Alive With a Vengeance: Houston's Black Teachers and Their Fight for Equal Pay

William Henry Kellar

One of the least known but most significant chapters in the civil rights history of Houston, Texas, occurred in 1943 when the Bayou City's oldest segregated institution, its public school system, provided the battleground for one of the first major victories in the struggle for equal rights in the city. During the first half of the twentieth century, African Americans in Houston endured many forms of racial discrimination including a system of educational separatism in the city's public schools. Houston's schools had always been segregated institutions and, in fact, had provided the pattern and precedent upon which residents established the city's Jim Crow laws during the early years of the twentieth century.

Under this system of educational Jim Crow, African-American teachers taught African-American students and white teachers taught white students in separate schools.[1] Not only were these schools separate and unequal, but so too was the salary schedule for the teachers and principals of those schools. Indeed, southern states had a long-established custom of paying black teachers from 30 percent to 50 percent less than their white colleagues who possessed the same qualifications. During World War II, Houston's black teachers, tired of the discriminatory practice, joined in the widening push for pay equalization. This story is important, not only because black teachers achieved their goal – equal pay with white teachers – but also because of how their struggle became a part of the wider campaign for equal rights in the South.

In order to understand the historical context in which Houston's African-American teachers pursued their quest for pay equalization, it is important to note that, from 1935 to 1950, the National Association for the

William Henry Kellar is Visiting Assistant Professor of History and Director, Scholars' Community at the University of Houston.

Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) sponsored a host of lawsuits on behalf of teachers across the South as part of a broad strategy of litigation adopted by that civil rights organization during the 1930s. The NAACP had hired Charles Hamilton Houston in 1935 to coordinate its legal campaign. Houston, who left his post as academic dean at Howard University to take the NAACP position, believed that an attack on the South's racially segregated schools was the most important place to press the courtroom struggle against Jim Crow.

Houston viewed segregated schools as detrimental to African Americans not only because of the inferior education they often provided but also because they stood as a symbol of black subjugation. He determined that the most effective way to attack segregation in schools was to focus initially on two areas of racial discrimination, the dual pay scales under which African-American teachers received less than their white colleagues and the refusal of southern universities to open their graduate and professional programs to African-American students. The evidence in these areas was clear, apparent, and straightforward. Also, a string of victories in these types of cases might raise the cost of maintaining separate schools and would lay the groundwork for the wider campaign against racial segregation to follow.[2]

The NAACP implemented this strategy beginning in 1935. During the next fifteen years, the organization's attorneys, led by Thurgood Marshall, focused their attention on fighting for schoolteachers to receive the same salary as white teachers with the same qualifications and for an end to racially segregated graduate schools at southern universities. In addition, many state and local NAACP chapters joined the fight against racial discrimination in education and on other fronts, including the battle against the "white primary" in Texas.[3] The pay equalization cases, however, provided great opportunities for NAACP legal staffers to litigate because of a large pool of potential plaintiffs – mostly female and, unlike males, not subject to the wartime draft – and because there was somewhat less resistance in salary cases due to the fact that the primary issue was money and not the "symbolism of segregation."[4]

After some protracted periods of litigation, Marshall and the NAACP attorneys began to achieve success in many of these lawsuits, particularly in large cities. However, while the settlements increased the financial cost of maintaining segregated schools, they did not achieve the objective of making the cost prohibitive. Pay equalization in Maryland in 1941 cost the state $412,000. The U.S. Office of Education estimated that southern states would have to spend some $26 million per year to bring the

salaries of African-American teachers in line with similarly qualified white teachers and an additional $9 million annually to equalize pupil-teacher ratios in the segregated schools. Part of the problem was that the NAACP simply did not have the resources to take the campaign to the individual rural communities. Also, some school districts found ways around the court settlements by implementing rating systems and merit pay to avoid bringing African-American teachers' salaries in line with white teachers'.[5]

