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MILESTONES

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON
CENTER for PUBLIC HISTORY

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR – FIFTIETH MILESTONES

Debbie Z. Harwell, Editor

We all have milestone moments that mark our personal history – perhaps a wedding, the birth of a child, a career achievement, or, sadly, the loss of a loved one. We also recall historic events that impact our culture. Thinking back to the 1960s, I remember my dad taking me to see The Beatles at the Houston Coliseum, and my first Major League Baseball games at Colt Stadium and the Astrodome, which cemented my life-long love for the Astros. In the late 1960s when the Intercontinental Airport was under construction, my dad took me there on Sundays to teach me how to drive on the deserted runways, which shows how little we worried about security in those days. Our family went to Astroworld when it opened, and we looked forward with anticipation to the fancy new Galleria and its indoor ice skating rink. Not all milestones were positive however. For example, when my high school finally "integrated," we added just one black student and one black teacher.

The initial articles in this issue mark milestones from 1969. The first two explore the efforts of University of Houston (UH) students who formed Afro-Americans Students for Black Liberation (AABL) to address racial inequalities on campus that mirrored the larger society. Although UH admitted its first African American student in 1962, progress toward education equality moved slowly. Thus, AABL demanded greater representation in the student body, faculty, and staff and creation of an African American Studies (AAS) program. UH President Phillip Hoffman agreed to create AAS, making it one of the first such programs in the nation and the first diversity studies concentrations at UH. The current director, James L. Conyers, writes about the program's first fifty years and its importance to the students, the university, and the Houston community.

Those of us old enough to remember the first moon landing likely know right where we were, listening to the radio or watching TV, when the *Eagle* landed on the moon on Sunday, July 20, 1969, at 3:17 p.m. CDT, and, several hours later, when Neil Armstrong stepped onto the lunar surface. Once Houston was chosen for the Manned Spacecraft Center (MSC), Houstonians bought into the space program with everything they had. NASA rented several buildings around town as they built the MSC, and residents welcomed the astronauts as A-list celebrities. Houston embraced its new identity as "Space City" and continues to celebrate its role past, present, and future in space travel.

Other scientific breakthroughs occurred at the Texas Medical Center. In 1969 Dr. Denton Cooley opened the door to new possibilities in medicine when he implanted the first artificial heart in a patient, who was awaiting a heart transplant. For many years, Cooley and Dr. Michael DeBakey went on to advance techniques in cardiovascular surgery.

Many of our personal milestones may be associated with a historic hotel or restaurant, like the Shamrock Hilton or Sonny Look's Sir Loin Inn. In 1947 UH began hosting the Texas Hotel Short Course, but it became apparent as Houston grew that more was needed to train new hospitality professionals. The Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management developed from that need and now educates students from Houston and around the world, providing hotel, culinary, beverage, and management training. Over time, Houston has gained a reputation as a food city and now boasts over 80,000 hotel rooms, which makes UH a natural location for the Hilton College.

The articles that make up the Departments, likewise celebrate a variety of milestones. The Houston Furniture Bank, founded twenty-six years ago by Oli Mohammad, provides a critical service to the community, making furniture affordable to those in need. The photo essay on the hundred-year-old San Isidro Cemetery demonstrates the dramatic impact such a place can have on those seeking to understand its past and the lives of those at rest there. Lastly the anniversary of the Mahatma Gandhi statue installation in Hermann Park and the sesquicentennial of his birth remind us of the leader's impact on peace and civil rights movements around the world.

We have so many milestones in Houston history that it is impossible to list them all. As you reflect on the special moments in your life, perhaps you will connect to some of these or recall a few Houston milestones of your own. We invite you to share them with us at Facebook/HoustonHistoryMagazine.

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Cover Photo: *As student activists, Lynn Eusan and Gene Locke worked tirelessly to gain equal rights for African American students at the University of Houston.*
Photo courtesy of *Houstonian*, 1969, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

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The Daily Cougar *reported on a group of racially diverse students who marched to President Hoffman's office on March 7, 1969. Their banner reads, "Fight Racism - Support the Black Demands."* All photos are courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries unless otherwise noted.

Afro-Americans for Black Liberation and the Fight for Civil Rights at the University of Houston*

By Robinson Block

The University of Houston (UH) is celebrated today as one of the most diverse research institutions in the nation. It also has one of the oldest African American Studies programs in the country. Located at the edge of the predominantly African American Third Ward, the university's student body today is thirteen percent African American and more than fifty percent students of color. The transition that UH has made from its foundation as an exclusively white university, to becoming a diverse school with ethnic studies programs, owes a great deal of credit to the trailblazing work of the Afro-Americans for Black Liberation student organization. Known as AABL (pronounced "able"), this group of students created and organized around a list of grievances in the spring of 1969 that led to rapid and profound changes for students of color at UH.[1]

Initially, black students had a hard time at UH where they remained a small minority throughout the 1960s. Although classes had become integrated, most student groups remained segregated, and few restaurants would seat black students. Quality student housing near campus was also very difficult to find. By the late sixties, black students began staging sit-ins against segregation at Woolworth's lunch counters in Houston.

Several national social movements of the late 1960s influenced the events at UH. The civil rights movement had mobilized youth from the North and South to oppose Jim Crow, and the Black Power movement was growing. These movements had taken root in Houston as well, and conflicts inevitably followed. Students at TSU supported Friends of SNCC. In 1967, the Houston Police Department raided the campus, culminating in the arrest of the "TSU Five," only after a firefight in which a police officer was killed, most likely by a fellow police officer's bullet. In 1968, black student activist Lee Otis Johnson was railroaded into prison, sentenced to thirty years for handing a marijuana cigarette to an undercover police officer.

Other social movements gained ground at UH, lending their support to AABL, including a chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), which was extremely radical in 1969. The Mexican American Youth Organization and the League of Mexican American Students supported AABL's

**This article is a reprint from Fall 2010.*

goals, specifically the creation of ethnic studies programs. Some voiced fears, however, that if African American students won black faculty or an African American studies program, Mexican American students might lose hope for similar advancement.[2]

AABL was founded initially as the Committee on Better Race Relations (COBRR) in spring 1967. Following a visit by Stokely Carmichael in 1968, COBRR changed its name to Afro-Americans for Black Liberation to reflect a changing consciousness, an acceptance of Black Power politics, and participation in the national and international struggle of African and other oppressed peoples for human rights, economic rights, and self-determination.[3] AABL bridged the gap between the civil rights movement and black liberation and, in fact, maintained strong ties to established civil rights organizations in Houston and Texas.

AABL was active as a social as well as a political organization. AABL fielded an intramural football team, created and raised money for a scholarship for black students in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and tutored youth in Houston's Third Ward. The unlikely election victory of AABL leader Lynn Eusan as the first African American homecoming queen at UH in 1968 put the group on the map. Eusan and other contemporary accounts concluded that many whites voted for her in order to counter the ascendency and exclusivity of the white Greek system, and that their success was the start of AABL activities in other areas of student life.[4] Eusan made national news, was featured in *Ebony* magazine and several newspapers, and earned AABL a good deal of respect from the black community in Houston.

The endeavor that caused the biggest stir and has left AABL's greatest legacy came out of the creation of a list of demands they devised and, flanked by seventy-five student supporters, presented to UH president Philip Hoffman on February 7, 1969.

Ester King, a student at Texas Southern University, worked closely with the leadership of AABL. He explains their twofold strategy: "Certainly you wanted to get to a point where you could get those demands met, which was gonna take some negotiation . . . but the primary reason for all that was to heighten awareness to create tension on the campuses to get attention of other students."[5]

AABL saw the university as reluctant to take action to eliminate racism or modify policies that had negative social impacts on black students. "Through our eyepiece, we see the university imitating the racist society at large, Black students are the victims of 'refined racism.' Plainly stated, we feel that the University of Houston is a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant institution. . . . We as Black people struggling for survival in a racist country must exercise control over political, economic, social, spiritual, and physical aspects of our lives."[6]

AABL demanded that the university create a Department of Afro-American Studies, hire more black university faculty and staff, recruit and admit more black students, and provide expanded financial aid and adequate housing for black students, improve conditions for black athletes, tackle racist practices in grading and instruction, establish a Black Student Union, award credit for black students doing community work, and raise the wage scale of the school's service workers.[7]

President Hoffman took these demands seriously. His files show that the day after receiving AABL's demands, the vice president of staff services responded with a written appraisal of the costs involved in raising the wages of service workers on campus. Staff services supported some raises but calculated that it would cost more than $100,000 to raise the wages of all employees to $2.00 per hour.

President Hoffman facilitated a good deal of research about AABL's demands, and issued a point-by-point reply on February 14, 1969.[8] He read the document in its entirety at a meeting of AABL and then left the meeting without taking any questions. The statement struck a very conciliatory tone. Hoffman answered "no" to only a couple of the demands: the creation of a university funded Black Student Union, under the justification that the only government funded student organization was the existing Student Association; and a minimum admission percentage for black students or a designation of financial aid resources exclusively for black students, based on a rejection of any type of quota system.

At the same time, Hoffman did not answer "yes" to any of the demands. Hoffman offered to create a task force of students, faculty, and administrators to review several grievances, including the creation of an Afro-American Studies Department, and the predicament of black athletes. He proposed that many of the

Lynn Eusan was elected the first African American homecoming queen at the historically white University of Houston on November 23, 1968. The Cougars celebrated by defeating Tulsa 100-6.

demands put forth in the AABL list could be dealt with by existing or newly created institutions and bureaucracies. For example, the newly formed University Student Assistance Committee could handle faculty grading practices. Also, Hoffman agreed to ask the University Council and Academic Deans to secure more minority faculty.

Hoffman also announced plans to take action on some of the points, including filing a complaint with the Federal Housing Authority over the racist practices of landlords of properties near the university, the creation of a recruitment committee, publication of promotional materials to distribute to high schools that discuss financial aid, and possibly modifying admission criteria with the goal of accepting more black students to UH. The president of UH also supported the creation of a program to give credit to students who do work in the black "ghetto" community.

President Hoffman found himself in the delicate position of trying to resolve the demands of black students on his campus with the concerns of many faculty and alumni who remained hostile to AABL and other Black Power movements of the times. Hoffman's archive contains correspondence from numerous people, some alumni, some seemingly completely unconnected to Houston in any way, who encouraged him not to surrender to the demands of "communist" and "negro" students. In particular, letters expressing concern from executive officers at the Continental Carbon Company, a continuing donor of funds to the university, must have given Hoffman pause.[9]

A police officer stands in the UH bookstore after the March 17, 1969, disturbance.

