

“Yes, We Have No Jitneys!” Transportation Issues in Houston’s Black Community, 1914-1924

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An impulsive idea begun mostly to fill a gap in the mass transportation systems of America’s fast-growing cities, the jitney was always on the periphery of the transportation and business world. The jitneys were privately-owned cars which carried passengers over a regular route according to a flexible schedule—a way for a fellow with an old Ford to make a few extra dollars by taking people to town faster and cheaper than the cumbersome streetcars could manage. Jitneys lasted for less than ten years in the United States, but many cities, including Houston, took the interlopers to heart and its citizens soon depended on jitneys to get them where they wanted to go.

By 1923-24, when the Houston City Council gradually abolished the jitneys, there were nine lines operating in the city with nearly 200 drivers—and this was much reduced from the nearly 300 jitneys in the city in 1918.¹ One of these nine, the San Felipe Line, catered to black Houstonians who could not ride in the white jitneys. This line’s black-owned and operated jitneys were a part of the black community: a business, if somewhat on the edge of respectability and only marginally profitable, that provided a needed service. But Houston’s black-owned jitneys were prevented from operating for a year before the white-owned jitneys were forced to shut down, as the black community became the biggest losers in a power struggle involving white business interests and local government.

Jitneys Sweep the Country . . .

Jitneys began on the west coast in late 1914; by the beginning of 1915 they had already spread east to cities like Omaha, Kansas City, San Antonio, and

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¹Writer’s Program, Works Progress Administration, *Houston: A History and Guide* (Houston, 1942), 115.

Houston and the jitney phenomenon had caught the attention of the national press. The estimated number of jitneys west of the Mississippi was 2,500, and, according to a Kansas City citizen, what spurred their growth was the "'public be damned' attitude of streetcar corporations." Indeed, jitneys were born out of the inefficiency of trolley lines, and were popular because they offered, for the same price as a trolley ride, a flexible routing which could deliver people closer to their destinations, and were deemed "cheap, comfortable and quick."² And, it was only logical that "as the automobile became a sturdier, more powerful product, its possibilities as a money-making passenger carrier were increased."³

It was not long before streetcar companies complained about unfair competition from jitneys because the upstarts were not subject to regulation, did not pay taxes like the traction companies, and had no "rolling stock" to maintain. Jitney competition took an estimated \$3 million worth of business away annually from the trolley lines.⁴ There were questions, too, about the safety of the vehicles and the advisability of adding them to the already congested urban streets. By mid-1915 regulation of jitneys, mostly in the form of hack licenses, had thinned their ranks.⁵ Yet while the jitney drivers admitted that it was hard to eke out a living charging so little fare and carrying so few passengers, and although civic and business people wondered how they could maintain their cabs and still make a profit, the number of jitneymen continued to grow. Even with regulations, over one hundred cities in the United States and Canada had jitneys, and "in Houston, Texas, 350 cars are reported running under stringent traffic-regulations."⁶ For a time at least, jitneys made themselves part of the mass transit system of America's cities.

... And Challenge Houston Streetcars

Electric streetcars began operating in Houston in 1891, and in 1900 when the Houston Electric Company took control of the streetcars, there were already 35 miles of track.⁷ But after 1900, Houston's burgeoning central business district and rapidly growing population put a strain on a mass transit system dependent on the laying of expensive track and overhead

²"The Jitneys," *Literary Digest*, February 13, 1915, 302-03; "The Jitney," *New Republic*, February 13, 1915, 43-44; "The Jitney," *World's Work*, April 1915, 618-19; Stanley I. Fischler, *Moving Millions: An Inside Look at Mass Transit* (New York, 1979), 39.

³Fischler, 39.

⁴"The Jitney," *World's Work*, April 1915, 618-19; "The Jitney 'Bus' and Its Future," *American Review of Reviews*, November 1915, 624-25; Fischler, 167.

⁵"The Jitney 'Bus' and Its Future," 624-25; *Literary Digest*, July 3, 1915, 3-4.

⁶"The Jitney 'Bus' and Its Future," 624-25; *Literary Digest*, July 3, 1915, 3-4; "The Jitney Unprofitable," *Literary Digest*, June 19, 1915, 1509-1510.