Nevertheless, by 1943, the NAACP had suits filed in cities across the South including Birmingham, Little Rock, Tampa, Palm Beach, Miami, and Atlanta. Black teachers in Dallas also entered the fray and took action that would have important ramifications for their counterparts in Houston. By seizing the initiative and filing a suit against the Dallas Board of Education and the City Superintendent of Schools, the Dallas teachers established a Texas precedent to which the Houston teachers could point in their own case for pay equalization. In the suit, the plaintiffs, Thelma E. Paige and the members of the Dallas Negro Teachers Alliance, a group established specifically for this action, charged that the pay scale for black teachers was based on race. The Dallas teachers had asked the school board in January 1943 to equalize their pay, but the school board denied their request. In early March, Federal Judge William Atwell decreed that the 235 black teachers of the Dallas school system would receive the same pay as their white colleagues. The salary increase would begin on March 1, and would be spread out over a period of time, with total equalization of pay by September 1945.[6]

One of the first encouraging signs of change for Houston's black educators came on January 25, 1943, in the form of a decision by the Houston school board to increase the pay of all teachers, secretaries, office workers, and maintenance workers who earned less than $2,000 per year. Although some 840 teachers received this salary increase, a local newspaper noted that school officials had made no comments regarding equalization of pay based on experience and qualifications. However, at least it represented a color-blind pay increase.[7]

Evidence suggests that, although Houston had provided one of the better school systems for blacks in the South, the conditions never reached the constitutionally mandated level of "impartial provision" and the gap in teachers' salaries had continued to widen over the years.[8] Overcrowding, lack of funds, and a general state of disrepair plagued black schools and must have added to the despair of the underpaid African-American teachers.[9] During the early 1920s, Houston's black leaders and the black press began to

express their dismay over the shameful conditions of the city's African-American schools. The *Informer*, the leading news publication in Houston's African-American community at the time, published a series of articles and photographs of Houston's black schools and criticized officials for allowing those facilities to deteriorate into "fire traps, health menaces and abominations both in the sight of man and God!"[10]

However, some positive changes had begun to take place during the mid-1920s, changes that included Houston's black schools. Between 1924 and 1929, due to a construction and renovation program instituted by a new superintendent, Edison E. Oberholtzer, the building capacity of the African-American schools in Houston more than tripled. Houston's population, both white and black, grew rapidly during these years, and so too did the enrollment in the city's public schools (see Table 1). During the 1924–1925 school year, the number of students matriculating at Houston's "colored" schools reached 8,293. By the 1929–1930 school year, it had jumped to 12, 419.[11]

Table I

ENROLLMENT IN HOUSTON'S PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM
1900 – 1950

DATE	TOTAL	WHITE*	PERCENT	AFRICAN-AMERICAN	PERCENT
1900	6,380	NA	NA	NA	NA
1910	12,151	8,586	70.7	3,565	29.3
1920	26,015	19,495	75.0	6,520	25.0
1930	56,612	44,193	78.1	12,419	21.9
1940	65,198	51,050**	78.3	14,148**	21.7**
1950	84,866	66,196**	78.0	18,167**	22.0**

Source – Houston Independent School District (HISD), Pupil Accounting Office

* Hispanic students were counted as "white" until 1970.
**HISD estimate

During the late 1920s, then, education for black students in Houston began to improve dramatically. By 1930, Lorenzo J. Greene, an associate of famed African-American educator Carter G. Woodson, proclaimed that Houston had "the best Negro school system in the South." The city could boast that it provided its "colored" population with a junior college, three high schools, one junior high, seventeen elementary schools, and more than 400 teachers, "the largest colored teaching personnel of any city in the entire South."[12]

Just as black Houstonians began to notice significant improvements in their public schools, the Depression hit the city and brought a corresponding relapse upon its school system. Although the Depression did not affect Houston's petroleum-based economy as severely as other large industrial communities, the entire school district felt the effects of the financial crash, and racial discrimination again played a role in the allocation of educational funds. In 1933, the city school board found it necessary to reduce spending, including teachers' salaries. But, here again, African-American teachers had to bear an unequal share of the burden. White teachers who earned $1,000 or more annually received salary cuts of between 6 and 8 percent, while the pay of those who made less than $1,000 remained the same. All black teachers who earned between $700 and $1,900 per year found their pay cut by 6 percent. Thus, all black teachers had to suffer pay reduction while those of their white colleagues who were on the low end of the salary scale did not.[13]

