the most influential members of Houston downtown business community did not frequent 8F and did not automatically follow its lead.[18]

At the same time, groups of citizens traditionally not included fully in the life of the city asserted a stronger voice in Houston. Through the middle of the twentieth century, anti-Semitism remained a barrier to full participation in the life of Houston by prominent Jewish citizens. Not until the 1970s, for example, did the major downtown law firms actively recruit Jewish lawyers. Members of the all-Jewish firms that arose in response contributed many of the leaders of Houston's thriving Jewish community, as did successful developers and retailers such as Leopold

Maurice Hirsch was central in building the many educational and cultural institutions that now flourish throughout Houston.

Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

and Joseph Meyer, Joe Weingarten, Simon and Tobias Sakowitz, and Ben and Sam Taub. General Maurice Hirsch of the firm of Hirsch and Westheimer lived a long and fruitful life in Houston practicing law, building several businesses, and helping build the Houston Symphony, the Houston Grand Opera, the Museum of Fine Arts, the Houston Ballet, Rice University, and the University of Houston. Historically, Hirsch and other Jewish leaders had a form of dual civic citizenship in Houston; they took seriously their responsibilities in nurturing the causes and institutions of the Jewish community at the same time that they made important contributions to the city as a whole.[19]

A somewhat similar pattern prevailed among African Americans and Mexican Americans in Houston. In the postwar years, non-white citizens long ignored by downtown business interests were beginning to find their own civic voices. As discussed in more detail in Amilcar Shabazz's article in this issue, the successful black businessman, lawyer, and newspaper owner Carter Wesley used his newspaper, *The Informer*, to give voice to the city's growing black communities. For most of the twentieth century, such communities taken collectively had a population large enough to have ranked as a major Texas city, and black Houston generated its own leaders, despite the yoke of segregation. A handful of white philanthropists from Joseph S. Cullinan to Jesse Jones contributed to the development of medical and educational institutions serving the black community. But this limited assistance was designed to make good on the promise of "separate, but equal," not to foster desegregation and equal opportunity. For that, blacks turned to Wesley and other leaders, who mounted sustained challenges to Jim Crow from the 1930s forward.

At least through the 1960s, most

Courtesy Brown & Root

Left to right: George R. Brown, Lyndon Johnson, unidentified man, Tommy Corcoran, and Herman Brown

Houstonians thought of race relations as a question of black and white, but a growing brown population gradually generated its own leaders. In his biography of Houstonian Felix Tijerina, Thomas Kreneck tells a success story quite similar to the stories of those who frequented suite 8F.[20] One of the first prominent Houstonian business leaders of Mexican decent, he displayed values that closely matched those of his counterparts in 8F. In his many business and civic endeavors, he could count on the support of his friend, Bob Smith, who was a part of the inner circle of 8F. While participating in civic initiatives that were aimed at the betterment of the entire city, Tijerina also played an active role in issues that affected primarily Mexican Americans. Tijerina was a pathbreaking leader in an increasingly diverse city, and the growing number of Houstonians with close ties to Latin America assured that others would follow his lead.

As Houston became more diverse, it also became more dispersed, sprawling out over an ever-broader region. Civic leaders in the city's suburbs and in once distinct surrounding cities such as Sugar Land, Katy, and even Galveston, added their voices to issues affecting the entire Houston metropolitan region. Such issues as transportation, pollution control, water supply, and even taxation all had implications for the entire metropolitan area, but public authority remained quite fragmented, with competition by city, county, state, and federal authority levels.

By the 1970s Houston was a maturing city with numerous centers of power and influence. At times these groups spoke with something akin to a unified voice on important issues such as the need to create strong educational and cultural institutions. But at other times, they fought bitterly over issues ranging from political campaigns to the building of a new multipurpose stadium for the city's various sporting events. 8F was not the only suite in town, although it was certainly the most highly publicized. If we insist on continuing to use the phrase "8F crowd" as shorthand for Houston's business/civic elite in the postwar era, we should at least amend it to read "8F and many more."

That said, a closer examination of the ties that bound 8F together tells us much about the operations of the broader business elite of which they were a part. Their power reflected their business ties into the critical industries that fueled the postwar boom. The key economic task of this generation was building prosperous regional companies that made good use of the connections into the national economy established in the Baker era. 8F and many others in this era built local companies that became nationally and internationally competitive. The growth of these compa-

Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

The opening of the Houston Negro Hospital in 1926 was a prime example of white philanthropy for "separate, but equal" facilities.

FELIX TIJERINA AND AN EXPANDING CIVIC ELITE

Born in 1905 in General Escobeda, Nuevo Leon, Felix Tijerina came with his family to the Houston area in 1915 to escape the turmoil caused by the Mexican Revolution. He spent the remaining fifty years of his life building his restaurant business while also making contributions to the betterment of his adopted city. During his years in the city, the Mexican American population grew from an estimated 6,000 (in 1920) to perhaps 50,000 in the late 1950s. Tijerina was one of the first Mexican Americans to play a prominent role in Houston's civic affairs, and he became a potent symbol to many in the city that Houston's version of the American Dream was available to Latinos.

Left to right: Houston Mayor Pro-Tem Phil Hamburger, Mayor Salinas (of Monterrey, Mexico), Felix Tijerina, and R. E. Smith

Tijerina initially found work as a bus boy in one of the original Mexican food restaurants in Houston, and he worked his way up from the bottom to become the proud owner of his own chain of Felix restaurants. Both the food and the owner became Houston institutions.

As Felix and his wife Janie steadily built their restaurants, they looked for ways to make a difference in Houston. From early in their lives in the city, they were involved in a variety of civic causes such as the Boy Scouts that sought to improve the lot of children. Tijerino's most significant project was the "Little School of the 400," a program to prepare Spanish-speaking children to succeed in school by teaching them 400 basic English words. This highly acclaimed program used creative teaching techniques later incorporated in the federal government's Operation Head Start program.

Tijerina exhibited a sense of a dual civic responsibility, to Houston in general and to other Mexican Americans in particular. As a four-time national president of the League of United Latin American Citizens, he extended his influence far beyond Houston. By the time of his death in 1965, the Mexican American population of Houston was greater than the total population of the city had been at the turn of the twentieth century. In local and national affairs, Felix Tijerina put a face on the significant new reality of growing ethnic diversity.

Source: Thomas H. Kreneck, *Mexican American Odyssey: Felix Tijerina, Entrepreneur and Civic Leader, 1905-1965* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001).

Courtesy Tijerina Papers, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

Felix Mexican Restaurant, 1948

nies provided the dynamism that fed Houston's sustained expansion up the ranks of the nation's largest cities.

The Browns and Bill Smith represented the area's booming construction industry, which placed them in the middle of such key economic trends as the growth of the petrochemical industry and the expansion of offshore petroleum production. The Browns also owned a substantial interest in Texas Eastern Corporation, a major competitor in one of the region's and the nation's fastest growing regional industries after World War II, natural gas. Bob Smith was an independent oilman, while Jim Abercrombie was a major supplier of tools and services to the oil industry. Gus Wortham, whose Houston-based American General was one of the largest insurance companies in the Southwest, provided financial services to many of the region's leading firms. Judge Elkins represented the legal/banking interests that traditionally guided Houston's evolution. Will Hobby and his wife Oveta Culp Hobby had extensive political connections and ran one of Houston's major daily newspapers, *The Houston Post*. Jesse Jones was Jesse Jones. This was one very well-connected crowd.

Strong personal and business ties linked the core members of 8F. Wortham was a protégé of Jones and a friend and business associate of the Browns; he had organized American General in 1926 in part with capital supplied by Jones and Judge Elkins. In the 1940s and 1950s, George Brown and Gus Wortham spent long hours together on the Rice University Board of Trustees. Among his friends at 8F, Wortham was the quiet man who could be counted on to do his share behind the scenes. He also set the tone for the group as a whole with an oft-repeated distinction between "business dollars," which had to be watched closely, and "entertainment dollars," which were meant to be spent lavishly.[21]

Judge James Elkins played a central role in the dynamics of decision-making at 8F; all members of the group valued his counsel. This reflected his well-earned reputation as a clear-headed, decisive decision maker, as well as his broad connections into all areas of the Houston political economy through his bank and his law firm.[22] The Browns were clients of his law firm and prominent shareholders in his bank.

The economic interests of the 8Fers

often overlapped, a situation best symbolized by their memberships on various "interlocking directorates." In practice, this meant that many of them met regularly at meetings of various boards of directors of banks and other businesses based in Houston. In general, they belonged to the same downtown businessmen's clubs, where they often ate lunch together. The Browns regularly hosted lunches at a table reserved for them at the Ramada Club. After the meal and a drink or two, those present often strolled back to 8F for a mid-day visit. Many belonged to the same country clubs. They often supported each other's favorite charities and civic causes,

Governor Will Hobby and Jesse Jones

just as they often closed ranks in support of political candidates.

Beyond that, they were good friends who enjoyed spending time together. Many afternoons of cards, trips to Southwest Conference football games, regular hunting expeditions to various retreats, and an annual trek to the Kentucky Derby gave them time to relax out of the public eye and away from the pressures of running their companies. In this fraternity of bosses, these strong-willed men who spent most of their working lives making hard decisions under intense pressure could relax, bantering and cutting up like carefree young men. A closeness and mutual respect gained from long and often fun-filled hours spent together helped smooth over disagreements on the issues of the moment, fostering a cohesion that was crucial to the sustained influence exerted by this group.

The core group of 8Fers stayed active in politics. Each might be asked to ante up a contribution to the campaign funds of political candidates at the local, state, or national levels who had passed muster with the group. Similar contributions could be expected when one of them became highly committed to a particular charity or civic cause. Individuals could pass on a particular candidate or on a request for a charitable contribution, but all recognized that a part of their mystique as a group was their often demonstrated capacity to close ranks behind favored causes.

Politics was their favorite sport. Most were conservative Democrats in the traditional one-party system of Texas, but a real Republican or two could be tolerated. Politicians who sought support at times underwent what amounted to job interviews at 8F, and those who passed could expect vigorous support. The 8F crowd's unofficial endorsement was a potent weapon for annointed "moderate" candidates who sought local and even state offices. Campaign funds, as well as support from Jones' *Houston Chronicle* and the Hobbys' *The Houston Post*, often followed, making such candidates difficult, though not impossible, to defeat.