The student government system at UH had to address AABL's political demands and mobilizations, particularly as student elections happened at the same time. Independent John Sayer, campaigning for president, supported AABL and attended their demonstrations. His opponent, Bob Ulmer of the Representative Government Party, advocated "law and order," and Ulmer's election signs contained slogans such as "VOTE for RESPONSIBILITY and against DISRUPTION" with images of confrontations between police and students at other universities. Sayer, who ended up losing the election, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Daily Cougar* on March 20, 1969, explaining his position: "You who criticize so loudly should remember that the black people on this campus have been asking quietly through the regular channels for a long time, but they never got attention until they made a 'demand.'"[10]

Other white students and white organizations supported AABL's demands. In a period of four hours, a group called Students for the Eradication of Racial Injustice gathered 350 signatures of white students, and then delivered the petition to the Board of Regents, city officials, and local media.[11]

The campaign gained a new urgency and visibility as tensions at UH exploded on March 17, 1969. When Gene Locke arrived on campus that morning, three white students attacked him. By one o'clock, students rallied to protest the attack and marched to the UH Safety and Security Office to demand immediate action. According to the university's press release: "At approximately 1:40 p.m. some of the students, both white and black (estimates vary from twenty-five to forty) left the Safety and Security Office and went to the Cougar Den where a disruption took place. The students overturned tables and chairs, broke dishes, destroyed food, and broke out four glass windows. Upon dispersing from the Den at the urging of Gene Locke and Dwight Allen, a smaller number (ten to twelve) broke into the bookstore and damaged property. No one was seriously injured in the incidents and the extent of property damaged was estimated at $2,000."[12]

In the weeks following, the police failed to find the men who assaulted Locke. The students involved in the resulting unrest expected to face charges at the University Student Court, as prescribed by the Student Life Policy. Instead, on April 7, 1969, arrest warrants were issued for twelve UH students and three non-students at the request of the Harris County District Attorney, charging them with crimes relating to the property damage in the University Center. The students—including Gene Locke, Dwight Allen, Deloyd Parker, TSU student Ester King, and Doug Bernhardt, a white UH student and member of SDS—became known as the UH Fourteen. (The numerical discrepancy between those initially arrested and those facing charges is never made clear.)

AABL and their allies regarded the cooperation between UH administrators and the district attorney's office as a violation of trust between the university and the student activists. Dwight Allen spoke to the *Daily Cougar* about the charges, "Dean Yardley told Gene Locke and myself that the matter would be within the confines of the university, and Dr. Hoffman sat right across the table from Yardley and agreed."[13]

President Hoffman must have felt considerable pressure to circumvent the Student Court. The March 17, 1969, events had been reported in the *Houston Post,* which drew much attention from conservative alumni and citizens, many of whom wrote to Hoffman to encourage him to take harsh disciplinary action against the students. The conservative student organization Young American Independents boasted of delivering a petition of over 2,000 signatures the day after the "mini-riot," in "support of non-disruption on campus" and demanding "to prosecute those rioters or disrupters to the full extent of the law and to cooperate fully with all police authorities."[14]

Although it was common practice across the country for the justice system to obstruct the activities of social movements by entangling its leaders in the court system, AABL used the charges against the UH Fourteen as a platform to campaign both for their acquittal and to continue building momentum for their demands on the university. AABL and its allies on campus formed a "Majority Coalition," which hosted rallies and facilitated other events. Previously hostile Student Government president Bob Ulmer spoke at a rally April 23, 1969, to condemn the lack of transparency in administration-student relations. In the community, AABL earned significant public support from the civil rights movement.

Student leader Gene Locke prepares for a May 18, 1969 rally.

On May 18, AABL held a rally in Emancipation Park in support of the UH Fourteen with speakers from the NAACP, Hope Development, and several black churches.[15]

Harris County D.A., Carol Vance, took the prosecutions of black activists very seriously: he personally prosecuted Charles Freeman of the TSU Five (charges were dismissed following a hung jury) and went on to prosecute Gene Locke and Dwight Allen (also failing to convict them). Eventually the D.A. accepted plea bargains and dropped charges against the other defendants.[16]

Through editorial and news coverage, the *Daily Cougar* proved to be one of the most insightful places to see multiple perspectives on the struggle over AABL's demands. The student paper published letters to the editor from white students both supporting and critical of AABL. Overall, the editorial content of the *Cougar* remained supportive. For example, columnist Tim Fleck, an Anglo who wrote "The Grapevine" column, concluded that AABL's demands "represent a sane, logical step towards an escape from the vicious race cycle so easily observable within our own little pearl of a city."[17] The *Cougar* also gave Dwight Allen a weekly column called "The Black Perspective," which Allen used to explain AABL positions and discuss other issues on campus.

The *Daily Cougar*'s news coverage frequently covered AABL press conferences and protests—generally in a neutral or positive light. At the same time, some provocative editorial choices were made, including the *Cougar*'s February 18, 1969, report focused on Dwight Allen's statement at a student rally: "You white students had better wake up. If we can't have our black studies, you can't have your white studies."

The brisk pace of events at UH in spring 1969 may be seen as a result of the university's eagerness to defuse any possibility

A group of protestors gather outside the courthouse downtown in opposition to the arrest of the TSU Five.

Photo courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, RGD006-2577.

Dwight Allen addresses a crowd in front of the University Center on February 17, 1969.

for campus unrest. In comparison to other public universities in the South, the university's willingness to enter negotiations and make changes can now be viewed as quite progressive. President Hoffman seems to have had sympathetic attitudes on racial justice, but he made it clear that he regarded preservation of "law and order" as a vital responsibility of his office. No doubt university administrators hoped to avoid a scenario like the 1967 police raid on TSU. Nevertheless, AABL leaders considered the institutional and bureaucratic responses too slow. They worried that the university might adopt the tactics used by other universities to stall until the end of a semester or the summer, when students would leave campus and then would have to struggle to resume their momentum the following academic year.

AABL continued to hold small "rap sessions" and informational events for students of all races almost daily throughout March, as well as press conferences and appearances on radio programs. On March 6, 1969, one of the task forces created in response to the AABL demands recommended the creation of an Afro-American Studies Program by the start of the summer term. On March 7, AABL and allies held a rally of 600 students, followed by a march of around 200 to the Cullen Building. By March 27, just ten days after the "mini-riot" and less than two months after AABL first delivered its demands, Douglas MacLean, vice president of staff services, released a sixteen-page report on the status of negotiations between the university and AABL. This document addressed each of AABL's ten demands, presented commentary on AABL reasons, and spelled out the university's initial response as well as actions taken.[18]

The creation of the African American Studies Program became the most visible and transformative response to the AABL agitations. A task force to consider the program included students like Gene Locke and two other AABL members, faculty, and Chester Bratton, the assistant dean of students, and one of the first African American administrators at UH, who enjoyed a good working relationship with AABL. They called for the creation of a degree-granting department. A second task force with more faculty and fewer students announced in April a few of the course offerings: Afro-American history, Afro-American literature, as well as Afro-American culture.[19]

In May, President Hoffman announced the appointment of white history professor Robert Haynes as acting director of the new Afro-American Studies Program. Over the summer, Haynes stated the objectives of the program: to instill the concept of black awareness and identity as well as a community orientation. The program grew so rapidly that Haynes was later quoted as saying "that pamphlets listing the courses to be offered are almost outdated by the time they come from the printer."[20]

Although it has never gained the status of a degree-granting department, the African American Studies Program still operates on the UH campus, as does the Center for Mexican American Studies, which was established in 1972. These programs represent important examples of the university's response to student demands for educational programs to meet their needs. AABL's leadership regarded this as the most significant victory of their campaign.

During the next school year, much of the leadership of AABL moved off of the UH campus and allowed for a new generation of black student leadership to emerge. Dwight Allen told the *Daily Cougar,* "We concluded that the black community is of primary importance and that UH should serve as a base for recruiting black students to return to their communities."[21] They went on to build political support and raise funds for the UH Fourteen, and established service programs in the black community, primarily in Third Ward, including athletics programs for youth and black history classes. Later, AABL went on to support national liberation struggles in southern Africa, to promote the SHAPE community center, to support HOPE Development, and to campaign on behalf of blacks running for political office.

AABL's struggles at UH and in the Houston community have fundamentally transformed UH as an institution and the city of Houston as a whole. AABL alumni have gone on to participate in a variety of social movements and institutions. Gene Locke ran for mayor of Houston in 2009 and lost by a small margin to Annise Parker in a run-off election. His fellow AABL alumni continue to do progressive political work on a grassroots level: Deloyd Parker is the director of the SHAPE Community Center, which has operated for more than forty-five years and continues to offer service programs to the community of Third Ward, and Ester King continues as an activist for progressive causes.

AABL's work helped UH to evolve from a white institution to one that embraces diversity and now celebrates itself as one of the most diverse research universities in the country. Today, students at the university continue to want their voices heard and to make changes to curriculum, to administrative policy, and to conditions for workers and students. Afro-Americans for Black Liberation built a strong foundation for later generations who would desire to further transform the University of Houston.

Robinson Block is a history and Mexican American studies undergraduate student at the University of Houston.

Update: Robinson Block is now a Houston firefighter/EMT.

Honoring the UH African American Studies Program's 50th Anniversary

By James L. Conyers, Jr.

The way I viewed African American Studies ... it wasn't just for African American students but for everybody. It was important for everybody to share in the history, the culture, the things that were important to the evolution of this country.[1]

—Sylvester Turner, Mayor of Houston and AAS Alumnus

The University of Houston's African American Studies Annual Scholarship Banquet in 2019 celebrated the program's fiftieth anniversary by bringing together those who have supported the program past and present. From left to right: Melanie Lawson; Van Rountree, Jr., Ph.D.; Crystal Edwards, Ph.D.; Kevin B. Thompson, Ph.D.; James L. Conyers, Jr., Ph.D.; Rev. William (Bill) Lawson (seated); Angela Williams-Phillips; Sherra Aguirre; Omowale Luthuli-Allen; Elwyn Lee, Ph.D.; Wilbert Taylor; Jimmie White-Luthuli; Baba Fana; and Rhea Brown Lawson, Ph.D.

Photo courtesy of African American Studies.

African American Studies (AAS) at the University of Houston is an academic unit in the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences. In both theory and praxis, AAS is inclusive of the African experience from a global-Pan Africanist perspective. Yet, interpretive analysis is the anchor, which dispenses the use of sources and queries the context of the Black experience. Even more important, this unit offers an undergraduate major and minor, while providing a post baccalaureate graduate certificate program. As the oldest AAS unit in the state of Texas, this program is afforded the vibrancy of Houston's city and greater community to extend a correlate of service learning for students at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Dean Antonio D. Tillis of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences explains the importance of AAS, "Fifty years of African American Studies at the University of Houston means fifty years of contributing to the intellectual diversity on this campus through curricular and co-curricular activities that have to do with the history of people of African descent ... What it does for the community as well is it allows the community to understand the historical development, the ideology, the contributions, and culture relative to this demographic of people."[2]

Established in 1927 as a junior college under the Houston Independent School District, the University of Houston (UH) became a four-year institution in 1934 and a public institution in 1963. It was not until 1962 that UH admitted its first African American student, Charles P. Rhinehart, and hired its first African American campus employee in a professional position, Charles D. Churchwell, Ph.D.