Another example of the school district's racially discriminatory funding practices occurred in 1934, when the superintendent, E. E. Oberholtzer, applied for a $1.6 million construction and renovation grant from the federal government. When the district received the federal funds in 1935, the Board announced plans for the construction of five new schools for white students but made no mention of any plans to provide relief for overcrowded black facilities. These discriminatory practices doomed the city's African-American students to attend schools that continued to be filled to capacity and staffed by teachers who continued to receive less remuneration for their efforts than their white colleagues in the Houston public schools.[14]

During the late 1930s, the approach of World War II initiated a period of rapid and profound change in Houston. Economically, the city became a place of both national and international importance. Industrialization and the development of the petrochemical industry created thousands of jobs that attracted thousands of new residents to the city. The

combined effects, first of the Depression, and later, the influx of people during the World War II years, further added to the disparities between the public schools on opposite sides of the color line. Predictably, the flood of humanity pouring into Houston severely strained the city's resources and its institutions, including the public school system (see Table 1 and Table 2).[15]

Table 2

AFRICAN-AMERICANS AS PART OF HOUSTON'S POPULATION 1900 – 1950

DATE	TOTAL POPULATION	AFRICAN-AMERICAN	PERCENT
1900	44,633	14,608	32.7
1910	78,800	23,929	30.4
1920	138,276	33,960	24.6
1930	292,352	63,337	21.7
1940	384,514	86,302	21.4
1950	596,163	125,400	21.0

In the midst of this economic growth and population increase, Houston's African-American community, including its educators, continued the fight to break out of the racial caste system of Jim Crow segregation. Although most of the district's schools continued to suffer from overcrowding during the 1940s, black Houstonians found many of their schools literally bursting at the seams. African-American educators managed to cope with these deficiencies and continued to teach under adverse and unequal conditions in Houston's segregated public schools. However, perhaps one of the most galling discrepancies among the many which black teachers had to accept was the continuing gap in salaries between themselves and white teachers in the school district.[16]

The success of the Dallas Negro Teachers Alliance, in March 1943, prompted some activity among black educators in Houston. Houston's African-American teachers held a series of secret meetings to discuss preparations for a lawsuit. However, the so-called "Old Guard" – the older, experienced teachers – remained fearful of losing their jobs if they took any action that might antagonize the all-white school board or school district administrators. Thus, they continued to advise patience and caution, while the younger teachers wanted to press ahead with a lawsuit. Their divided leadership, then, could not agree on what course of action to take. All of this made it extremely difficult for the educators to organize and plan strategy.

While the teachers continued their secret meetings, Carter Wesley, a prominent black attorney, civil rights activist, and editor of the *Houston Informer*, became so disgusted that he wrote a scathing editorial in the March 6, 1943, edition of his paper, saying, "all leaders in the state agree that Negro teachers' pay should be equalized. But the Houston teachers themselves seem to be waiting for somebody to do the job for them." He stated that the *Informer* favored the filing of a lawsuit to force equalization of pay. He admonished teachers, saying that they needed to summon their courage and act like "human beings instead of skulking cravens."[17] The following week, the *Informer* put up $500 as a "bet" to underwrite the salary of any teacher who had the courage to step forward and become the plaintiff for the lawsuit. Wesley hoped that the offer would embolden at least one teacher who otherwise might be afraid of losing his or her job.

Carter Wesley was a native Houstonian and had a long record of fighting for equal rights for African Americans. Born in the city in 1892, he graduated from Fisk University, attended Officers' Training School at Des Moines, Iowa, and received a U. S. Army commission during World War I, and then earned a law degree at Northwestern University Law School. After a brief stay in Oklahoma, he returned to Houston in 1927. By 1931 he had gained control of the *Informer*, which he built into a successful chain of newspapers serving the African-American communities in Houston, Dallas, New Orleans, Beaumont, Austin, Mobile (Alabama), Corpus Christi, San Antonio, and Shreveport.[18] Described as a "hard-headed, almost cold-blooded" businessman, he frequently aroused controversy and had little patience for those who disagreed with his ideas, as evidenced by the derisive tone of many of his editorials. Still, by the end of his life he became one of the most respected leaders in Houston's black community.[19]

