AGENCY: THE QUEST FOR CIVIL RIGHTS
in August 1917, in recognition of its hundredth anniversary. It opens with the Camp Logan incident—a sense of control or desire to control one’s destiny, in the la colonia to the growing spirit of inclusion as Houston proudly proclaims itself the nation’s most diverse city.

The “Departments” articles on the African American Library at the Gregory School, preservation advocate Minnette Boesel, and early television programming at KUHT done in conjunction with Texas Southern University also focus on creating understanding and making the city a better place by instilling respect for our history at its roots. Telling the story of agency in the quest for civil rights is like making a crazy quilt, one created from irregularly shaped pieces using a variety of fabrics. Each piece whether large or small, soft or rough, of any color or pattern adds to the greater whole, which is not complete until all of the pieces are in place. These articles and others in our past issues represent but a few blocks in Houston’s larger story, but without them, the image we have of the civil rights struggle would remain a limited narrative.

About two years ago, after spending several days studying the 1960s civil rights movement in my U.S. History class, one student said, “Gee, Dr. Harwell, I always thought the civil rights movement was just black people marching and then they got their rights.” In high school he had heard only the limited narrative of Rosa Parks refusing to give up her bus seat and Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I have a dream” speech. Further, the student had no idea that the movement had any impact on him as a millennial Latino.

When hearing the term “civil rights,” many people think of the 1960s movement to end segregation and disenfranchise-ment of African American voters. Protests in that era — the sit-ins, Freedom Rides, Freedom Summer, and the Selma to Montgomery marches — led to passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, but the quest for civil rights is so much more.

Historian Vincent Harding argued that the civil rights movement in this country began when the first captive coming from Africa resisted slavery. And it has not stopped. The quest for civil rights certainly involves organizing and demonstrating, but it includes a host of other methods, some of which are so subtle they might be overlooked as part of the struggle. Houston History has covered some of these stories in past issues, from the Great Migration to the landmark civil rights cases that ended the white primary and segregation in higher education, from early suffragists to the National Women’s Year Conference, and from Mexican Americans creating la colonia to the growing spirit of inclusion as Houston proudly proclaims itself the nation’s most diverse city.

This issue examines the ways people have exerted agency, a sense of control or desire to control one’s destiny, in the stand for civil rights. It opens with the Camp Logan incident in August 1917, in recognition of its hundredth anniversary.

Although the event is usually called the Camp Logan Riot, I take issue with that term because frequently it is used to place blame for the violence solely on the African American soldiers, many of whom had served admirably around the world. When analyzing the racism and police brutality they experienced in Houston in the context of the times, however—the Waco, Texas, lynching of Jesse Washington attended by over 10,000 people in 1916 and attacks by white mobs who killed an estimated 40 to 150 African Americans in their East St. Louis communities days before the troops arrived at Camp Logan—we gain a deeper understanding of why these men took up arms in response to rumors that a white mob was advancing on them.

Other individuals featured in the magazine broke down barriers through their political activism. Eldrewey Stearns and students from Texas Southern University began a sit-in movement that put pressure on local businesses to quietly desegregate. Eleanor Tinsley championed minority rights while on the school board and city council. She faced harsh treatment in retaliation but, nevertheless, continued the fight and improved living conditions for all Houstonians. Coach Bill Yeoman, in his quest for the best football team he could muster at the University of Houston, integrated the team in 1964, opening the door for African American players in colleges across the South that wanted to stay competitive.

We can also learn from Guadalupe Quintanilla’s story, which could come straight out of today’s headlines. In 1978 a riot erupted in Moody Park in response to the death of Joe Campos Torres at the hands of police who had received a mere slap on the wrist for their actions. Seeing this division between law enforcement and Latinos, Quintanilla conceived the Cross Cultural Communication Program to create understanding between the two groups and assist police in getting to know community members as people. Recognized by leaders across the United States and in the United Nations, her model could be used today as our country faces similar challenges, a remarkable achievement for an “uneducable” immigrant and first-grade drop-out (who later earned a Ph.D.).

We will distribute two print issues annually, one in mid-May and another in mid-December.
FEAT URES:

2 | Camp Logan 1917: Beyond the Veil of Memory
   By Matthew Crow

8 | Remembering “The Mouse that Roared”: Eleanor Tinsley and Houston
   By Marina DonLevy Shimer

13 | Guadalupe Quintanilla: Defying the Odds
   By Adriana Castro

18 | The Original Bona Fide Dude: Coach Bill Yeoman and Early UH Football
   By Ryan Graham

23 | Edrewey Stearns and Houston’s Student Civil Rights Movement
   By Michael Anderson

DEPARTMENTS:

PRESERVATION

28 | Building on Intellectual Foundations: Creating the African American Library at the Gregory School
   By Ela Miljkovic

33 | Minnette Boesel: “Invest in History!” Houston’s Preservation and Adaptive Reuse Advocate
   By Silvia Celeste Martinez

FROM THE ARCHIVES

39 | Progressive Programming at KUHT: People are Taught to be Different
   By Emily Vinson

NEWS AND BOOKS

43 | By Barbara Eaves
Few of Houston’s residents today realize that during World War I Houston had a military base just west of downtown. Camp Logan, one of sixteen auxiliary military training camps established during the era, sprawled across much of the area that is now Memorial Park, south of Washington Avenue and across the bayou from River Oaks. The camp housed and trained over 30,000 soldiers, who lived in neatly organized tents amongst the then scattered trees on the grounds. On the night of August 23, 1917, African American soldiers from Camp Logan incited by police violence earlier that day, armed themselves and marched into town in the only race riot in American history that saw more white casualties than black.

Business leaders expected the Houston economy to grow rapidly with the arrival of the military. The Houston-based American Construction Company received the contract to build the camp at a cost near one million dollars a month, according to newspaper reports at the time. Further, citizens expected the camp to generate $60,000 a week for the local economy. Knowing soldiers on leave would enter the city to spend their hard-earned pay, residents welcomed the coming military installation. Although the Chamber of Commerce assured the Army that racial tensions would not be a problem if it sent black troops to Houston, the chamber members failed to account for an unprofessional police force and culturally condoned bigotry.

When African American soldiers of the Third Battalion, Twenty-fourth Infantry Regiment (3/24th) were sent to Houston to guard the construction in 1917, they faced hostility from the start. The soldiers resisted the Jim Crow segregation of the era, particularly on streetcars. Discrimination from the white construction workers occurred almost daily, and they found similar tensions in town, courtesy of the Houston police. The clashes between police and the black troops stood in sharp contrast to the more subdued African American Houstonians. Fearing a loss of control with the locals, police officers may have “picked on soldiers to show everybody that [they were] in charge.” Colonel William Newman “ordered all of his men disarmed including the battalions military police, and stored the arms under lock and key” to minimize the hostility of local whites. Only those on guard duty had access to weapons. The Crisis reported, the African American troops “were supposed to call on white police officers to make arrests” if needed.

Tensions between black soldiers and civilians were in no way limited to that time and place in Houston. Beginning with the arrival of the first black soldiers in Texas during Reconstruction through the early twentieth century, discrimination against black soldiers was rampant. In 1889 soldiers of the Twenty-fifth Infantry Regiment were accused of shooting towards the city of El Paso. In 1906 in Brownsville, racial tensions led to an incident in which twenty-five soldiers were accused of shooting up the town and shooting a bartender. Military authorities punished 167 of the soldiers with a dishonorable discharge despite the lack of any specific evidence. Additionally soldiers in San Antonio and police
nearly clashed on two occasions in 1911 and 1916. Above all the Brownsville incident “gravely undermined the Negro’s trust in the Army’s ability to guarantee equal justice for all soldiers.” This background of racial tension was likely well known to the soldiers as they pulled into Houston.

One of several segregated units, the 3/24th had served with distinction in the Philippines and was one of the remaining links to the Buffalo Soldiers of the Old West. Although comprised largely of veteran soldiers, the 3/24th replaced much of its leadership prior to the events that occurred on August 23, 1917. Commanding officer Colonel William Newman, who had been with the unit since 1915, was promoted and relinquished command to Major Kneeland Snow two days earlier. Additionally, prior to the unit’s movement to Houston, a large portion of the senior noncommissioned officers were sent to officer training school. While this signaled advancement for these black soldiers, it also left the 3/24th with a “vacuum of leadership” at its new posting.

The Houston police force was also under new command, headed by Chief Clarence Brock. Formerly the superintendent of parks, he lacked the popularity of his predecessor. His attempts to professionalize the force met with resistance and added to his unpopularity. At the time the 3/24th arrived in Houston, the force claimed only two black officers. Lacking a strong command of his personnel, Brock could not maintain efficient control of his officers.

Racial hostility reached a boiling point on August 23, 1917, when two Houston police officers attempted to break up a gambling game located in the all-black neighborhood, the San Felipe District. The officers were Rufus Daniels, known as “Daniel Boone” in the black community, and Lee Sparks, who was notorious for using violent tactics. A foot chase ensued that led to the officers barging into the home of Sara Travers, dragging her outside even though she was scantily clad, and accusing her of hiding one of the gamblers. A soldier from the 3/24th, Private Alonzo Edwards, intervened on her behalf and the officers promptly pistol whipped and arrested him.

In anticipation of such difficulties between soldiers and police, a system of provost guards similar to military police was established to keep peace between the military and civil authorities. Although the guards were instructed to cooperate with police and vice versa, Chief Brock may have failed to disseminate the order to cooperate with the military provost guards. One of the guards, Corporal Baltimore went to ask the police officers about Edwards. The police pistol whipped him, and Officer Sparks shot at him as he ran before being caught and arrested. A rumor that Baltimore had been killed quickly permeated the camp and alarmed the soldiers. Despite Baltimore returning to camp and proving the rumor false, word may not have reached everyone; and Snow was unable to calm his command, whether the soldiers knew Baltimore was alive or not. Provost guards had been instructed to cooperate with civil authorities but the civil police were arresting provost guards. One soldier reportedly remarked to Major Snow before the incident, “We are treated like dogs here.”

Police Chief Brock suspended Sparks as punishment for his violent tactics. Sparks reportedly remarked “any man that sticks up for a nigger is no better than a nigger” and stormed out. Although Brock suspended Sparks, he failed to inform the officer retrieving Baltimore of that fact—news that might have softened the tensions at a critical moment.

Rumors also circulated that a white mob had formed. Major Snow was informed of impending trouble by acting First-Sergeant Vida Henry. Snow attempted to assemble his command and collect all of the men’s arms and ammunition but failed to do so in any meaningful manner. As fears of white violence against the troops rose, a cry of “Get your guns, boys! Here comes the mob” catapulted the night from static to kinetic. Many soldiers grabbed rifles and began a
period of indiscriminate firing at which point Major Snow lost all control, fleeing the camp towards town in a reported daze. Later testimony of Captain Rothrock described him as “not [being] in physical or mental shape to take command.” Snow ceased being a viable actor in the events until the following morning.

The existence of a white mob was dismissed by the investigation, but the investigators were predisposed to that finding; and, in any case, the fear of a mob must have been very real. This period in American history witnessed numerous incidents of white mob violence throughout the South. Lynching was commonplace and justice was rarely, if ever, served for the victims of those crimes. Texas lagged behind only Georgia in the number of lynchings, some by white mobs. This was a period of bloody race riots as well; just one month prior, the East St. Louis riot occurred in which at least forty blacks were killed and massive property damage done with “large sections of the city razed to the ground” as white mobs targeted black populations.

At some point, Sergeant Henry reportedly led a large group of soldiers onto the road and towards Houston proper. They were encamped at what is now T. C. Jester Boulevard and Washington Avenue, and their march east crossed Buffalo Bayou at Shepherds’ Dam Bridge and continued east down what is now West Dallas Street (then San Felipe Street) before dissipating just shy of downtown.
Another group of soldiers joined the group and unknown others left throughout the march. The soldiers shot and killed eleven civilians and four policemen, including Rufus Daniels who had been involved in the earlier arrests. Another twenty-one Houstonians were wounded and survived the incident. Of the 3/24th soldiers, Sergeant Henry reportedly took his own life and another, Private Watson, was killed by friendly fire. A white officer of the unit was also mistakenly killed; Captain Mattes’s death dissipated the soldier’s anger and effectively ended the violence.16

The next morning Houston was under martial law as the military began the massive process of investigating the event. The unit was immediately transported to New Mexico, and a list of the suspected rioters was sent to Fort Bliss to await trial. Police Chief Brock was transferred back to his old job as superintendent of parks.17 On the very same day that his former partner Daniels was buried, Sparks shot and killed a black Houstonian and was indicted. The jury’s not guilty verdict was returned in less than a minute. In March 1918, Sparks shot two more black men, killing one, while working as a security guard and was subsequently released from the force.18

Dual military and civilian investigations were conducted in which “local inquiry placed the blame squarely on the Army’s lack of discipline.”19 The military, however, tries its own. The three military tribunals following the incident constituted the largest murder trial in American history. A total of twenty-four sentences of death and ninety-one various prison sentences were handed down. Every one of the accused was represented by one man, Major Harry Grier, who was not a lawyer. The prosecution relied mostly on the account of several soldiers who had been offered clemency for their testimony. These soldiers’ testimony could be considered coerced since they were facing death penalties (by hanging). Overall the level of justice afforded to the 3/24th soldiers was appalling.

The confusion of the night made identifying who actually fired or hurt someone nearly impossible. The first trial, known as the Nesbit Trial, sentenced thirteen soldiers to death for their roles in the riot. They were executed secretly on December 11 with little notice and no opportunity to appeal. The second and third trials, known as the Washington and Tillman trials respectively, resulted in another eleven death sentences, although some were commuted after the trial. Eventually six more soldiers of the 3/24th were hanged. Out of the 118 men tried, 110 were found guilty of at least one charge.20 Much like the Brownsville incident, the soldiers’ trials lacked due process. In addition to not having an opportunity to appeal, the soldiers faced a murder trial with inadequate legal counsel. President Wilson found himself deluged with petitions and letters appealing on behalf of the soldiers. A New York branch of the NAACP sent the following: “[T]he hanging of 13 men without the opportunity of appeal to the Secretary of War or to their Commander-in-chief, the President of the United States, was a punishment so drastic and so unusual in the history of the nation that the execution of additional members of the Twenty-Fourth Infantry would, to the colored people of the country, savor of vengeance rather than justice.”21

This NAACP letter, accompanied by a 12,000-signature petition, was just one of hundreds from across the nation. Even a memo to the secretary of war from the judge advocate general described those sentenced to death as belonging to two groups: the guilty and those who could not be connected to particular violence. President Wilson eventually intervened and the sentences of five were commuted to life imprisonment. In response to the executions the War Department issued General Orders No. 7 prohibiting executions without review by the judge advocate. The legacy of General Order No. 7 is that it began the first formal appellate structure of the U.S. Army.22

The woods surrounding Memorial Park contain the ruins of Camp Logan. Concrete foundations for ovens and...
After the initial night of violence, SGT Vida Henry was identified as the ringleader of the riot who committed suicide when it failed. However, evidence shown in the coroner’s report and death certificate clearly indicates his death was a homicide. A career soldier, Henry had served his country admirably at home and abroad, reenlisting multiple times.