Despite their many political activities, the 8F crowd knew that a low profile could be useful in politics. As Gus Wortham was fond of saying, "You don't go hunting with a big brass band."[23] But on several occasions, controversy over political disputes spilled out into public. In the early 1950s, 8F supported Roy Hofheinz for two terms as mayor of Houston. But his efforts to raise property assessments on downtown buildings cost him their continued support. In the 1956 mayoral race, the group threw its weight behind Oscar Holcombe, who had previously held the office for eleven terms. Hofheinz responded by going public with the contents of a meeting in 1952 with the Browns, James Elkins, and Gus Wortham, with an open phone line to both the *Houston Chronicle* and *The Houston Post*. Hofheinz later recalled that Herman Brown told Mayor Holcombe he was

Courtesy Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library

Colonel Oveta Culp Hobby

Core Group from 8F

Herman Brown (1891-1962)
Born: Belton, Texas
Moved to Houston: 1940s
Business interests: Brown & Root (construction), Texas Eastern Corp. (natural gas transmission)
Other interests: Southwestern University, Texas Children's Hospital, Brown Foundation

George R. Brown (1889-1983)
Born : Belton, Texas
Moved to Houston : 1926
Business interests : Brown & Root, Texas Eastern Corp.
Other interests : Rice University, Museum of Fine Arts, Brown Foundation

Robert E. "Bob" Smith (1894-1973)
Born : Greenville, Texas
Moved to Houston : 1900s
Business interests : Independent oil, real estate, cattle
Other interests : Houston Symphony Orchestra, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston Astros, Petroleum Club

James Abercrombie (1891-1975)
Born : Huntsville, Texas
Moved to Houston : 1906
Business interests : Cameron Iron Works (oil tools), independent oil
Other interests : Texas Children's Hospital, Pin Oak Horse Show

Gus Wortham (1891-1976)
Born : Mexia, Texas (grew up in Huntsville)
Moved to Houston : 1915
Business interests : American General Insurance
Other interests : Houston Symphony Orchestra, Rice University, Wortham Foundation

Judge James Elkins (1879-1972)
Born : Huntsville, Texas
Moved to Houston : 1917
Business interests : Vinson & Elkins (law firm), First City National Bank
Other interests : University of Houston, University of Texas, St. Anthony's Home for the Aged

Governor William P. Hobby (1878-1964)
Born : Moscow, Texas
Moved to Houston : 1893
Business interests : *Houston Post*, KPRC (radio), KPRC-TV
Other interests : Governor of Texas (1917-1920)

Oveta Culp Hobby (1905-1995)
Born : Killeen, Texas
Moved to Houston : 1928
Business interests : *Houston Post*, KPRC (radio), KPRC-TV
Other interests : Head of WAACs (Women's Auxiliary Army Corps), Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare

through as mayor, and then informed Hofheinz that "we will support you for mayor and all you have to do is call them down the middle."[24] When Hofheinz later disagreed on what constituted "the middle" on issues such as taxes on downtown buildings, he lost 8F's support.

In state politics, Herman Brown took the lead. The state legislature in Austin in the 1950s has never been used in high school civic texts as the model of government of, by, and for the people. Business-led lobbying was so direct, determined, and open that it drew responses that were equal parts outrage, astonishment, and admiration for a job well done. Herman Brown spent much time in Austin while also maintaining there a skilled team of lobbyists. One key issue of concern was the possible impact of organized labor on the traditionally non-union operations of Brown & Root. In an era when the Texas Senate had only thirty-one members, Brown held such sway that an article in the *Reader's Digest* in 1953 quoted an unidentified source that "if Herman Brown is against something, there is no reason for the Senate to meet." His influence was especially strong in shaping a series of antiunion laws at the state level, including a "right-to-work" law that outlawed union membership as a requirement to hold a job.[25]

The Browns' West Texas property at Fort Clark became a frequent weekend retreat for the brothers and their friends in business and government. The ranch was a short plane flight away from the state capital, and Brown & Root's DC-3s regularly ferried passengers from Austin and Houston to Fort Clark. Searcy Bracewell, a prominent Houston lawyer and one-time state legislator who later worked on political issues in Houston for several 8F members, later recalled these leisure/lobbying trips. Of the 31 state senators in the 1950s, "usually fifteen or sixteen or seventeen of them...would come." Frequent guests at these retreats also included political writers for the state's major newspapers. Festive barbecues around a large, spring-fed swimming pool highlighted the activities. Looking back at these gatherings, Bracewell concluded: "Now, in this day and time, that would have been a scandalous situation that Brown & Root had the state senators out to their place....In those days, it wasn't."[26] Indeed, following the custom of the time, reporters never wrote about these get-togethers.

At the national level, the Browns and their friends supported numerous prominent Texas politicians, led by Lyndon Johnson, Sam Rayburn, Albert Thomas (long-time representative of Harris County in the House), and Lloyd Bentsen.[27] The Browns had known their fellow central Texan, Lyndon Johnson, since his first election for the U.S. House in 1937. In that election the Browns supported Johnson's opponent, but they

The Texas Medical Center in the 1950s. Clockwise, from bottom left: Hermann Hospital, Baylor College of Medicine, M.D. Anderson, and Methodist Hospital.

recognized a winner after they were beaten by him. It was as if the brothers purchased a winning colt at a county fair and that colt grew up to win the Triple Crown of politics: the Senate majority leadership, the vice presidency, and the presidency. Their unwavering support of Johnson as he climbed the ladder all the way to the presidency assured the brothers of good political access at the highest levels of national politics. It also focused the intense glare of the national spotlight on their political activities. History plays cruel jokes, especially in the high stakes game of national politics. Today, decades after the end of extraordinarily productive lives, the Brown brothers, when included at all in history books, generally appear as campaign contributors to Lyndon Johnson.[28]

The 8F crowd by no means reached consensus on every political candidate or every significant issue. But they shared with other business leaders a broad vision of Houston and a predisposition to use their collective economic, political, and civic influence to shape the city's future. They had chosen to migrate to Houston to pursue their ambitions. They had lived through the dramatic growth of their adopted city and were strongly committed to making Houston a better place to live. They felt that this required the continued growth of business and more fully developed civic institutions—art museums, symphonies, ballets, operas, universities, medical facilities. Although most of them preferred college football to high culture, they committed both their money and time to these endeavors in the interest of creating a "major league city."

This meant that they were as deeply involved in the city's cultural life as they were in its political life. They often used their wealth and influence for broad social purposes as they aggressively shaped Houston's development. 8F and others supported such initiatives as Jim Abercrombie's impulse to build and support the Texas Children's Hospital. The philanthropic gifts of the 8F crowd (and later their foundations) and many more helped make the Texas Medical Center complex a major new hub of research and jobs in Houston. They supported the efforts of George Brown and Gus Wortham to make the Rice Institute into an elite university, the parallel efforts of fellow Houstonian Hugh Roy Cullen to build the University

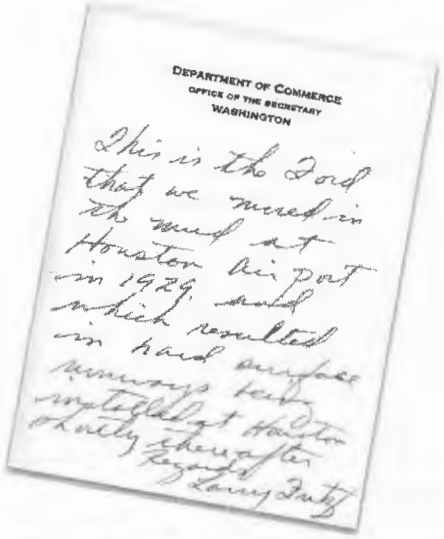
Courtesy Isabel Wilson

Alice Pratt Brown (seated) with husband George R. Brown and friend.

of Houston into an agent of upward mobility for the mass of Houstonians, and the efforts of Herman Brown to support Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas. The opera, the symphony, the Museum of Fine Arts, and many other cultural institutions flowered after sustained watering with money from 8F and many more. This generation took seriously the need to develop in Houston the cultural and educational institutions worthy of a major metropolis.

In addition to substantial personal fortunes, many of the business/civic leaders also had strong-willed wives who took seriously their responsibilities to support good causes. The often-used word "helpmate" does not do justice to their efforts. Some of them made invaluable contributions of their time and energies to help build the city's cultural institutions; at times their work included educating their husbands about the value of such institutions. One such woman was Alice Pratt Brown, the wife of George Brown. Her love of art developed as she grew up in central Texas. She came to Houston with her husband in the 1920s and lived in the city until her death in 1984. She became a steady presence in Houston cultural affairs, with a special interest in supporting the Museum of Fine Arts, Rice University, and her alma mater, Southwestern University. She and other wives of business leaders of this era played critical roles in building and sustaining the high-quality cultural institutions that began to define Houston as a mature metropolis by the 1960s.[29]

Their husbands specialized in another sort of city building, the improvement of the economic infrastructure of their booming city. One of their dramatic and successful initiatives involved the creation of a new airport for Houston. By the mid-1950s, the Houston Municipal Airport (later renamed Hobby Airport in tribute to Governor Will Hobby) had



Improvements to Houston's airport were necessary as early as 1929. After this airplane became stuck in the mud, a new hard surface was installed.

been renovated with a new terminal building. Several regular visitors at 8F and several others discussed the need for a larger airport farther from downtown Houston. These men included, among others, Ralph Johnston, the Brown brothers, J.S. Abercrombie, William A. Smith, and Hugh Roy Cullen. The group commissioned studies of potential airport sites. The studies noted that fog was more intense and lasted longer south of Houston where the existing airport was located than north of the city. A survey conducted during the early 1950s indicated that a site north of Houston was the most appropriate to locate a new jet airport, although no plans developed out of the survey.[30]

In late 1956 and early 1957, through an agent, the group quietly began purchasing land north of Houston. In anticipation that Houston would build a large, modern airport on this site, the company ultimately bought 3,000 acres for approximately $2 million.

After acquiring the land, George Brown and several others involved in the purchase met privately in early 1957 with Mayor Oscar Holcombe and other city officials, including the city attorney, the public works director, the aviation director, and one city council member. The group argued that Houston needed a new jet airport to assure its future growth. They had purchased the land for this new facility with borrowed money and promised to hold it until the city was ready to buy it. The group offered the city of Houston a one-year option on the land extending until February 1, 1958. City officials reacted with skepticism, noting that Hobby Airport had just received a new terminal building.