It is important at this point to note briefly the role of the African-American business and professional community, particularly the newspaper publishers, in the struggle for equal rights in Houston. During the early years of the century, black lawyers and businessmen had joined with black ministers in fighting against the encroachments of Jim Crow segregation. Later, black attorneys, newspaper publishers, and businessmen became the leaders of the growing civil rights movement.[20]

The African-American press, as it would with the teachers pay issue, had taken a leading role during the 1930s to challenge the white primary in

Texas. Throughout the next forty years, black editors and publishers exhorted, encouraged, and inspired the community to press on with the campaign to break down the walls of racial segregation. Frequently, these men contributed not only newspaper reporting and editorializing, but financial, legal, and personal support as well.[21]

Therefore, it is not surprising that Carter Wesley took an active role in advocating pay equalization for black educators in Houston. His editorial derision of fearful teachers and his endorsement of a lawsuit seem to have had some impact. The following week black elementary school teachers finally organized and began drafting plans for a lawsuit. They chose the Rev. J. D. Moore to chair a citizens' committee that would guide the suit through the courts. Wesley trumpeted the news in the headlines of the March 13 *Informer*, noting that the "Old Guard" had been "ignored." He noted gleefully that while the "old duffers" tried to impede progress by advising teachers to postpone their lawsuit, he felt they would likely go ahead and file it as soon as they had completed their preparations. In his article on the front page, Wesley advocated that school principals be included in the suit so that one lawsuit would settle the entire matter and undue pressure would not be brought upon them. [22]

A school board election was approaching at this time. A staff reporter for the *Informer* noted that the Superintendent, E. E. Oberholtzer, had instructed school principals to "have the Negroes vote for Mrs. Ray K. Dailey and Miss Ima Hogg." Dailey, an incumbent, had long been popular with the black community. Ima Hogg, the daughter of former Texas governor James S. Hogg, represented an unknown factor regarding her interest in the concerns of black Houstonians. The reporter noted that while Hogg's brother "did many fine things for Negroes and made contributions to common people generally," Ima Hogg "had never taken any interest in Negroes herself personally."[23]

Oberholtzer's backing did not represent a ringing endorsement in the African-American community. While he had initiated a vigorous school building construction project in the black neighborhoods during the 1920s, ample evidence indicated that he also harbored racially discriminatory attitudes of his own. In particular, the school superintendent established pay rates for teachers in Houston's public schools. Oberholtzer set the starting salary for black teachers at $675 per year and white teachers at $1,125 per year. At one point the *Informer* charged that Oberholtzer assigned substitute teachers and supernumeraries to teach in the black school as a way to cut costs and avoid placing these teachers on salary. Staffing schools with part-

time or substitute teachers was seen by many, including Carter Wesley, as indicative of a lack of concern for the quality of education to be provided to students.[24]

Although both Dailey and Hogg would win their respective elections to the school board by significant margins, data are not available to determine what effect Oberholtzer's instructions to building principals actually had on voting.[25] One must consider, however, that teaching stood as one of a limited number of professions open to African Americans at this time. School principals, therefore, held a tremendous amount of power and could make or break the careers of their faculty members. The implication is that the school district administration maintained a tight grip on its employees, especially its teachers. It is understandable that teachers who did not have many other employment options would be timid and reluctant to engage in a courtroom showdown with their employers, the Houston Independent School District.[26]

As Rev. Moore's citizens' committee continued preparing for the lawsuit, Houston's black teachers began raising funds for the legal battle between themselves and the school district. Carter Wesley encouraged all black teachers to support the fund-raising activity. On Saturday, March 20, 1943, he wrote in the *Informer* that when the educators finally won their lawsuit, there would be "an honor roll for those who paid and a public roll for those who were too selfish or too craven to do their share."[27] By April 3, the teachers had collected $5,000 to fund their court battle. The impressive results of this fund raising effort indicated black educators' firm resolve to stand up to a powerful school board and to challenge the racist salary structure. Wesley praised the teachers for raising such a large sum in such a short time, noting that once Houston's black teachers came alive, they "came alive with a vengeance."[28]