Photo courtesy of the Harris County Archives.
shower can still be found in the underbrush surrounding Seymour Lieberman Trail, and just south of the Picnic Lane loop, the foundation of the old footbridge sits covered in graffiti by the bayou. One of the cinder roads from Camp Logan still exists on the golf course grounds. The riot is acknowledged by a small paragraph on the Camp Logan historical marker but seems otherwise forgotten. The Hogg family of Houston acquired the tract of land where Camp Logan stood. They donated the land to the city in 1924, resulting in the creation of Memorial Park to honor the soldiers who fought in Europe in World War I.

Major General John A. Hull remarked during the investigation of the riot that, “…nobody will ever know all that took place on that terrible night.” This is true, but one piece of evidence remains here in Houston unmolested since the event: Sergeant Vida Henry, the “ringleader.” The official version has laid out that the mutiny was led by Sergeant Henry, the same soldier who had warned Major Snow of the possibility of trouble that night. Most clearly described in Haynes’s A Night of Violence, Henry reportedly assumed command and led the soldiers out into the city. Legend has it that after the march on the town dissipated and Henry bid farewell to his fellow soldiers, he then took his own life. Yet, his death is not listed as a suicide but as a homicide on his death certificate. At least one newspaper headline also indicated the leader was killed, and a coroner’s report details a crushed skull and a stab wound by a bayonet, either of which would have been fatal. Both the embalmer and the coroner described the skull as crushed by a blunt object not blown apart as would be expected from a self-inflicted gunshot with a 30-06 military rifle.

Sergeant Henry was buried in Houston along with Bryant Watson, the other member of the 24th infantry who was killed that night. Thanks to the work of history professor Angela Holder, their bodies have been located in unmapped plots in College Memorial Park Cemetery. Was Sergeant Henry a convenient scapegoat due to his death? Was Sergeant Henry the tragic leader of a group of angry soldiers lashing out against racial oppression? The truth likely sits somewhere in the middle of these theories; but it seems very convenient to have a dead ringleader, suitably convenient for a convenient scapegoat. The truth of the matter may never be known.

Although no one is certain who lies in which grave, these two soldiers will finally receive headstones in 2017 to commemorate the Camp Logan centennial. A historical marker would also be appropriate to inform visitors about this veiled piece of Houston history. Additionally, military pardons for the soldiers buried at Ft. Sam Houston and listings on their headstones that show their ranks and where they served should be considered.

While the violence of the event cannot be condoned, the memory of it must be preserved. Rather than let the story of the 3/24th Infantry and Camp Logan fade into the past it should be reexamined. The incident of the night of August 23, 1917, was a reaction to racist policies and has been repeated in many forms across time. The old adage of “history repeats itself” is as pertinent as ever today as police violence is scrutinized and examined across the country.

Matthew Crow is a native Houstonian and served four combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan with the 3rd Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment. Following his service with the U.S. Army, Matthew enrolled at the University of Houston as a history major with a minor in business foundations.

100TH ANNIVERSARY OF CAMP LOGAN MUTINY

Exception where noted, the events are at the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum, 3816 Caroline Street.
Most events are free. For updates call 713-942-8920 or visit www.buffalosoldiermuseum.com.

EVENT:

**Monday, August 21**
6:00 p.m. “Mutiny on the Bayou” Reception
7:00 p.m. Viewing documentary
7:40 p.m. Discussion and keynote address with Robert Tecklenberg, Garner Christian, Paul Bentley, and Chad Williams

**Tuesday, August 22**
Camp Logan Exhibit Opening; Curator, Prof. Angela Holder
6:00 p.m. Reception/book signing
7:00-9:00 p.m. Exhibit tours

**Wednesday, August 23**
10:00-11:00 a.m. Tombstone Placement Ceremony, College Park Cemetery, 3525 W. Dallas
5:00 p.m. Camp Logan Historical Marker Rededication Ceremony at Memorial Park, corner of Haskell (6400 block) and Arnot

**Friday, August 25**
6:00 p.m. Reception
7:00-7:30 p.m. Excerpts from Camp Logan play

**Saturday, August 26**
9:40 a.m. Discussion and keynote address with Robert Tecklenberg, Garner Christian, Paul Bentley, and Chad Williams
12:00-1:00 p.m. Lunch
1:00-2:00 p.m. Keynote address by Dr. Williams
2:30-3:30 p.m. Discussion with descendants of soldiers and Houston police officers killed during the mutiny
In the late 1960s Mrs. James Tinsley set a shining example of domesticity in the local press as the “clever hostess,” behind the University of Houston history department’s annual dessert and coffee party. The genteel mother of three rounded out this image teaching Sunday school and offering piano lessons to elementary-aged children at her home in southwest Houston. Eleanor Tinsley had been to dozens, perhaps hundreds, of dinner parties since she and husband Dr. James Aubrey Tinsley had moved to the city. As the couple zig-zagged through yet another crowded gathering in 1969, Eleanor could not have known that this event would affect the course of her life, career, and the progress of the entire city. When a member of Citizens for Good Schools (CGS) headed purposefully toward the Tinsleys, they first assumed he planned to talk to James. When the man instead addressed Eleanor, suggesting she consider running for the Houston Independent School District (HISD) school board, Dr. Tinsley reportedly looked down from his impressive height and said, “Who, her?”

That night, as James slept peacefully, Eleanor was up, thinking. One can imagine her standing in the cool dark of her blue-accented kitchen on Firestone, unable to get the idea out of her head. During the first twenty years of her marriage, she had happily dedicated her energy toward caring for her family and their home. On the night of that fateful dinner party, however, her two children still at home were sixteen and twelve, allowing her free time during school hours to pursue hobbies and other interests. For years she had been active in school organizations, church outreach groups, and she and Dr. Tinsley served as co-presidents of the Parents League. The group of over 1,500 families worked together to support legislation to raise the legal driving age in Texas, distribute educational material about teen drug abuse, and pilot social programs for school-aged children. She valued education immensely, and her interests aligned perfectly with the position she had been asked to consider. As her family slept around her, suddenly she knew what she had to do: “It came like a bolt to me. I decided I could do some good.”

At that time, few may have guessed that in just a few years, Eleanor Whilden Tinsley would make a name for herself as an influential member of the HISD school board during the city’s tumultuous attempts at desegregation. During her four-year term of service as a member and eventually president of the board, HISD schools experienced progress by leaps and bounds. At the end of her term, she left the district (and the city) better than she had found it, having played an important role in the creation of the Houston Community College system, the HISD magnet schools program, and much more. Although she was not re-elected at the end of her term, her career in public service was far from over.

In 1979 Eleanor Tinsley made history again as the first woman elected as an at-large member of Houston’s City Council, defeating a twenty-year incumbent for the seat. As a councilmember, she consistently fought for human rights and a better quality of life, championing many causes whose effects can still be seen across the city and “going to bat” for under-represented Houstonians such as Asian Americans, the LGBTQ community, and African Americans. Although “small in stature,” Eleanor was not easily intimidated. According to daughter Kathleen Ownby, her mother “was very much aware of the rights of other people,” and fought hard for what she believed despite her prim demeanor. Her tenacity even earned her the nickname “the mouse that roared.” Although very little scholarly attention has been paid to Eleanor’s life and work, her career had a significant impact on Houston in the late twentieth century and beyond.

On October 31, 1926, Eleanor Whilden was born to parents W. C. Whilden and Georgiabel Burleson Whilden in Dallas, Texas. The two branches of her family, although
very different, both reportedly inspired her strength of character and “stick-to-it-iveness.” Having only achieved an eighth grade education, Eleanor’s father was a successful entrepreneur who “sold hominy and rags on the street,” eventually expanding his business through warehouse ownership and good investments “playing the stock market.” On her mother’s side, Eleanor’s great grandfather Rufus C. Burleson served as the second president of Baylor University from 1851 to 1861, then again from 1886 to 1897. This highly-educated, conservative Baptist background made descendants in the Burleson family “big wigs on campus” at Baylor, where Eleanor pursued her bachelor’s degree in English after attending courses at the College of William and Mary.

After completing her degree, she ran into another Baylor graduate, James Aubrey Tinsley, “on the street in Dallas.” According to family lore, “they waved at each other and that was it.” The couple married in 1948 and intermittently relocated with their young family as James pursued his master’s degree at the University of North Carolina and his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. After teaching history at Texas A&M and North Texas State University, Dr. Tinsley received a job offer from the University of Houston. The family, including four-year-old Kathleen and infant Tom, moved to the city in 1953, where a third child, Marilyn, was born in 1956.

Kathleen Ownby, Eleanor’s eldest daughter, remembers her mother staying home during her childhood, teaching piano lessons and hosting recitals for her pupils in their home. Eleanor was also active at their local Baptist church, organizing youth group and Sunday school activities for young adults who enjoyed fellowship and hospitality on the Tinsleys’ enclosed back porch, which also served as a game room. Kathleen claims her mother always had a “strong moral compass,” as well as being “very ecumenical,” and willing to consider different points of view. For example, she belonged to a neighborhood discussion group attended by women of various faiths and organized an interfaith workshop at Willow Meadows Baptist Church in 1968.

When she ran for a position on the HISD school board, she campaigned as part of a progressive slate of candidates intent on initiating court-ordered integration for the school district. Although the Brown v. Board of Education decision had declared the “separate but equal” system of segregated schools unconstitutional nationwide in 1954, the conservative bloc that dominated the HISD school board had stalled...
integration efforts for nearly fifteen years. Eleanor agreed to run, hoping that a change in leadership could create “a board that works together rather than the constant bickering we have witnessed,” especially surrounding the desegregation issue. Her candidacy was announced in several local papers, including the Houston Chronicle, the Houston Post, and the Jewish Herald Voice. In interviews Eleanor claimed that “as a mother, [she wanted] the best education possible, not just for [her] own children, but for every child in Houston.” Well-qualified for the position, Eleanor was “the leading vote getter on the reform slate,” even picking up an additional 308 votes when her opponent called for a recount. She was elected to Position 2 alongside George Oser, the founder of CGS. Although school board members were all volunteers, Eleanor “took [the work] very seriously,” often staying late at the district headquarters during her tenure.9

While Eleanor was in office, the school board enacted desegregation policies that included re-zoning principals and teachers as well as busing students to newly integrated schools. The community backlash was severe, but Eleanor and other reform school board members stood firm. Kathleen remembers her mother mentioning the “most afraid she ever was in political office was when the Ku Klux Klan came to a school board meeting,” to protest integration: “…there was so much hate in the room, and, I think that just empowered her more to think that something had to be done.” Concerned mothers picketed school buildings, and students fought against losing their administrators or being separated from their friends. One concerned parent even asked Eleanor, “What if my child catches something from being around a black student?” According to her daughter Kathleen, Eleanor “looked that parent straight in the eye and said, ‘I hope your child catches tolerance.’”10

Eleanor even faced opposition at home. As a senior at Westbury High School, Tom Tinsley begged not to be re-zoned so he could stay at the school where he held leadership positions and had many friends. Eleanor “could NOT make an exception for [her] own son.”11 Although people threw trash onto the family’s lawn and called her nasty names, Eleanor refused to back down from what she believed was right.

In addition to working toward integration, Eleanor supported many other causes during her term. For example, she helped facilitate the installation of a more progressive superintendent, Dr. George Garver. She championed vocational training for HISD students and campaigned to establish the Houston Community College System because, as Kathleen explains, she “really believed strongly that people needed to come out of high school and have a plan… maybe they needed to go to a community college and learn a trade...
so they can support their families.”12 With Eleanor’s support, the school board also planned drug education courses, initiated the magnet school program, and began Volunteers in Public Schools. In 1972 Eleanor even served as president of the HISD school board.

In 1974 she ran for re-election with another slate of CGS candidates including John Hannah and Dr. George Oser. All three were defeated by conservative opponents backed by Concerted Action for Responsible Education (CARE). During the campaign and after her loss, Eleanor faced the anger of constituents on both sides of the aisle: “black carnations were left at [her office] door. Crumpled election flyers were strewn on [her] lawn. Many old friends stopped speaking to [her].”13

Although she was shocked and devastated by the defeat, Eleanor continued her work to make life better for Houstonians. She spent a few years serving on housing authority and children’s welfare boards, as well as sitting on a grand jury. Then in 1979 she decided to run for city council. Many of her advisors warned that the office offered little power to affect change and that no woman had ever been elected to the council before. On top of that, her opponent for the at-large position was venerable twenty-year incumbent Frank Mann. Eleanor’s chances looked bleak.

Against the judgment of her advisors, Eleanor proudly accepted the endorsement of the Gay Political Caucus because she believed she would “gain more votes than [she would] lose, and it’s the right thing to do. [She wanted] to be on the forefront of this civil rights movement.” Mann had openly worked against gay causes during his long tenure and mocked the LGBTQ community by calling them “queers and oddwads.” He insisted that Eleanor was not a viable candidate for office because she had earned their support. Quite to the contrary, she won the election with the help of voters from many marginalized groups, including members of the LGBTQ community, supporters of Planned Parenthood, and Asian Americans.14 At the time of her victory, she joined controller Kathy Whitmire and district councilwoman Cristin Hartung as the first women elected to city office in Houston.

She immediately set to work championing regulations to improve the quality of life for Houstonians, including ordinances to guarantee handicapped parking spots, improve city ambulance services, and require smoke detectors in apartments, hotels, and homes. She spoke out in support of affirmative action for women, initiating annual studies revealing the disparity in pay between white men in city government in comparison to women and minorities. Even as she fought against sexism, she experienced it herself as the first female to hold her office. For the first two years in the position, the other (male) at-large councilmembers forced her to office on a separate floor with the new district councilmembers. When she was finally invited to join them in 1982, she agreed on the condition that the “art deco aluminum lettering over the entrance to the reception area be changed from councilmen to simply ‘council.'”15 The edited sign can still be seen on the eighth floor of City Hall.

During her tenure, Eleanor focused much of her energy on health and safety causes. For example, she spearheaded a charge to add fluoride to the water supply on the eastern side of the city.16 She also supported bike helmet regulations, DWI checks for school bus drivers, and smoking ordinances. The tobacco industry did all they could to keep these regulations from being approved, even organizing a television debate with Eleanor. Despite their best efforts, ordinances banning smoking inside public spaces passed and set an important precedent for city health and safety legislation for years to come. In 2006 a citizen argued in favor of an expanded smoking ban by pointing out that Eleanor Tinsley had started the conversation about second-hand smoke’s dangers over twenty years before.17

Eleanor took on another strong opponent in fighting to reduce the “visual pollution” caused by billboards and other signs. She supported legislation to remove existing billboards as well as prohibit future construction. When a general assembly attendee pointed out that the proposed legislation would put many sign company owners out of business, Eleanor reportedly responded: “Exactly.” She brushed off the industry’s attempt to blame her for ordinance-related job losses. Taking the display of a billboard reading “Tinsley Town” in stride, she declared, “the industry meant it to be a slam—I loved it!” Eleanor was even sued by a sign company owner for alleged business losses of $21 million. The case was thrown out, and Eleanor initiated legislation to ban all billboards in Houston at the end of their useful lifespan. As was the case with many of the issues she championed, Eleanor refused to back down from the cause. She responded to the backlash of the billboard industry by saying, “As a public official, I’m not going to be squelched or have a muzzle put over my mouth.”18
One significant project pioneered by Eleanor, the SPARK School Park Program, still thrives today. SPARK is a unique program that encourages the cooperation of the private sector, school districts, and local government to “create more green space and critically needed recreational areas by transforming public school grounds into neighborhood parks.”