⁷Fischler, 75.

wiring. A magazine published by the Galveston and Houston railway companies reported in 1912 that there had been great difficulty in maintaining route schedules due to traffic, narrow streets, few bridges, and many railroad crossings. Add to these difficulties the automobile—on sale in Houston beginning about 1902—and the city was primed and ready for the jitney when it arrived.⁸

Jitneys became a firmly established part of Houston's transportation system very quickly, as evidenced by the city council's June 1915 ordinance revising the city code to add an article on jitney rules and regulations. The ordinance defined jitneys not as licensed hacks but as

... regular transportation . . . that travel up and down the streets soliciting patronage and for a certain fee demanded by those in charge . . . persons are carried to and from destinations and over routes designated and fixed by said owners, managers and drivers of such vehicles.

Further, the ordinance stated that since public safety was "affected and endangered by unlicensed and unrestricted methods of such use," jitneys must be licensed, have definite routes and schedules, and obey all traffic laws.⁹

Race and Transportation

The black community in particular welcomed the advent of the jitneys. The new mode of transportation was not only cheap and convenient, but also offered the means to protest the inequities of segregation on the streetcars. Texas had a long-standing tradition of racial separation in mass transit, beginning with the railroads. Civil rights legislation in the last quarter of the nineteenth century slowly advanced the notion of equal accommodations for equal fare, but separate cars were fixed by both law and custom. In 1903 the City of Houston, supplementing state law, passed an ordinance providing for the separation of black and white passengers on cars in the street-railway company. The revised city code of 1904 designated "separate but equal" compartments, with each divided and lettered, and provided that any person sitting in a car not designated for his or her race was to be charged with a misdemeanor. The law required the use of a movable screen to separate the races, whites in front, blacks behind.¹⁰ From 1903 to 1905 Houston's black

⁸Peter Papademetriou, *Transportation and Urban Development in Houston, 1830-1980* (Houston, 1982), 28.

⁹City of Houston, Jitney Ordinances, June 16, 1915.

¹⁰August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Along the Color Line: Explorations in the Black Experience* (Urbana, Illinois, 1976), 267-68; *Charter of the City of Houston* (Houston, 1903); *Charter and Revised Code of Ordinances of the City of Houston* (Houston, 1904); James M. SoRelle, "The Darker Side of 'Heaven': The Black Community in Houston, Texas, 1917-1945" (Ph.D. diss., Kent State University, 1980), 93. See also James M. SoRelle, "'An De Po Cullud Man Is In De Wuss Fix Uv Awl': Black Occupational Status in Houston, Texas, 1920-1940," *The Houston Review* 1 (Spring 1979).

citizens, like those in several other southern cities, responded to discriminatory streetcar ordinances with a boycott.

The boycotts were possible because blacks still dominated the traditional jobs of hackman and drayman in many southern cities. In Houston, "a negro visitor reported that the protestors had developed an informal transit system of passenger vans, wagons and carriages," charging a five-cent fare.¹¹ Some whimsical black hackmen set aside "whites only" spaces in their cabs, or joshed that they were sorry they could not pick up white passengers since they did not have screens. However, the boycott did not end streetcar segregation, nor prevent the increase in segregation laws of the following decade, which included the 1913 establishment of separate waiting rooms for the races at Union Station.¹²

The streetcar situation was always volatile in Houston. There were many incidents, and a series of confrontations between black soldiers stationed at Houston's Camp Logan and discourteous streetcar conductors played a significant part in polarizing racial tension, leading to the violent race riot of 1917.¹³ In 1919, one of the first issues of the *Houston Informer*, soon to become black Houston's foremost minority paper, featured a front-page story about a black passenger being assaulted on a streetcar by the conductor and a white passenger. Another editorial in July of that year condemned the nation's common carriers for charging blacks and whites the same fare, but giving blacks poorer service. Blacks' "place" on the streetcars was a constant reminder of their oppressed status and thus a constant source of friction between the races.¹⁴

Jitneys as a Black Business

The black jitneys became a well-established part of the city's transportation system and of black life in Houston. The current social and political situation encouraged such black transportation enterprises:

Because of deteriorating conditions [within the black political situation], there had been a shift in emphasis from agitation and politics to economic advancement, self-help, and racial solidarity, often coupled with a philosophy of accommodation. The development of transportation companies, therefore, functioned in three ways: as a means of protesting against discrimination, as a fulfillment of the dream of creating substantial Negro business by an appeal to racial solidarity, and—hopefully—as a practical solution to the transportation problems faced by the masses

¹¹Meier and Rudwick, 273-74.