Encouraged by their successful fund raising, the emboldened educators engaged the services of F. S. K. Whittaker as attorney and spokesperson. On April 6, Whittaker and eleven representatives of the Negro Committee of the Houston Teachers Association presented their petition for pay equalization to the school board, and they simultaneously filed a lawsuit in Federal District Court. Carter Wesley also attended the school board meeting and constantly consulted with Whittaker. The timing of this petition was significant because the school board had already begun considering a proposal to increase the salaries of all school district employees, including teachers. The African-American educators needed to act quickly before they

found their hopes for pay equality overwhelmed by funding requirements for the proposed pay increases.[29]

Whittaker cited instances that showed a general trend in the South toward approving such petitions. He presented examples from Virginia and North Carolina and the recent action in Dallas to make the point about precedents. He argued that Houston paid black teachers generally one-third less than white teachers, even though many of the blacks held graduate degrees and had proven to be excellent instructors. Whittaker also pointed out that the custom of paying black teachers less than whites had already been found unconstitutional in several different state courts and by the U. S. Circuit Court of Appeals.[30]

School board member Henry A. Petersen, chairman of the committee to study pay raises, observed that "the things you have told us are absolutely true, there has always been a discrimination against Negro teachers in the matter of salaries." Then he continued, "Unfortunately, however, we have found through national teacher exams that many of the Negro teachers do not make high grades." Petersen attempted to discredit the qualifications of black teachers, but his efforts had little effect on other board members.[31]

Following this exchange, board member Ewing Werlein proposed that the teachers file a "friendly" suit in Federal District Court. A verdict from the court would make pay equalization "legal and binding on both parties" and a matter of legal record as well. Following a private session, however, the board instructed school district attorney Melvin Kurth to enter into negotiations with Whittaker to try to reach an agreement on the issue and avoid what portended to be a losing court battle for the school district. In the Saturday *Informer*, Carter Wesley wrote that "to the everlasting credit of the white citizens of Houston and the statesmanship of the board, the petition was accepted seriously and the obligation was faced and accepted by the board."[32]

On Monday, April 13, the HISD Board of Education agreed to equalize the salaries of black teachers and principals with their white counterparts who possessed the same credentials and performed the same duties.[33] They estimated the total cost of pay equalization to be $297,000. The pay increase would be retroactive to March 1, 1943, and would be achieved through a series of payments and step-raises until salaries became equal in September 1945. Teachers and principals would receive a lump sum payment at the close of the semester, in July 1943, of 15 percent. They would receive a 25 percent salary increase in September 1944. The balance would be made up in September 1945. The plan would affect some four hundred

district employees at thirty different schools and had to be signed by all of them before it could be implemented. The school district scheduled the first payment for July 1943 and estimated an initial outlay of $44,600.[34]

This pay equalization agreement was comparable to the court-ordered settlement in Dallas. However, the action of the school board made Houston the first large city in the South to reach such an agreement without an actual lawsuit. Most teachers and black leaders believed the time period and formula for equalization to be reasonable since the settlement represented a major expense to the school district which had to be made up with tax revenue.

While it may appear that the Houston school board had little choice about agreeing to pay equalization, they had two alternatives open to them that could have caused the efforts of the black teachers to backfire. The first alternative would have been to fight the lawsuit in court. Although the school district most likely would have lost, it could have appealed and dragged the case out for two to four more years. The legal expenses that the school district would have incurred rendered this option questionable if not downright foolish. However, future Houston school board members would be willing to spend taxpayers' dollars in many fruitless court battles in their efforts to delay desegregation.

The second alternative, which caused more concern to the black teachers, involved the possibility that the school board would equalize pay by reducing white teachers' salaries to the same level as their black colleagues instead of implementing the proposed pay increases that had been under discussion. This action would have aroused the resentment and animosity of white teachers. However, black teachers in Houston and across the South had an advantage in the timing of their actions. Because of the high employment caused by the war effort, no community could afford to have black teachers "walk out" of their jobs. There remained few qualified persons to replace them. Indeed, Texas found itself in the midst of a severe teacher shortage that seemed to threaten the opening of school the next fall. Also, the courts tended to support equalizing teachers' pay during this time, possibly as a means of maintaining the "separate but equal" school systems.[35]