When Kathleen and her family returned to Houston from the Dallas and Tulsa areas in 1988, she volunteered in her mother’s city council office and attended many SPARK events. She recalls the energy in Eleanor’s office as hopeful and accepting: “It was a privilege for me to see what a difference she was making, and to be in her office, which was like a think tank…. [She brought] everybody into the same room who had different viewpoints… Even if compromises had to be made, “issue[s were] pushed forward because everybody had a voice at the table.”

Soon Eleanor asked Kathleen to take over a recently vacated assistant directorship in the SPARK program. After a year in the position, she took over as executive director and has been leading SPARK ever since.

In 1995 Eleanor was forced out of office by term limits. Still she did not stop fighting for what she believed. She served on Mayor Lee P. Brown’s transition team in 1998, continued to support Planned Parenthood and the rights of women, and campaigned for mayoral candidate Annise Parker in 2009. She passed away on February 10, 2009.

Her legacy lives on in the legislation that keeps Houstonians safe and healthy, in the creation of over 200 SPARK parks under her daughter’s steadfast leadership, and in an HISD elementary school and a downtown park, which both received the honor of bearing her name. Just before her death, Eleanor was humbled and delighted by the news that a family member would also soon share her name: “How lucky can you be to have a park, a school and a great-granddaughter named for you?”

Eleanor’s journey from a model housewife to a celebrated political force in Houston’s history ruffled a lot of feathers during her twenty-five years in local government, but her actions had profound effects on Houston’s progress during the late twentieth century. Being able to make a difference and “have a hand in making Houston a better place” ranked as one of her favorite parts of being in politics. It is undeniable that she was able to “do some good” during her career, just as she had hoped when deciding to run for the school board in the middle of the night in 1969 as her stalwart husband snored on, oblivious to the challenges and triumphs in their future.

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At twelve years old, Guadalupe Quintanilla moved from Mexico to Brownsville, Texas. When her grandmother took her to enroll in school, she was required to take an aptitude test and scored very poorly, so the school classified her as “retarded” or a “slow learner.” The reason she received such a low score had nothing to do with her intelligence; rather it was because the test was administered in English, and she only knew Spanish. Quintanilla was placed in the first grade but soon dropped out. Perhaps surprising to some, many years later, this seemingly “slow learner” went on to obtain a doctorate degree, become an administrator and professor at the University of Houston, develop and implement the Cross Cultural Communication Program with the Houston Police Department, receive presidential appointments to the United Nations, and be elected to the Hispanic National Hall of Fame. This is the story of how a first grade drop-out became an outstanding and influential figure in Houston and the United States.

Guadalupe Quintanilla was born Maria Guadalupe Campos on October 25, 1937, in the small town of Ojinaga, Chihuahua, Mexico. She does not remember Ojinaga because, when she was eighteen months old, her parents divorced and she went to live with her grandparents in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico. She recalls, “Living with my grandparents was very nice. Grandma sewed me beautiful clothes and made me dolls from scraps of cloth.” After a few years they moved to San Luis Pedro, Guerrero, to be with her grandparents’ eldest son, Quintanilla’s Uncle Chalio, who had just become a doctor and told his parents that he would take care of them. In Mexico it is customary for doctors to pay back the cost of their training by working for the government for one year, so Chalio was sent to San Luis Pedro, where, Quintanilla says, “There was no school, there was no water…we had to get it from the river, there was no electricity, there were no roads.” Since she could not go to school there, her grandfather taught her how to read, write, and do basic arithmetic. Quintanilla helped her uncle by being his “nurse.” She practiced giving injections on an orange and cleaned his medical instruments.

The family moved to Matamoros, Mexico, where her
Quintanilla’s grandmother decided to teach her everything she needed to know to be a good wife and mother. She taught her how to do household work, like cleaning and cooking. At sixteen years old, she married Cayetano Quintanilla, a dental technician. By age twenty-one, she already had three children: Victor, Mario, and Martha. She was content, explaining, “I thought that life was perfect, that that was the way life was. I didn’t drive, I didn’t speak English... He [her husband] would bring everything that was needed. I would only go out with him and the children and I thought that was life, the way it was supposed to be, until my children started going to school.”

When Victor and Mario began bringing home bad grades on their report cards, Quintanilla became worried. The school system in Brownsville divided children into two categories: Red Birds and Yellow Birds. Red Birds were the students the teachers considered smart and capable of going to college. Yellow Birds were the students the teachers consid-
ered slow and unable to learn. Quintanilla’s children were placed with the Yellow Birds. This confused her because she knew how smart her children were. At home, they easily learned everything she taught them, but she hesitated to approach the teachers to find out why they had been labeled as slow. In Mexico, it is considered disrespectful to question a teacher because he or she is considered the child’s “second parent.” Teachers know best and Quintanilla thought, “Who am I to question a teacher?”

Finally she gathered her courage, thought of her love for her children, and went to talk to the teachers. When she walked into the classroom she immediately noticed that all of the children in the Yellow Birds group were Hispanic, while all of the Red Birds were white. “I thought, well this doesn’t make any sense. My children can be slow learners because of me, but what about the other children?” She asked the teacher why the classroom was arranged in this way; why were all of the Yellow Birds Hispanic? The teacher responded, “That’s just the way it is.” That answer was not acceptable to Quintanilla, who later learned it was because the children did not know English. Determined to get her children out of the Yellow Birds, she had to learn English herself.

Quintanilla first tried to get help learning English at the hospital near her house, where she also volunteered. She asked if she could sit in on some nursing classes to learn a few words and was immediately turned down because she did not have a high school diploma. Then Quintanilla tried a telephone company that was hiring telephone operators. Although she did not really want to be an operator, she thought that if she got the job, she could begin to learn English. But she was rejected again because she lacked a diploma. She then attempted to return to high school, but the counselor said that the school could not accept her because its records stated that Quintanilla was “mentally retarded.” Admitting her meant she would occupy a chair that someone else—who could learn—could use. She left dejected and in tears. She explains, “You get to the point where there’s one time in your life...that you feel like the whole world has come down on you and you don’t know what to do. You cannot go over the obstacle, you cannot go under the obstacle, you cannot go on the sides. You don’t know what to do and I felt that way.”

The next day, after she had sent her husband to work, her children to school, and made breakfast for her grandparents, she returned to the school where someone suggested she go to the community college. Quintanilla took the bus to Texas Southmost College and asked if she could sit in a class and listen. Again, she was turned down because she did not have a diploma. “So I left. I went home and I started thinking, ‘What do I do? What do I do?’ and then I learned that in this world, if you want to succeed, you have to be persistent. You cannot give up. If you want something for you or somebody you love and you know that it’s right, you cannot give up. You have to do it.”

With determination and persistence, Quintanilla returned the next day and, instead of going to the office, asked the first Spanish-speaking student she saw, “Who makes the decisions in this place?” and he told her, “The registrar.” She found the registrar’s parking spot and sat on top of his car, waiting. Knowing the office secretary would not let her through to see him, she waited by the car for two hours. Imagine the registrar’s surprise when he found Quintanilla sitting on top of his car. She told him she wanted to learn English to help her children but the school would not let her. The registrar took her to his office and accepted Quintanilla to the college on an individual approval basis. He enrolled her in four college classes but warned her, “If you don’t make it, don’t bother me again.” With those encouraging words, she got to work right away.

Quintanilla was the oldest among the college students. Since she had never attended college before, everything was new and unfamiliar, even how to operate the water fountains. She juggled her responsibilities as a housewife and a student, “Every day I woke up and got my husband and children off to work and to school. Then I took the bus to college. I came home to make lunch for my husband and grandparents. Then I returned to college. I got home in time to meet Victor, Mario, and Martha when they arrived from school. In the evenings I cooked and cleaned and did laundry and put the children to bed. Then I would study, often until three o’clock in the morning.” She had a hard time with algebra but got help from other students. In her words, she “learned to learn.” Despite the many challenges, she made the honor roll every semester.
Quintanilla’s achievements set an example for her children. She began to speak English around the house and eventually she and her children became comfortable with the language. To her delight, her children’s grades greatly improved and they all became Red Birds. After finishing her four classes, Quintanilla enrolled in more. In 1969 after only three years, she graduated with honors from Pan American University, earning a bachelor’s of science degree with honors in biology.

Quintanilla moved to Houston in 1970 because Brownsville had few opportunities. Houston had universities where she could earn advanced degrees, but she also thought, “If my children want to be doctors and lawyers, we need to go to Houston.” Quintanilla attended the University of Houston where she received her master’s degree in 1971 and her doctorate of education five years later. She started working at the University of Houston as a grader but soon became a teacher and later an administrator. She was the first director of the newly established Mexican American Studies Program and the first Hispanic woman hired in that position.

In 1977 tragedy struck Houston’s Hispanic community when twenty-three-year-old Vietnam War veteran Joe Campos Torres died at the hands of police. Police officers arrested Torres at a bar for disorderly conduct and beat him while in custody. When they arrived at headquarters, the officers were told to take Torres to the hospital to be treated for his injuries, but they took him to the banks of Buffalo Bayou instead. It is not certain whether they pushed him into the water or he jumped, but Torres’s body was found days later in the bayou. The police officers involved received a minor punishment, which angered the Hispanic community. At the one-year anniversary of his death, a riot broke out in Moody Park when police responded to reports of a fight during a Cinco de Mayo celebration.

Quintanilla felt deeply disturbed by this event. She also read a newspaper article about a fire in Chicago where seven people had burned to death even though they had a way to escape the burning building. She describes the confusion between the victims and the people on the ground, “They were on the third floor in the building screaming to the bottom, and the people on the bottom were telling them how to get out in English. The people up there did not understand English, and the people down here did not speak Spanish. So the seven people in this family burned to death [when] there was a way out.” This story, along with Torres’s death touched Quintanilla’s heart. She did not want something like the Chicago family’s deaths to happen in Houston, but she also knew that to avoid such a tragedy the Houston Police Department (HPD) and the Houston Hispanic community needed to understand each other. This prompted her to start a program to bridge their communication gap in 1978.

Quintanilla got together with Ripley House director Felix Fraga and assistant police chief John Bales and they developed the Cross Cultural Communication Program. The program consisted of Dr. Quintanilla teaching Spanish language classes to police officers at Ripley House. HPD agreed to pay five dollars for each officer who took the course. Upon completion, graduation ceremonies and a fiesta were held with food and folclorico dances.

Quintanilla’s main focus was teaching the officers “community relations” through the Spanish language. She not only taught the officers police vocabulary, such as sayings that alert the officers of danger, but she also provided the officers with important cultural information. Quintanilla explains how she helped clear up misunderstandings between the officers and Hispanics. She told the officers, “You tell me that most Mexicans are liars, but frequently they may be giving you the right answer to a wrong ques-
You pick up a man whom we’ll call Juan Gomez Perez. You ask him, “What’s your name?” He says, ‘Juan.’ ‘No,’ you say, ‘your last name.’ He answers, ‘Perez.’ He’s honest. But what you really wanted was his surname, which is Gomez. The computer gives you nothing about a Juan Perez, whom you know by sight and know has been picked up for driving without a license. ‘He lied,’ you say. But he didn’t.”

Quintanilla taught the officers the differences between Hispanic and American cultures that could cause misunderstandings between Hispanics and the officers. While teaching, she started to bring her children to talk to the officers and, thereafter, volunteers from the University of Houston and the community. The program became a success in improving community relations as “people [in the Hispanic community] started knowing the officers as people with children.”

The program did not always progress smoothly. At the start, the police department wanted the classes to take place in the police academy, but Quintanilla insisted that they take place in Ripley House, the community center. She explains, “I wanted the officers to come out to the community and I wanted them to see the community. I wanted them to meet the people because officers meet people, Hispanics and Chinese and Blacks, when they’re in trouble or causing trouble. They don’t meet them as friends... they don’t meet them as family members... I wanted them to experience the community.”

Getting the Hispanic community to accept the officers also presented challenges. Quintanilla recalls a confrontation she had with the Brown Berets, a pro-Chicano movement organization. One day she arrived at Ripley House and found the Brown Berets waiting for her, angry that she was helping the police department. “They were angry at me that how dare I, who was such an icon in the community with a strong reputation...and everybody knew who I was, how come I was supporting the pigs [police officers]? They were very angry at me, the Brown Berets. And I told them (you know, my legs were weak), and I said, ‘You know what? We don’t want you in the community. You need to get out of here.’ And the police officers were inside the building and they were studying and they didn’t know what was happening to me outside... and I walked into the building and then I dropped. I was so scared.” Worried that her life was in danger because she was working with the police department, HPD gave Quintanilla protection after this incident.

The Cross Cultural Communication Program received national recognition from the Department of Defense and the Department of Justice, which named it the best of its kind in the United States. Quintanilla was even invited to train the security forces for the Pan American Games in 1987. The program also attracted the attention of the FBI Academy, as they saw its value. The Department of Defense asked her to make films on subjects such as communication between cultures and Hispanic body language.

In 1983 President Ronald Reagan appointed Quintanilla as co-chairperson of the National Institute of Justice. The next year she received a presidential appointment to become the first Hispanic U.S. representative to the United Nations and to serve as a UN international correspondent. She was elected to the National Hispanic Hall of Fame in 1987 and received the La Raza award in 1989. Now, the first grade drop-out works as an associate professor in the Department of Hispanic Studies at the University of Houston. As for her children who were classified as “slow learners,” Victor is a lawyer practicing in San Antonio, Mario is a doctor who opened his own clinic in Houston, and Martha is also a lawyer, working in Dallas.

Quintanilla’s story of defying the odds proves how wrong we can be when we judge based on culture or language. Houston is fortunate to have such an iconic figure who remained true to herself and did not allow labels to define her or her children.

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The greatest and most successful college football coaches are those who unlock the hidden potential in a program. Not only do they bring out the best in themselves, they also bring out the best in their assistant coaches and, most importantly, their players. From perennial “P5” powerhouses (Power 5 NCAA Division 1 football conferences) to freshly minted FBS teams (Football Bowl Subdivision, formerly Division 1-A), these coaches are all across the country. While many coaches enjoy success at larger, more prestigious programs, some of the greatest coaches in college football cut their teeth coaching smaller, often fledging teams. For many of these programs, football is largely an afterthought, underfunded by uninvolved administrators and unsupported by indifferent students. Instead of focusing on the program’s shortcomings, these coaches spend time changing the school’s football culture. They are trailblazers, imbuing a new sense of pride, excitement, and admiration in students for their football teams.

THE ORIGINAL BONA FIDE DUDE: COACH BILL YEOMAN AND EARLY UH FOOTBALL

By Ryan Graham

The greatest and most successful college football coaches are those who unlock the hidden potential in a program. Not only do they bring out the best in themselves, they also bring out the best in their assistant coaches and, most importantly, their players. From perennial “P5” powerhouses (Power 5 NCAA Division 1 football conferences) to freshly minted FBS teams (Football Bowl Subdivision, formerly Division 1-A), these coaches are all across the country. While many coaches enjoy success at larger, more prestigious programs, some of the greatest coaches in college football cut their teeth coaching smaller, often fledging teams. For many of these programs, football is largely an afterthought, underfunded by uninvolved administrators and unsupported by indifferent students. Instead of focusing on the program’s shortcomings, these coaches spend time changing the school’s football culture. They are trailblazers, imbuing a new sense of pride, excitement, and admiration in students for their football teams.