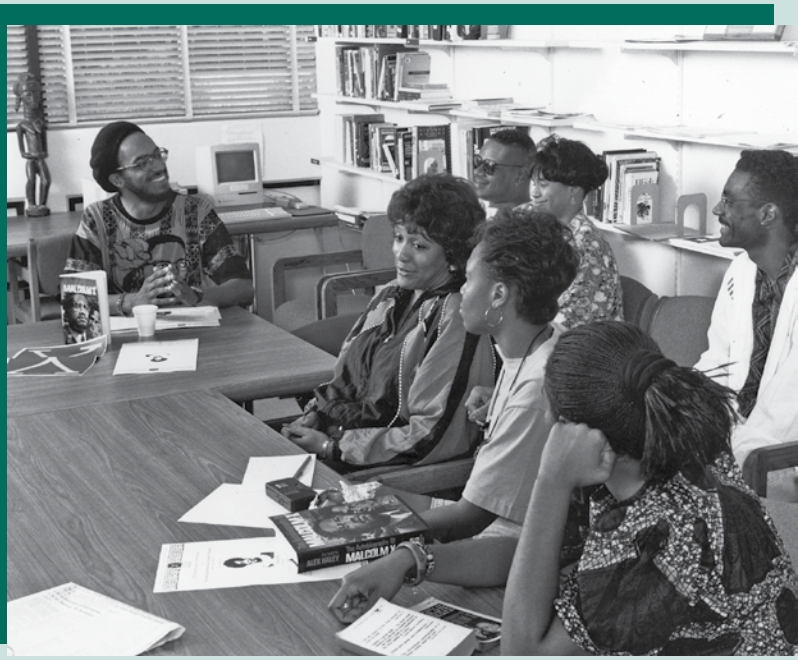
In the early 1960s the United States experienced a period of protest and challenges to authoritarian domination across the country. In response, in August of 1963, America witnessed the March on Washington, and the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s iconic "I Have a Dream" speech was synchronized as a hallmark in American history. Blacks who participated in the Washington, D.C., march placed emphasis on protecting the civil rights and voting rights of African Americans.

Supporters of Afro-Americans for Black Liberation march on President Phillip Hoffman's office to demand equality, including the addition of Afro-American Studies at UH.

Photo courtesy of *Houstonian*, 1969, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

In the course of the civil rights movement in the early 1960s, when concepts of dissent, ethics, and social query arose, President Lyndon B. Johnson, a Texan, occupied the Oval Office following the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Kennedy's death was seen as a significant blow to the movement for equality, and Johnson invoked JFK's memory to call for passage of the Civil Rights Act, which he signed into law on July 2, 1964. The following year LBJ pushed for passage of the Voting Rights Act, when it became apparent additional legislation was needed to protect Black voters. Indeed, this public policy had an impact on the nation and, in turn, the University of Houston.

Ironically, African Americans in Houston experienced an alternate type of civil rights movement in the early 1960s that consisted of a silent form of protest and negotiation, led largely by Black students and brokered between African American and white business and civic leaders. Likewise, in 1964, UH celebrated the desegregation of its athletic program with the recruitment of its first African American athletes. Coach Bill Yeoman recruited Warren McVea to



The African American Studies Book Club discusses the writings of Malcom X in 1994.

Photo courtesy of the UH Photographs Collection, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

come to UH on a football scholarship, changing not only UH athletics but also athletics for universities across the South that wanted to remain competitive. Coach Guy V. Lewis offered scholarships to Don Chaney and Elvin Hayes, who became the school's first African American basketball players in 1965.[3]

However, the student movement that took shape after the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965, referred to as the Black Power—Black Arts Movement, along with the call for Black Studies programs on university campuses, led to continued dramatic social change across the country and at the University of Houston. Through 1967, after the first appointment of an African American professional, the university prioritized the recruitment of Black students, increasing both academic and athletic opportunities available to them on campus. Following the passage of federal legislation in 1967, the University of Houston recognized its first class of African American students. Many of the Black students admitted in the 1960s were connected nationally, directly or indirectly, with the call for Black Power, as exhibited through actions such as the formation of the Committee on Better Race Relations. Later, this organization took on the cultural nomenclature of Afro-Americans for Black Liberation (AABL).[4]

Equally important to organizing their campus and community efforts, AABL positioned itself to support the candidacy of Lynn Eusan as the university's first African American homecoming queen in 1968. Having won the election, Eusan is believed to be the first African American homecoming queen named at a predominantly white institution in the Deep South. Yet again, this period in American historiography notices the influence of the Black Power—Black Arts Movement.

While UH celebrated the homecoming queen victory, American society remained immersed in a culture of strife

and struggle. Clouded in this period of protest and civil unrest, at the 1968 summer Olympic Games in Mexico City, USA track and field athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos exhibited their discord against the war in Vietnam by lowering their heads and raising a clenched fist on the medalist stand. In the same year, civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, leading to passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1968.

In 1969, AABL students at UH were growing impatient. AAS alumnus Omowale Luthuli-Allen recalls, "We were being impacted in such a way that our ideas were growing more and more militant every day. We were not comfortable with the idea of gradualism. We wanted something to happen right then and right now at that moment so we basically stepped on the accelerator in terms of saying that we could not wait." Fellow AAS classmate Gene Locke remembers, "We had protests virtually every week at the University of Houston trying to demand change. We had political rallies, we had marches, we had demonstration, we had walk-outs from class, all designed to put pressure on the University of Houston to make sure it became the institution that it could become."[5] Thus, AABL presented President Phillip G. Hoffman with a platform of ten demands, including the establishment of Afro-American Studies as an academic unit. This movement marks the foundation of AAS on the UH campus on February 7, 1969.

Gene Locke played a pivotal role in the formation of AABL and the demand to expand opportunities for African American students. As a UH alumnus he remains committed to the continued success of both AAS and the university as a whole.
Photo courtesy of Ed Schipul, Flickr.

The first offerings by AAS included Afro-American history, Afro-American literature, and anthropology. Former AAS student and Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner notes, "At that time they were pulling in different professors from other colleges to teach in African American Studies."[6] Over the first decades, the faculty came from a wide array of departments that offered classes related to AAS, such as anthropology, communication, economics, education, English, history, law, and sociology.

The earliest students were among those who had fought through AABL to get Afro-American Studies, including Gene Locke, Lynn Eusan, and Omowale Luthuli-Allen. Locke had come to UH in 1965, just three years after the first Black student. He explains, "I was a part of a wave of African American students who felt that we had some sort of obligation to our people to be the first to go to these integrated schools to demonstrate that we were intellectually capable and academically gifted enough to perform well at the schools."[7]

While in Ghana for the study abroad program, students Lamar Johnson (center) and Desire Davis (right corner) created a fabric for display outside of the African American Studies office in Agnes Arnold Hall.
Photo by Varsha Williams courtesy of African American Studies.

Through the 1980s, the university experienced the national political posture of conservatism of the Republican Party under the administrations of Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush. Indeed, this era exhibited twelve years of public policy that affected federal and state student financial aid and the working and labor classes. A decade later, resurrected from this struggle – the contemporary Nadir of Black neo-conservatism – the presidency of Marguerite Ross Barnett emerged at the University of Houston in 1990. The announcement of President Barnett's appointment marked

AAS students began participating in study abroad to Ghana in 2003, a tradition that continues today, offering experiential student engagement opportunities. Photo courtesy of African American Studies.

UH President Marguerite Ross Barnett, Dean James Pickering of Humanities, Fine Arts & Communications, and Elwyn Lee, Ph.D., then Interim Director of African American Studies and now Vice President of Community Relations and Institutional Access, in the AAS offices, circa 1990.

Photo by unknown photographer courtesy of University of Houston.

the first African American and first female named to the executive leadership of a predominantly white institution of higher education below the Mason Dixon Line. Her impact on the campus and in the greater Houston community initiated a precedent for celebrating diversity, cultivating private donors, and putting the university on the national map of urban universities. Both Lawrence Curry and Elwyn Lee refer to the administration of President Barnett as uplifting to the ecology of the campus and the city of Houston, regarding the development of AAS. Consequently, in 1994, the university advanced the idea of AAS becoming a minor offering cross listed courses to comprise this academic achievement.

Near 2001 students began asking for expanded opportunities in African American Studies. By the close of 2003, AAS's priority was to become a degree-granting program, and it began the process to petition for a B.A. degree. Unconventional in thought and practice, the idea of a degree-granting unit was foreign, strange, and almost impossible to attain. In 2003, AAS also initiated its first faculty-led summer study abroad to Ghana, West Africa. The first group of students resided in Ghana for a period of thirty-three days; it was eventful and celebrated. Today, the study abroad program to Ghana has marked over a decade

African American Firsts at the University of Houston

Photo courtesy of African American Studies.

Year	Achievement
1962	Charles Rhinehart enrolled as the first African American student.
1964	Warren McVea was recruited as the first African American football player and scholarship athlete.
1965	Don Chaney and Elvin Hayes became the first African American basketball scholarship athletes.
1967	Charles D. Churchill, Ph.D., was hired as the first African American in a professional position.
1967	Committee on Better Race Relations formed, later renamed Afro-Americans for Black Liberation (AABL).
1968	Lynn Eusan was elected as the first Black woman homecoming queen.
1969	AABL presented its list of demands to President Phillip G. Hoffman, including establishment of an Afro-American Studies Program.
1984	Carl Lewis became the first African American Olympic gold medal winner from UH.
1990	Marguerite Ross Barnett, Ph.D., was named as the university's first African American president.
2003	AAS initiated its first summer study abroad to Ghana, West Africa.
2004	Chandi Jones was the first UH women's basketball player drafted by the WNBA in the first round.
2018	UH's AAS program received approval to offer a B.A. degree in AAS, the first urban university in Texas to do so.

of student engagement in international learning. From its inception, the process and trajectory of study abroad introduced a cultural fabric to discuss the possibilities, potential, and prospective outcome for AAS to become a degree-granting unit.