¹²*Ibid.*; David McComb, *Houston: A History* (Austin, 1981), 109.

¹³Robert V. Haynes, *A Night of Violence: The Houston Riot of 1917* (Baton Rouge, 1976), 64-68.

¹⁴*Houston Informer*, June 7, 1919; *ibid.*, July 12, 1919.

of boycotting Negroes.¹⁵

Jitneys were typical of Houston's black businesses in many respects. Not only were they oriented to the black market because of the laws, but they provided a needed service to that community. They were generally small in size and capital investment, as were most black Houston enterprises. Jitneys were also a facet of the historical pattern of blacks being employed as public drivers, such as hack drivers and draymen. Jitney drivers were an obvious extension of an ongoing, almost totally black-dominated trade which later evolved into several black-owned taxi firms (such as Hobart Taylor's HT Taxi Service in the late 1920s).¹⁶ The black jitneys were a highly visible and important part of the community, since much of their operation involved getting black patrons to and from domestic and yard work in white neighborhoods. In a 1919 editorial in the *Houston Informer*, editor Clifton Richardson called for the San Felipe Jitney drivers to clean up their appearance, noting that they operated "mostly in white residential areas where protest is imminent." He felt that an "unbecoming appearance" reflected poorly on their race and showed a lack of respect for their black patrons.¹⁷

Exactly who Houston's black jitney men were is hard to establish, although the *Informer* and the city and telephone directories are of some use in determining how they functioned. Advertisements for car services appeared regularly in the *Informer*, although it is not certain these were all jitney owners. In several issues in 1921, the paper congratulated a new transfer company, the Red Star Line, operated by Richard Fortson and Johnny Reese and formed from the consolidation of two separate lines. In the 1921 *Houston City Directory* Fortson is listed as owner of the San Felipe Auto Repair, while Reese is listed as a driver in 1921 and as "service car" in the 1922 directory.¹⁸ A sampling of telephone directory listings for the years 1918-1920 shows over fifty auto livery or jitney companies. It appears that the jitney or car business was a second income for many blacks, including G. B. M. Turner, who was a school principal and whose wife was president of the San Felipe Jitney Association.¹⁹

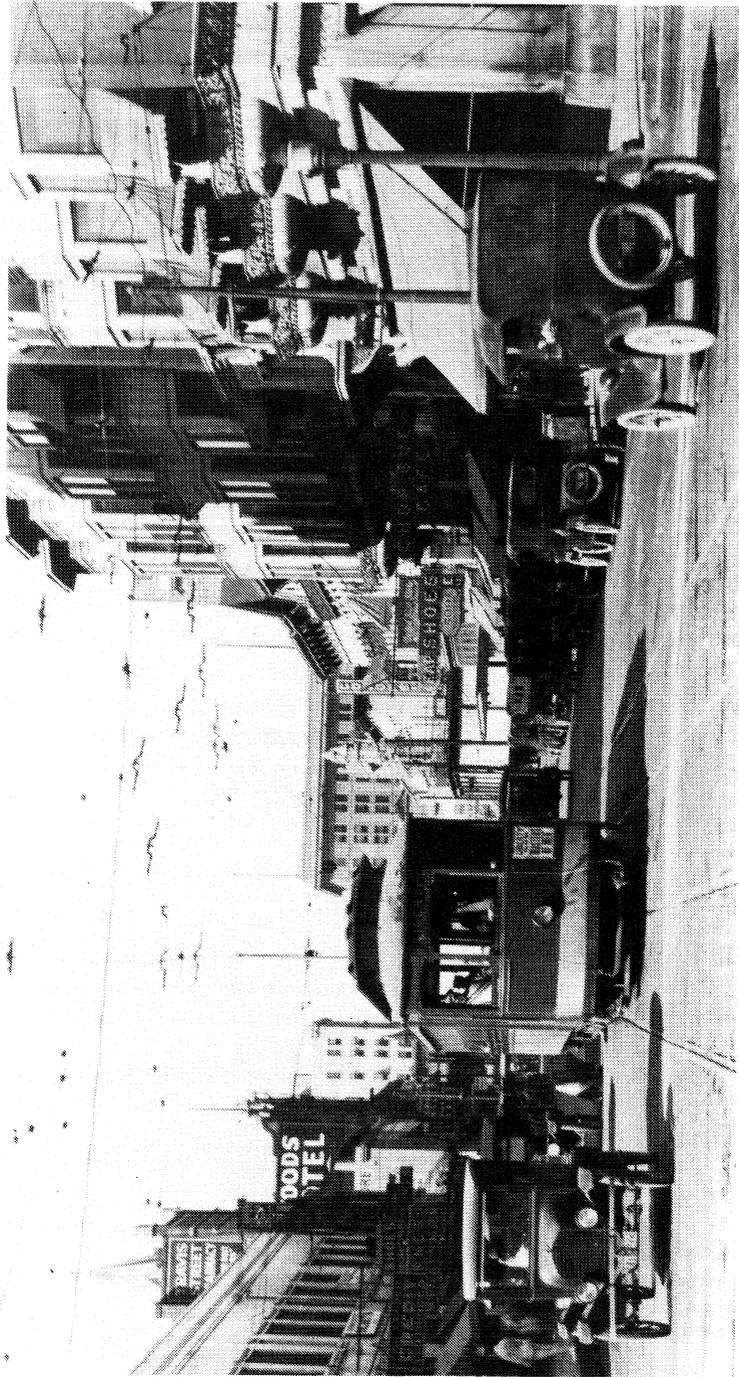
¹⁵Meier and Rudwick, 274.