Mayor Holcombe nonetheless indicated that he wanted the city to go forward with the purchase of the land, but after he lost the next mayoral election, the process broke down. The newly elected mayor, Louis Cutrer was not eager to go forward with the deal. According to Louis Welch, he questioned the motives of the group: "You're not going to tell me that that bunch of high rollers isn't in this for money. They're looking for a profit on this."[31]

After the deadline for the city to purchase the land had passed, Judge Elkins, Gus Wortham, and Herman and George Brown met with Mayor Cutrer and forcefully argued that the city should purchase the land for the airport. They assured the skeptical mayor that they sought the good of Houston, not personal profits. Cutrer finally yielded. By the early 1960s, construction began on Houston Intercontinental Airport, which became Houston's major airport when it opened for operations in 1969. The acquisition of a site for what became Bush International Airport was motivated primarily by civic interest, not the self-interest of those involved.

Another event orchestrated by civic leaders in the early 1960s pulled the city southward toward Galveston while illustrating the power of a full-court press by 8F and many others. When NASA began scouting about for a site to build what became the Manned Spacecraft Center (which later became the Johnson Space Center or JSC), Houston joined other cities in a race to acquire this jewel. The city brought to bear impressive resources in its quest for the JSC. George Brown was more than a close friend of Vice President Johnson, who chaired National Aeronautics and Space Council (NASC), the federal board that advised the president on all aspects of the space program. He also was chairman of trustees at Rice and was appointed in 1961 by Johnson as a civilian member of the NASC. Kenneth Pitzer, Rice's president, had strong ties to Representative Albert Thomas, who chaired the house committee that approved NASA's funding. Thomas and George Brown had been friends since their freshmen year together at Rice in 1916, and he was always eager to help Houston at the federal level. Morgan Davis, then the chairman of the Houston-based Humble Oil & Refining Company, had worked with Brown on other civic projects, and he supplied a critical element in the plan to persuade NASA to select Houston for its coveted project.[32]

The plan was simple. Humble owned a large tract of land south of the city that seemed well suited for the JSC. Davis, who like many officers before him at Humble had strong ties to Rice, agreed to donate this land to the university. After expanding the original tract of land to meet NASA's requirements, Rice offered this land as a gift to NASA. The rest of the proposal came together quickly, and almost before other cities had warmed up for the race for the JSC, Houston had crossed the finish line victorious.

The city benefited greatly from this victory, since the JSC expanded rapidly and became a much-needed source of diversity for a regional economy still dominated by the petroleum industry. Rice gained national attention and new funding for space-related programs. Humble Oil profited from the development of a planned community on land adjacent to the JSC. Brown & Root received a relatively small construction design contract for the JSC, but publicity surrounding this episode boosted the reputation of George Brown, his company, and his university. The nation found a good site for a vital space program that provided a healthy measure of diversification to the regional economy. And Houston's business/civic leadership had another impressive story to tell in the ongoing saga of its "can do" spirit.

In the era of 8F and many others, one important barrier to the status of a major league city could not be so easily cleared. Jim Crow still remained in Houston in 1960. By that time the civil rights movement had defeated the segregationists in the courts and had them on the run throughout the South. The practical question was not if, but when and how Houston would dismantle its Jim Crow system.

Houston's business/civic leaders had resisted taking charge of change on this issue for half a century. They now faced difficult choices. In the deep South, the violent defense of Jim Crow against determined civil rights demonstrators had produced bloody conflicts sent out over the airwaves for all the world to see. In 1960, Houston's black population had grown to more than 215,000, a figure roughly equal to the total population of the city in the mid-1920s. With an eye on the escalating racial conflict in much of the South, white civic leaders in Houston sought to cut their losses by desegregating with as little violence as possible. With the cooperation of most of the city's media, they arranged for drug store counters and some public accommodations to be desegregated with a blackout on the sort of publicity that had assured the presence of aggressive white racists at similar sit-ins in other parts of the South. Administrators at Rice and at the University of Houston followed a similar path, moving as quietly as possible to admit black students.[33]

Chairman of the Board George Brown led the way at Rice in the early

Continued on page 40

Courtesy Brown & Root

A strong push from Brown & Root construction workers made the new Rice Stadium (shown here under construction) ready for the first game of the 1950 season.

SHIP CHANNELS AND AIRPORTS AND SPACECRAFT CENTERS might prove easy enough, but the harsher test of civic leadership proved to be the building of sports stadiums. 8F and many others spent much energy trying to acquire the most obvious symbol in popular culture of a "major league city"—major league sports teams. They also worked hard to build big time athletic programs at local universities. Both required large stadiums, which are expensive propositions. The high visibility of such projects and the mixture of public and private funds often used to build them assured that they would come under intense public scrutiny.

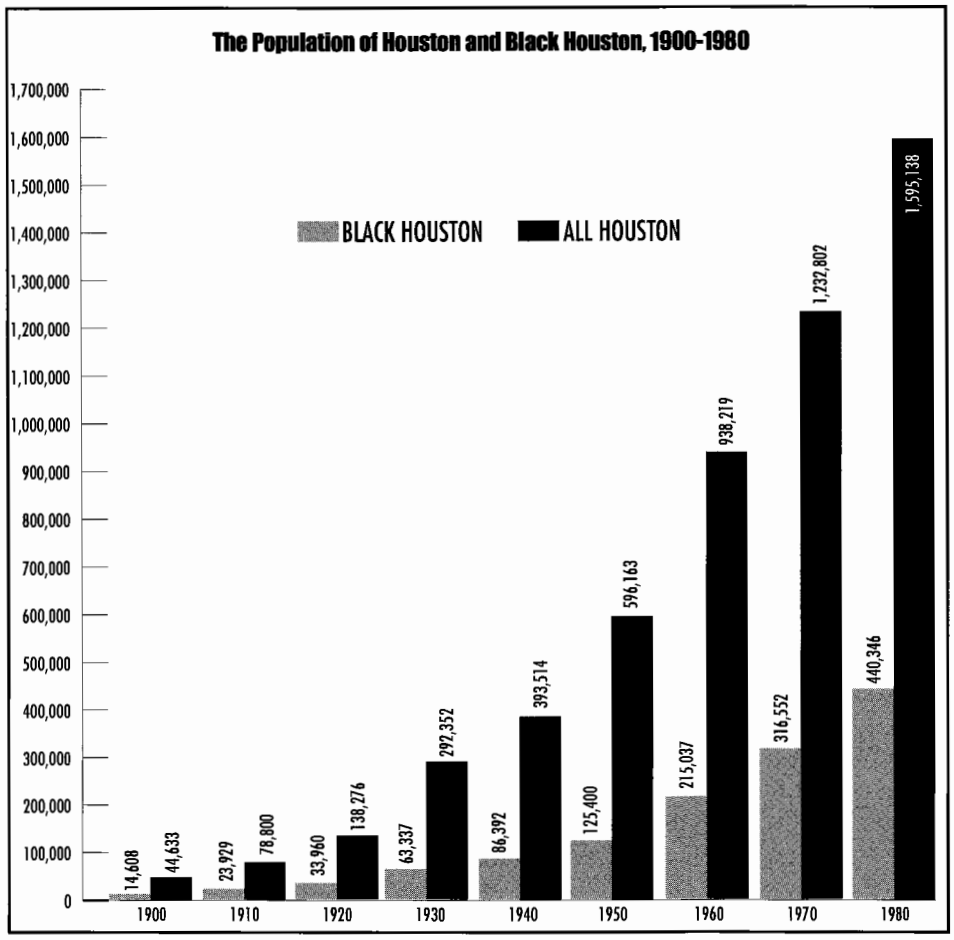
The first postwar effort at stadium building in Houston involved college football. Southwest Conference football was a major sport in these years, and Rice Institute had some of the best teams in its history in the 1940s and 1950s. By the late 1940s, boosters of the Rice football program found the existing stadium's capacity of about 30,000 to be inadequate. As the Brown brothers and Gus Wortham led discussions of the construction of a new stadium for Rice, other groups within the city also began to look into the prospects for building a stadium worthy of a city on the move.

Suddenly, proposals for new stadiums popped up all over. The fact that the city's rival to the north, Dallas, now had a fine new stadium to host the Cotton Bowl, added urgency to the debate. If Rice had a new stadium, the University of Houston, of course, needed one also. The Houston Fat Stock Show needed a new home worthy of its bulls. Glenn McCarthy and others schemed to find a way to build a stadium capable of enticing an existing major league baseball team to move to Houston. Mayor Holcombe and the Houston City Council proposed the construction of "Houston Stadium," a 110,000 seat monster to be used by everyone and to try to attract such events as the Pan American Games.

As 8F and others argued about the best way to move a large stadium off the drawing board, Brown and Wortham finally lost patience. They convinced the Rice board to go it alone. The proposed Rice Stadium quickly grew in size from 50,000 seats to 70,000. Wortham took the lead in selling options to buy season tickets that netted about $1.6 million of the final cost of $2.1 million. The Browns pushed the project forward by agreeing to build the stadium at cost. Brown & Root attacked the job as it had the construction of ships for the war effort, with crews working two ten-hour shifts in a determined nine-month blitz to complete the stadium before the start of the football season in September of 1950. When a reporter asked Herman Brown if the stadium would be finished on time, Brown famously answered with his own question: "Is it a day game or a night game?" He obviously relished the task of proving that his company and his friends at 8F were up to the task. The night game was played on the scheduled date with all the seats full in a mostly finished stadium worthy of a major college football program in a major league city.[34]

1960s. By then he knew that Rice could not gain the federal funds, the faculty, or the administrators needed to become a first-rate university if it remained segregated. An ugly court battle in which former students of Rice sued the university to prevent desegregation tested the resolve of Brown and the Rice board. After Baker Botts lawyers successfully defended the university from the demands of the pro-segregationist former students, Rice finally admitted its first black undergraduate in 1965.[35]

8F and others have been given credit for helping Houston desegregate with relatively little violence. They did this, but only after forces beyond their control forced them to act. A grassroots movement in Houston led by black activists and an ascendant national civil rights movement left them with little choice in the early 1960s. The key civic leaders in this pivotal era were not those who finally stepped aside from the doors of traditionally all-white institutions, but those who actively confronted segregation and shoved open those doors. Their ranks include numerous young black citizens who physically desegregated the institutions that embodied the old Jim Crow system. Included were college students such as Winona Frank, who was among the first black students at Lamar in Beaumont in 1956; Charles Freeman, one of the first black undergraduates at Rice in 1965; Nia Becnel, one of an impressive early group of black students who left a permanent, positive imprint on the University of Houston; and many others.* Such names may never appear in listings of the region's "civic leaders," but they remain useful symbols of those who literally took the first courageous steps in desegregating schools and public accommodations in our region, often at great personal costs.[36] Their actions helped end the long era of formal segregation. Yet efforts to repair the personal and societal destruction wrought by the Jim Crow system and to find ways to create a more open and just racial/social order remained formidable challenges for the region's civic leaders, white and black, after the turbulent 1960s.