In the early 2000s African American Studies was much more than just a series of courses examining the lives of people of African descent, it was a place for finding common ground at a time when the number of Black students in some majors still lagged. Eronn Putman, an AAS alumnus who now operates her own legal firm in Houston specializing in family law, reflects on her time as a student, saying, "When I was [at UH], there weren't a lot of Black students. [AAS] was the place to be for camaraderie. This is the place we would come and we would feel included. … I was the one Black person in that class, or one or two in that class. I was a political science major. But when I was here [at AAS], it was home, it was family."[8]

Other students have found AAS opens the doors to new opportunities and understandings in a variety of efforts. For example, student Crayton Gerst, who wants to produce films, explains the value of AAS, "The things that I've learned taking African American Studies courses are going to influence the kind of work that I produce. … Film is conscious. It is cause-driven and it is challenged with task of re-picturing African people in media and in television. Africans as intellectuals … Also things that I've learned influence the way that I move in the world, things that I value, and the things that I support."[9] Similarly, alumnus Kaine Hampton talks about the popularity of Black culture, especially among millennials, and how his experience in AAS prepared him to understand that: "My experience in the African American Studies program really educates, contextualizes, and informs a lot of my conversations surrounding programming and helping me understand fully where Blackness has been derived from, and how Blackness affects culture and the positive impacts of that, but also to fully understand what it means to appropriate Black culture. I don't know that I would be able to have those conversations and be impacted such professionally … had I not been in the African American Studies Department at the University of Houston."[10]

Both students involved in the founding of African American Studies and those in the administration who carry on the tradition today agree on the necessity of the program. Gene Locke contends that AAS and other area studies programs are "academically viable and enriching courses of study that allow students to learn more about themselves, about their fellow human beings, and about where society was, is, and should be going."[11]

During the summer of 2018, Dean Antonio D. Tillis, Provost Paula Myrick Short, and University of Houston President and Chancellor Renu Khator signaled the pulse and vibration for support of AAS at the Board of Regents meeting in August of 2018. The regents voted unanimously to approve the AAS degree and recommended it to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) for review. After a short period, the THECB approved the AAS proposal and forwarded it to the U.S. Department of Education. In December of 2018, AAS received approval to offer the B.A. in African American Studies. This achievement marked fifty years of strategy, struggle, and sustainability.

James L. Conyers, Jr., Ph.D., is the director of the African American Studies Program at the University of Houston and University Professor of African American Studies.

Looking to the future of African American Studies

"African American history is American history; thus, African American Studies on this campus for the past 50 years has chronicled, intellectually, the political, social, economic and cultural history of Americans of African descent. Looking ahead toward the next 50 years, African American Studies as a discipline is becoming more 'Africana', which bring into the conversation cross-cultural connections between people of African descent globally. This is exciting for UH students and faculty, as the rich diversities of global Blackness will be engaged interdisciplinarily from multiple geo-cultural perspectives."

Dean Antonio D. Tillis,
College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

The Houston Manned Spacecraft Center: The Right Place with the Right Stuff

By Calvin D. Blair

[T]he vows of this nation can only be fulfilled if we in this nation are first, and therefore, we intend to be first.

– President John F. Kennedy,
September 12, 1962, Houston

A view of Earth from the lunar spacecraft.
Photo courtesy of NASA, AS11-44-6552.

About the size of a beach ball, *Sputnik I*, the world's first artificial satellite, orbited the Earth in a mere ninety-eight minutes. Even as many Americans rushed outside to watch the first space explorer streak across the sky, the emergence of the Soviet satellite in 1957 wounded their perception of U.S. ideological and technological superiority. In response, the military scrambled to design missiles, politicians deepened their rhetoric, pundits struggled to come to grips with the new world order, and, at President Dwight Eisenhower's request, the U.S. Congress created the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).[1]

Elected in 1960, President John F. Kennedy announced to a joint session of Congress on May 25, 1961, that the United States would place a man on the moon by the end of the decade. Many believed that was an impossible goal, considering the Wright brothers' first flight had taken place less than sixty years earlier. Nevertheless, Houston rose to the occasion to help fulfill President Kennedy's vision and, in doing so, became immortalized in one of mankind's greatest feats —landing on the moon.

The Selection: From Bayou City to Space City

In the long list of people responsible for Houston's selection as the site of the Manned Spacecraft Center (MSC), three men stood above them all: Albert Thomas, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Houston; George R. Brown, a co-owner of Brown & Root, which was one of the world's largest construction companies of its kind; and Lyndon Johnson, vice president of the United States and a former U.S senator from Texas who chaired the Senate Special Committee on Space Preparedness. Apart from having a good professional relationship, these three men had a strong friendship. Brown's mentor, Texas state senator Alvin Wirtz, introduced him to Johnson, who was then a rising politician. Brown became one of Johnson's biggest contributors throughout his political career, and Johnson rewarded him with a civilian appointment to the National Space Council. Brown and Thomas also had a strong friendship, dating back to their college years at Rice Institute (now Rice University).[2]

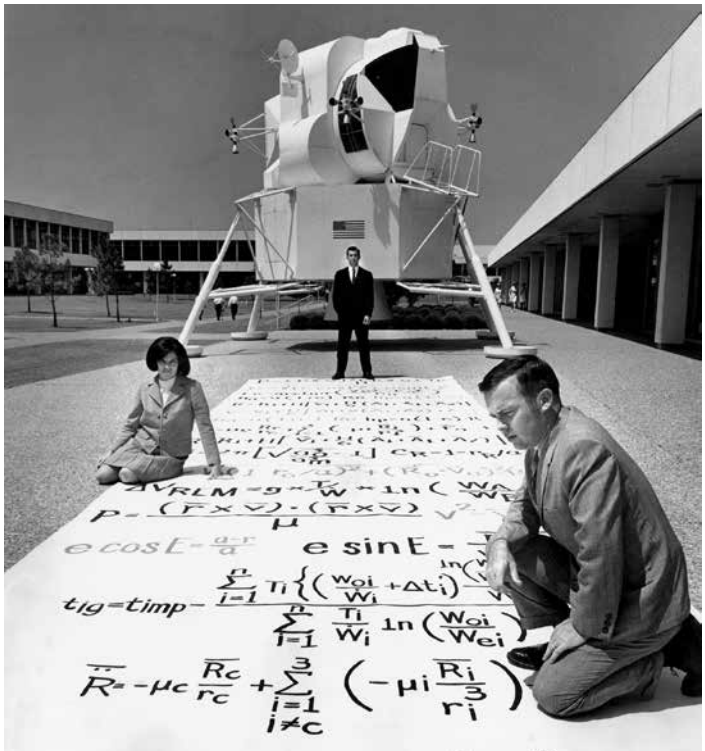
Together, Brown, Thomas, and Johnson used their influence and knowledge to ensure Houston was an attractive MSC option for NASA, which had previously denied Rice Institute's request for a research program. Thomas chaired the House Independent Offices Appropriations Subcommittee, which oversaw NASA's budget. When Thomas was absent, NASA selected Beltsville, Maryland, as the site for the Goddard Space Flight Center, and Thomas did not approve. When it came time to review NASA's budget for the 1960 fiscal year, Thomas called NASA administrator Keith Glennan and threatened to cut NASA's funding if Houston was not chosen as a site for a research facility, saying,"Now look here, Dr., let's cut out the bull! Your budget calls for $14 million for Beltsville and I am telling you that you won't get a god-damned cent of it unless that laboratory is moved to Houston."[3]

Thomas, Brown, and Johnson knew Houston could be a viable candidate for the MSC site because Houston met all of NASA's criteria, even though it was not initially the front-runner. It had access to the ocean, navigable water ways that did not freeze, a mild climate, a thousand acres of land priced right for current and future development, universities within proximity, an airbase to accommodate military aircraft, and a business community excited to foster future technological advancements.[4]

Houston's leaders took advantage of the city's lucrative position and navigated their way through the halls of power to emerge as the vanguard of the space race. Thomas,

The original seven Mercury astronauts, each wearing a cowboy hat, are on stage at the Sam Houston Coliseum during the welcome ceremonies and barbecue dinner.

Photo courtesy of NASA.



Mathematicians and engineers played a critical role in the success of the Apollo 11 mission. One of the most influential among them, John C. Houbolt (not shown) insisted on the lunar-orbit rendezvous linking two spacecraft to protect the astronaut's safety. It was used for the first time in the Apollo 11 mission.

Photo courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, MSS0087-2488.

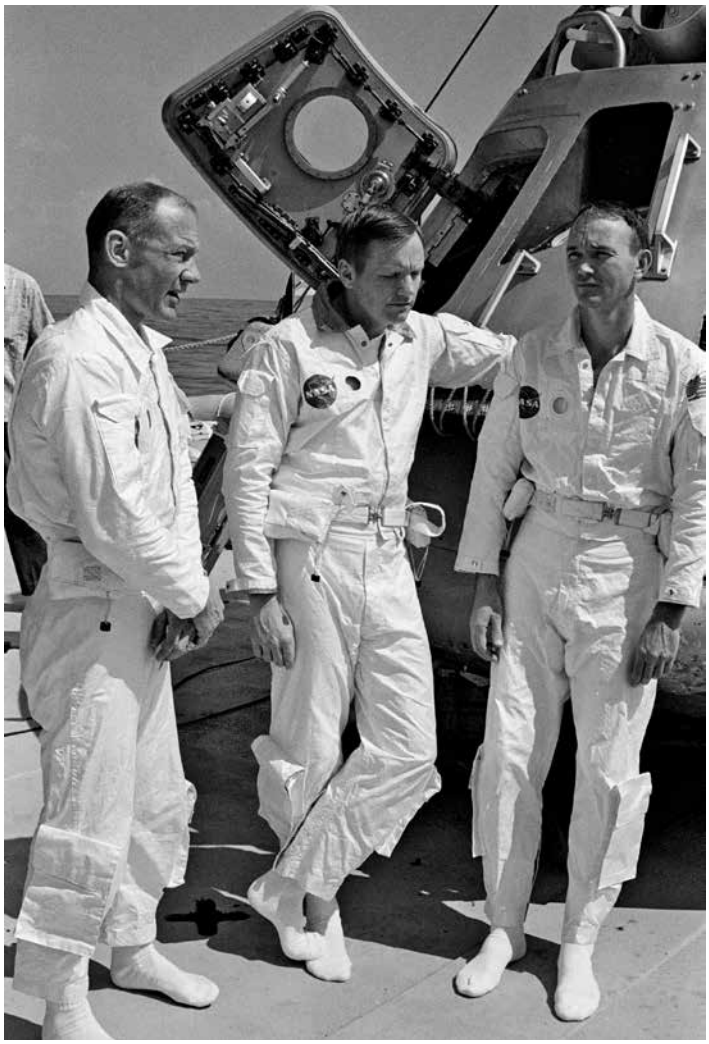
Brown, and Johnson had access to Kennedy's budget proposal, which included $60 million to fund construction of the MSC. On May 23, 1961, the three leaders received word from the new NASA administrator James Webb that he was considering Houston due to Brown and Thomas's interest in expanding Rice's space research. In an impromptu meeting held in June 1961 with Thomas, Brown, Webb, and Morgan Davis, the chairman of Humble Oil and Refining Company (now ExxonMobil), Thomas presented a plan to obtain the land and build the NASA facility in Houston.[5]