¹⁶SoRelle, "The Darker Side of 'Heaven'" 268, 259; Meier and Rudwick, 273. A brief mention in the *Houston Informer*, January 1, 1921, shows that jitney men were an organized group that contributed to the community. The paper reported that the San Felipe Jitney Association had donated \$15.00 to the municipal Christmas tree for colored children, and gingham material for the girls of the Dorcas Home.

¹⁷*Houston Informer*, July 5, 1919.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, February 19, 1921; *ibid.*, March 12, 1921; *Houston City Directories*, 1920-1922; *Houston Classified Telephone Directory*, Fall 1921.

¹⁹*Houston Classified Telephone Directories*; *Houston City Directories*; *Houston Informer*, January 8, 1921.



Downtown streets such as Travis were overcrowded by the early 1920s. The flood of jitneys and privately owned cars meant huge losses of revenue for the streetcar company.

One well-known jitney operator was George S. Goodson, who owned several cars. First listed in the 1903-04 *City Directories* as a porter, Goodson subsequently is listed in the directories and in *Informer* ads as a hack driver (1910), proprietor of a hack line stand at 603 Travis (1912-13), manager of the West End Transfer Company (1919), manager of the Cut Rate Auto Line for "rent cars" at 1515 Prairie (1920), proprietor of the Union Station Auto Transfer Company and operator of an auto repair service and soft drink stand (1922), and owner of a filling station at 610 Heiner (1927). Goodson moved into auto repair and service after the abolition of the jitneys.²⁰ In addition, during the early 1920s, Goodson's photograph appeared as manager of the Emerson and Company casket company in another *Informer* advertisement, which also included the information, "first class cars for hire by the hour or trip," and three telephone numbers.²¹

While the black jitneymen were small entrepreneurs whose livelihoods often depended on the condition of an old "flivver," they were, nevertheless, part of the black business community and vital to the black community's transportation needs. They were also acknowledged and regulated by the white-dominated city government, but in the coming jitney-streetcar controversy neither their importance to the blacks nor their acceptance by the whites would matter.

The End of the San Felipe Line

Almost as soon as jitneys appeared in the Bayou City, the Houston Electric Company complained of lost profits. By 1919 Luke Bradley, vice president of the company, told the Kiwanis Club that the company was losing \$400,000 a year to the jitneys and could no longer "afford nor maintain the line."²² In September 1922, the Houston Electric Company made a formal request to the Houston City Council that jitneys be abolished on streetcar lines and within two blocks of these streets. The company said it was unable to continue operation at the same fare, intimating it was not making enough revenue to pay the interest and dividend charges which it needed for its credit standing. Apparently the council had already reduced the number of jitneys by 100 but there were still over 180 cars left.²³ On September 12, "in view of the complications that have arisen one after another, in the matter of the jitney question since 1914," Houston City Commissioner T. L. Waugh suggested "that the proposition be submitted to the vote of the citizens" in a public referendum. But the Houston Electric Company did not want voters to

²⁰George Nelson, telephone interview with author, March 17, 1986; Houston *City Directories*, 1903-1927.