The Coming of the Greater Houston Partnership– 1980s te present

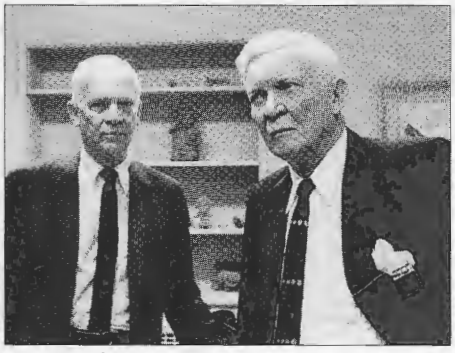
Herman Brown died in 1962; George, in 1983. Between those dates the leaders of postwar Houston steadily passed from the scene. Their reputation for decisive action had been earned in an era that gave them much leeway to decide. Decades of steady economic growth created new jobs, easing social tensions. Only near the end of this era did the racial time bomb of Jim Crow threaten to explode, and 8F and others moved, however reluctantly, to defuse it. A one party political system—and a pro-business party at that—held power for much of their era, and 8F and many more proved adept at using it to their advantage. Although Houston more than tripled in population from 1940 to 1970, for most of these years the city remained compact enough for the downtown business leaders to hold the region together on key issues.

In these years, 8F and others enjoyed a hell of a run, building productive nationally-competitive companies that created jobs by the tens of thousands in the Houston region. Many of the business leaders in this era built their own companies, earning personal fortunes relatively early in their careers that gave them the independence and resources to pursue their civic and political interests. With a swagger backed by real power over much of what mattered, they worked and played hard in an era

** Winona Frank graduated from Lamar and had a long career as a teacher in the Beaumont Independent School District. (Her son, Amilcar Shabazz, has an article in this issue.) Charles Freeman, a National Merit Finalist from Port Arthur, transferred to Texas Southern University in 1967. (He was my suitemate at Rice, and I remained astonished by how little Rice did to prepare him, other students, or the university as a whole for the process of desegregation.) In the spring of 1967, in response to growing activism by black students including Freeman, policemen stormed the dorms at TSU. When an officer died after police fire ricocheted off the dorms, Freeman and four others became scapegoats for the night of violence, and they were tried for inciting a riot that led to the policeman's death. After a hung jury, Freeman went back to school at Lamar and then earned a law degree at the University of Houston (UH). He practiced public interest law until his death at age 54 in 2003. Nia Becnel was not one of the very first black students at UH, which desegregated its undergraduate programs in 1962. But she was one of a dynamic group of black students several years later that helped create the African American Studies Program at UH. Later, as a faculty member of the College of Architecture at UH, she remained active in the study of Houston's Freedmen's Town before her untimely death in 1990.*

Courtesy Houston Chronicle, ©1985

The Lamar Hotel and suite 8F, symbols of Houston's most powerful business and civic leaders, came crashing down on April 14, 1985.



Courtesy Brown & Root

George and Herman Brown

that gave them more admiration than criticism. In civic affairs, they demonstrated an undeniable love of their adopted hometown and a willingness to commit their time and money to its betterment. The legend of 8F has exaggerated both how tightly power was held in postwar Houston and how cohesive the downtown business elite was in those years. But the impact of 8F and many more on Houston's development is difficult to exaggerate.

Those who came after them had a tough act to follow and a much more difficult stage on which to perform. From the 1970s through the end of the twentieth century, the Houston economy went through a cycle of boom, bust, and rebirth that posed severe challenges to the region's business leaders. While tending to the health of their own companies in an increasingly competitive economy, those who cared about Houston's future had to find ways to help diversify the petroleum-led economy that had served the region so well in the past. And they had to do this in a global economy in which deregulation had removed many traditional safety nets.

The last thirty years of the twentieth century witnessed another doubling in the population of the Houston area. This much larger size combined with sprawl out into ever-growing suburbs made the city much more difficult to manage from the perspective of those in the downtown business community. They faced a growing challenge in defining a common interest for the broad region centered on Houston but extending forty or fifty miles in all directions, south to Galveston, north to The Woodlands, west to Katy, southeast to Sugar Land, and (at least on some issues) east all the way to Beaumont and Port Arthur.

They also needed ways to bring a measure of unity to an increasingly diverse population. In the decades after desegregation, white and black leaders alike confronted hard questions involving integration. At the same time, Houston was attracting growing numbers of migrants from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. To move the city forward, Houston's leaders had to find ways to build consensus on key civic issues in a multiracial, multiethnic society. "Embracing diversity," an issue largely neglected before the 1970s, proceeded along numerous avenues. The most pressing challenge was to create a public school system capable of preparing children from a variety of backgrounds to compete as equals in the modern economy. Past leaders in Houston had made great headway in developing institutions of higher education, but they had seldom focused their attentions and resources on the public schools.

Before business/civic leaders could

tackle such issues, they had to find ways to organize civic initiatives. Captain Baker and friends could meet in a hotel coffee shop; 8F could meet in a single hotel suite; 8F and others could meet in a hotel lobby; the expanded leadership needed to move a larger, more diverse city required the grand ballroom.

During the oil boom of the 1970s, prosperity washed aside many such concerns. But when the oil price bubble burst in the 1980s, the region went into a downward spiral as devastating to its economy as the onset of the Great Depression had been. This "oil depression" raised fundamental questions about the city's future. The challenge of recovery attracted the efforts of business and civic leaders who had come to prominence in the boom years. During the flush times of the 1970s, this diverse group had taken to the task of mobilizing the city's resources to sustain and expand the cultural and educational institutions created by earlier generations. But hard times brought harder tasks. How could the "energy capital of the world" cushion itself against the cycles of boom and bust that plagued the petroleum industry? Could other industries be added to the region's growing space and medical industries to build a more balanced regional economy?

The new generation of business leaders was too large to list, too diverse to classify easily. It included bankers and lawyers operating within banks and law firms far different than those of Captain Baker's era; Houston-based developers active around the world with a bit of the dash of Jesse Jones; representatives of Houston-based oil, gas, and oil-related manufacturing with a more corporate tinge than their counterparts in 8F; and a variety of others from emerging new industries from space, to medical, to computers. The downtown business community still dominated, but many others emerged from the numerous "satellite cities" that had grown around Houston by the 1980s. An increasingly ethnically diverse middle class and professional class had a seat at the table, as did representatives of suburbs with futures closely tied to Houston's.

Courtesy Greater Houston Partnership

Robert Onstead (right), 1990 chairman of the Greater Houston Partnership, recognizes Ben Love for his leadership.

One of the best symbols of this generation is Ben Love, whose experiences reached back into the world of Jesse Jones and the 8F crowd and forward into the creation of the Greater Houston Partnership. Like most of Houston's business/civic leaders, he grew up in a small town, the north Texas community of Paris. Love's early and lasting impression of Houston came during World War II. While training to be an Army Air Force navigator at Ellington Field, he came into the city on weekend passes to visit the U.S.O. He came away impressed with Houston's prospects, especially after receiving a grand tour of sorts by older Houston businessmen who, in typical booster tradition, showed soldiers like Love the town while touting it as a good place to make a career after the war.

After flying twenty-five B-17 missions over Europe with the Eighth Air Force, Love returned to the University of Texas and completed his business degree. Then, as so many small-town Texans had done before him, he cast his future with that of Houston. As he succeeded in building his own business and then in becoming a banker, he gradually became more involved in civic affairs. Taken under the wing of 8Fer Gus Wortham, he gained growing prominence in civic affairs as he moved up to become chairman and CEO of Texas Commerce Bancshares, a major downtown bank with a predecessor once owned by Jesse Jones. Love did not have the option to keep old-fashioned "banker's hours" while devoting his time to civic issues. In a rapidly changing banking industry, he worked overtime to meet the rising tide of competition and to build a statewide bank holding company. But he also found time to become involved in a wide range of civic projects. One of these was the reorganization of the city's business/civic leadership to better meet the needs of a city that continued to grow larger, both in population and area, and more diverse, both in ethnic and economic terms.[37]

Love joined a collection of civic leaders who sought to create some sort of "big umbrella" capable of pulling together business/civic leaders in their sprawling city. The Chamber of Commerce had done this at times in the city's past, notably during the hard times of the 1930s. In the 1980s, as in the 1930s, economic development was badly needed, and the Greater Houston Partnership (GHP) evolved to address

The Creation of The Greater Houston Partnership

by Barbara Eaves

The Greater Houston Partnership was founded on January 1, 1989, with the merger of the venerable Greater Houston Chamber of Commerce and the spunky, young Houston Economic Development Council. Six months later, the Houston World Trade Association joined the partnership, raising one umbrella over all three organizations dedicated to promoting trade and development in the Greater Houston Area.*

But the story of boosting the City of Houston began 150 years earlier in 1840, when a community of 2,000 people raised $2,000 to buy wagons, shovels, and mules to clear Buffalo Bayou and build a seaport 53 miles from the sea. And thus began the Houston Chamber of Commerce, the unquestioned premier civic/business organization of a village that grew, over the next century-and-a-half, into the country's fourth largest city, home of a port that became the largest in the nation in terms of foreign tonnage and second-largest in total tonnage.

The preeminence of the Greater Houston Chamber of Commerce was never questioned until the first drop in oil prices in 1981. Real estate took the first hit. When leasing slowed (almost instantly) and buildings on line were not filled, Houston's more aggressive developers, led by Greenway Plaza's Kenneth Schnitzer, began petitioning the Chamber to market the city. This had not been necessary before because Houston had been the fastest growing city in the nation for decades with minimal sales effort. But in 1983, Schnitzer, together with John Walsh, president of Exxon's Friendswood Development Company, and Bob Onstead, chairman/CEO of Randall's Food Stores, raised $7 million and hired an executive who had achieved success running an economic development council on the East Coast. The next year, the Chamber spun off its economic development department as a nucleus and the Houston Economic Development Council (HEDC) was formed. The group's purpose was to recruit companies with jobs that could fill Houston's empty office buildings.