Brown and Thomas used their connections to Rice University, where Brown chaired the board of trustees, to coordinate the transfer of 1,000 acres of land from Humble Oil to Rice University that then donated the property to the federal government for the MSC. There was just one problem: the site for the new center stood within the city limits of Pasadena, and NASA wanted to say "Houston" when it landed on the moon. Thus, the mayors of Houston and Pasadena struck a deal swapping the MSC property for the natural area along Armand Bayou, which has become a renowned nature center.[6]

In the meantime, Houston was moving ahead. Rice University prepared a presentation for Webb on the programs it could offer to help educate the MSC's workforce. On September 19, 1961, NASA announced Houston as the MSC site. Brown & Root received a contract to construct the center, and Rice received $192,000 in fellowship money from the federal government to fund Rice graduate students.[7]

The choice of Houston puzzled some individuals, among them flight director Eugene "Gene" Kranz, who had worked at the NASA Launch Operations Center in Florida at Cape Canaveral (now Kennedy Space Center). However, he quickly realized NASA's success depended on its access to bright, young minds, and Houston delivered. Kranz pointed out, "By the time we started the search for the raw talent we needed to go to the moon, this [Houston] was the right decision because we could go to Universities and we'd bring in entire graduating classes."[8]

Just as Thomas, Brown, and Johnson took the reins as powerbrokers from their predecessors, a new wave of settlers to Houston helped mankind conquer the cosmos. In June 1961, Thomas foresaw the future of Houston, saying, "[NASA] will bring some of the smartest people in the world to Houston to work and raise their families," and so it did. As NASA employees began to relocate to Houston, they struggled to find housing close to the MSC until they discovered the newly developed Timber Cove subdivision. Some "NASA employees moved into the neighborhood, including rocket scientists, engineers, spacecraft designers, and four of the original Mercury 7 astronauts." Timber Cove, just like Houston, was forever changed by the pres-



From left to right, Edwin E. "Buzz" Aldrin Jr., Neil A. Armstrong, and Michael Collins stand in front of the Apollo Boilerplate 1102 during a training exercise for Apollo 11 on May 24, 1969.

Photo courtesy of NASA, S69-34882.

Armstrong and Aldrin can be seen performing lunar extravehicular activity on the monitor in the Mission Operations Control Room in the Mission Control Center (MCC). Gene Kranz led a massive restoration effort that brought Mission Control to its former glory for the moon landing's fiftieth anniversary. Kranz reflected on seeing the restored MCC, "It was dynamite. ... the emotional surge at that moment was incredible… believe it or not, I could hear the people talking in that room from 50 years ago." Photo courtesy of NASA, S69-39817.

ence of NASA and its employees. As historian Rebecca Wright noted, "Collectively, they transformed their neighborhood… and the subdivision evolved into a close-knit community."[9]

On September 21, 1962, President Kennedy visited Houston, where he spoke at Rice Stadium, proclaiming, "We choose to go the Moon in this decade and other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard." Kennedy also spoke to the spirit of Houston's boosters, who worked tirelessly behind the scenes for years to bring the MSC to Houston, adding, "This City of Houston, this State of Texas, this country of the United States was not built by those who waited and rested and wished to look behind them. This country was conquered by those who moved forward—and so will space."[10]

Training: Do it Again, and Again, and Again

Originally unsure about the demands of spaceflight, NASA sought the best astronaut candidates who could withstand a set of rigorous tests. Only military test pilots could apply, and 508 did. After screening for age and height requirements, NASA chose 110 men and subjected them to high heat to test their tolerance, an endurance test to measure lung strength by how many balloons they could blow up, and a psychological analysis asking the candidates to provide, for example, twenty unique answers to the question, "Who am I?" The first astronauts selected, dubbed the "Mercury 7," included Scott Carpenter, Gordon Cooper Jr., John Glenn Jr., Virgil "Gus" Grissom, Walter "Wally" Schirra Jr., Alan Shepard Jr., and Donald "Deke" Slayton.

NASA divided its space flight program into stages: Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo. The goal of Mercury, which carried one man in the space capsule, was to place a human in orbit around the globe, determine man's ability to function in microgravity, and recover him safely when returned to Earth. After adding "The New 9" astronauts, Gemini missions carried two men to demonstrate they could stay in space for longer periods, conduct space walks, rendezvous, and dock in space, essential components for a moon landing. In the culminating program, Apollo, the three-man crews first demonstrated the ability to orbit the moon, and, finally, to land men on the moon and bring them home safely.[11]

The man in charge of selecting the astronaut crews for the Apollo missions was Deke Slayton, who insisted that all the astronauts "were essentially equal" and made his assignments purely on seniority.[12] Sadly, Apollo 1, saw the first loss of life for the space program when Roger Chaffee, Ed White, and Gus Grissom died in a fire during a test on the Florida launch pad in 1967. The unexpected tragedy and additional problems with construction of the lunar module delayed NASA's schedule but did not deter its mission.

The second round of astronauts included one of NASA's first civilian astronauts, X-15 test pilot Neil Armstrong, who had a degree in aeronautical engineering. Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin, who had a doctorate and a dissertation on orbital rendezvous, entered with "Astronaut Group 3, as did West

Gene Kranz at the flight director console during a simulation in April 1965. Gemini IV was the first mission to be managed at Houston's Mission Control Center. Photo courtesy of NASA, S68-55503.

Point graduate Michael Collins after a career as a fighter pilot in the Air Force. Despite NASA's strict training regimens and protocol meant to leave little or nothing to chance, a set of unforeseen circumstances led to the selection of Aldrin, Armstrong, and Collins for the Apollo 11 mission to land on the moon. The retirements of Wally Schirra and Frank Borman and the deferment of James McDivitt from Apollo 8 to Apollo 9 resulted in a shake-up that saw Armstrong and Aldrin assigned to Apollo 11. Collins, originally scheduled to fly on Apollo 8, had back surgery, resulting in his return to the astronaut selection pool and assignment to the Apollo 11 crew.[13]

Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins reached their dream of travelling to the moon by unconventional means. Some might even call it luck. Director of flight operations Christopher Kraft liked to quote legendary University of Texas football coach Darrell Royal, "Luck is what happens when preparation meets with opportunity." NASA and the MSC saw to it that these men were prepared for their 240,000-mile journey to the moon. The astronauts travelled the world preparing for every eventuality. They learned how to survive in the desert and the lava flows of Hawaii, and how to "kill and eat a snake in the jungles of Panama." In May 1968 Armstrong had to eject from the lunar landing training vehicle after it started to tilt uncontrollably, causing it to crash into a large fireball as Armstrong floated safely back to Earth. The Apollo 11 crew logged an estimated 2,000 hours in the flight simulators in addition to their other preparations.[14]

Fate ordained these men the knights of the skies, but they did not achieve this feat alone. Three new Houstonians—Gene Kranz, Richard Koos, and Steve Bales—made the final call to land or abort the mission just seconds before the *Eagle* module touched down.[15]

Kranz stumbled upon an advertisement for the Space Task Group while flipping through a copy of *Aviation Week* magazine while working at Holloman Air Force Base in New Mexico. He opened the magazine on his desk and looked at the ad every time he entered his office. Kranz recalls, the Space Task Group "captured my imagination." After consulting with his wife, Kranz and his family decided they would prefer life in Virginia to Cape Canaveral so he applied to NASA and the family moved to Virginia in 1960.[16] At the time, NASA was still creating the procedures and protocols for mission launches. Ironically, Kranz became directly responsible for shaping and creating the very flight director's position for which he later gained notoriety.

In the weeks leading up to the Apollo 11 mission, Kranz and his "white team" trained tirelessly for every contingency, as the simulation supervisor (sim sup), Richard Koos, increased the pressure on the team. Koos was one of the earliest pioneers of the Space Task Group with a background at Army Missile Command at Ft. Bliss, Texas. Kranz said, "We went through a series of scenarios that was almost—seemed like forever. It was only a couple of weeks, but it seemed a lifetime where we could not do anything right. Everything we would do, we would either wait too long and crash or we would jump the gun and abort when we didn't have to, and the debriefings were absolutely brutal during that period of time."[17]

Kranz recounted the story of a final practice session they had that proved fortuitous, "[W]e were just about ready to finish up the training with the Apollo 11 crew. Then Sim Sup [Koos] stuck it to us again. The final training runs, invariably, are supposed to be confidence-builders." Koos did not see it that way and went through more challenges, which resulted in the crew performing more aborts. "I think it was

Approximately 300,000 people attended the ticker tape parade in downtown Houston on August 16, 1969, to congratulate Neil Armstrong and the other astronauts.
Photo courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, RGD0006N-3813R3-004.

either last or second to last training exercise…" Kranz recalled, "We saw a series of computer program alarms. We'd never seen these before in training. We'd never studied these before in training. My guidance officer, Steve Bales, looked at the alarms and decided we had to abort."[18]

Steve Bales arrived at NASA as one among a long list of young, new hires. After receiving a bachelor's of science degree in aeronautical engineering from Iowa State University, Bales applied to and accepted a job offer from NASA at twenty-two years old. Four years later, he served as the guidance officer under Kranz's white team, which was responsible for the lunar module's navigational systems. A year younger than Bales when he arrived at NASA, Jack Garman graduated from the University of Michigan with a bachelor's of science in engineering physics with a specialty in computing. NASA sent Garman to trainings across the country, sharpening his skills on the inner workings of computers, which resulted in him becoming an important leader on Bale's support staff. Channeling his expertise and work ethic, Garman led the Instrumentation Lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and made regular trips to Cambridge to oversee the construction and programming of the computers that would power the Apollo program. Garman was in the training session with Bales and Kranz when Bales incorrectly called an abort because of a computer error.[19]

With two weeks before the launch of the Saturn V rocket carrying the Apollo 11 spacecraft, Kranz wanted his guidance team to know every computer code. "I want a total expose, and I don't give a damn how long it's going to take him," Kranz asserted. "If he has to work all night or all week or every day from now to the launch, he's going to understand these program alarms."[20] Bales, Garman, and the rest of the team proceeded to study all of the codes, no matter how unlikely they were to occur. Garman created a cheat sheet that he described in 2001, "I still have a copy of it. It's handwritten, under a piece of plastic, and we wrote it down for every single computer run and stuck it under the glass on the console."[21]

Thanks to one difficult simulation supervisor, one meticulously prepared flight director, one humble guidance officer, and a support staff intimately familiar with every aspect of the onboard computers, opportunity met preparation. At 3:14 p.m. CDT, the alarm bells started on the lunar module. Only three minutes from the eventual touchdown on the moon, with fuel running out, Bales was called upon to give a "go" or "no go" ruling on the mission. According to Kranz, "There's two types of alarms. These are the exact ones that we blew in the training session on our final training day." Bales immediately went to his headset with Garman, and Garman, using his notes, determined the codes were "just like a simulation." As told by Chris Kraft, "When flight director Gene Kranz pressed him for his answer, young Mr. Bales' response was the loudest and most emphatic 'go' I have ever heard." Bales remembered the codes—1201 and 1202. And he recalled later, "[My friends] gave me a t-shirt that had those two alarms on it when I retired."[22]

Kraft reminisced that the support staff "in Houston were with their astronauts each step of the way," and that can equally apply to all of those working at MSC to fulfill NASA's missions. Jerry Bostick, the flights dynamic officer of Apollo 11, reflected on the lunar landing's importance to the space race: "We've done what we came to do, we want to do it a bunch more times, but we have proved it can be done.