²¹Houston *Informer*, March 6, 1920.

²²McComb, 74.

²³Houston *Post*, September 6, 1922.

determine its constitutional rights and instead requested a fare hike from seven to nine cents, and meanwhile stopped improvements.²⁴

Fares had already increased four years earlier, and Mayor Oscar Holcombe vowed to fight this new increase.²⁵ Houston Electric Company Manager W. E. Wood declared that the company's return was not enough to pay interest on the money borrowed to make the improvements, "let alone pay a return on our investment." The reported dividend to investors had been eight percent.²⁶ But tempers cooled temporarily as the Houston City Council agreed not to take over the franchise and the company agreed to wait to file for an injunction as well as to provide a complete report, including an accountant's check on operations. A few days later, the council announced that the question of whether or not jitneys should be abolished in Houston would come to a vote at the November 7 general election. Within a week of this decision, however, the council once again changed its mind, and by October 15 the mayor and council had declared the question of outlawing the jitneys "dead."²⁷

With the jitney question settled for the time being, the city council introduced a motion to accept the streetcar company's proposition that the company resume improvement work immediately if the council would agree to reduce the nearly 190 jitneys operating in Houston to 150 by January 1, 1923. And the next day, under the headline "Street Car—Jitney Fight Ended," the *Houston Post* reported that Mayor Holcombe and streetcar company officials had worked out a deal. Forty jitneys were to go; the council and mayor declined to say which ones, but it was believed that the reduction would come "gradually."²⁸

Houston blacks soon found out that the city's plan to solve the jitney dilemma meant the elimination of their line. On November 1, as part of a city council compromise with the streetcar company, 11 of the 23 jitneys on the San Felipe Line were ordered to discontinue service by November 15. Then, on November 10, the papers reported that the "Last San Felipe Bus Runs December 15." Under the compromise, the remaining 12 black jitneys and 17 other jitneys from various white lines would be abolished by December 15, 1922. Even though the black jitneymen, under the leadership of Richard Fortson, got an injunction to prevent the city from revoking their licenses

²⁴Houston City Council Minutes, Book U, September 12, 1922.

²⁵Houston *Post*, September 22, 1922.

²⁶*Ibid.*, September 23, 1922; McComb, 107.

²⁷Houston *Post*, September 30, 1922; *ibid.*, October 3, 15, 1922; Houston *Chronicle*, October 1, 1922.

²⁸Houston *Post*, October 15-17, 1922; Houston City Council Minutes, Book U, October 16, 1922; Houston *Chronicle*, October 17, 1922.

until January 1, 1923, when they expired, by January 3 the black San Felipe jitneymen were gone. They had been served notice that their licenses would not be renewed, and "officials of the traction company drove around the line to see that the job had been done," making sure that bootleg black jitneymen were arrested and fined.²⁹ In the spring of 1923 jitney operators were still trying to reestablish the line, circulating a petition to get the issue of its closure put to a popular vote. However, they were unable to get the necessary 3000 to 3500 signatures (ten percent of the votes cast in the last city election) even after "weeks of trying." In his *Informer* editorials, Richardson claimed that there was no lack of qualified black voters, only a lack of interest. (Houston's black population was 33,843 in 1920.) Even a good number of the black jitneymen themselves had not qualified to vote because they had not paid the required poll taxes.³⁰

Voting for Jitneys

To Richardson, the black vote was the key to the whole situation. When the San Felipe Line was first shut down, sacrificed by the city council to placate the Houston Electric Company, Richardson speculated in an editorial that it was because black jitneymen were poorly organized and unable to resist, and that the series of legal restrictions and qualifications which effectively limited black voting power made black opinion negligible: "If the colored citizens of Houston participated in the mayoralty elections, no such summary action would have been taken."³¹ Black citizens might be upset, Richardson reported, but it did not matter because the race was just a "football" of city officials. White lines were not decimated because "whites could resent the discrimination and confiscatory legislation on election days." His advice: "Pay your poll tax and get ready for the elections of 1923."³² The chance to vote on the jitney-streetcar issue occurred in the spring.