It should be noted that one problem developed with the implementation of the pay equalization plan in Houston. When the school district issued the lump sum payments to the teachers and principals as promised in July 1943, the bureaucracy somehow "miscalculated" the amount of money to be disbursed to the teachers and principals. Angry teachers once again threatened lawsuits when they found themselves

shortchanged. HISD resolved the matter, but this unfortunate incident provoked a needless sense of suspicion and mistrust.[36]

Although black Houstonians maintained a steady campaign against racial discrimination throughout the first half of the century, they had made little progress until now toward racial equality. While Houston's black teachers shared many of the same problems as their white colleagues in the city's overcrowded schools, they found themselves laboring under the additional burden of a system that had institutionalized racial discrimination and had exacerbated the problems inherent to the school district's tremendous growth during the war years. Still, black teachers had won an important concession from a racist institution and had established an important precedent. Houston school officials, for the first time, had acknowledged that the district's African-American teachers were entitled to the same compensation as its white teachers. Teacher pay equalization began a string of important civil rights victories during the 1940s that would eventually bring about the demise of Jim Crow. This decade was a crucial period in civil rights history, then, because of the broad attack on Jim Crow segregation across the South. The teacher pay equalization and the later graduate school education cases represented the initial phases of an assault that included suits to end "restrictive covenants" and to challenge the "white primary", culminating in one of the most dangerous, difficult battles of all, the battle over school desegregation.

NOTES

[1] Article VII: Section 7, of the Texas Constitution required racially segregated public schools in Texas. Although the focus of this article is on the 1940s, it is important to note that, initially, white teachers taught black students in the Freedmen's Bureau schools established in the city during the Reconstruction.

[2] Mark V. Tushnet, *Making Civil Rights Law: Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court, 1936–1961* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 13.

[3] See Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas*, 1979.

[4] Tushnet, *Making Civil Rights Law*, 116 – 117.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Houston Informer*, March 6, 1943. See also: Amilcar Shabazz, "The Opening of the Southern Mind: The Desegregation of Higher Education in Texas, 1865 – 1965" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Houston, 1996), 51–151.

[7] *Houston Informer*, January 30, 1943.

[8] Evidence indicates that the earliest school for whites in Houston, a private school, opened in November 1837, less than one year after the founding of the city. A newspaper story about a local artist, A. E. Andrews, also mentioned that his wife intended to open a school in their home to provide rudimentary education for young ladies and possibly for a few young boys under the age of twelve. By 1879, Houston had established five schools for black children, one in each of the city's five wards, with a total enrollment of 716 students. See: William A. Young, Jr., *History of the Houston Public Schools, 1836–1965* (Houston: Gulf School Research Development Association, 1968), 1–8; and David G. McComb, *Houston: The Bayou City* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1969), 58.

[9] P. W. Horn, *Annual Report of the Public Schools of the Independent School District of the City of Houston, Texas, 1909–1910* (Houston: n.p., 1910), 9, 54, 338. The public school system paid white teachers a starting wage of $45 per month or $405 per year, with the opportunity of receiving a maximum salary after nine years of service at $85 per month or $765 per year. Conversely, a beginning "colored" teacher received $40 per month or $360 per year, and "topped out" after seven years of service at $60 per month or $540 per year. A white high school principal received a maximum of $2,200 per year in 1910, but an African American with similar qualifications and experience at the Colored High School (the city had only one high school for black students in 1910) received $1,000 in annual salary. Houston public schools enrolled 12,151 pupils, 8,586 white and 3,565 "colored." The faculty numbered 296 teachers, 222 whites and 74 blacks, which averages into 41 students per teacher in the school system as a whole. The pupil:teacher ratio for whites, 38.6 students per teacher, contrasts with 48 students per black teacher. In other words, based on the total enrollment and the total number of teachers in the Houston public schools in the 1909–1910 school year, black teachers had the responsibility for 25 percent more students, on average, than white teachers, and yet they received 30 percent less in salary.