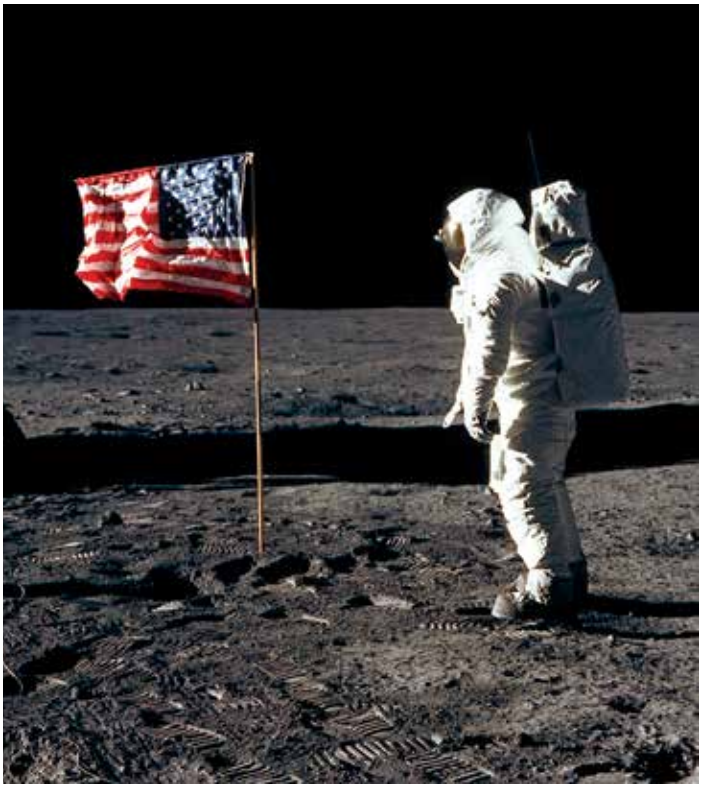
Established in 1979, Tranquillity Park commemorated the tenth anniversary of the Apollo 11 mission, which landed in the moon's Sea of Tranquility. Visitors can see space themed installations, such as a replica of Armstrong's first footprint and memorials to those lost in the Challenger *and* Columbia *accidents.* Photo courtesy of the Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, RGD006N-1979-2419-015.

We met the President's goal. We beat the Russians."[23]

When the astronauts returned home safely, Houstonians lined the streets of downtown to throw a ticker tape parade for the men who had stood on the moon. It could not have been done without the vision set forth by Albert Thomas, George Brown, and Lyndon Johnson to secure the MSC for Houston. It would not have happened without the hard work and endless training by Buzz Aldrin, Neil Armstrong, and Michael Collins to fly to the moon. It might have been delayed without the meticulous preparation of Gene Kranz, Stephen Bales, and Jack Garman, not to mention the thousands of other NASA employees, contractors, and university programs. All these factors forever linked Houston to its nickname "Space City" and culminated in this unforgettable moment:

> **Ed Aldrin**: Contact light. Okay. Engine stop. ACA – out of descent. Mode control – both auto. Descent engine command override – off. Engine alarm – off. 413 is in.
> **Capsule Communicator** (CAPCOM): We copy you down *Eagle*.
> **Neil Armstrong**: Houston. Tranquility Base here. The *Eagle* has landed.

Calvin D. Blair is a graduating senior majoring in history at the University of Houston and a former intern at *Houston History*. In 2018, the Texas Historical Commission selected him as a Preservation Scholar.



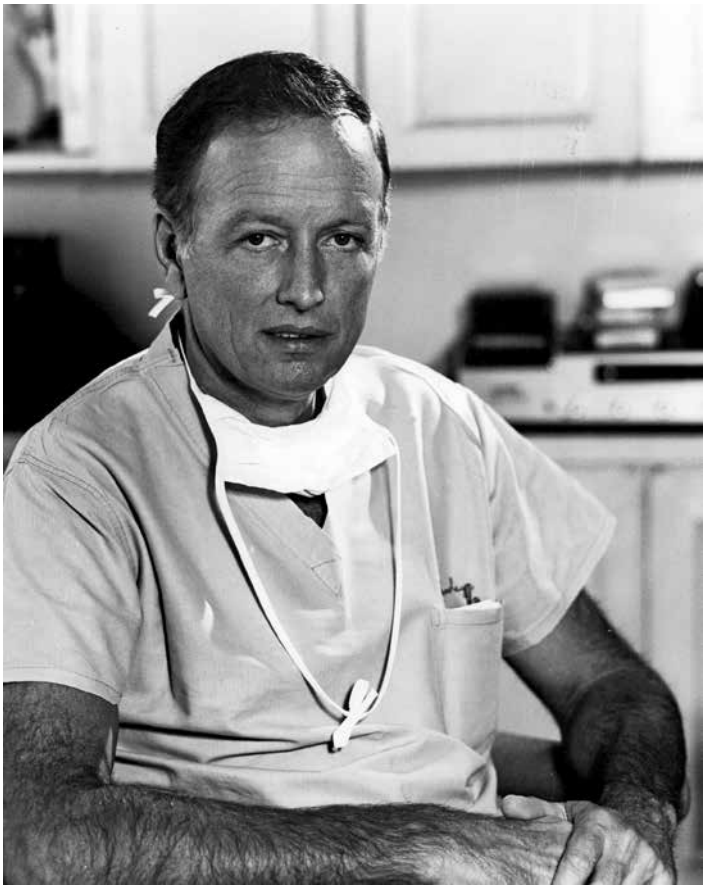
Neil Armstrong photographed astronaut Buzz Aldrin posing with the U.S. flag during the Apollo 11 mission on July 20, 1969.
Photo courtesy of NASA, AS11-40-5875.

Making a Miracle – The Story of Denton Cooley and the First Total Artificial Heart

By Kenan Nerad

The world awoke on April 8, 1969, to find history had been made a day earlier in Houston, Texas — Haskell Karp, a forty-seven-year-old man emerged from surgery to find his failing heart had been replaced by an artificial heart made entirely of plastic. Such an operation had never been done before and was inconceivable to many, but Dr. Denton Cooley and his team at the Texas Heart Institute relied on decades of advances in cardiovascular surgery to save the life of a dying patient.[1]

The second of two sons, Denton Cooley was born to Ralph and Mary Cooley on August 22, 1920, at Houston's Memorial Baptist Hospital. The son of a prominent Houston dentist and grandson to one of the founders of the Heights, Denton Cooley spent his childhood in a Montrose home off West Alabama Street. He attended local public schools throughout his education at Montrose Elementary School, Sidney Lanier Junior High School, and San Jacinto High School. As a budding basketball player, Cooley was recruited to play for The University of Texas (UT), which found success during his years there, winning the 1939 Southwest Conference Championship and playing in the first NCAA competition. Cooley always thought highly of the lessons basketball taught him, particularly "endurance and competitiveness, with perhaps an emphasis on endurance."[2]



Renowned heart surgeon Dr. Denton Cooley founded the Texas Heart Institute at St. Luke's Hospital in Houston.

Photo courtesy of John P. McGovern Historical Research Center, Houston Academy of Medicine—Texas Medical Center Library, ICC 077 MWN, 13602.

Cooley entered UT in 1937 as a freshman in the predental program, with plans to work in his father's practice, but a fateful trip to San Antonio soon altered his career path. Cooley had a friend interning at Santa Rosa Hospital who gave Cooley the opportunity to assist in sewing a knife wound. Enthralled by the experience, Cooley immediately changed his major to premedical upon returning to UT.[3]

In 1941, Cooley graduated with honors and began medical school at UT Medical Branch at Galveston (UTMB). The scholastic environment that Cooley found at UTMB was a product of medical understanding of the time. Surgery was still in a rudimentary state, with a focus on excising problems instead of repairing or replacing when addressing issues found in the body. Thus, many at UTMB did not consider advancements in heart surgery possible. "We did not even think about surgery of the heart," said Cooley, adding, "It was beyond thought at the time that surgery or manipulation of the heart could be successful. In fact, we were even taught that if you suddenly stopped the heart's action or anything, for any purpose, you would never get it started again."[4] Misconceptions such as these led to cardiovascular surgery being nigh absent from Cooley's surgical training at UTMB.