The reduction in jitneys was not enough for the streetcar company. The city council tried to reroute the jitneys to avoid direct competition with streetcars, but the council members could not agree on routes, and "in desperation" decided to put the issue to a popular vote on June 9, 1923. Simeon B. Williams, writing in May 1923 as "Cimbee," the *Informer's* own "social

²⁹Houston *Post*, November 2, 10, 1922; Houston *Chronicle*, November 26, 1922; *ibid.*, January 3, 1923; Houston *Informer*, November 11, 1922; *ibid.*, January 6, 1923; *ibid.*, January 5, 1924. Apparently the San Felipe jitneymen had run "bootleg" operations after their licenses were not renewed, as the Houston *Chronicle* reported on June 28, 1923.

³⁰Houston *Informer*, April 7, 14, 1923. Comparative population figures can be found in Jesse O. Thomas, *A Study of the Social Welfare Status of the Negroes in Houston, Texas* (Houston, 1929), 8.

³¹Houston *Informer*, November 11, 1922.

³²*Ibid.*, January 6, 1923.

observer," ruminated on whether blacks should vote "fer dem w'ite jitney men's what had er chanst ter he'p our black jitney boys an' turnt de cole shoulders ter 'em," or the streetcar company, which was the main reason there were no black jitneys. If he voted with the streetcar company, Cimbee asserted it would not be because he thought they were not making money or because their drivers gave polite service.³³ Richardson felt assured there was little concern among blacks with this election. His paper took no stand on the election, except to remind readers that the white jitneymen had asked for black support, but had not given any to the blacks when the latter had asked them to help keep their line alive. Richardson changed his stand on election day, urging that the jitneys be abolished. He decided that the streetcar company was a "real asset to the community" and "helped the city grow." Taking a position as a civic booster, Richardson forgave the streetcar company for past indiscretions against blacks, saying it was not a question of big corporation versus small business but "equity and dependable transportation facilities."³⁴

In the June election, however, the streetcar company lost by 1100 votes, and the white jitneys remained in business. The Houston Electric Company sought an injunction to restrain the city from continuing to enforce the seven-cent fare, while the mayor traveled around the country to find a transportation consultant—finally hiring one from New York—to investigate the situation. The expert declared the system efficient, but reported that as long as there were jitneys, the streetcars would continue their fight. Meanwhile, prominent Houston businessman A. S. Moody headed a citizens' committee to work out a solution.³⁵

About half of the black votes cast favored the jitneys in the June election, perhaps partly because some white jitneymen held out the hope that if the white jitneys won the June election, the permits of the black jitneymen might be renewed. But black hopes were dashed when, to combat a planned lawsuit to force the city to issue permits for the San Felipe Line, the Houston City Council "in an informal preliminary meeting Thursday morning [June 28, 1923] agreed to meet Thursday afternoon and abolish the line altogether."³⁶ In their haste, however, the council passed the resolution without the proper signature of the mayor on a letter requesting the council's action on the matter. So council reconvened the following Saturday, Mayor pro tem Allie Anderson signed the document, and the council voted two to one to pass the resolution abolishing the San Felipe Line. It was a simple matter to eradicate the whole

³³*Ibid.*, May 26, 1923; *Houston Chronicle*, January 20, 1924.

³⁴*Houston Informer*, June 2, 9, 1923; SoRelle, "The Darker Side of 'Heaven,'" 351-352.

³⁵*Houston Post*, June 9, 10, 1923; *Houston Chronicle*, June 21, 1923; *ibid.*, January 20, 1924.

³⁶*Houston Informer*, December 22, 1923; *Houston Chronicle*, June 28, 1923; City of Houston, Jitney Ordinances, June 30, 1923.

line, which was established by city ordinance. The "no" vote came from Street and Bridge Commissioner W. R. Britton, who said "he did not think the city should discriminate, especially since the voters have shown they want the jitneys."³⁷ But the city would brook no opposition from any black jitneymen. With little fanfare, a whole economic enterprise within black Houston and a vital method of mass transit for the black community was gone.