At first, the Chamber and the HEDC seemed to work well together. However, there were mixed feelings in the business community because some saw in the HEDC the future diminution of the Chamber and its traditions. These feelings were exacerbated in 1986 when, with the city feeling the full impact of the second plunge in oil prices, HEDC solicited a second $7 million. This was money many corporate and civic leaders believed otherwise would have gone to the Chamber of Commerce. Indeed, when the Chamber ran deficits in 1987 and 1988, it became obvious that the two groups should not continue operating separately, and several who had maintained ties with both organizations began discussing the possibility of a merger. In addition to Onstead and Walsh (chairman of the HEDC at that time), these included banker John Cater, president of MCorp; Charles Duncan, former president of the Coca-Cola Company and then chairman of the Greater Houston Chamber of Commerce; and another banker, Ben Love, chairman of Texas Commerce Bancshares.

Then in mid-1988, the Chamber's president stepped down, a move that answered one question about merging the two organizations: Who would be president? Until then, there had been two excellent choices: Gerry Griffin, who had run the Chamber for three years after he retired as head of NASA's Johnson Space Center; and Lee Hogan, who had been president of the HEDC since 1986. Everyone agreed that economic development should be the first concern of any chamber of commerce, and, when Griffin retired, agreement quickly and logically emerged that Hogan should run the combined organization.

That left the questions of committee appointments and finances to be resolved. These were sorted out in a series of meetings the small group held in Duncan's home.

Finally came the quandary of a name. What would the new organization be called? The group had been using "greater Houston partnership" as a working title, but the name, "Houston Chamber of Commerce" retained a long, proud tradition. Some favored operating under that historic banner while others felt just as strongly that the newly-combined structure deserved a freshly-minted name. Then Cater suggested, "Here we are talking about the Chamber's 150 year-history. Shouldn't we be focusing, instead, on its 150-year future?" That crystallized thinking and soon after, the working title became the official title for the newly-merged organization: "The Greater Houston Partnership."

On December 31, 1988, Duncan's term as chairman of the Greater Houston Chamber of Commerce expired, as did Walsh's as chairman of the Houston Economic Development Council. The next day, the two groups formally merged to become the Greater Houston Partnership, and Love became its founding chairman.

The Partnership was endorsed enthusiastically by the business community. The new group was focused, it eliminated duplicated effort, and it attracted new business to the city. Early fund raising went extremely well. During its first year, the Partnership supported Houston's regional mobility program and gained reaffirmation of major federal financial support for a rail supplement—despite vigorous local debate on the rail issue. Voters rejected that plan in November. The Partnership also backed a $130 million bond issue to widen and deepen the Houston Ship Channel, which voters saw as a crucial improvement to the city's lifeline.

There always will be issues that generate discussion in a growing city. In Houston, whether these issues concern the port, zoning, annexation, rail or whatever, the Greater Houston Partnership is the vehicle to accelerate their movement toward constructive resolution.

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* At one time, there was talk about adding the Greater Houston Visitors & Convention Bureau to the Greater Houston Partnership. However, the Bureau's use of public funding would have changed the tone of the Partnership which primarily uses private funds.

Barbara Eaves is retired from Texas Commerce/Chase and Compass banks. She occasionally travels and does free lance writing.

this need. The list of its founders and its early presidents reads like a 1990s roll-call of a suite 8F with the walls knocked out to take in the entire eight floor. But the rank-and-file members included a much broader slice of Houston than had been characteristic of previous generations of business/civic leaders. Men and women from businesses large and small were joined in this big tent by people from non-profits, social service providers, and other professions. With some success, the Partnership reached out far beyond the all-white male downtown businessmen who dominated earlier generations of civic leaders.

The key issues faced by the Partnership were at first glance similar to those of earlier eras in the region's history. As always, first came the need for jobs. Amid sustained economic growth in the decades after World War II, job creation seemed on automatic pilot, but the oil bust of the 1980s demolished that illusion. The diversification of the regional economy became a central concern of the Greater Houston Partnership, and the organization's work has reinforced market forces in fostering the emergence of a more diverse set of medical, space, and technical industries to supplement the region's traditional core activities in oil, gas, petrochemicals, and oil-related manufacturing.

Business conditions at the turn of the twenty-first century, however, present stark differences from those during most of the twentieth century, and these differences have profound implications for civic leadership. Many of the potential business/civic leaders in Houston today did not move here to stay as of old, but rather are passing through as they move up the corporate escalators. Will such individuals display the long-term commitment to the city that characterized earlier generations? In addition, an intense merger movement in oil, natural gas, and banking has greatly reduced the number of large companies in these vital industries, further reducing the list of potential difference makers in civic affairs. When, for example, a company with the record of good civic works of Tenneco disappears, the void is most difficult to fill. Can the "foreign" banks that have purchased the major Houston banks reasonably be expected to be their equals as corporate citizens? Finally, a deregulated, globally competitive business world has become meaner and more demanding than the business environment in the postwar boom years. Civic leadership is easier to embrace when your business is on automatic pilot than when it is in a fight to the death for survival in worldwide competition. The future will make its own judgments of Ken Lay's business decisions, but his full to overflowing plate of civic endeavors had to deflect his attentions from his duties at Enron at a critical juncture in his company's development. Ironically, Lay's many civic contributions will probably be buried beneath the rubble of Enron's collapse, a cruel reminder that business leadership in civic affairs has always flowed from the power and resources of successful companies.

In the 1990s, Lay spoke persuasively about the need to build Houston into a world-class city so that world-class companies such as Enron could continue to attract the talented employees they needed to succeed. Despite his company's collapse, we should not dismiss Lay's sentiments. A world-class city, properly understood, requires a business climate that embraces much more than low taxes, lax regulation, and neglected public services. Needed are other factors that could contribute to profitable business operations in the long-term, such as an excellent public school system, clean air and water, efficient transportation, and safe working conditions. Success in a global economy will also accrue to businesses and regions that understand how to take advantage of the skills and ambitions of people from diverse backgrounds. A healthy business climate, much more broadly defined than in the city's past, will continue to be vital to its future.

Aggressive business/civic leadership will continue to play important roles in shaping Houston, but modern leaders face a more difficult set of challenges than their predecessors. The rapid population growth and spectacular expansion of regional-based companies and industries since the heyday of 8F now call for the redoubled efforts of the even larger collection of people and resources encompassed by the GHP. The activities of Houstonian George Mitchell—from the redevelopment of his hometown of Galveston, to his Houston-based oil company, to his planned community at The Woodlands—exemplify the growing economic integration of the Houston Metropolitan Area.

The big umbrella required to hold those who deserve a voice in shaping the future of this sprawling region will need seats for many such leaders from outside the downtown business community. It will need more seats for the growing number of women and for representatives of the "minorities" who are rapidly becoming the majority in the region. But most of all, it will need seats for people with the vision and commitment to identify critical problems and solve them.

As we go about this last demanding task, we would do well to recall the work of those who came before us. They were very good at job creation and at building and sustaining institutions of high culture, higher education, and sports. Looking back, we might wish that they had paid greater attention to other issues such as pollution control, public education, historical preservation, and green space. But we cannot honestly examine their record without noting the mix of commitment, passion, energy, and, yes, money they brought to the civic affairs of their adopted city. If we could bottle that and serve it with lunch at the meetings of the Greater Houston Partnership (and many others), we might unleash a new generation of civic involvement capable of finding creative solutions to the many challenges presented by our ever-growing city. If we become pessimistic about meeting such challenges, we should recall the leap of faith required by those who looked at a small, hot, dirty town on a meandering bayou one hundred years ago and saw the raw material from which they could build a major metropolis. ■

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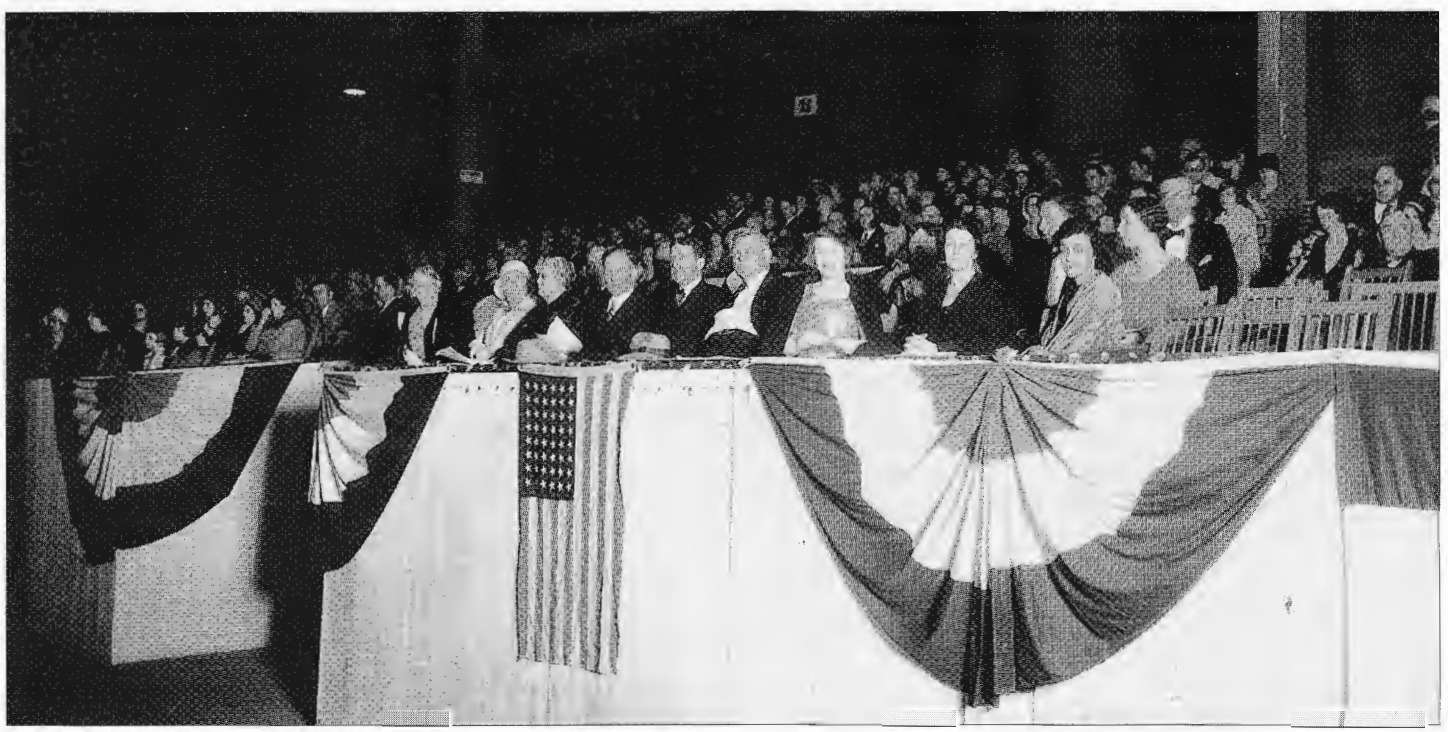
serve them well, Houstonians often took Sunday afternoon strolls near the convention site to watch the construction of "Democracy's Cradle."[11]

While overseeing the building of the new hall, city officials also made countless other improvements to dress Houston in her best "Sunday clothes." Mayor Holcombe proclaimed the first of April as "Clean-Up Week," prodding city residents to beautify their homes by planting flowers and cleaning-up unsightly rubbish. Two days later, 1196 cubic yards of trash had been cleared from Houston streets, but there was still much to be done. In anticipation of an automobile stampede, workers repaired damaged streets and paved additional ones. The city also finalized plans for adorning downtown streets with flags, barrels of ice water, and nearly 200 additional police officers during the convention. New Texas road maps designed "to spread knowledge of the Lone Star State and its history and attractions" along with expanded city parking lots rounded out efforts to welcome out-of-town motorists.