Although UTMB was Cooley's first choice for medical school, he transferred in 1943 due to a developing political issue involving faculty that could threaten his career prospects. Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor and entry of the United States into World War II, the social climate within the country changed drastically. Concerns over un-American activities and paranoia ran rampant, and when the dean of medicine at UTMB began to have reported conflicts with his colleagues over political issues, he was investigated by the Texas Rangers. These investigations led to UTMB being placed on scholastic probation, temporarily negating any value of a degree from its medical school and causing Cooley to transfer to Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in February of 1943, which propelled him into the world of cardiovascular surgery.[5]

At Johns Hopkins, Cooley found a mentor in Dr. Alfred Blalock who was on the cusp of a major circulatory breakthrough during the 1940s. His research hoped to treat "blue

Dr. Denton Cooley, right, performing the artificial heart operation.
Photo courtesy of John P. McGovern Historical Research Center, Houston Academy of Medicine—Texas Medical Center Library, ICC 077 MWN, 7465.

babies," or congenital pulmonic stenosis, primarily caused by an unusually small pulmonary artery, which prevented the artery's normal function. The pulmonary artery carries deoxygenated blood from the right ventricle of the heart to the lungs for oxygen exchange before returning it to the left ventricle and pumping it into the body for cellular respiration. Vivien Thomas, an African Amercian lab technician working for Dr. Blalock, discovered a solution for the condition that involved inducing pulmonary hypertension by rerouting blood through a neighboring vessel into the pulmonary artery, forcing the artery to pump the required volumes of blood to the lungs for normal human function. Thomas advised Blalock, as Cooley and others assisted the doctor, during the first operation in November of 1944. The operation saw immediate success. Cooley explained, "Before you opened this connection, they [the patients] were intensely cyanotic or blue, and then you opened the connection and suddenly, they become pink." Upon reflection he added, "I have always thought that that was the dawn of modern heart surgery and I was privileged to be present to witness it."[6]

During Cooley's postgraduate education, he spent two years serving as chief of surgery at a hospital in Linz, Austria, through his service in the Army Medical Corps. He achieved the rank of captain before spending a year in London studying under Russell Brock, London's top heart surgeon. Cooley returned to the United States in 1950 and began a series of medical advances, which helped propel the efficacy and effectiveness of cardiovascular surgery. One of his first stops upon returning to the United States was to observe the work of Dr. John Kirkland who had spent the last thirty years researching and developing an artificial circulator, allowing blood to be mechanically oxygenated outside of a patient's body. Kirkland's machines circulated blood through a column of bubbled oxygen to imitate oxygen exchange in the lungs. Some open-heart surgeries required compromising normal cardiovascular function, and Kirkland's invention sought to make these surgeries safer by providing a way to replicate lung functionality in the absence of a functioning heart-lung system. These early machines failed to oxygenate blood to a high concentration and were therefore only suitable for operations on children due to their reduced blood volume.[7]

Inspired by the inventions he saw, Cooley returned to Houston in 1951 and created his own artificial circulator at Baylor College of Medicine. In 1956 Cooley performed his first open heart surgery with his bubble oxygenator. His machine was still subject to several limitations despite the improvements made. Operations were on a timer, as the machine was unable to properly oxygenate blood if used longer than thirty to forty-five minutes. If used much longer, inadequate blood flow to varied organs could cause long-term complications for the patient. Patient size remained a major factor, as the machine's efficiency was still less than desirable. Despite the shortcomings, Cooley's machine proved what his former colleagues at UTMB thought was impossible: doctors could stop and restart the human heart and expect the patient to survive.[8]

During this time, the use of potassium ions was becoming a mainstream practice, which enabled the heart to be stopped during surgery. Such practices allowed surgeons to "operate in a completely quiet and bloodless field," as Cooley described, allowing for more precise operations to be performed with a lower mortality rate. In 1960, the use of an electrolyte solution instead of blood to prime bypass machines became a mainstay for Cooley and his team. In years prior, large quantities of blood drawn from either the patient or taken from the blood bank were utilized. This causes potential strain on patients due to blood loss and potential exposure to blood-borne pathogens and infections. Such developments showed that surgery could be practical, reproducible, and performed with disposable equipment.[9]

The artificial heart implanted in 1969 as seen on exhibit in 2013.
Photo courtesy of Karon Flage, Flickr.*

During his time at Baylor College of Medicine, Cooley partnered with another leading cardiovascular surgeon: Dr. Michael DeBakey. DeBakey had been instrumental to the development of the first heart-lung bypass machines, developing some of the components utilized in the 1932 models. The development of the heart-lung bypass machine was imperative to open-heart surgery, as it allowed for the complete immobilization of the heart during surgery and led to drastically safer operations. Another critical invention of DeBakey's was the use of Dacron grafts for repairing and replacing damaged blood vessels. Dacron was later used to construct the first total artificial hearts. Cooley, recruited by DeBakey in 1950, saw historic firsts as early as 1953 when the pair reported successful operations to treat aortic aneurysms, pulmonary embolisms, and carotoid endarterectomy. Such procedures were not possible without the progress DeBakey and Cooley made with heart-lung bypass machines, as pulmonary embolisms were cured by squeezing the lungs flat to remove inaccessible blood clots.[10]

Cooley's partnership with DeBakey was short lived, largely ending in 1962 due to what Cooley described as incompatible personalities. Upon leaving DeBakey's team Cooley established Texas Heart Institute. The two constantly sought to outperform the other, leading to incredible progress in cardiovascular surgery. From 1962 to 1967, the mortality rate for heart valve transplant patients fell from seventy percent to a mere eight percent. Their rivalry, however, was temporarily overshadowed when Dr. Christiaan Barnard performed the first heart transplant in South Africa on December 2, 1967. Fueled by competition, Cooley wrote to Barnard after his procedure, "Congratulations on your first transplant, Chris. I will be reporting my first hundred soon." Indeed, Cooley was not far behind, performing his first heart transplant six months later on May 3, 1968. Although the world's first, Barnard's patient survived only eighteen days, while Cooley's survived 204.[11] Cooley performed another twenty-one heart transplants by the end of 1968, keeping true to his promise to reach one hundred transplants.

Dr. Christiaan Bernard, a cardiac surgeon from South Africa, performed the world's first successful human heart transplant.

Photo courtesy of Nationaal Archief, the Dutch National Archives,and Spaarnestad Photo, Wikicommons.*

Dr. Michael DeBakey (center) was with Baylor College of Medicine for six decades, serving on the faculty, as chairman of the Department of Surgery, president, chancellor, and chancellor emeritus.

Photo courtesy of John P. McGovern Historical Research Center, Houston Academy of Medicine—Texas Medical Center Library, ICC 077 MWN, 5597B.

On April 7, 1969, what began as a routine procedure to repair the lower chamber of a patient's heart quickly developed into an international story. Haskell Karp, a forty-seven-year-old man who suffered his first heart attack ten years prior, was suffering from severe heart failure and needed a surgical miracle. An hour into surgery, however, Dr. Cooley found Karp's heart beyond repair and concluded Karp was certain to die without an immediate transplant, a transplant they did not have. What was available to Dr. Cooley was an experimental, totally artificial heart still in the early stages of its development and testing. Made completely out of plastic, the eight-ounce pump had shown it could replicate all cardiac function of a normal heart for several days, and Dr. Cooley hoped it would be enough to buy time for a transplant heart to be secured. The operation was unprecedented, not just because the heart was still in the pre-clinical stage of testing but because it was the first time a totally artificial heart was implanted into a human.[12]

The operation, despite being a major trek into the unknown, was successful. Karp was described as "awake and alert" by attending physicians during the sixty-five hours until a human heart transplant was made available. Dr. Cooley found success, replacing the artificial heart with the donor heart, but Karp's luck ran out. Karp received immunosuppressant drugs to mitigate organ rejection, leaving his body prone to post-surgical infections. He quickly succumbed to pneumonia and died a short thirty-two hours after surgery, not an uncommon story for transplant patients due to the limited immunosuppressant drugs available during this time.[13]

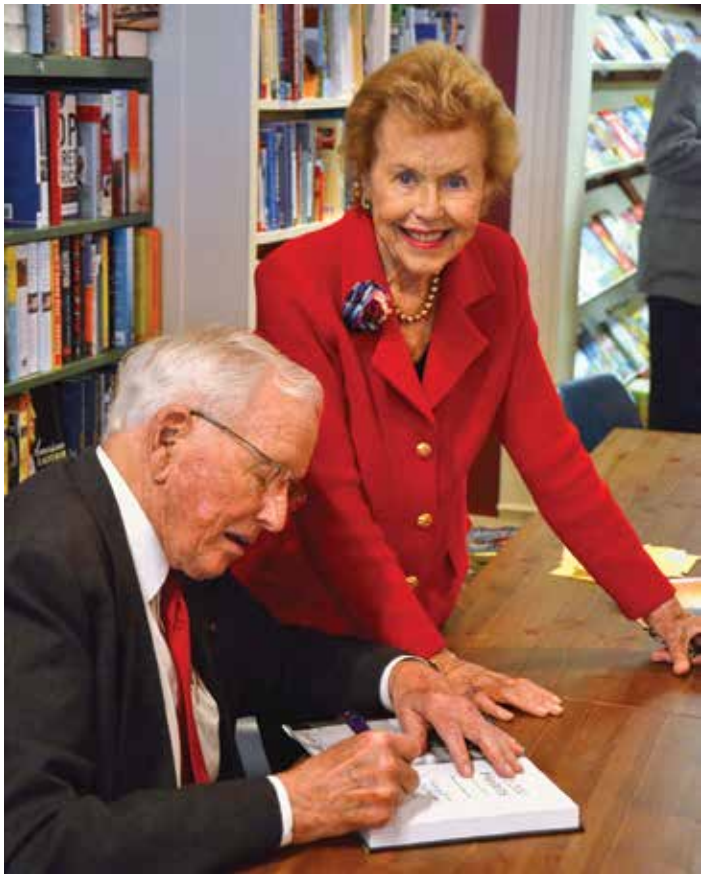
Furious upon hearing the news of this development, DeBakey believed Cooley had appropriated DeBakey's

research and failed to receive federal approval for the procedure. One of the physicians working with Cooley, Dr. Domingo S. Liotta, had recently parted ways with DeBakey and his research team, citing a conflict of interest over the future of cardiovascular surgery. With Liotta came a design for an artificial heart nearly identical to one DeBakey was testing in his own laboratory. DeBakey felt the model was not ready for implementation in a human and could lead to a defunding of research grants for artificial hearts. In 1965 DeBakey stated that with $50 million, "an artificial heart could be ready for permanent implementation within three to five years," and he was rightfully scared to see his project's funding jeopardized due to the actions of a colleague.[14]

Cooley's reputation suffered a major setback. The American College of Surgeons voted to censure him, Cooley ended his nineteen-year association with Baylor College of Medicine, and he faced a multimillion-dollar malpractice suit from Karp's widow. Cooley held fast by his decision, arguing that "if you are a ship out in the ocean and someone throws you a life preserver, you don't look at it to see if it has been approved by the federal government." Although Cooley proved a patient could survive on an artificial heart, the first total artificial heart to see FDA approval for human implementation, the Jarvik 7, would not surface until 1982.[15]