A Change of Allegiance

Meanwhile, the white jitneys were also in jeopardy despite the public vote in their favor. A. S. Moody's citizen's committee worked out a plan whereby the Houston Electric Company would resume its improvements and withdraw its suit for a fare increase in return for the city abolishing all jitneys. This bargain was approved by both bodies, and council agreed to a second vote on jitneys on January 19, 1924. Moody said that the "transportation problem is an economic one and should be settled in a business-like manner without allowing a lot of extraneous matter to confuse the issue."³⁸

Six weeks away from the January referendum, Richardson launched into high gear with weekly editorials telling his readers to vote for the traction company and against the white-owned jitneys. If the jitneys were retained, he foresaw increased streetcar fares, lack of adequate transportation, and loss of potential growth for the city. A *Houston Post* editorial concurred, saying that when all the transportation needs of a city had been put on the jitneys, they had failed to provide adequately.³⁹

But Richardson's real point was that one white power structure had put the black jitneys out of business and another should not also be allowed to keep the black community from the only means of transportation left to them: the streetcars. He noted that jitneys did not employ blacks, gave no money to black causes, and were above the law as "no other public carriers in Texas are permitted by law to operate without making provisions for the accommodation of both races." A full-page advertisement loudly proclaimed: "Help Houston Grow! Vote to Abolish the Jitneys." This ad and others placed by the Colored Citizens Club and the Houston Electric Company were carried in Richardson's newspaper up to election day. Richardson painted the traction company as a beneficent patron of the black community for its jobs and philanthropy, while pointedly noting that the white jitneys had never done any of this.⁴⁰

In the week following the election, Richardson reported that the jitneys had

³⁷*Houston Post*, July 1, 1923.

³⁸*Houston Chronicle*, January 20, 1924.

³⁹*Houston Informer*, December 8, 1923; *Houston Post*, December 3, 1923.

⁴⁰*Houston Informer*, December 22, 29, 1923.

lost soundly by a general margin of two to one, and by a vote of over three to one in the black community. “[The] part the colored voters played in the election is not only an encouraging sign, but also a redeeming one,” he wrote. Most of the blacks who voted had cast their ballots in favor of streetcars this time whereas the previous year more than half of them had supported the jitneys. Even the former San Felipe jitneymen who had hoped to have their line reinstated after the earlier vote were supporters of the ordinance to abolish jitneys altogether. This election was a good sign that black indifference to civic matters was on the wane, Richardson felt, adding that the traction company now had to try to assure better service for *all* its patrons and extend lines to the new black neighborhoods.⁴¹

* * *

The demise of the jitney was probably inevitable as urban areas grew, technology improved, and big business ruled the marketplace. But although all jitneys were abolished, the attention given by civic authorities and citizens to the effects of the white jitneys’ demise was much greater than that given the ending of the black jitneys. The closure of the San Felipe Line highlights two important, ongoing issues in the black community: the effort to establish black businesses and segregation in mass transit systems.

The black-owned jitneys served a need not adequately filled by the established transportation system, and thus were of significance to the whole black community. They were small, service-oriented businesses with little capital and certainly no political leverage. These facts, and the lack of support from the black community, perhaps caused by years of having no effective political voice, left the black jitneys vulnerable. Like the jitneys, black business at this time remained fragile and on the fringe—barely avoiding being undone by government, white business, and especially by economic adversity. Houston sacrificed the black jitney business for the sake of progress and civic improvement, and no significant voice was raised in protest. With the end of the San Felipe Line, a thriving business enterprise had been wiped out, without any thought being given to its economic or social impact.

As in the case of the jitney-streetcar controversy, public transportation with its separate-but-equal segregation was a focal point for racial inequality throughout the United States. The black community found adequate transportation difficult to achieve, whether on the streetcars with their signs, screens, and incidents, on the jitney lines so easily abolished, or on newer forms of mass transit. The transportation controversy did not end in Houston with the jitneys; the same news story that announced their demise promised

⁴¹*Ibid.*, January 26, 1924; *Houston Chronicle*, January 20, 1924.

the addition of buses to the streetcar lines. But the buses initially excluded black passengers, despite the efforts of local black leaders to obtain separate compartments or separate buses. When members of the white elite in River Oaks protested that their black servants could not get to work and petitioned city council to establish a separate bus line for them, some blacks were then allowed to ride the buses. However, it was not until 1932 that the Houston City Council amended the ordinances to allow blacks segregated bus transportation.⁴² The black jitney line was easily abolished, but the larger issue of mass transportation for Houston’s blacks would remain an issue for many years to come.

⁴²SoRelle, “The Darker Side of ‘Heaven,’” 95-96.