[10] *Houston Informer*, April 21, May 5, May 12, 1923; James M. SoRelle, "Race Relations in 'Heavenly Houston,' 1919–45," in *Black Dixie: Afro-Texan History and Culture in Houston*, eds. Howard Beeth and Cary D. Wintz (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992), 180–81. Racial bias played a significant role in state funding for children in the school district. Figures from 1918 indicate that the State of Texas provided $9.06 for each white student enrolled in the Houston Public School District but only $6.90 for each black child attending its schools. These disproportionate appropriations contributed to the overcrowded, inferior facilities for black students. For example, some one thousand students enrolled during 1923 at the Colored High School, still the only high school for African Americans in Houston, but the school had seats for only five hundred pupils. Ira B. Bryant, Jr., *The Development of the Houston Negro Schools* (Houston: Privately printed, 1934), 6.

[11] Cary D. Wintz, *Blacks in Houston* (Houston: Houston Center for the Humanities, 1982), 30; SoRelle, "Race Relations," 181.

[12] Lorenzo J. Greene, "Sidelights on Houston Negroes as Seen by an Associate of Dr. Carter G. Woodson in 1930," inBeeth and Wintz, *Black Dixie*, 149–50; SoRelle, "Race Relations," 183.

[13] SoRelle, James Martin, "The Darker Side of 'Heaven': The Black Community in Houston, Texas, 1917–1945" (Ph.D. dissertation, Kent State University, 1980), 85, 89–90.

[14] Young, *Houston Public Schools*, 40; SoRelle, "Darker Side of 'Heaven'", 85.

[15] Marvin Hurley, *Decisive Years for Houston* (Houston: Houston Chamber of Commerce, 1966), 72.

[16] Part of the problem stemmed from the fact that HISD had not constructed any junior high schools for the black students. In 1940, all three of the African-American high schools in fact served as combination junior–senior highs, thus increasing the total enrollments in those buildings. The school district combined white junior high students with elementary school pupils at five schools, but this supplemented the ten facilities designated solely as white junior high schools. By 1942, the school district's 1,600 white teachers and 400 black teachers provided for the educational needs of some 82,328 students. Precise figures are not available because many students enrolled for school but left to work or serve in the war effort. The pupil:teacher ratio was approximately 40:1 in the white schools and 44:1 in black schools. *Houston Chronicle*, March 1, 1943; *Houston Informer*, January 30, 1954.

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] Marguerite Johnston, *Houston: the Unknown City, 1836–1946*, (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 198; Phillip Alan Pyle and George McElroy, "The Black Press in Texas: A Short Overview," in *The Black Presence in the Texas Sesquicentennial*, eds. Jesse E. Gloster and Hunter O. Brooks (Houston: D. Armstrong Company, Inc., 1986), 34–36.

[19] Robert D. Bullard, *Invisible Houston: The Black Experience in Boom and Bust* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1987), 119–21; Kenneth E. Gray, *A Report on the Politics of Houston* (Cambridge, Mass.: Joint Center for Urban Studies of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and

Harvard University, 1960), V–23; Robert V. Haynes, "Black Houstonians and the White Democratic Primary," in *Black Dixie*, Beeth and Wintz, 197–208; Interview with Weldon H. Berry, NAACP attorney, by author, August 25, 1994, Houston, Texas.

[20] Bullard, *Invisible Houston*, 119–23; Haynes, "Black Houstonians," 197–209; Berry interview; Matthew W. Plummer, attorney, interview by author, August 29, 1994, Houston, Texas. African Americans established a local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1912. A roster of the organization's earliest supporters includes many business and professional leaders, such as Duke Crawford, Julius White, Newman Dudley, E. R. Nelson, Rev. Miles Jordan, Rev. J. S. Scott, Carter Wesley, Jack Atkins, Clifton F. Richardson, O. P. DeWalt, E. O. Smith, and O. K. Manning. Black attorneys, including Wesley, Atkins, James M. Nabrit, Albert Dent, and John Murchison, joined forces with local black newspaper publishers including Charles N. Love and Clifton F. Richardson, and with other businessmen, including R. R. Grovey, L. L. Spivey, and W. L. Dickerson, to establish a pattern of involvement with the NAACP. This pattern of activism continued into the 1950s and 1960s when businessmen like George Nelson, Hobart Taylor, and others, joined forces with attorneys Weldon H. Berry, Matthew W. Plummer, Robert W. Hainsworth, Heaulin E. Lott, Henry E. Doyle, Francis L. Williams, A. M. Wickliffe, and F. S. K. Whittaker to fight the legal battles and to continue the drive to destroy racial segregation.