Because Houston lacked hotel facilities to accommodate all convention visitors, a variety of additional housing options also had to be identified and made available. Such accommodations included private homes, dormitories at the Rice Institute (now Rice University), campsites at Galveston beach, and specially built tourist centers that offered shower baths and first aid facilities. Heightened efforts by local and federal officials to enforce Prohibition resulted in the confiscation of several shipments of liquor earmarked for convention bootleggers. To provide convention guests with entertainment they were sure to remember, officials amassed almost a dozen marching bands and made preparations for the "biggest rodeo ever held in the Southwest." In addition, an enormous Hospitality House was built adjacent to the convention hall to provide cold drinks, shaded benches, rest room facilities, writing rooms, telephones, and information booths for visitors unable to gain admittance to the actual convention. Private companies joined in readiness efforts as well, with Southwestern Bell alone spending nearly $500,000 for new telephone lines and booths in the heart of the convention area—the largest, most expensive expansion at that time in the company's history.

With the potential for so many improvements to amplify an already inflated sense of city pride, it is no wonder that one journalist quipped: "The only trouble about having the Democratic Convention in Houston is that Texas will blow so much about it. We shall never hear the last of it." Indeed, by June city officials had already sent thousands of photographs, stories, and propaganda to cities all across the country heralding the finer points of America's newest convention city. Houston was finally ready to capitalize on its newfound notoriety, and its crowning moment lay just over the horizon.[12]

Houston's pre-convention preparations were by no means an exclusively white male affair. Throngs of area women proved indispensable to the city's fund-raising and beautification efforts, prompting the *Houston Post-Dispatch* to recognize that the success of events like the "Me Too" button campaign largely hinged upon the labor of women. While most women's groups lent their energies to the city in such traditional social "housekeeping" activities, others like the Women's Christian Temperance Union preferred to take direct political action. Choosing to place their own political agendas above Houston's quest for national commendation, however, these "cold-water throwers" became easy targets of blame when the city's preparations occasionally went awry. Blacks on the other hand, had no such opportunity



Inside the convention hall

Democratic Party members from across the U.S. filled the streets of downtown Houston.

to move beyond their historically subordinate roles. Although city officials urged the "negro section of the city" to "clean up and beautify" their homes and lawns, the greatest pre-convention demand placed on Houston's black population was for their "dependable" services as "cooks, maids, porters, chauffeurs and other help."

Houston's pre-convention preparations obviously did not occur in a political vacuum. As city officials molded the environment in which delegates would meet, independent political currents simultaneously chiseled the contours of the convention agenda. On the eve of the convention, Al Smith practically had the Party's nomination locked-up with more than 700 delegates in his pocket and another 170 leaning his way. Indeed, Smith was not expected to win by a landslide only because a few states had decided to send uninstructed delegations and others had promised to back favorite sons like Cordell Hull of Tennessee, James Reed of Missouri, and Jesse Jones of Texas. Nevertheless, Smith seemed likely to easily obtain the votes of two-thirds of the delegates that he needed to secure the nomination, and he decided not to attend the convention in Houston.

Although it was customary at the time for presidential candidates to decline attending their nominating conventions, Smith had more significant reasons for opting to be "the most important man, not in town." He had promised the state of New York that he would not "lift a finger" to obtain the Democratic nomination, electing instead to let his public service record make him deserving of the nomination. Moreover, as an associate of the infamous Tammany Hall, Smith did not want to appear to be "grasping for the nomination." Even more importantly, as a candid opponent of Prohibition, Smith did not want to envenom the deep division between "wet" and "dry" factions of the Party. As H. L. Mencken noted, "Al Smith's no hypocrite. He doesn't go out and make people believe he's a rank Prohibitionist when he's a guzzler." While Smith opted to monitor the convention by radio, he did prompt his wife and children to attend the convention. Painted by the press as "dowdy, vulgar . . . and a heavy drinker," Mrs. Smith heeded her husband's request to use the convention to redefine her public image as a "good, simple, and handsome woman."[13]

With hopes for harmony overriding fears of division, an estimated 33,000 visitors began to descend upon Houston in trains, cars, and ships during mid June. The early arrival of such standouts as Congressman Cordell Hull and popular humorist Will Rogers threw Houston into a state of "bedlam" as convention "fever" swept the city. Vendors hawking everything from Al Smith ties embroidered with beer mugs to "buttons as big as saucers" elevated the "carnival-like" atmosphere of the city. Sporting cigars and solemn faces, George W. Olvany declared on behalf of the Tammany delegates, "We came here to nominate for president an Abe Lincoln from the 'Sidewalks of New York,'" as bands serenaded them with the song of the same name.

Al Smith's wife and children soon reached the city as well, bearing reports that the nominee-to-be "was eager . . . to get their observations and impressions of the convention." Having just covered the Republican convention in Kansas City two weeks earlier, members of the "Convention Press Army" also filtered into the city, discovering that in Houston they were celebrities in their own right. Undoubtedly the most anticipated luminary of the convention, however, was famed New York mayor Jimmy Walker. Decked in a purple suit and white Panama hat, Walker stepped off his train to the largest welcoming crowd of the Houston convention. Thousands of female fans fawned over the dapper "Prince of Wales." One adoring follower who "looked old enough to know better" exclaimed "Isn't he just too cute!" With taxis marked "Coliseum Only" and activists hoisting flyers at every passerby, Houston's new convention hall was formally dedicated on June 24 in a lavish ceremony attended by Edith Wilson, wife of the late President. Houston's rise to prominence had finally begun.[14]

National Party Chairman Clem Shaver opened the first session of the convention on June 26 to trite welcoming speeches and rather uneventful logistical Party business. In contrast to the convention's mundane opening, however, famed historian and writer Claude Bowers brought the first day of the Houston convention to a fiery close with a "bombastic, fist-shaking" keynote address that declared Republicans "pillage[d] by law" and "[stole] by stealth." Wearisome presidential nominations filled nearly all of the second day of the convention but not before Permanent Chairman Joseph T. Robinson delivered

a controversial speech denouncing religious affiliation as an inappropriate criteria for political office. A riotous demonstration ensued as avid Smith backers chanted "Al! We want Al!" while southern dry delegations chose to listen to the sounds of "The Old-Time Religion" from their seats. Franklin D. Roosevelt had the honor of prompting thirty additional minutes of political pageantry when formally nominating the "happy warrior, Alfred Smith," bringing the first two days of the Houston convention to a boisterous close as the sounds of "The Sidewalks of New York" faded into the night.

With radio announcers beaming news of Houston to a nationwide audience of eleven million, city residents redoubled their concern with the impression their city was making on convention guests and journalists. Local residents took their first sigh of relief when convention visitors reacted positively to Houston. Whether commenting on the "huge success" of Houston's pre-convention preparations or the many "pretty women" gracing the city's streets, accolades of "marvelous" and "beautiful" were a dime a dozen. Convention guests also spoke highly of the many forms of entertainment the city had prepared. Twice daily, guests were treated to the "grueling contests of cowboy sport" at the convention rodeo held at the Rice athletic field, while visitors seeking more traditional entertainment took in a performance of the "Houston Durbar," a grand novelty show featuring a cast of 600 actors and dancers in such convention boosting numbers as "Democrats . . . Houston Welcomes You." Despite enhanced efforts to enforce Prohibition laws even before the convention began, out-of-town guests had little trouble rounding up liquid entertainment and participating in what one visitor labeled drinking "orgies that would have been a disgrace even in saloon days." Will Rogers summed up this sentiment best: "The whole talk down here is Wet and Dry. The delegates just can't hardly wait till the next bottle is opened to discuss it."[15]

Even with a profusion of cool beverages, few guests found adequate refuge from the scorching Houston heat. As mounted police officers watched their horses' hooves sink into the sizzling pavement outside of the convention hall, delegates within only muttered "cool" when describing tempers, not temperatures. Between convention sessions many Party dignitaries could be seen flocking "coatless and perspiring" to nearby ice trucks for any relief they could find from the incessant heat. After some visitors were treated in Houston hospitals for heat-related illness, Will Rogers noted that "if perspiration was a marketable commodity, the party could pay off the national debt." Journalists at the Rice Hotel similarly reported crowds of "a thousand sweating men and women, panting, laughing, [and] swearing," including one heat-aggravated maverick who fired his revolver in the hotel elevator after losing patience with the maddening hysteria. Indeed, after a horse-mounted woman galloped up the Hotel's staircase to "freshen up" in the powder room, one historian appropriately labeled the heat-exacerbated atmosphere of the Houston convention as a "circus of Texas-style high jinks, hoorahing and high-rolling, highfalutin business and social hobnobbery."[16]

While many visiting women assisted local organizations with entertainment and hospitality activities, others participated directly in the convention. The Democratic National Committee had urged states to fill half of their recently accrued "at large" positions with female delegates, ostensibly giving women "adequate representation" at the Houston convention. However, the addition of a new male "at-large" delegate for every new female one made this change essentially cosmetic, confirming the Party's underlying desire to maintain "prevailing party custom." The scant presence of women on convention committees only confirmed the Party's commitment to this traditional view. What women lacked in formal power, however, they made up with informal lobbying. As one journalist noted, "giggling flappers" could be seen at every street corner rallying behind various causes, the most important of which was Prohibition. Consequently, hundreds of women gathered at regular prayer meetings lasting as long as five hours to plead for divine intervention against Smith's nomination. To them, behind Smith's candidacy loomed "the greatest crisis since the Civil War," and every possible action was justified to prevent such an apocalypse.[17]

Politically-minded women fared much better at the Houston convention than blacks. A lynching in Houston only