Coach Bill Yeoman began his legendary career as head coach of Houston football in 1962. He brought his experience from Michigan State University, but UH offered only a fraction of the support and funding he received at MSU.
These successful coaches, or “bona fide dudes,” have earned great respect in the college football community. Such a coach proves his mettle week after week. He exhibits an inherent, intangible element — a certain moxie and diligent determination — aside from producing results on the field. Bona fide dudes bring out the best in everybody they work with, encouraging leadership and greatness wherever they go.¹

Former head football coach Bill Yeoman completely reshaped the University of Houston football program when he arrived, changing the culture and leading the transformation of UH football from an overlooked, forgettable program to one of the most memorable and storied teams in the country. The original bona fide dude at UH, he brought out the best in his players and the university as a whole.

Yeoman’s time as head coach is defined by one, constant theme: overcoming adversity. As head coach, Yeoman had to fight for every inch of success. Whether on the field or off, no victory could be taken for granted.

Growing up in Arizona, Bill Yeoman knew from an early age that he wanted to be a football coach. Unfortunately, his father had other ideas. Having been a high school basketball coach in Indiana, Coach Yeoman’s father knew the hardships that accompany the career and stressed that while it seemed like fun, coaching was “serious stuff.”²

After his father dismissed his coaching plans, Yeoman was determined to “at least do something when he got out of school.” Still committed to lead young men and make a name for himself, he enrolled at the United States Military Academy at West Point, and his time there proved to be indispensable to his development as a head coach. He was surrounded by many bona fide dudes, who went on to achieve greatness in college football and the National Football League (NFL). A member of the 1946 National Championship team, Yeoman learned what it took to put together a winning squad. Fortunate enough to sit in at meetings with coaching greats such as Red Blaik, Vince Lombardi, and Murray Warmath, Yeoman was exposed to many different coaching styles and ideas. After Yeoman graduated from West Point, the Army sent the young second lieutenant to Germany as part of the Fourth Infantry Division. Almost serendipitously, his first order was to report to division artillery headquarters and start a football team for his unit.

After coaching in Europe for three years, Yeoman decided that coaching was his destiny. The Army brought coaching staffs from around the United States for coaching clinics in Europe. There, Yeoman first met Michigan State (MSU) coaching greats Biggie Munn and Duffy Daugherty. After Biggie Munn stepped down to become the athletic director at MSU, he named Duffy Daugherty as his successor. Remembering Yeoman from their time together in Europe, Daugherty offered Yeoman an assistant coaching job at MSU. Working under Daugherty proved to be invaluable to Yeoman, providing him a different perspective on how a head coach conducts business. Contrary to Blaik’s authoritarian style, Daugherty approached coaching in a more...
Yeoman's intensity was mirrored by his players on the field as they dominated offensively, but he also coached one of the league's best defensive players in 1976 Lombardi Award winner Wilson Whitley (1955-1992).

Yeoman reminisced that from time to time Michigan State’s staff meetings consisted of Daugherty “cracking jokes for thirty minutes.” Yeoman later remarked that experiencing this lighthearted approach was essential to his success when taking over at UH.1

When UH began looking for a new head football coach in 1962, benefactor and supporter of UH Athletics Corbin Robertson had members of the MSU coaching staff on his radar. Originally from Chicago and a former football player at Northwestern University, Robertson knew of MSU’s coaching talent and its success in the 1950s. Seeking some of the same success for its relatively young football program, UH hired Yeoman as the new head football coach for the 1962 season.

Taking over at UH was a tall order for Yeoman, who said the UH football program was “unbelievably different” than that of Michigan State. UH football had only a fraction of the support and funding Yeoman enjoyed at his previous job. Knowing that he had his work cut out for him, he hit the ground running. Recognizing that stronger and more established Southwest Conference programs, such as the University of Texas and Texas A&M, had overlooked hundreds of athletes, Yeoman set out to capitalize on their neglect. Yeoman explained that since these schools did not “get off their backsides” and try to recruit these players, he saw a golden opportunity to recruit talented athletes who were otherwise unable to play college football.4

As a smaller school, UH had a far more difficult time recruiting than Michigan State. While at MSU, Yeoman marveled at how high school coaches would “jump up and run around” whenever he and Daugherty visited. As UH head coach, Yeoman did not receive the same attention. To overcome this he and his staff traveled to some of the most remote areas of Texas in search of good players. Going to places like Pampa and Sharyland, Yeoman combed the “boonies” and found players who were “as good as you can get.”5

While recruiting at UH was not easy, Yeoman had a secret weapon: the city of Houston. In Yeoman’s words, “Houston was a good name to the people out in the hinterlands of Texas. If you told them you were from the University of Houston, the kids and the parents were more than happy to sit down and listen to your conversation.” UH was the kind of place where one went to college “to get a degree that would let [him] make a living.” The people in the isolated Texas countryside were aware of Houston’s growing and vibrant economy. Just like today the name Houston was synonymous with opportunity, with jobs in the oil industry being on the forefront of everyone’s minds. For parents in rural Texas, sending their sons to play for Yeoman meant more than letting them play a beloved sport, it meant their sons would receive two things the parents never had: an indispensable education and the seemingly limitless opportunities that accompanied it. Put simply, Houston was a place that had “everything a kid could possibly want,” Yeoman explained.6

Recruiting difficulties forced Yeoman to get creative with his offensive schemes — as the old proverb goes, necessity is the mother of invention. With his team mismatched and outmanned, he needed a system that could help his team compensate for its somewhat sporadic lack of speed and strength. With his characteristic humor, Yeoman says, “The Lord took a look at me and said, ‘Kid, you’re gonna need some help.’”7 After much experimenting and trial-and-error, he eventually developed the Veer offense. Incredibly innovative for its time, the Veer introduced the idea of “reading” a defensive player, or anticipating his actions, to eliminate the need for blocking him. After reading the actions of a few key defensive players, the quarterback then decides whether to keep the ball, hand it off, or run an option-pitch.8

The Veer’s origin story is almost as entertaining as watching it on the field. According to Yeoman, one day during practice the offense was attempting to run a simple half-back dive play out of a split-back formation. After failing to see much success against an eight-man front, Yeoman told his offense “since you can’t block” the defensive tackle “just get out of the way.” After this adjustment the offense gained around fifteen to twenty yards per play. The next day while watching film from the previous day’s practice, Yeoman said, “Hold it...there’s something here we need to pursue.” Yeoman further developed the Veer and refined it by introducing new elements into the offense. In just a few short years after its implementation, the Veer helped the Houston Cougars compete against some of the best teams in the country.

As the Cougars’ new look under Yeoman’s leadership began chalking up victories against college football powerhouses, students became interested in the team. Decisive victories over Kentucky in 1966 (56-18), Michigan State in 1967 (37-7), and Ole Miss in 1968 (29-7) contributed to growing campus support for UH football. According to the “first veer quarterback” Bo Burris, “[W]e beat Ole Miss, and they were pretty good; and we beat Kentucky, who was really good, when we started running the veer.” The most pivotal victory according to Yeoman occurred against Michigan State in 1967, “…that’s what mentally turned it all around for the student body, because they knew Michigan State had a team, and our kids didn’t beat them gently.”9 Just as Yeoman overcame difficulties by fighting for recruits...
and inventing a new, unprecedented offensive scheme, he also broke barriers in the long fight to end segregation in collegiate athletics throughout the South. With his efforts and the efforts of the University of Houston as a whole, the climate of college football in the South changed completely.

Growing up in Arizona, Yeoman was exposed to a variety of people from different cultures and backgrounds. Reminiscing about these days, he remarked, “In Glendale we had Poles, Russians, and we had a fair amount of Japanese around that helped with the nearby farms. I never cared what people were. My parents instilled that in me from an early age.” As he began coaching, this non-prejudicial philosophy stuck with him. When he first came to coach in Texas, Yeoman was deeply confused by blue-chip college football programs that failed to recruit young black players simply because of their skin color. While he saw the racial prejudice expressed by so many of his coaching counterparts throughout Texas, Yeoman remarked that his only prejudice was against one group of people: bad football players.10

Fitting with his recruiting strategy up to this point, Yeoman continued to go where other Texas football programs refused to go and decided to recruit black players. This move was unprecedented for a major southern college football program. A fixture of the Jim Crow-era South, college football could not escape segregation, which pervaded every facet of southern life. Yeoman recalled many instances when other Southwest Conference coaches told “some very critical black jokes,” leaving Yeoman to stay behind and apologize for their remarks. Make no mistake, though, Yeoman’s quest to integrate the UH football team was not part of a larger ideological crusade against Jim Crow. In his own words, Yeoman wishes that he had “thought about [the moral responsibility]” to end segregation, but he really “did it to win.”11 Concerned more with improving his halfback counters than integrating lunch counters, Yeoman’s philosophy was simple: get the players that could best help him win the most games. If somebody could improve his team, Yeoman put him on his list of targeted recruits. Like with any good football team, Yeoman was concerned with building a meritocracy of players. For Yeoman, all that mattered was skill and talent. The best recruits in Texas deserved the chance to play college football, no matter their skin color.

Staying true to his philosophy, Yeoman targeted one of the most exciting players in the 1964 recruiting class, Warren McVea. Coming from San Antonio’s Brackenridge High School, McVea put up staggering statistics in his three years at running back, scoring “just under 600 points,” averaging “better than a first down per carry” and “rushing for 1,332 yards.”12

McVea’s stellar performance on the field caught the attention of some of the top football programs throughout the country. Soon a frenzy grew around him as all of these schools went to great lengths to court him. Many coaches resorted to unique methods to persuade McVea, with the University of Missouri even sending him a letter from President Harry Truman detailing the benefits of attending Mizzou.13 Impressed with his talent and the attention surrounding him, Yeoman set his sights on McVea. Well aware that integration would be a long, difficult road, Yeoman decided that bringing a black star athlete would help make integration more palatable for doubtful UH students and officials. Almost as important for Yeoman were McVea’s intangible qualities. His off-the-field demeanor and personality made him the obvious choice to integrate the team. As Yeoman put it, McVea “really had all of the things you had to have...He was comfortable in crowds. He could go into a room of people, and in ten minutes, he could tell you exactly what he could and couldn’t do with every one of them... He was a difference maker, and that’s what you had to have.”14

Yeoman still faced some opposition from university administration, and, after attempting to work through conventional channels, he was stonewalled. Unsatisfied, he eventually decided to use more unorthodox methods when trying to recruit McVea and take matters into his own hands, spearheading the integration efforts. Sick of the foot-dragging from university administration, Yeoman still faced some opposition from university administration, and, after attempting to work through conventional channels, he was stonewalled. Unsatisfied, he eventually decided to use more unorthodox methods when trying to recruit McVea and take matters into his own hands, spearheading the integration efforts. Sick of the foot-dragging from university administration,
Yeoman “wasn’t really interested in listening to anybody else because [he] didn’t think they understood what had to be done.” Convinced that the only way he would see progress was by his own initiative, Yeoman walked into former athletic director Harry Fouke’s office, knocked on the door and said, “Harry, I’m recruiting Warren.”

McVea’s successful recruiting of McVea was controversial outside the university as well. Frustrated that McVea chose the University of Houston over other, more established programs, several media outlets published disparaging articles about him and Yeoman’s recruiting process. In 1963 the San Antonio Light, which once praised McVea as a remarkable athlete, published an article that overwhelmingly denigrated McVea and portrayed him as a prima donna. According to this piece, McVea was forced to sign with UH after many other programs decided to pass on him, citing rude behavior that was “past the realm of discourteous.” Unwilling to accept such behavior on their teams, these coaches allegedly passed on McVea because “their loss of dignity…would be greater than any good [they] could get” by signing him. Soon, though, many came to McVea’s defense. Gomer Jones, an active recruiter from the University of Oklahoma, insisted that he “would have been happy to have signed [McVea] right up until the moment he signed with Houston” and that he “was never discourteous to our staff in any way.”

McVea also faced seemingly incomprehensible barriers when playing throughout the South. While juking and dodging defenders on the field, McVea also had to simultaneously face unthinkable discrimination, hearing racial epithets hurled at him in every stadium he went to. Determined to maintain strict segregationist policies in their stadiums, some southerners went so far as to mobilize the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) against McVea. In a supreme act of hatred KKK members in Mississippi issued a threat to McVea, claiming he would be killed and that “nobody would ever look for the shooter.”

Ultimately, McVea got the last laugh. Despite the threats and racial slurs, McVea enjoyed great success at UH and became a national college football superstar as a two-time All-American and going on to play in the NFL.

Time and time again, Coach Yeoman has proven that he is the original bona fide dude of Houston Cougar football. Throughout the course of his career at UH, Yeoman has shown himself to be a pioneer and innovator. His grit and determination in the face of adversity have been indispensable to his development as a head coach and for the growth of UH football as a whole. Whether recruiting capable but overlooked players, developing a new offensive scheme, or working to end segregation, Bill Yeoman has had an undeniable and irreplaceable impact on the University of Houston and his legacy will be fondly remembered for decades to come.

Ryan Graham is a law student at the University of Houston Law Center and avid college football fan. He received his degree in political science from the Honors College at the University of Houston, where he is a member of the first UH class inducted into the Phi Beta Kappa Society.

Coaching Stats

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In the late 1950s and early 1960s young people in Oklahoma, North Carolina, and Tennessee held sit-ins that caught the eye of Texas Southern University (TSU) students in Houston. A growing disconnect existed between the younger generation and their elders on how to assert their rights as citizens. Those in Houston who remembered the horrific events in 1917 when violence erupted between white residents and African American soldiers guarding Camp Logan had no desire to see that repeated. Parents and grandparents told their children to wait, mind their own business, and focus on their education. The students chose to employ methods of peaceful protest preached by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.  

Eldrewey Stearns was twenty-eight years old when Houston’s student civil rights movement began. Born and raised in Galveston, Stearns served in the U.S. Army and graduated from Michigan State University (MSU) in 1957 before attending law school at TSU. In 1959 Stearns was pulled over in an upper-class white neighborhood late one night after dropping off his boss from the Doctor’s Club. Stearns had a defective light on his car and was asked to step out of the vehicle during the stop. He recounts, “I told...
them I had constitutional rights, and I was a law student.” He expected to get a ticket and leave, but the officers noticed a picture of a white girl, a friend of Stearns’s from MSU, in his wallet and told him, “Boy what are you doing with a white girl’s picture?” The officers arrested Stearns who claimed they told him he had no rights and upon reaching the station, said, “This is a smart nigger here and we’re gonna do something about him.”

Stearns was brutally beaten by the officers before being thrown in a segregated cell and given a phone call. At around 4:00 or 5:00 a.m., Stearns was taken to the inspector’s office. He remembers, “I was told I was lucky to have my head on my shoulders after talking back to a white policeman in the South.” Stearns goes on, “He said I’d better take my little black ass away from here and never look back, and I promised him I wouldn’t.” That experience was “the shot in the arm [Eldrewey] needed” to get involved with the students active in the Houston civil rights movement, especially TSU’s student protest movement.

Stearns pleaded his case to city council, the Houston Chronicle, the Houston Post, and the NAACP. With the NAACP’s help Stearns filed a nationally publicized lawsuit. Although the case made him a household name as newspapers picked up the story, he points out, “I didn’t particularly like being a celebrity for getting my butt kicked.” He lost his job as a waiter but was hired at the South Central YMCA working as a youth director under Quentin Mease, who became his civil rights mentor. In February of 1960 Mease suggested that Stearns emulate the peaceful protests of students in the North. The next day Stearns discovered a group of TSU students were planning a Greensboro, North Carolina, style sit-in. He recalls that the group was trying to pick a leader with suggestions of Martin Luther King and then TSU Baptist Student Union director Reverend Bill Lawson. Stearns explains a white Jewish classmate sitting in the front row said, “We don’t need Martin Luther King. We got Eldrewey Stearns! I’ll follow him!”