[21] Bullard, *Invisible Houston*, 119–23. Black women played key roles as well. Lula B. White, the wife of NAACP co-founder Julius White, served as the local chapter's Executive Secretary during one of the most active periods for the organization in Houston, from 1942–49. Later, Christia V. Adair would also serve in that role and courageously defy state requests to turn over the membership lists of the Houston Branch during the late 1950s when the Texas legislature, Attorney General John Ben Shepperd, and state officials attempted to destroy the organization. Doris Wesley had a significant role in community organizations and in her husband's (Carter Wesley) publishing company. Eventually, she ran the business alone for three years after his death in 1969. See: Gray, *Politics*, V–23; Pyle and McElroy, "The Black Press," 35; *Houston Post*, May 13, 1979; *Houston Informer*, October 22, 1956, May 11, 1957.

[22] *Houston Informer*, March 13, 1943.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] It is interesting to note that in December 1939, the Houston school board considered requiring, "in the interest of good government," that all employees, both "white and Negro," pay their poll taxes. However, the district's lawyers recommended against this policy, believing those employees legally could not be forced to obey such a directive. Nevertheless, the board trustees had a long history of tight control over school district employees. Young, *Houston Public Schools*, 50. A more detailed discussion of the politics of the Houston school board may be found in Don E. Carleton, *Red Scare! Right-wing Hysteria, Fifties Fanaticism and Their Legacy in Texas* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1985), Chapters 6–7; and in William Henry Kellar, "Make Haste Slowly: A History of School Desegregation in Houston, Texas" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Houston, 1994), 113–150.

[25] Election returns showed that out of a potential electorate of 85,000 qualified voters (those who had paid their poll tax), 7, 559 participated in the April 3, 1943, Houston school board election. Miss Ima Hogg received 4,350 votes in the Position 3 race while her opponents, Dr. C. M. Taylor and T. A. Lambright, received 3,026 and 109 votes, respectively. Dr. Ray K. Dailey, a long-time incumbent, received 5,082 votes for another six year term in Position 4, while her opponents, Mr. Sam H. Davis and Virgil E. Arnold, managed to secure 1,949 and 382 votes in their respective races. Since school board elections were "at-large," voters could participate in both contests.

[26] Hazel H. Young, former HISD teacher, interview by author, January 21, 1987, Houston, Texas; Henry Allen Bullock, *A History of Negro Education in the South, From 1619 to the Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 99; Gunner Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1944), 304.

[27] *Houston Informer*, March 20, 1943.

[28] *Houston Informer*, April 3, 1943.

[29] *Houston Chronicle*, April 2, 943. The court-ordered teacher pay equalization in Dallas and the proposed across-the-board pay increases for Houston school district employees had created a kind of "window" of opportunity for Houston's African American educators to press their own case for equal pay.

[30] *Houston Post*, April 6, 1943; Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 320; Tushnet, *Making Civil Rights Law*, 116–121.

[31] *Houston Chronicle*, April 6, 1943; *Houston Post*, April 6, 1943; Bullock, *A History of Negro Education*, 183–84; Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 905.

[32] *Houston Chronicle*, April 6, 1943; *Houston Informer*, April 10, 1943.

[33] School board members were: Holger Jeppesson, (President), Dr. Henry A. Petersen, E. D. Shepherd, Ewing Werlein, Dr. Ray K. Dailey, George D. Wilson, H. L. Mills (Business Manager), and J. O. Webb, the supervisor of Senior High Schools.

[34] *Houston Chronicle*, April 13, 1943; *Houston Post*, April 13, 1943; *Houston Informer*, April 17, 1943.

[35] Bullock, *A History of Negro Education*, 249; *Houston Chronicle*, May 2, 1943. During the spring of 1943, the teacher shortage had become so severe that state officials planned a special conference in Houston to discuss possible remedies. Houston school controller W. W. Kemmerer stated that approximately 17,000 Texas teachers had left the profession since Pearl Harbor, either to join the armed forces or to participate in the wartime industries.

[36] *Houston Informer*, July 3, 1943.