Looking north on Main Street around the time of the convention.

six days before the convention became the source of much concern in national newspapers (see the article by Dwight Watson in this issue). Unfortunately, those in charge of the convention did little to ameliorate the lynching's underlying message. As one commentator discerned, the Democratic Party functioned as "a sort of racial church in the South" where "heresy is a crime." As a result, "no half-subdued, half-defiant Negro delegations" could be seen at the Houston convention "for the Negro does not vote with the Democratic Party in the South and Democracy knows him not." Blacks who attended the convention sat in a chicken wired "colored section" within the convention hall, a portion of the otherwise packed facility that was "seldom full." Thus, it was no wonder that one observer felt the Houston convention exuded an atmosphere of the older South, where the only sound piercing the unspoken silence of white superiority was that of black jubilee singers performing slave spirituals—a diversion from the "cotton-growing heat" that was much to the delight of many white convention guests.[18]

Between convention sessions and entertainment activities, the Party Platform Committee met in the "furnace-like" Houston Public Library to hash out its formal views on such controversial issues as agricultural relief, tariff rates, and Prohibition enforcement. After hours of heated debate, Southern "bone-dry" factions and "moist" Northern delegates agreed on a comprise plank that called for "an honest effort to *enforce*" the 18th amendment—a deliberately ambiguous provision that allowed individual Party members to maintain their own views on the real need for Prohibition. While the Party's Prohibition plank could be seen as "a passive endorsement of the status quo" designed to promote "harmony" and "the success of the Democratic Party," the same could not be said for the plank on agriculture. To address the plight of America's farmers, the Platform committee adopted an assertive plank calling for federal support in the form of loans and cooperatives. Moreover, the plank on tariff rates signaled "a remarkable abandonment by the Democrats at Houston of their historic position." The Party voiced Republican-like support for more protective rates, reflecting the increasing industrialization of the South and the desire to protect the interests of big business. Indeed, after the Platform Committee proceeded to abandon a League of Nations plank for first time since the Wilsonian era, one delegate remarked, "McKinley could have run on our tariff plank and Lodge on our plank on international relations." Still, by advocating state rights and refusing to adopt an anti-lynching plank as the Republicans had done two weeks earlier, the Houston Democratic Platform was distinct, signaling a redefinition of "traditional Democratic doctrine" that shunned "the received wisdom of the Wilsonian Bryanite Democracy."[19]

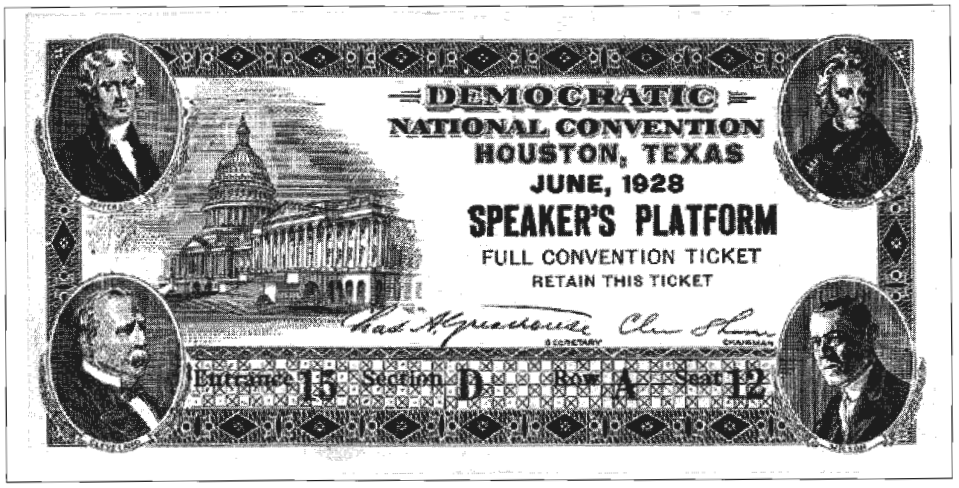
On its third day, the convention approved the Platform by a voice vote, marking the first time an amendment roll-call vote was unnecessary since 1912 and the first time a minority report was not filed since 1882. The most animated demonstration before the vote came when the name of Jesse Jones was placed in nomination. Southern delegates paraded around the convention hall amidst falling balloons and enlisted the sights and sounds of the Old Gray Mare Band—a phalanx of musicians and donkeys led by Mrs. Katie Parks. After thirteen minutes of horsing around, Chairman Robinson kindly declared that "the lady will please remove the cavalry from the hall." On the first roll call for the presidential nomination, Smith received 724⅔ votes, falling just short of the 733⅓ needed. When it became apparent that no other candidate had received enough votes to challenge Smith, many delegates abruptly switched their votes in favor of Smith, making a second ballot unnecessary. Smith won with a total of 849⅔ votes, becoming the first Roman Catholic nominated for president by a major political party in American history.

In heartfelt jubilation, Smith's wife waved a green handkerchief while calling her husband's nomination "the happiest moment of my life." Careful to avoid exciting the edgy nerves of Smith's opposition, the Tammany delegation

kept its euphoria at a polite and modest level. As one reporter noted, "the band never tooted 'Tammany' at all and they didn't even spring the side walk piece until late in the show when everybody was fed up with Dixie." After the Party had overcome the division that Smith's nomination had threatened to incite, Will Rogers wryly concluded: "Democracy has found a candidate, now they are looking for a drink."[20]

In contrast to the capacity crowds of the first three days, the convention hall was only two-thirds full on the fourth and final day for the nomination of Smith's running mate. Although several states offered favorite sons, or a favorite daughter in the case of Wyoming's Nellie Tayloe Ross, few doubted that Senator Joseph Robinson of Arkansas had the vice presidential nomination all but wrapped-up. Southern, Protestant, and "dry," Robinson offset Smith's nomination by appealing to "championed Prohibitionists, who thought of Tammany as a uniquely wicked organization" and "whose heritage included a deep substratum of hatred and fear of Roman Catholicism." Unsurprisingly, Robinson secured the nomination handily with 1035½ votes. Noting the larger significance of Robinson's selection, the *Arkansas Gazette* pronounced: "The action of the Houston convention is of historic significance because the nomination of Senator Robinson means that after sixty-four years of virtual exile from such honor, the South again furnishes one of the two men named as standard bearers by a major party."

Before the final gavel sounded, a brief acceptance telegram from Smith was read to the remaining delegates. After listening to the Party platform over the radio and later receiving confirmation of his nomination from Robinson, Smith made his views on Prohibition unquestionably clear so delegates might select another candidate if they found his position undesirable. Beaming with Platform lingo, Smith proclaimed that "[c]ommon honesty" required "fundamental changes in the present provisions for national Prohibition." Not wishing to disturb the harmony that had dominated the proceedings, Franklin Roosevelt quickly brought the convention to a close. As



Platform Pass for the 1928 Convention

one journalist noted, "The Democratic donkey with a wet head and wagging a dry tail left Houston."[21]

Most Party members left Houston feeling that the convention was enormously successfully, having avoided the potential rift between the "wet reactionaries of the east" and "the dry anti-Tammany progressives of the south." Some scholars have argued that Smith's placid nomination was attributable to a feeling of exhaustion lingering from the 1924 convention, to his unrivaled national preeminence, and to a belief that he was the Party's only chance to win the November election. Others have concluded that the Party never truly believed Smith could win the Presidency, feeling instead that they "must nominate him and get it over with or he would be a menace for the next twenty years." This latter group of historians has interpreted Smith's nomination as "the product of an ideological and sectional cease-fire rather than of a genuine healing of the wounds of 1924."

Any concord prevailing at Houston proved short-lived as Herbert Hoover defeated Smith decisively four months after the convention, garnering 444 electoral votes to Smith's 87. Moreover, Smith did not even carry his home state of New York and lost the southern "rim" states of Texas, Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina, and Florida. As one writer noted, Smith's defeat marked "the most serious crack in the Solid South since its inception." Only states with the highest percentage of rural areas, the greatest dependence on one crop agriculture, and most importantly, the highest percentage of blacks remained loyal to the Democratic Party. In a contest where the Republican nominee had "promoted Negroes to minor posts in charge of white clerks in his department" and where the Republican platform called for federal anti-lynching laws, preservation of southern racial hierarchy ultimately overshadowed secondary concerns over "Rum and Romanism,"[22] at least in the deep South if not in the southern border states.

In the end, the lasting significance of the 1928 Democratic National Convention to local residents did not lay in the realm of politics. They had viewed the convention as their city's long-awaited "coming out party," and the decisive and divisive defeat of the Democrats in the November general election was of little consequence. In six short months, Houston had transcended the boundaries of regional notoriety to become a city of truly national prominence. As one journalist proclaimed: "No longer will Houston be known but to a few. Her fame will be universal." In preparing for a convention when time was of the essence, the citizens of Houston gained a distinction that proved timeless.[23] The city emerged from the national spotlight with an enhanced reputation as a city on the move, one with "can do" leaders such as Jesse Jones who could be counted on to push Houston to even greater future prominence. ■

ENDNOTES

8F and Many Many More

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9 See Smith, *Emancipation,* 344-50, for a description of the environment that faced black lawyers like Wesley in the early twentieth century; and Bessent, "The Publisher," chapter 2.
10 On July 24, 1928, a United States District Judge declared that the lawsuit of Leonard D. Ingram, a Creek freedman, against Wesley, Atkins, and another

attorney, Charles A. Chandler, was without merit. In *Ingram v. Wesley et al.*, 169 Okla. 248, 36 P. 2d 720, 1934 Okla. LEXIS 315, the Supreme Court of Oklahoma affirmed the court's finding that Ingram's "suit to recover what he had lost at the hands of these negro attorneys was wholly wanting in equity." This 1934 decision appears to have ended Ingram's legal battle against Wesley and his co-counsel. I am grateful to Al Brophy for his assisting my limited study of Wesley's Oklahoma years. The subject remains a matter ripe for deeper investigation.

11 Quotations are from an excerpt of Lorenzo Greene's diary published in Beeth and Wintz, eds., *Black Dixie*, 140, 149.

12 Gunther, *Inside U.S.A.*, 868.

Democratic National Convention

1 Although the 1912 Democratic Convention was held in Baltimore and the 1904 and 1916 Democratic Conventions were held in St. Louis, no national party convention had been held in the deep South since the deadlocked Democratic Party meeting at Charleston, South Carolina, in 1860. In that year, conflict over slavery prevented Democratic Party members from settling on a single candidate, leading northern, anti-slavery factions to nominate Stephen A. Douglas for President while southern, pro-slavery enclaves selected John C. Breckinridge. For more on the historical context of the 1928 convention see John Boles, *The South Through Time: A History of an American Region* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995), 285, 288.