On March 4, 1960, fourteen TSU students gathered around the flag pole in front of the TSU administration building holding hands and singing the “Star Spangled Banner.” Lunch counters were the initial targets for the protests, and the students marched to the Weingarten’s store at 4110 Almeda Road. Among the protesters were Deanna Lott, Guy Boudouis, John Hutchins, Jessis Parvis, Curtis Graves Burrell, Holly and Pete Hogrobrooks, Clarence Coleman, Eddie Rigsby, Pat Patterson, and Eldrewey Stearns. As they marched, they were joined by other students who accompanied them to the store. By the time they arrived, their numbers had reached over one hundred. They easily filled all thirty lunch counter seats, politely requesting service. Within minutes, store officials closed the lunch counter. Despite the arrival of law enforcement and reporters, Holly Hogrobrooks recalls, “everybody stood around.” The students were denied service until the store closed at 8:30 p.m.

Three days after this first peaceful protest, white men kidnapped Felton Turner, a twenty-seven-year-old black man who had not participated in the sit-ins, and took him into the woods where they beat him with a chain, carved two rows of “KKK” into his abdomen, and hung him upside down from a tree. Despite the assault multiplying the older generations’ fear of white violence, the student sit-ins spread to other lunch counters and were reported by the media. Black parents, teachers, ministers, community leaders, and others in Houston tried to dissuade the students from continuing the protests; however, this new generation believed the time for waiting had passed; now was the time to act.

Not long after these protests, a Houston council member, Louie Welch, came up with an idea he called “vertical integration,” a term usually associated with a business structure. Welch suggested that since blacks and whites already

The students agreed to follow these rules created by student protesters elsewhere in the South:

- Do show yourself friendly on the counter at all times.
- Do remember the teachings of Jesus Christ, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King.
- Do feel that you have a constitutional right and democratic reason for what you are doing.
- Don’t strike back or curse if attacked.
- Don’t speak to anyone without stating your purpose for being in the movement.
- Do sit straight and always face the counter.
- Do refer all information to your leader in a polite manner.
- Do continue if your leader is discouraged and placed in confinement.
- Don’t laugh out.
- Don’t hold conversations with floor walkers.
- Don’t leave your seat until your leader has given you permission to do so.
- Don’t block entrances to the store and aisles.

Source: Thomas R. Cole, No Color is My Kind; The Life of Eldrewey Stearns and the Integration of Houston.
stood side by side vertically when using the elevator, they
could do the same when served food at a counter. Despite
moderate success initially, soon the busy lunch counter at
Weingarten’s became a ghost town.8

When the students learned that Argentina’s ambassador
was visiting Houston, Stearns sent a group of TSU students
to City Hall. On March 25, 1960, the students marched
around City Hall carrying picket signs and singing church
songs. After about an hour the group walked into the build-
ing’s cafeteria and asked to be served, and to the students’
surprise, they were. Welch announced, “We don’t all have to
be fools,” grabbed his tray, and sat down next to the black
students. That day John Miller became the first black man
to have a cup of coffee at the City Hall cafeteria.9

With all the racial tension and protests throughout the
city, Mayor Lewis Cutrer announced the students would
be arrested if they did not stop the protests. Later Houston
police chief Carl Shuptrine told the mayor that the students
had broken no laws and he would not arrest them, suggest-
ing the mayor lock them up himself. Without the police
chief’s support and threats of violence escalating, Cutrer
set up a biracial committee to study the issue and make
recommendations. Cutrer guaranteed police protection
for peaceful protesters but called for a moratorium on the
demonstrations. The TSU administration and black leaders
such as Rev. Bill Lawson, Earl Allen, and Charles Lee sup-
pported the mayor’s moratorium to let the biracial committee
do its research; however, a small group of demonstrators
sent a telegram to the mayor stating that demonstrations
would resume if lunch counters were not desegregated
within two weeks of April 12, 1960.10

The biracial committee voted nineteen to three to inte-
grate Houston. The mayor quickly disbanded the commit-
te. According to the TSU president at the time, Dr. Sam
Nabrit, “This left the mayor in a dilemma. He wanted to
make sure no one knew what had transpired behind those
doors.”11

On April 25, 1960, Stearns and 150 to 200 students met
at the South Central YMCA to discuss whether or not to
resume protesting. The majority followed Rev. Bill Lawson’s
advice to wait for the committee report. Nevertheless, about
fifteen students rallied around Eldrewey Stearns’s call to
resume the protests. That afternoon Curtis Graves led that
group to the Greyhound Bus Station cafeteria at 1410 Texas
Avenue. Stearns and Otis King waited by the phone at the
YMCA for a call from Curtis to say he had been arrested,
but instead he said, “Drew [Eldrewey], they’re feeding us.”
King remembers that Curtis was disappointed and said,
“He didn’t realize how momentous this was, that the tactic
had worked.”12

After the first protests ended, the students regrouped and
began targeting supermarkets, department stores, bus and
railway stations, restaurants, and theaters. They quickly
learned that peaceful protests such as sit-ins, picketing, and
boycotts were effective in a city devoted to making money.
TSU students asked black people across the city to boycott
Foley’s department store in an effort to show their support
for the movement. Eldrewey Stearns went on KYOK, a local
black radio station, to ask customers not to shop at Foley’s
the Saturday before Mother’s Day in 1960. These protests
became a powerful economic weapon because many of the
targeted stores lost business. With Chief Shuptrine attempt-
ing to protect the students from harm and preserve their
right to protest, the students were not arrested during the
first year of demonstrations.13

In February of 1961 the Houston Police Department
There were twelve of them and twelve of us. They had the New York at Houston’s Union Station. Hogrobrooks notes, one of the TSU students who met Freedom Riders from required travel across state lines. Holly Hogrobrooks was the students hoped to evoke a federal right to dine but that students disagreed.15

Charged under Texas state law with unlawful assembly, the students hoped to evoke a federal right to dine but that required travel across state lines. Holly Hogrobrooks was one of the TSU students who met Freedom Riders from New York at Houston’s Union Station. Hogrobrooks notes, “There were twelve of them and twelve of us. They had the interstate tickets. We went into the coffee shop and were arrested.” Holly reflects, “I remember singing. We would sing. The guys would pick it up and we would sing back. We would have the whole building rockin’! It would drive the jailers crazy!” The students’ lawyers appealed the unlawful assembly charges, and the state’s highest court ruled in their favor.16

Sam Nabrit made a trip to New York City where he spoke to NAACP attorney Thurgood Marshall, who had won numerous civil rights cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, including two Houston cases, Smith v. Alwright (1944) and Sweatt v. Painter (1950), and Brown v. Board of Education (1954). Nabrit recalls, “Marshall suggested that we alert the students to the fact that the one way they would be arrested would be to block an exit to a theater. Well the students wanted to get arrested so they did just that.” Many students were arrested and the ones who were not walked up and down the street raising bail money. According to Nabrit, “About two weeks later, Mr. John T. Jones called me from Washington, D.C. I had alerted him to the fact that the manager of Loew’s Theater had indicated he would see this segregated theater [be] desegregated.”17

Many businesses in Houston were interested in desegregating, but most opposed it in fear of an all-out boycott from the white community. Despite racial tensions, a group of business leaders, led by Bob Dundas of Foley’s, got together and decided to quietly integrate their stores. On August 24, 1961, several black business leaders were contacted and told that all lunch counters would be open the next day. Owners and managers instructed newspapers, radio, and television stations not to report the events, for fear of a race riot. In the fall of 1961 another media blackout took place to cover up the desegregation of restaurants and hotels.18

A backdrop of the civil rights movement was the city’s ambition to have a Major League Baseball (MLB) team. After an effort in the 1950s to persuade MLB to come to Houston, the owners agreed on October 17, 1960, to expand the league and include the Bayou City. Plans to build the Harris County Domed Stadium called for the use of public funds, so Mease and other black leaders threatened to oppose the bond election unless the stadium opened fully integrated. He had spent fifteen years building the South Central YMCA into a successful branch that regularly held large interracial business meetings. With the help of the TSU students, Mease made sure it was known that if there was any attempt to segregate the Dome, protests would be held, and he sent that message in a letter to MLB as “insurance.”19

Stearns, along with Otis King, Curtis Graves, Earl Allen, Charles Lee, and Holly Hogrobrooks knew that media visibility provided their movement with momentum. According to Thomas Cole, “Eldrewey Stearns was a media hound.” On May 23, 1963, Houston hosted a parade for NASA that put the city on TV screens across the globe. Stearns and the rest of the students knew this was their chance to get the media attention they deserved by protesting the fact that Houston’s theaters remained largely segregated. Otis King recalls on the night of May 22, “Bill Lawson worked with us very closely in his garage. We spent the whole night get-
ting these signs ready and planning everything and getting people lined up.” He adds, it felt like “a military operation where we had, perhaps, as many as 100 people downtown.”

The protestors planned to break out of the crowd once the parade reached Main Street by stepping out on both sides of the street as the parade passed, pulling signs out from under their coats, and rushing into the road. Otis King recalls, “We were gonna reach a fail-safe point where at a certain time we wouldn’t be able to call it and it would have really embarrassed the city.” King continues, however, “At the last moment, with about ten to fifteen minutes to spare, they [the theater and business owners] told us that they would open up all the downtown theaters and they would integrate them.” Rev. Lawson sums it up saying, “Another page in history was turned.”

Dr. Thomas R. Cole researched and reported on the events as both writer and editor of books with Eldrewey Stearns and Quentin Mease. He was also the creator and executive producer of the film The Strange Demise of Jim Crow. His research uncovered previously unknown information about secret deals between white and black business leaders along with local media blackouts of the movement’s success. Cole explains, “It took me years to figure out a secret. I knew there was a secret [and] that there had been an agreement, but I didn’t know who instigated it, who it was between, and I wanted to find out what it was. I wanted to find out who dreamed this up, who agreed to it.”

Cole admits that he missed one thing that should have been mentioned in the film: “the mixed blessing that desegregation was to the black community.” After blacks and whites were no longer separate, many black businesses that relied on black customers took a tumble. Holly Hogrobrooks notes, “Too many blacks saw integration as integration, and not desegregation.” For example, after segregation ended, blacks began going downtown to watch movies. Holly recalls, “As a result, we lost practically every movie theater in the black community.” Similarly, as housing desegregated and people moved to other neighborhoods, they took their business out of Third, Fourth, and Fifth Wards and began shopping at the new malls springing up in the suburbs, causing the once thriving black business centers to fade into memory.

Despite Cole’s films and books chronicling desegregation in Houston, many people still do not know this history or the role the TSU students played in leading local civil rights protests between 1960 and 1963. Few realize the importance of people like Eldrewey Stearns who acted as a catalyst and leader for the local student protests, or African American community leaders like Quentin Mease and Rev. Lawson working alongside white businessmen like Bob Dundas of Foley’s and John T. Jones of the Houston Chronicle who were willing to make a change and saw it as critical to Houston’s progress. Peaceful methods and cooperation made it possible for the student movement to force Houston to integrate lunch counters, department stores, theaters, restaurants, and hotels, followed by the Astrodome in 1965, without experiencing the violence seen in other cities.

Michael Anderson is a senior at the University of Houston majoring in history.
On September 2, 2002, a group of city officials and Houston’s then-mayor, Lee P. Brown, solidified the fate of an abandoned brick building at 1300 Victor Street in Freedmen’s Town, an area listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Through a significant restoration effort, Fourth Ward’s late-1920s-era African American elementary school, vacant since 1984, was to become a dual-purpose cultural center and research institute. The decision marked just over two years since the city’s acquisition of the structure from the Houston Independent School District (HISD) on May 10, 2000, and three decades as a documented place of interest on the city’s radar. Indeed, as Mayor Brown acknowledged in 2003, such drawn-out beginnings foreshadowed a “long-standing project” and an equally lengthy reconstructive process. The structure’s ramshackle exterior — its faded whitewashed walls, boarded windows, and disintegrating roof — and decaying interior at the time of purchase corroborated his sentiment. Further “delayed progress,” the mayor added, awaited developers “because of [the building’s] historical significance.”

THE SEARCH FOR A PERMANENT HOME

Before becoming Houston’s African American Library at the Gregory School, one of approximately five public African American libraries in the United States preserving, celebrating, and promoting black culture and history, the building was home to Houston’s first African American public elementary school for nearly six decades. Founded in 1870, the Gregory Institute represented an unprecedented community effort at combating post-Civil War racial and educational oppression. Originally labeled an elementary school, the institute welcomed all age groups, uniting residents young and old through education. In doing so, the Gregory Institute played an important role in the success of Freedmen’s Town, a small settlement of the first one thousand freed slaves after the Civil War’s end, now Houston’s oldest established African American neighborhood.

The school received its name from Edgar M. Gregory, a Union officer and assistant commissioner for the Freedmen’s Bureau, a federally created organization that assisted freed slaves post-Civil War with acquiring land and other civil protections. Following the Texas Legislature’s 1870 decision to create public schools for African Americans, Gregory donated land for the construction of the Gregory Institute, a wooden, two-story edifice situated on Jefferson Avenue between Smith and Louisiana Streets. Shortly afterwards in 1876, the school officially entered the Houston public school system. By that time, many of the schools established by the Freedmen’s Bureau had been closed, sending extra students and teachers to the Gregory Institute. An unparalleled accomplishment, the Gregory Institute played an important role in the success of Freedmen’s Town, a small settlement of the first one thousand freed slaves after the Civil War’s end, now Houston’s oldest established African American neighborhood.
School stood tall for almost two decades as a place where African Americans of all ages learned basic literacy and arithmetic skills, giving them the tools to participate in the workforce or open businesses.3

In 1893 a destructive storm abruptly interrupted the school’s tenure on Jefferson Avenue. Severe damages to the building forced Gregory students to relocate to Colored High School on West Dallas Street, now known as Booker T. Washington High School, while builders repaired the affected areas. What was predicted to be a brief respite turned into a ten-year postponement after the building’s condition was deemed beyond repair. In 1903 the Gregory School opened its doors anew, earnestly welcoming a fresh generation of young scholars, this time at its present-day location between Cleveland and Victor Streets.4 Structural challenges plagued the second building as well, leading to the construction of an entirely different multi-building complex — larger and sturdier than before — in 1926.

Architecturally austere” and “minimally ornamented,” the third and permanent home for the elementary school was designed by Hedrick & Gottlieb, a prominent architectural firm whose work peppers the streets of downtown Houston to this day. For its part, the Gregory School was one of three educational institutions located in low-income African American neighborhoods that received modifications or expansions in the 1920s.5 Such enhancements occurred in response to swelling public school enrollment numbers, urban population growth, and a building boom that caused rapid development of nearby areas such as Downtown. The Fourth Ward, too, was bustling with activity during the 1920s and 1930s. Businesses started by original Freedmen’s Town settlers were well established by the early twentieth century; churches were highly frequented, bringing neighbors together; and schools had cemented their position as dynamic learning institutions that bred informed and ambitious citizens.

Fondly remembered by many alumni, the Gregory School was, in one way or another, a part of daily life in Fourth Ward. Martha Whiting, a pupil from 1919 to 1923, recalls her teachers’ generosity, stating that parents “trusted teachers with their children” and teachers “would keep [children] until [parents] got there and picked them up…” Teachers often cared for children outside of regular school hours and, “If it was cold,” Whiting explains, teachers took children “in and kept them.”6 For others like alumnus Hardy Anderson, who experienced the school in the 1940s, mentioning the Gregory conjures up memories of recreation. “When I started school,” Anderson comments, “...some days we would come to school barefooted because you can do that then, right, that was a lot of fun.” Echoing Whiting, Anderson emphasizes the close-knit bond between the school and the community: “…most of those folks that taught at the Gregory lived in the neighborhood...my biology teacher was a block down from here, it was quite [an] interesting neighborhood at that time; we were all cluttered in one area...”7 For alumna Geraldine Wooten, attending Gregory Elementary during the mid-1930s and early 1940s was part of her family legacy. She explains, “I was the tenth of my mother’s eleven children. All of us attended Gregory beginning with the first grade...to the fifth grade.”8

Still others such as Bennie Jackson, a student during the 1940s, call on the valuable education they received: “…this was a beautiful school at that time. I had many friends and we actually learned how to read and write downstairs, in that first room down there.” Besides reinforcing basic reading, writing, and math skills, the Gregory also encouraged creativity through art. “I remember we had to draw that tree [still standing] and I found out that I had an ability to draw...we had a great education here,” Jackson remarks.

Not all lessons were educational, however. James “Bo” Humphrey, a graduate of the class of 1944 reveals that, “The experience I had here, I will never forget…before school started the boys would play ball in the grass and the bell would ring. We would all line up — we were very regimented — we would line up downstairs outside of the building and our teacher would play the piano. We would say the pledge of allegiance and march to our different rooms.”9 The ability of the Gregory to be at once a source of innocent entertainment and a place guided by rules is apparent to the school’s former students. Jackson also calls to mind a particular incident in which teachers and administrators did not hesitate to dole out punishment: “Well, I was called in [to the principal’s office] one time because of a fight after school and I was involved in it and we were disciplined for that very severely,” “But,” she ribs, “that was the only time I was in to see her.”10

These vivid memories serve as voices from an institution no longer in existence and a community no longer connected as it once was. Gregory Elementary School was formally decommissioned in 1984. Its teachers and remaining student body were consolidated with Lincoln Elementary. Today the Gregory’s heritage as an elementary school lives on through the Gregory-Lincoln Education Center, which continues to service the children of Fourth Ward. The exodus of students, teachers, and administrators in the 1980s, however, left the Gregory building bare and uncared for, quickly becoming a forgotten relic.

THE SLOW ROAD TO RESTORATION

Even before the school’s closing, the City of Houston pinpointed the Gregory School as a potential center to honor Houston’s rich African American history and culture.
During the 1970s Mayor Jim McConn’s administration attempted to purchase the school, an effort that resurfaced in the 1980s when the city approached HISD once more to acquire the school for a museum-like facility to house community services and cultural events. In 2000 the city secured the complex using a $1 million federal grant allocated for an affordable museum. While projected funding for the sizeable restoration project was large, the trick was locating that funding. Early renovation estimates totaled $5 million with possible funding sources from library bonds, federal grants, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance. The project obtained an economic development initiative grant of $997,800 from Senator Kay Bailey Hutchinson as a starting point. The annual cost to the facility, however, was estimated to run $1,392,796 out of the Houston Public Library System’s (HPL) general fund budget. Funding in hand and in progress, attention turned to design and construction.

Mayor Brown’s 2002 mission statement for the building articulated that it would serve as a culturally oriented research facility geared towards enhancing understandings of the African American experience. It would “provide[archival, cultural, and related services essential for studying the culture and history of people of African American descent in Houston, Texas, historic Freedmen’s Town, and Southwest Texas.” Its primary role was to serve as an “information resource to the general public and the research community to build a sense of community pride” through the display of cultural and historical material in exhibits, special events, seminars, meetings, and conferences. This emphasis on local and community history, explicit since the project’s beginnings, was a distinguishing feature compared to other museums in the area.

While on paper such a proposal seemed entirely feasible, site visits to the building suggested otherwise. Beginning in March 2003 the engineering firm WP & Associates, Architects, Engineers, Planners Inc. conducted structural investigations of the area, concluding that the building was in unsafe condition. Separated mortar had caused cracks on the exterior brick walls, the roof and flooring had deteriorated, and the building’s concrete panels were sagging severely. Multiple reports analyzing the complex’s structural integrity suggested a substantial facelift if the former elementary school was to fulfill plans for a contemporary cultural center.

Although the 2003 planning documents showed real concern for keeping all three buildings and conforming to developers’ goals, the firm ultimately recommended renovating only the main building and demolishing the two 1950s- and 1960s-era surrounding structures (formerly a cafeteria and two-story classroom building) as their salvage would have been too costly. Illustrating the length of time it can take for a governmental project of this sort to proceed and the neglect of the building, two years passed until work started on the interior. The renovation effort was halted due to existing hazardous material, structural defects, and severe pest conditions that raised health and safety concerns. Such pressing matters required resolution before work recommenced.

While WP & Associates assessed the durability of the structure in 2003, Walker Architects created a two-pronged program for “promoting and preserving the rich history and culture of African Americans in Freedmen’s Town.” The first involved finding “key people in the fine arts community...to advise on the layout and scope.” Walker identified several facilities of interest but worked most closely with Howard Dodson of New York’s Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture. From site visits to the Schomburg, Walker suggested that Houston’s new African American cultural center fill its space with galleries and exhibits and its library archives commit to processing and storage.

The second element in Walker’s design plan was influenced by the community — the Freedmen’s Town Association, residents of the area, local pastors wanting to participate in the “uplift of Fourth Ward,” and former Gregory School teachers. Developers organized focus group meetings and interviews with representatives of the African American community for input on collections requirements and “best use” of the library. These forums were well attended and not without controversy. Positive feedback included: “Restoration would keep the community that attended Gregory to feel a continued connection to the landmark...[the acknowledgement of] a portion of your history enhances future generations.”

Negative comments expressed unease that the meetings ignored community fears. Community members advocated saving the entire site, believing that demolishing the two buildings failed to protect the unique heritage of the neighborhood. They voiced concern that changing the entrance location and adding the proposed glass facade addition to the red brick school structure would fundamentally alter the building’s character. The architect’s reasoning for the glass
The feeling of being in a historic school building is part of the African American Library’s experience, as illustrated by this restored classroom.

Completion of the African American Library at the Gregory School in 2009 reflected the main goal of city planners: maintaining the structural integrity of the original building. The glass facade serves as the entrance to the front lobby.

The facade reflected both space concerns and regulations imposed by the Texas Historical Commission (THC). To begin with, the original building lacked space for a gallery room and a lobby area. Furthermore, since 1995, the school had been designated a state archaeological landmark. With that classification, renovations had to be approved by the THC. Their requirements mandated that additions could not mimic the style of the original building, but must differentiate the “old from the new.” The contemporary glass and metal facade met both concerns. Thus, by the end of Mayor Brown’s administration, the developers had reached a consensus on both the exterior and interior design of the building.

In 2005 a second administration and new architects took over the project with continued enthusiasm and a corresponding appreciation. Mayor Bill White described a vision for the site as a one-of-a-kind institution because of its location in a “space significant to the African American community.” A unique aspect of the center would be its inclusion under the umbrella and direction of HPL. The library would be the third major research institution in HPL’s Special Collections Division after the Clayton Library Center for Genealogical Research and the Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC). These special collections libraries are all centrally situated near downtown Houston, located within a few miles of each other, and were envisioned to provide exceptional and easy access to extensive resources for researchers and scholars.

Aside from completing the renovation, the next major challenge was to populate the library’s collections. Initially exhibits and collections were to be developed from HMRC materials and other agencies. Nevertheless, in staying true to its founding principal of celebrating the community, the African American Library began collecting items from residents in early 2008. The city commissioned Patricia Smith Prather, co-founder of the Texas Trailblazer Preservation Association, to locate artifacts for inclusion in the collections. Prather accomplished her mission by walking the neighborhood, knocking on doors, and visiting homes, churches, and businesses in the black community. Literally going through residents’ “clutter,” Prather said that “people have history in their homes, but they just don’t know it. It is uncollected history.” Among her early collection items was a pew from Antioch Missionary Baptist Church, Houston’s first African American Baptist church. Prather’s participatory approach to the collection of material artifacts has followed the library into its current-day operations, which rely on community members to contribute personal or family mementos for use in exhibits and to participate in oral history interviews that tell the stories of the African American experience in Houston. This was the last step in a decade-long process to renovate the forgotten school building. The African American Library at the Gregory School debuted on November 14, 2009.

IN THE PRESENT

Tucked into a cluster of row houses, the library’s hefty brick exterior stands quietly but resiliently as a witness to its increasingly gentrified surroundings. Surrounded by multi-level apartment complexes, flashy sports bars, trendy restaurants, and a bustling downtown, the African American Library remains a beacon for a simpler time. As the library’s oral historian Valerie Wade points out, if not for the library, the historical value of the area would be lost. “Residents and visitors,” she adds, “may not even be aware the building is a national historical landmark.” In fact, with the active push in recent years to rename the area “Midtown,” the memory of Freedmen’s Town and Historic Fourth Ward as a socially conceived racial project stands on the brink of extinction.
The Gregory School’s permanent exhibit, along with many of its special exhibits, tell the story of African Americans and African American life in Houston, enlightening visitors and enabling them to understand where Houston’s story fits in the larger narrative. As the creation story of the African American Library demonstrates, developers went to great lengths to preserve the building’s classical charm. This is not lost on the institution’s current staff. On the contrary, the need for authenticity is more pressing in light of the area’s changing landscape. To recreate a truthful portrayal of the black experience in Freedmen’s Town, Wade, archivist Miguell Ceasar, and the rest of the team encourage Fourth Ward residents to preserve their unique histories through archival donations or oral histories using the library as the primary conduit. In this way, the public shapes the telling of their history while simultaneously creating institutional memory for the organization.

Wade understands the importance of oral communication to the telling of African American history as it was often the only form of preserving black history in the face of extreme barriers on the written word. Likewise, adding to the archives is both an engaging process and a contribution to community knowledge. In Ceasar’s experience, gathering material for the archives involves considerable community outreach. Working toward collecting manuscripts, photographs, and books, the library hosts “Walk-in Wednesdays,” or donor days, during which community members drop off items for donation, and a community scanning project that allows for scanning if the donor prefers to keep original documents. These are the current foci of the African American Library, the product of a pioneering institution created 146 years ago. New collaborations, larger projects, and expanded community outreach are all on the agenda for the library.

Recently after segments of the brick streets laid by former slaves around the Gregory School’s neighborhood were inadvertently removed by contractors, Mayor Sylvester Turner urged city leaders to designate the area a historic cultural district. “The story of Houston’s African American community begins right here in Freedmen’s Town. This is where freed slaves came to settle once word of emancipation finally made its way to Texas,” Turner said. “It was a neighborhood filled with churches, businesses and homes — a place where residents provided their own services and utilities. There were blacksmiths, doctors, lawyers, teachers and pastors. There was even a vibrant jazz scene and a minor league baseball team. It’s such a wonderful story and we are going to tell it.” The African American Library at the Gregory School stands at the heart of that history, relaying that story to all who enter and preserving it for future generations.

Ela Miljkovic is a Ph.D. student at the University of Houston studying Mexican cultural history. A public history minor, Ela enjoys learning about the rich history of cultural institutions in her local surroundings.
What is the current building trend in Houston? Adaptive reuse of buildings has become increasingly popular in an effort to preserve existing structures and simultaneously adapt their function to their communities' needs. Since preservation activist Minnette Boesel wrote “Historic Preservation in Houston…a History?” which appeared in *The Houston Review of History and Culture* (now *Houston History*) in 2006, Houston has seen an increasing awareness of historic preservation's importance. “Preservation across the country…has become a huge movement in the last forty years...[I]n Houston, I think there is awareness, but perhaps not as much as in other cities until more recently.”

Not only has the city created more incentives for people to purchase and maintain historic structures than ever before but with this newfound consciousness of history’s value in our relatively young city, more people are realizing the importance of this practice to create a sustainable and economically beneficial trend for Houston’s growth. Boesel, through her unwavering determination, has managed to significantly help change attitudes towards preservation locally and continues to embody Houston’s can-do spirit that enchants those involved with the city.

**THE MAKINGS OF AN ADVOCATE**

Minnette Boesel was born in Boston, Massachusetts. Her mother was a portrait painter and her father a corporate oil company executive with a strong interest in history. This combination of exposure to the arts and history early in her life instilled in Minnette a great appreciation for both disciplines and inspired her to pursue working as a museum curator. After graduating with an art history degree she interned in a curatorial environment at several museums. When her family moved to Atlanta, she landed a job with the Atlanta History Center as curator of the Tullie Smith House. An adaptive reuse project, the Tullie Smith House, rescued from demolition due to highway construction, is part of an 1840s farmhouse complex converted to an educational museum where visitors learn about daily life in a typical, mid-nineteenth-century “plantation plain” style home and its outbuildings. This experience yielded a profound change in her career path. Witnessing the grassroots efforts of women volunteers who took action to preserve these historic buildings for educational purposes fostered her interest and passion for historic preservation, specifically, historic properties that faced possible elimination from the rise of urbanism.

Her newfound interest led Minnette to Columbia University where she completed a master’s degree in historic preservation in the 1970s. Historic preservation as an urban planning tool to preserve existing neighborhoods was a fairly novel approach at the time. The focus of the master’s program, the first of its kind in the country, highlighted a new way of thinking about historic preservation. In the 1960s support for preservation in the United States was virtually nonexistent. The *Washington Post* reported, “The post-World War II zeitgeist, or spirit of the time, was relentlessly future-oriented. Whether to save or demolish was primarily a financial choice based on real estate value, economic potential, existing physical conditions and functionality. If something was old and obsolete, the logical move was to get rid of it.”

The destruction of New York’s Pennsylvania Station in 1964, along with the large scale slum clearance rapidly occurring across the nation through so-called “urban renewal,” brought attention to this issue. That same year, James Marston Fitch, with other founding members, established Columbia’s preservation program. Before coming to Houston, Minnette became the first executive director of the Georgia Trust for Historic Protection.
Preservation, following a rising trend of statewide historic preservation non-profits being created, and then moved to Maryland to work for Preservation Maryland, the state’s “...oldest, largest, and most effective preservation organization.” At the Georgia Trust and at Preservation Maryland Minnette was exposed to the honed strategic efforts of funding, outreach, and advocacy in organizations. With education and experience under her belt, all the preparations for her move to Texas seemed complete but what truly awaited her was an uphill battle.

ONE CHANGE AT A TIME

Fate and marriage brought Minnette to Houston in the early 1980s, when oil and gas markets were soaring and the city booming. With the ongoing expansion of the interstate highway system and a laissez-faire, non-zoning approach to growth, suburbia rose along the periphery. Further development of the Texas Medical Center encouraged more people to come to Houston in search of employment. All these things ultimately affirmed the need for personal vehicles to facilitate maneuvering through the city, leading to a lack of pedestrian-friendly areas. NASA’s earlier arrival and accomplishments prompted Houston to adopt a “space age” attitude that influenced the city, creating an adverse mindset toward historic preservation until the oil bust in the mid-1980s forced the public to reassess the value of conservation.