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17 Mayor Oscar Holcombe to Julia Ideson, June 23, 1928, DPNCC, Scrapbook vol. IV, HMRC; "Delegates and Alternates to the Democratic National Convention" in DPNCC, Folder 3, HMRC; National Woman's Party, "Immediate Press Release, June 29, 1928" in DPNCC, Scrapbook vol. IV, HMRC; Woman's National Democratic Club, "The Bulletin," HMRC.

18 While black delegates were influential in securing the nomination of Herbert Hoover in the 1928 Republican National Convention, blacks did not begin to play a significant role in Democratic convention politics until the 1936 Democratic National Convention held in Philadelphia.

19 "Petition for Referendum Vote on 18th Amendment" in DPNCC, Scrapbook vol. IV, HMRC; Felix Ray, "Harmony Hall," *New Republic* 55 (July 18, 1928): 224. Platform excerpt on Prohibition taken from Kirk H. Porter and Donald Bruce Johnson, comps., *National Party Platforms* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1966), 277. Quote regarding the Party's tariff plank obtained from T. R. B., "Washington Notes," *New Republic* 55 (July 18, 1928): 225.

20 James Cannon, Jr., "Al Smith–Catholic, Tammany, Wet," *Nation* 127, no. 3287 (July 4, 1928): 9; Barry Hankins, "The Fundamentalist Style in American Politics: J. Frank Norris and Presidential Elections, 1928–1952," *American Baptist Quarterly* XI, no. 1 (1992): 76–95; Edmund A. Moore, *A Catholic Runs for President: The Campaign of 1928* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1956), 102–3; Michael S. Patterson, "The Fall of a Bishop: James Cannon, Jr., Versus Carter Glass, 1909–1934," *Journal of Southern History* XXXIX, no. 4 (1973): 493–518; Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., ed., *1910–1945: From Square Deal to New Deal*, vol. 3 of *History of U.S. Political Parties* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1973), 1827.

21 "The Republican and Democratic Candidates–1928," *Congressional Digest* 7, no. 9 (September 1928): 225.

22 Paul T. David, Ralph M. Goldman, and Richard C. Bain, *The Politics of National Party Conventions*, rev. ed. (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1972); Allan J. Lichtman, "They Endured: Democrats Between World War I and the Depression" in *Democrats and the American Idea: A Bicentennial Appraisal*, ed. Peter B. Kovler (Washington, D.C.: Center for National Policy Press, 1992), 239; Herbert S. Parmet, *The*

Democrats (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1976), 40; Nicol C. Rae, *Southern Democrats* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 38–39.

23 R. L. Dufus, "Houston Again Makes History," *New York Times Magazine*, June 24, 1928, 7, 20.

* *These endnotes are an abbreviated version of the original. For further information, please contact the author at jgillum@austin.rr.com.*

1928 Robert Powell Lynching

1 For a discussion of Houston's image as an emerging Mecca for blacks see, James Sorrelle, "The Darker Side of Heaven: The African American Community in Houston, Texas, 1917–1945 (PhD diss., Kent State University, 1980); and Robert Bullard, *Invisible Houston: The Black Experience in Boom and Bust* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1987), 1–20.

2 For a discussion of the history of lynching, see Ida Wells Barnett, "Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases" (1892), in *Southern Horrors and Other Writings: The Anti-Lynching Campaign of Ida B. Wells, 1892–1900*, ed. Jacqueline Joues Royster (1892; repr., Boston: Bedford Books, 1997), 49–68; Walter White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929); Arthur F. Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (New York: Dover Publication, Inc., 1970). This book was first published by the University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill with the cooperation of the Southern Commission on the Study of Lynching.

3 Ida B. Wells [Barnett] quoted in Leon Litwack, *Trouble In Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 299. For a full discussion, see Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

4 White, *Rope and Faggot*; Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching*.

5 *Houston Chronicle*, July 15, 25, 1917; *Houston Press*, August 24, 25, 1917; Robert V. Haynes, *A Night of Violence: The Houston Riot of 1917* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976); Edgar A. Schuler, "The Houston Race Riot, 1917," *Journal of Negro History* (July 1944): 300–38.

6 The term conservative is being used to describe both political and economic factions in Houston. The struggle for control of Houston was played out in the stripes against its black citizens, as both groups tried to shape the city's growth and direction. For a discussion of the ideological framework of the racist mind, see I. A. Newby, *Jim Crow's Defense: Anti–Negro Thought in America, 1900–1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965); Barry N. Schwartz and Robert Disch, *White Racism: Its History, Pathology and Practice* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1970); Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*; John Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

7 Adam Ferrer, "Democratic National Convention of 1928," The Handbook of Texas Online, http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/view/DD/wbd1.html. Also see "Jones Single-handedly Landed National Convention," *Houston Chronicle*, January 15, 2001, sec. A.

8 Bascom Timmons, *Jesse H. Jones, The Man and the Statesman* (New York: Holt, 1956), 136–45, quoted in David McComb, *Houston: A History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 84.

9 "Houston Wins the 1928 Dem Conventiou," *Houston Chronicle*, January 12, 1927.

10 Houston Police Department Annual Report, 1925. These reports are archived at the Houston Police Department Museum, Aldine Mail Route and Rankin Road, Houston, Texas, and the Houston Public Library, Texas Regional History Collection.

11 Merline Pitre, *In Struggle Against Jim Crow: Lulu B. White and the NAACP, 1900–1957* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 5–9.

12 Don E. Carlton, *Red Scare!: Right-wing Hysteria, Fifties Fanaticism, and Their Legacy in Texas* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1985), 10.

13 Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915–1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 237–39. Jackson estimates that there were approximately 8,000 Klan members in Houston and 190,000 Klan members in Texas from 1915–1944.

14 Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 74.

15 John H. Crooker, Jr. and Gibson Gayle, Jr., *Fulbright & Jaworski: 75 Years, 1919–1994* (Houston: Fulbright and Jaworski, 1994), 38. This is a firm history obtained from Fulbright & Jaworski of Houston.

16 Ibid.

17 Joe R. Feagin, *Free Enterprise City: Houston in Political-Economic Perspective* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 120. See also, McComb, *Houston*, 113; Carlton, *Red Scare*, 10–11.

18 Many of Houston's business elite refused to join the Klan because it was bad for business; however, they held many of the same racial views as the Klan and apparently felt that a harsh racial stance would hurt their business dealings. The politics and economics of the city were in black and white. To be successful they employed a cautious traditional position.

19 Feagin, *Free Enterprise City*, 120. For a discussion of Ku Klux Klan activities in the 1920s, see McComb, *Houston*, 112–13; Jon C. Teaford, *The Twentieth-Century American City: Problem, Promise and Reality* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 61–62; Casey Greene, "Guardians Against Change: The Ku Klux Klan in Houston and Harris County, 1920–1925," *The Houston Review* X, no. 1 (1988): 3–20. For a thorough discussion of the second coming of the Ku Klux Klan in America during the 1920s, see Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City*; Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York: Touchstone, 1987), 119–248; Nancy MacLean, *Behind The Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and Pitre, *In Struggle Against Jim Crow*, 18.

20 "New Policemen Are Being Drilled for Convention," *Houston Chronicle*, June 19, 1928, sec. A.

21 Ibid.

22 The HPD increased its ordinance repeatedly during the early twentieth century. Most of the officers bought their own weapons and HPD did not control sidearm caliber, therefore it was common to carry a large caliber sidearm in 1928.

23 McComb, *Houston*, 112.

24 "Heavenly Houston Turns Hellish and Hunnish as Mobbists Stage Pastime," *The Informer*, June 23, 1928, sec. 1. This clipping and others that are cited below were found in the NAACP Papers, Group I, Box 347, Lynching Folder, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (This source will hereafter be cited as Lynching Folder, NAACP Papers.)

25 *The Informer*, June 23, 1928; *Houston Chronicle*, June 23, 1928. Twenty years later, *The Informer* published statistics that put this episode in broader perspective, reporting that in "the period between 1882–1936, 345 Negroes were lynched in the State of Texas." See "Texas gets Anti-Lynching Law," *The Informer*, October 8, 1949, sec. I.

26 *Houston Post-Dispatch*, June 21, 22, 1928; *Houston Chronicle*, December 22, 1929; *The Informer*, June 18–21, 1928. See also McComb, *Houston*, 113; Denny Hair, "A History of the Houston Police Department." A personal copy of this report was provided to the author by the Houston Police Department.

27 "A Blow to Houston," *Houston Chronicle*, June 23, 1928, Lynching Folder, NAACP Papers.

28 "Jesse H. Jones Flays Lynching of Negro Slayer," June 2, 1928, Lynching Folder, NAACP Papers.

29 "They Are Ghouls," *Houston Press*, June 20, 1928, Lynching Folder, NAACP Papers.

30 Ibid.

31 "Houston Policemen Face Line-Up in Lynching Case," *New York Evening Post*, June 21, 1928, Lynching Folder, NAACP Papers.

32 "Odor of Lynching Greets Delegates to the Democratic National Convention," *Amsterdam News*, June 27, 1928, Lynching Folder, NAACP Papers.

33 "Lynch Law in Houston," *The News* (New York City), June 30, 1928, Lynching Folder, NAACP Papers.

34 The NAACP denounced the segregation of the black delegates.

35 *Amsterdam News*, June 26, 1929, Lynching Folder, NAACP Papers.

36 The twentieth century crusade for federal anti-lynching legislation was thwarted by Dixiecrats. Northern Democrats tacitly ignored lynching as a southern problem. While condemning it, they seemed to view it as a necessary evil for the sake of party unity. Federal anti-lynching laws were never passed. Texas' Fifty-first Legislature finally passed anti-lynching legislation in October 1940, making lynching a crime punishable by imprisonment or death. See "Texas Gets Anti-Lynching Law," *The Informer*, October 8, 1949, sec. I.; Randall Kennedy, *Race, Crime and the Law* New York: Pantheon Books, 1997), 55–58.

37 *Houston Press*, April 12, 1929 and May 11, 1929; *Houston Chronicle*, April 17, 1929.

38 "Mounted Traffic Force Abolished Chief McPhail," *Houston Chronicle*, May 11,1929, sec. 1, 1. Also, "Taps Sounded for Mounties: McPhail Definitely Abolishes Horse Police After Traffic Test," *Houston Press*, May 11, 1929, sec. 1, 1.