Boesel immediately volunteered for the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance (now Preservation Houston), started a preservation consulting business with architectural historian Barrie Scardino Bradley, and later began working as executive director of a downtown civic organization, the Downtown Houston Association (DHA). Among its programs, DHA focused attention on the Market Square Historic District, the 1836 town site of Houston and Market Square Park. (Originally called Congress Square, it was intended as the capitol site for the Republic of Texas.) DHA spearheaded a reconfiguration of the park in partnership with DiverseWorks Art Space, which coordinated and oversaw significant collaborative art installations.

The mid to late 1980s saw an economic downturn as the oil boom came to an abrupt halt. Historic buildings stood vacant and ready for purchase. At this opportune moment, Boesel knew “that if we could just hold on to the buildings, no matter what, eventually the economy would turn around and things would get better.” The strategy worked, but the area remained unappealing. With no city ordinances that addressed preservation and rising delinquency and vagrancy in the downtown area, the group faced much bigger problems. Some of the area’s businesses were high-crime bars and pornographic theaters.

Recognizing an organized effort was needed to overcome some of the challenges, in 1991 the Downtown Houston Association initiated a special project, becoming its own nonprofit, the Downtown Historic District, Inc. The organization raised funds to operate, was awarded a Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for operations from the city, and joined the Texas Main Street Program of the Texas Historical Commission. Boesel staffed the organization for the first two years and along with her board members helped initiate a facade grant program to encourage owners to repair their buildings. “We spent a lot of time cleaning the neighborhood up. It was Herculean and there was not a lot of support from people...but we were on a mission and everything we did was right,” Boesel recalls.

In early 1995, working for several years with then mayor Bob Lanier, Preservation Houston and the Planning and Development Commission Houston had its first legal success with the passage of a preservation ordinance. Although it lacked much legal power, the ordinance proved to be a necessary first step for the future of preservation.
Boesel along with like-minded colleagues undertook an adaptive reuse project in the early 1990s in the Market Square Historic District. With the help of fellow preservationists, Boesel and partners Jamie Mize, Dan Tidwell, Doug Lawing, and Guy Hagstette attempted to borrow money from banks to buy and restore the 1889 W. L. Foley Dry Goods Building, which had suffered a fire in 1989, in the 200 block of Travis Street. The adjacent Kennedy-Foley Building, also impacted by the fire and built in the 1860s, was purchased for renovation by artist Lee Benner after hocking his truck for the down payment. These buildings shared a party wall so it was important for all the owners to work together. After marrying the daughter of Kennedy, William L. Foley hired noted Texas architect Eugene Heiner, who had designed the exuberantly styled Houston Cotton Exchange Building in the same block. Heiner was tasked with designing Foley's dry goods store along with remodeling and incorporating the facade of the Kennedy-Foley Building because it had burned in the 1880s. W. L. Foley then went on to loan nephews Pat and James Foley $2,000 to start the Foley Brothers’ store that later grew into the Houston-based department store chain Foley’s. The buildings’ resilient past made a perfect model for restoration/renovation projects.

Unfortunately, the banks declined to offer financial help despite being obligated to make a good faith effort to assist in such cases under the Community Reinvestment Act. Undeterred, the group raised the money, engaged engineers and contractors, and invested sweat equity to complete the project. Today the Kennedy-Foley Building is home to the Landmark Houston Hospitality Group’s restaurant, Hearsay, which provides a unique dining experience, bringing people into the heart of historic Market Square. The W. L. Foley Building has loft apartments and a real estate office.

With this success, Boesel realized she could utilize her real estate broker license to help further preservation efforts. If historic buildings were going to be repurposed, they had to be bought and redeveloped. Seeing the profession as “a tool to make more change,” she opened Minnette Boesel Properties, the first residential real estate company to locate in the downtown area. She used her own and her partners’ project, the W. L. Foley Building, as the headquarters for her business.

Boesel’s next adaptive reuse endeavor was the Hermann Estate Building, built in 1917 as a part of the estate of well-known businessman and philanthropist George Hermann, who donated the land for Hermann Park and left funding in his will to establish Hermann Hospital. The Hermann Estate Building had been vacant for over twenty years and before that had served for several decades as a men’s mission for the Salvation Army. The sturdy structure, the great views, and big windows offered an opportunity to create residential spaces and became the first renovation project creating loft condominiums in downtown Houston. Lead developers Doug Crosson and Wally Hultin teamed up with Boesel, as an investor and broker, and they finished the project in 1998. Boesel’s broker license allowed her to work on the marketing and sales aspect of the loft condominiums. Pioneering the effort required investigating the legal framework for the project and adaptive construction and design techniques that had not been implemented in Houston previously.

The project proved to be a success and served as a catalyst for other similar renovations, for which Boesel’s company helped market the condominium lofts, including Bayou Lofts, housed in the Southern Pacific Railroad Building, built in 1911; and Franklin Lofts, originally the First National Bank Building, built between 1909 and 1925. Reflecting, Minnette explains, “Somebody had to go out on a limb to do these projects. We were going to be first, to show that it could be done. It was a huge risk and I’m really proud to be a part of the change that has come about.”

CELEBRATING ADAPTIVE REUSE AND PRESERVATION IN HOUSTON

Continuing preservation efforts, Boesel served as a board member and chair of the Downtown Redevelopment Authority/Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone #3, which among many projects funded a redesign of Market Square Park that opened in 2010 and included a dog park, large grassy lawn, and a restaurant kiosk. A facade grant program was also initiated for historic buildings. Additionally, she was a founding board member, along with preservation...
colleague Phoebe Tudor who served as board chair, of the Julia Ideson Library Preservation Partners, an organization that helped raise $32 million in private and public monies to restore, renovate, and expand Houston’s oldest extant library located in downtown and home of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, one of the largest archives in Texas.

The evidence of Boesel’s and others’ efforts and their impact on the Houston area can be observed in the track record of Preservation Houston’s annual Good Brick Awards. For thirty-nine years the organization has aimed to “recognize local contributions to the preservation, restoration, and enhancement of Houston’s architectural and cultural heritage.” At its founding in 1978 the organization averaged from one to four special mentions for preservation efforts throughout the city annually, the first including the restoration of Antioch Baptist Church, the Hogg Building, the Old Cotton Exchange building, and the Kirby Mansion. As the years passed, the number of recipients grew. Today the number of awardees is about fifteen per year. An interesting trend can be observed in the list of past recipients. As the awareness of preservation increased, more and more residential properties gained a second chance through restoration efforts. “There is huge added value in purchasing historic homes,” Boesel points out. “People need to remember that the materials used in older buildings are better. Usually: the wood is better, the structures were built for ventilation…materials have more longevity.”

Minnette Boesel Properties expanded to the east side of Houston and began, with a partner, restoring historic residential properties. She recalls, “I started the company to affect positive change in the Market Square Historic District and then we kind of spanned into other neighborhoods…and all of a sudden we had this business that was making enough money for ourselves but at the same time making positive change.”

THE IMPORTANCE OF RESIDENTIAL
Preservation of residential historic neighborhoods is one of Boesel’s main concerns for a developing Houston, “I think awareness has gotten much better in Houston but at the same time we are losing historic fabric and buildings because they are not declared historic…so there needs to be a greater awareness and effort to identify neighborhoods that need to be protected and work with those neighborhoods to try and get historic designation.”

The number of downtown residential units built, planned, or under construction doubled between 2010 and 2016 to almost 7,600 units. In addition six historic buildings have been converted into hotels utilizing the federal historic tax credit program, the city’s historic tax exemption program, and, in some cases, the new state historic tax credits. Today tools that continue to offer protection for at-risk neighborhoods include prevailing lot size and prevailing setbacks, but the challenge lies in getting residents to take action and initiate the process of designation with the city. “In order to get historic activities going, we need residents to participate!” Boesel exclaims.

Under Houston’s Historic Preservation Ordinance today, the city has increased its individually designated landmarks and protected landmarks to over 400. The city now has twenty-two city historic districts containing over 6,600 historic properties. Still this small percentage only covers 2.5 square miles of the 656 square miles in Houston. Former Houston City Council member Sue Lovell asserted that the most critical improvement made to the 2010 preservation ordinance was the “…prevention of property owners from demolishing or altering the exterior of historic buildings in designated districts without the approval of the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission. Previously, owners simply had to wait 90 days — even if the commission denied their request.”

Under Mayor Annise Parker, in 2010 and 2015 ordinance revisions were approved by City Council to create a more “…streamlined process for project approvals and refine the list of projects eligible to receive City of Houston preservation tax incentives.” Among these new revisions were improved solutions for the enforcement of infringement of the preservation ordinance. Other revisions included the lowering of the minimum renovation investment to qualify for all or a partial city property tax exemption in a historic structure from 50% to 25% of its base value. Increasing the legal power of the preservation ordinance makes it easier to give protection to the historic neighborhoods seeking it. Boesel contends, “There needs to be a movement in

The Kennedy Corner Building (c.1860) served as a Confederate arsenal during the Civil War. Although the Greater Houston Preservation Alliance and the Downtown Historic District persuaded the city to commit $126,000 to the owner, the building was demolished in 1991. Left to right: Jill Sewell, Kent Millard, Margie Elliott, Guy Hagstette, and Minnette Boesel.
that infrastructure. Park space, bike trails, art and cultural activities, historic neighborhoods with character—all these things that work together to make a good city,” Boesel adds.

The significance of the migration into the inner city lies in the ability to offer the public a sense of history, a place of belonging, knowing they are inhabiting the buildings that have existed in Houston for over a century. Adaptive reuse offers people one solution to both problems. By adapting the existing fabric to the needs of contemporary society, preservation and sustainability are addressed simultaneously. Not only is adaptive reuse a tool for downtown redevelopment but it educates the coming generations about the importance of preservation and preservation’s role in a developing city. “I worry sometimes that people don’t know or forget what it took to get from the beginnings in the eighties when preservation was hardly acknowledged,” Boesel observes. Though she faced many challenges from the government, developers, and even the public, she and many others have given Houston an awareness of preservation’s importance and a substantial push for the ordinances that offer protection for historic landmarks today.

**THE FUTURE OF PRESERVATION**

The National Trust for Historic Preservation’s National Conference came to Houston in November 2016. Having the conference in Houston was an affirmation that the city is preservation-minded and reinforced the fact that preservation is of economic and community benefit. Boesel continues to be a front-running advocate of preservation as a volunteer. She still invests in personal projects, one being a 1920s duplex in the East End that she renovated entirely and, on the same block, a two-story 1920s corner store that still has more work to be done. Although she and other preservationists’ efforts were met with resistance in the beginning, the fruit of their labor has changed Houston’s stance on preservation. One focus of the conference was the stock of mid-century modern (specifically 1940s-1980s) architecture available in Houston, both in the residential and commercial areas of the city. Houston’s Astrodome is one of the world’s most recognized mid-century structures. In 2016 the Astrodome Conservancy, chaired by Phoebe Tudor with Minnette as vice-chair, was formed to help preserve and activate this iconic marvel. With these structures representing the future debate over historic preservation and adaptive reuse, it will be interesting to see how people respond to this topic in today’s age.

As the younger generation becomes increasingly aware of preservation, new organizations are appearing like Pier & Beam, a “group of next-generation preservationists [affiliated with Preservation Houston] who share a passion for Houston’s architecture, art, history and culture…who believe in preserving and giving new life to significant buildings and landscapes, promoting sustainability and smart growth, and fostering vibrant, livable neighborhoods.” They are reaching out to a previously overlooked demographic. As the succeeding generation of preservationists emerge in this bustling city, Minnette Boesel offers some concluding words of guidance: “You have to know in your heart you’re doing the right thing and you just keep moving, and in the end it is always the right thing to do.”

Silvia Celeste Martinez received her degree in 2017 from the University of Houston Gerald D. Hines College of Architecture and Design. One of the ten students who comprise the third graduating class from the Interior Architecture program, she is interested in pursuing preservation and adaptive reuse as a means of generating awareness about this growing field.

In the early twentieth century, Houston celebrated its prosperity as a cotton market center with the No-Tsu-Oh (Houston) Carnival and the crowning of King Nottoc (Cotton). In 2015 Houston Arts and Media revived the tradition 100 years after the final festival with the crowning of a new king, Truett Latimer, and its first queen, Queen Ailongam (Magnolia). Minnette Boesel. She received her crown from Randy Pace in recognition of her many contributions to preserving Houston’s past.

Photo courtesy of The Heritage Society, Houston, Texas.

Houston to work with neighborhoods…it would take a huge educational initiative…but as with any of these preservationist movements, you have to prove that it can help you.”

**TWO BIRDS, ONE STONE**

Clearly preservation awareness is becoming an established notion in Houston, especially as issues of sustainability can no longer be as easily bypassed. As Boesel explains, “Sustainability is recycling materials. Preservation is the best form of sustainability.” In a young progressive city like Houston, it is no shock that the public consciousness is rapidly encouraging more eco-friendly practices in the realm of architecture, especially in regards to housing and the recent migration back into inner-city areas. More incentives exist than ever before to revitalize the inner city. The efforts to restore and activate the Bayou Greenways and give people a more pedestrian/bike-friendly city is what will keep the people coming in the long run. “If you want to attract and keep a good workforce…you need to have that infrastructure. Park space, bike trails, art and cultural activities, historic neighborhoods with character—all these things that work together to make a good city,” Boesel adds.

The graduation class from the Interior Architecture program, she is interested in pursuing preservation and adaptive reuse as a means of generating awareness about this growing field.
The KUHT television program *People are Taught to be Different* had the noble aim of improving intercultural understanding, and showing viewers that people are, at their core, much the same. Against a simple stage setting, elegant dancers interpreted moments of joy, sorrow, anger, and love across cultures, as the narrator provided cultural context to guide viewers to a better understanding of the universality of the human experience. Lessons in cultural sociology were presented in plain language and focused on the theory that an individual’s personality results from the culture in which he or she is raised.

Broadcast in 1958 just five years after KUHT-TV went on air as the country’s first noncommercial educational television station, *People* was distributed to educational stations nationwide. Envisioned by Dr. Henry Allen Bullock and developed by Texas Southern University and University of Houston-owned KUHT, the series featured an all-African American cast who, in twelve episodes, explored experiences common to all mankind. The program had a lofty goal — to improve “intergroup understanding by approaching universal crises such as birth, childhood, adolescence, courtship, marriage, and death by showing that different cultural
groups react to these crises differently because they were taught a certain reaction by their culture." The format, too, was innovative. By utilizing narration and modern dance Bullock and his cast aimed to show, rather than just tell, how personality develops through social teachings. Perhaps most extraordinary is the fact that People was even produced in the 1950s.

Located less than a quarter mile from each other today, the University of Houston (UH) and Texas Southern University (TSU) were founded in 1927 by the Houston Independent School District (HISD) as Houston Junior College and Houston Colored Junior College respectively to serve working-class Houstonians. By 1945 the four-year schools had separated from HISD as a private university system, with Houston College for Negroes as a branch of UH. Following a 1947 lawsuit filed by Heman Marion Sweatt, an African American applicant rejected by the University of Texas Law School based on his race, the State of Texas attempted to establish a “separate but equal” law school. Despite this effort, in 1950 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Sweatt v. Painter that the new school was not comparable and that educational equality, at the graduate/professional level at least, involved more than facilities. This set a precedent for Brown v. Board of Education, which deemed segregated schools unconstitutional in 1954. UH ceded Houston College for Negroes to the state, which renamed it Texas Southern University in 1951 after students petitioned to remove “Negroes” from the institution’s name.

By the early 1950s TSU boasted over 6,000 full-time students and a faculty of 400, making it the country’s largest African American university. Likewise, UH experienced a post-war boom, and in 1951 enrollment reached 14,000 students, up from 2,700 ten years earlier. Despite the Supreme Court’s rulings in the Sweatt and Brown cases, UH barred African Americans from enrollment until 1962.

Confronted with the challenges of booming enrollment, UH president W. W. Kemmerer saw the potential for distance education and, in particular, the role of radio and television in creating opportunities beyond the classroom. In 1950 UH obtained the nation’s first university-owned radio license and began broadcasting as KUHF-FM. A year later UH applied to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) for a television permit and, within a few months, refiled a joint application with HISD to maximize the station’s potential impact. On May 25, 1953, a year after the FCC lifted a freeze on new permits and granted one to Channel 8 KUHT, FCC commissioner and champion of educational television Frieda B. Hennock attended the station’s dedication and remarked, “With TV, the walls of the classroom disappear, every set within viewing range of the signal is a potential classroom…The accumulated riches of man’s educational, cultural and spiritual development can be spread before the viewers’ eyes.” For the first few years, KUHT productions focused primarily on credit and non-credit granting instructional “telecourses,” though some programming, such as Listening to Music, was dedicated to audience enrichment.

The central figure in the success of People are Taught to be Different was its creator, Dr. Henry Allen Bullock. Born in Tarboro, North Carolina, on May 2, 1906, Bullock earned his bachelor’s degree in social studies and Latin classics from Virginia Union University. The following year he went on to earn his master’s in sociology and comparative psychology from the University of Michigan, where he completed his doctorate in sociology in 1942 while teaching at Prairie View A&M College (PVAM). At PVAM, Bullock began experimenting with graphic design to effectively communicate social phenomena to large student audiences in auditorium classrooms — a pedagogical method that interested him throughout his life.

In 1950 Bullock moved to TSU where he served as head of the Sociology Department, chairman of the Division of Social Sciences, and director of Graduate Research. Bullock enjoyed a reputation as a preeminent scholar in his field, and lectured internationally. He went on to win a Bancroft Prize for scholarly publications in American history, and became the...
first permanent African American faculty member at the University of Texas at Austin (UT). While at UT, Bullock taught the History Department’s first course focused on the “Negro in America History.”

At TSU Bullock continued using his innovative approaches to classroom instruction, and his interest in ways to reach large student audiences grew. He developed one method that incorporated visual aids and social drama. One presentation entitled “With Intent to Kill” was so successful that it was “‘put on the road’ and proved to be a hit in several cities and colleges” in Texas. The 1955 proposal for Bullock’s People series is notably different from later iterations. Titled “Series on Negro Anthropology,” this pitch grew directly out of a Bullock lecture series that featured anthropological case studies from the African continent and included performances by TSU dancers and the school’s nationally-recognized choir.

To proceed with any production, TSU and KUHT needed funding for film production costs. A natural partner was the Educational Radio and Television Center (ERTC) in Ann Arbor, Michigan, created by the Ford Foundation in 1954 to advance adult education. Later rebranded as National Education Television (NET), the network was an early predecessor to PBS. ERTC did not produce programming nor was it a broadcaster in the traditional sense like commercial stations NBC and CBS. Rather, ERTC partnered with educational stations to subsidize the production of shows that it then distributed to other stations — a practice called “bicycling.” This type of syndication involved making copies of films and passing them from station to station, rather than using electronic distribution. ERTC had funded earlier KUHT productions, so in October 1955, Dr. John Schwarzwalder sent in a proposal for the Negro Anthropology series. In his proposal he noted that, to his knowledge, “the Center has never had material which emanates from a Negro university and...The fact that this would be done in cooperation with the University of Houston might also have extremely favorable connotations.”

Over the following months, the concept of what became People are Taught to be Different grew to encompass cultures around the world. Each episode followed the same general outline — the narrative began by identifying a universal human event such as birth, courtship, or death, and then three different culturally specific reactions to this event were explored to prove the thesis that human reaction is the result of a cultural framework taught from birth. The method of instruction consisted of a narration by Bullock (who authored all scripts) while dancers “interpret[ed the] anthropological data through the medium of dance and scored sound.” Naomi Ledé, who helped develop the People scripts alongside Bullock, noted in an interview, “Dr. Bullock believed that dancing could be used as a means of teaching, rather than as entertainment only,” and therefore partnered with TSU’s dance instructor Dr. Marjorie Stewart who created choreography to communicate “human development from birth to death.”

A pilot script focused on the “common crisis” of birth in three cultures — Americans from the United States, Manus of the Admiralty Islands, and Kiriwina of the Trobriand Islands — was submitted to ERTC along with a proposed budget of $26,600 for production costs. In ERTC’s reply, program associate John C. Crabbe expressed interest in pursuing the project but also concern for the “technical quotations and classroom lecture language that...might cause considerable adverse reaction when put on the air.” Within a month, Bullock responded to these reservations and created a script that was appropriate for students and laymen alike to teach audiences that “many of the so-called ‘peculiarities’ of other people are more like our own than we often think.”

By that time all twelve episodes were outlined. As previously planned, each episode would feature three cultures compared to each other, though now Bullock clearly stated that every episode would compare “the American” to two of the “others.” Bullock identified the Manus, Kiriwina, Hopi Indians, the Arapesch, Balinese, Tchumbuli, Southern American Negroes, and “other of preliterate level” as the cultures People would explore.

ERTC remained highly involved throughout the production of the series, going so far as to send a screening copy of the pilot to renowned Harvard anthropologist Dr. Clyde Kluckhohn. In a report

UH president Dr. W. W. Kemmerer (left), FCC commissioner Frieda Hennock, and UH Board of Regents chair Hugh Roy Cullen at the dedication of KUHT-TV, June 8, 1953.
of a phone conversation between Kluckhohn and Crabbe, some concern surfaced that, despite Bullock’s reputation, an issue arose about “accepting the authority of Bullock as an anthropologist.” Kluckhohn indicated that the program should definitely proceed but suggested that cultural anthropologists with specializations in the societies represented in the series, such as Margaret Mead and himself, be consulted. This approach seemed to satisfy both the ERTC and the Houston team and proved successful.

Filming began in the spring of 1956, with episodes completed at a rate of one per month. Throughout production, recording equipment was loaded into a Volkswagen van owned by KUHT audio engineer Pat Coakley and taken to the TSU auditorium. Reflecting UH’s admission policies, the production crew was all-white, including director Paul Schlessinger. TSU dance students performed in each episode, and faculty member Marjorie Stuart choreographed the dance sequences using music composed by Dr. N. L. Gerren and Jack Bradley.

ERTC released the People series to its first five educational stations, including KUHT, for broadcast the week of July 13, 1958. Response was overall very positive. In San Francisco an adult education discussion group requested scripts from the series to use it in a home-study course. UH psychology professor and notable KUHT personality Dr. Richard I. Evans utilized the program in a research project to study if students exhibited a “prejudice toward ‘educational’ television” as opposed to network productions. E. G. Sherburne Jr. of the ETRC submitted an episode to film festivals, noting that he believed “the films are just arty enough and so off-beat” that they “have an excellent chance of winning something.” People received second place in the Institute for Education by Radio-Television’s international competition.

Currently, the University of Houston Libraries Special Collections holds only three of the twelve episodes of People are Taught to be Different. Shot on black and white 16mm film, they were beautifully made and demonstrate high skill at every level of production. These digitized episodes can be viewed on the UH Libraries’ Digital Library. The National Educational Television (NET) Collection Catalog Project — undertaken by the American Archives for Public Broadcasting, a collaboration between the Library of Congress and WGBH in Boston — seeks to inventory and preserve U.S. public media history. Thanks to this project, researchers now know the entire series on 16mm film can be found at the Library of Congress.

Emily Vinson, M.S., is the audiovisual archivist at the University of Houston Special Collections.
Pleasant Bend: Upper Buffalo Bayou and the San Felipe Trail in the Nineteenth Century, by Dan Worrall, CreateSpace/Amazon, $29.95. This story began with Worrall’s effort to save a nineteenth-century family graveyard on land that was under threat of development. Ultimately, he addressed a ten-by-twenty-mile stretch of western Harris County along upper Buffalo Bayou that today encompasses River Oaks, Tanglewood, Spring Branch, the Memorial villages, Briar Forest, Addicks and Barker reservoir, and neighborhoods around Highway 6 at Westheimer. Well into the 1900s farms and ranches made up this vast prairie. Pleasant Bend discusses the pioneering Anglo American, African American, and immigrant German farmers and ranchers who settled and worked the land and shipped their produce to Houston markets — first by ox-drawn wagons along the San Felipe Trail, later by rail along what is now Westheimer Road, enabling Houston to become the commercial emporium the Allen Brothers envisioned in 1836. Little remains of Pleasant Bend but a few cemeteries, streets, and people with names like Shearn, House, McGowan, Hillendahl, Wheaton, Morse, Canfield, Bauer, Bering, Beinhorn, and more. Worrall’s excellent account brings into the present this exciting story of prairie, pioneers, ox-wagon treks, cotton, timbering, immigration, emancipation, roundups and cattle drives, barbed wire, and railroads. www.pleasantbend.com.

Of Texas Rivers and Texas Art, by Andrew Sansom and William E. Reaves, Texas A&M Press, $35. Sansom and Reaves showcase fine contemporary art detailing Texas’s gorgeous rivers. Rivers have figured in the artistic imagination for recorded history, including the flood stories in most religions. This collection shows their influence on current literature, music, and art, bringing a greater appreciation of nature’s stunning beauty. Artists include Randy Bacon, Hunter George, Lee Jamison, Noe Perez, Jeri Salter, and others. Sansom is director of The Meadows Center for Water and the Environment at Texas State University. Reaves, an avocational art historian and collector for more than thirty years, is co-owner of Reaves-Foltz Fine Arts in Houston.

P. Galindo: Obras (in)completas de José Diaz, edited by Manuel M. Martin-Rodriguez, Arte Publico Press, $17.95. A fascinating collection of Spanish-language poetry — and some prose — that captures life along the Texas-Mexico border in the early twentieth century. Born in Mexico in 1898, José Diaz became a journalist and poet whose work was published in numerous Texas Spanish-language newspapers beginning in the 1920s. He wrote with humor about social and political issues of interest to the working class with topics from the new school year to the effect of the Cold War on the local economy. Much of Diaz’s work ran under the pseudonym P. Galindo. Martin-Rodriguez is a professor and a founding faculty member at the University of California, Merced.

The Texas Historical Commission has produced two new, full-color publications: Courthouse Cornerstones and Historic Heights, available at www.thc.texas.gov free of charge. Courthouse Cornerstones highlights Texas’s historic county courthouses and the accomplishments of the THC’s award-winning Texas Historic Courthouse Preservation Program. Historic Heights highlights the THC’s twenty-one state historic sites, telling real stories from the prehistoric period to Colonial Texas, the Texas Revolution, early statehood, the Civil War, and the twentieth century.

James E. Crisp and Frank de la Teja were dubbed “Heroes of San Jacinto” by the San Jacinto Battleground Conservancy in April for their “heroic” contributions to Texas history and, specifically, to the San Jacinto Symposium. Crisp has helped design and recruit speakers for sixteen of the seventeen symposia. He spoke at the first one and has moderated fifteen. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Rice who completed his graduate degrees at Yale, Crisp has taught history at North Carolina State University for forty-five years. He has devoted his academic career to studying Texas. His many publications include the award-winning How Did Davy Die and Why Do We Care So Much.

De la Teja, Regents’ Professor of History and director of the Center for the Study of the Southwest at Texas State University and the inaugural state historian of Texas, won “hero” status for helping build the San Jacinto Symposium into the premier annual conference on the Texas revolutionary era. He has been a speaker three times, co-moderator numerous times, and an invaluable advisor in structuring the programs. He has published extensively on Spanish, Mexican, and Republic-era Texas, such as his recent Recollections of a Tejano Life: Antonio Menchaca in Texas History.
The Houston History team would like to thank Medilife of Houston and the Sheraton Brookhollow for sponsoring the launch party for the fall issue, “Houston Emergency Medical Services: 45 Years of Courage, Commitment & Compassion.” We also wish to express our gratitude to Dr. David Persse, Assistant Chief David Almaguer, and Diana Rodriguez. Their support and guidance enabled us to turn a simple conversation, when the idea for this issue was born, into one of the best magazines we have produced. Of course we also had an excellent story to tell and for that we thank the thousands of HFD members, past and present, who give their all on a daily basis to care for Houstonians. We salute you!

**EVENTS**

**Through October 8:** *Mapping Texas: From Frontier to the Lone Star State*, an exhibition of maps showing more than 400 years of Texas history, hangs at the Houston Museum of Natural Science. Most works are from the archival collection of the Texas General Land Office and Houston map collectors Frank and Carol Holcomb. Other items are on loan from the Witte Museum in San Antonio and the Bryan Museum in Galveston. Included are a 1513 map, one of the earliest maps of the Americas; one of the first modern maps (1775) of the Texas Coast; and a copy of the 1837 Connected Map of Austin’s Colony. The museum is located at 5555 Hermann Park Drive.

**Sunday, June 18:** Mayor Sylvester Turner, Emancipation Park Conservancy, and Houston Parks & Recreation Department will host the official ceremony and festivities celebrating the rededication of Emancipation Park. The 11.71-acre park, possibly the oldest in Texas, is located in Third Ward at 3018 Dowling Street. A group of black community leaders, all former slaves, purchased the land for $800 in 1872 as a place to celebrate Juneteenth. It has recently undergone a $33.5 million renovation. Visit www.houstonparks.org.

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De Luxe Theater (1941).
1 Mayor Lee Brown, to all council members, correspondence August 27, 2003, box 2, folder 1, African American Library at the Gregory School, Houston Public Library. (All archival material hereafter from African American Library, AAL).


3 "TheGregorySchool—CommunityMeeting,"April25,2003,AAL.


6 MarthaWhiting,OralHistoryInterview0002byNicholasCastellanos,December21,2009,AAL.

7 HardyAnderson,OralHistoryInterview0004byNicholasCastellanos,January13,2010,AAL.

8 GeraldineWooten,OralHistoryInterview0035byAdrienneCaine,February5,2013,AAL.

9 James"Bo"Humphrey,OralHistoryInterview0057byAdrienneCaine,February8,2013,AAL.

10 BennieRuthJackson,OralHistoryInterview0001byNicholasCastellanos,December8,2009,AAL.

11 SegmentsofthesecondhalfofthisarticlewerewrittencollaborationwithKimGoodling,afootballgraduatestudentatUH,forahistoricalpublicseminar.


15 AlbertE.HainsetoCityofHoustonFinanceandAdministrationDepartment,August12,2002,box1,folder5.


18 JamesWalkertomayorWhite,October24,2005,box3,folder3.


21 CityofHoustonLibraryDepartment,DirectorofMayor'sChiefofStaff,July16,2002,box1,folder2.


24 Brown,"GregorySchoolaHoustonJewelWorthPreserving,"THCtoCity ofHoustonLegalDepartment,RealEstateDivision,August23,2002,box1,folder5.

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