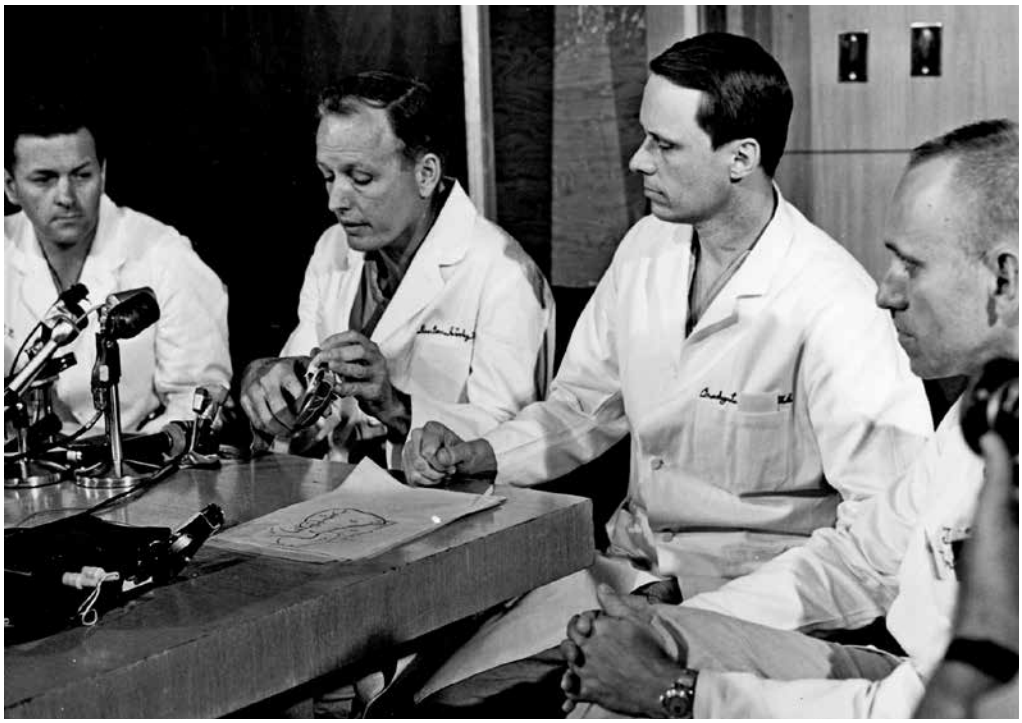
This development did not deter Cooley, as he continued to practice and improve cardiovascular surgery for the rest of his career. By 1972 Cooley had performed over 10,000 open-heart surgeries; and in 2001 he performed his 100,000th, performing as many as twenty-five surgeries a day. Many of his peers marveled as his dexterous hands, fully aware no one could ever match his speed and precision. Russell Brock once mused that "it stands to reason that the world will not produce a second Denton Cooley." Christiaan Barnard, upon viewing Cooley's technique observed, "It was the most beautiful surgery I had ever seen in my life...No one in the world, I knew, could equal it."[16] Cooley remained active at Texas Heart Institute until his passing on November 18, 2016. Although the last operation he performed was in 2007, he remained an omnipresent face throughout the hospital.

Kenan Nerad graduated from the University of Houston in 2019 with degrees in biotechnology and history. As an undergraduate he worked as a laboratory technician at Texas Heart Institute's Cardiovascular Surgery Research Laboratory. Kenan currently works for the Texas commission on Environmental Quality as a project manager of state and federal Superfund sites.



Dr. Denton Cooley and his wife of sixty-seven years, Louise Goldsborough Thomas Cooley, greet visitors in 2011 at a book signing for Dr. Cooley's book 100,000 Hearts.

Photo courtesy of the Texas Heart Institute.



Dr. Cooley, second from left, and the surgical team participate in a press conference following the artificial heart surgery.

Photo courtesy of John P. McGovern Historical Research Center, Houston Academy of Medicine—Texas Medical Center Library, ICC 077 MWN, 7465.

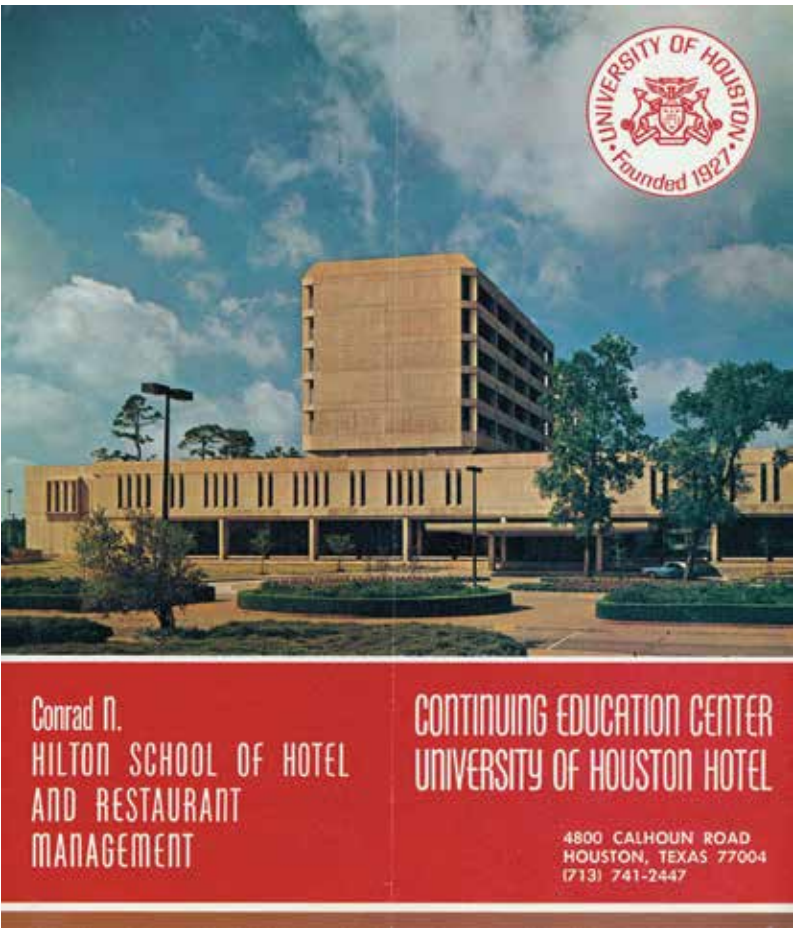
The Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management Celebrates 50 Years of the Hilton Legacy

By Mark E. Young

It happened fifty years ago in October 1969 at a formal banquet at the Shamrock Hilton in Houston, Texas. Conrad Hilton, the world-famous hotelier donated $1.5 million to the University of Houston to establish the first hotel and restaurant management program in Texas. In honor of this magnificent gift, the university named its hospitality program, the Conrad N. Hilton School of Hotel and Restaurant Management (later renamed as a college rather than a school). Thus, began a relationship that has continued for five decades between the Hilton family, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, and the University of Houston (UH).[1]

The roots of the Hilton College, however, actually predate the 1969 gala event. In 1947, the Texas Hotel Association moved its Texas Hotel Short Course to the University of Houston, where hotel and motel operators and workers could spend a week in classrooms learning all aspects of the lodging industry from accounting to design concepts. In an era with few hospitality programs let alone classes devoted to the subject, the Texas Hotel Short Course was popular with people from around the country and the world.

Dr. James C. Taylor, at the podium, and Barron Hilton took part in the groundbreaking for the Hilton School's new home at the University of Houston.



The Conrad N. Hilton School of Hotel and Restaurant Management opened in 1969 and its original building, now known as the North Wing, opened in 1974. Over the last fifty years the college has earned a reputation as one of the nation's best hospitality programs.

All photos courtesy of the Hospitality Industry Archives, Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management, University of Houston.

One of the instructors for the short course was Dr. James C. Taylor, a lawyer and labor relations arbiter. More importantly, Taylor developed strong connections with the local, state, and national hotel and restaurant associations. Taylor rose through the administrative ladder at UH to eventually become the dean of the Continuing Education program.

Through his work in the hospitality industry, Taylor came to know and befriend Eric Hilton, who was the general manager of Houston's Shamrock Hilton Hotel. Hilton had served as manager since the early 1960s and witnessed first-hand the value of the Texas Hotel Short Course that Taylor operated. Over the years, Hilton Hotels sent employees to the short course and the Shamrock hosted some of the classes.

Taylor and Hilton had often worked together on hotel related issues and it is fair to say they respected each other's business acumen. Taylor's dream was to take the hospitality training courses spread out among different schools and colleges at the university and create a hospitality college. Taylor had shared his thoughts about hospitality training with Eric, and in 1968 Eric told Taylor to put his ideas on paper. The following year, Taylor visited Eric in his office and presented him with a plan for a stand-alone hospitality program at the university. Further, Taylor asked if

Eric, Barron, and Conrad Hilton celebrate with UH President Philip G. Hoffman at the 1969 dinner announcing Hilton's generous donation to establish the hospitality school and promote professional training in the industry.

Eric's father, Conrad, might be interested in supporting the creation of such a school. Hilton was enthusiastic about the idea but before he approached his father he showed the plan to his older brother Barron. Eric knew that if he and Barron presented the idea to their father together it would make a more powerful impact.

Eric Hilton's instincts were correct, and his father liked the idea. As early as the 1920s Conrad Hilton valued the importance of professional hotel training and education. He had always encouraged his employees to attend hospitality training at the Texas Hotel Short Course and at the Cornell School over the years. Now fifty years after his start in the hotel business in Cisco, Texas, he was able to give back to the industry and support professional training of hotel and restaurant students. Hilton committed to financially supporting Taylor's dream of a hospitality school at UH.

In October of 1969, during a banquet in the Emerald Room at the Shamrock Hotel, Conrad, Barron, and Eric Hilton, along with state and city dignitaries and hotel and restaurant leaders, gathered to honor the hotel magnate. In a speech titled "Beyond the Horizon," Conrad laid out his vision of the school, saying, ". . . the keeper of the inn is the keeper of the flame, that thousand-year-old flame of hospitality which the graduates of our Hilton School of Hotel and Restaurant Management must hold high and carry into the hotels of the 21st century."

The first class enrolled thirty-nine students in 1969. The original college building, now the North Wing, was completed in 1974. It had over twenty-two conference and classrooms of various sizes, faculty offices, eighty-three hotel guestrooms, a kitchen, full-service dining room, school administrative offices, and rooms for the Continuing Education Center. In the meantime, classes were held across the UH campus and at the Shamrock Hilton Hotel. The faculty had their offices in a downtown building owned by the university. Despite not having a "home" the first couple of years, the Hilton school flourished, with student enrollment and faculty size both increasing.

In 1974 Hilton Hotels held a management meeting in Houston. Barron Hilton, president of Hilton by this time, brought the Hilton Hotels executives to tour the almost completed building. Acting as host, Dean Taylor showed the

Having the right faculty members ensured the new hospitality degree program and its students would succeed. Shown standing left to right in 1976, Anthony J. Mandola, David Dean, Frances Knipe (dean's assistant), and Dean James C. Taylor. Seated left to right are Dr. Clinton Rappole, Walter G. Lindemann, Dr. Herbert L. Williams, Gloria Perry (secretary), Donald Greenaway, Donald I. Smith, J. Patrick Stewart, and George E. Young. Not pictured, Robert D. Wickham and Thomas Lattin.

President George H. W. Bush had Hilton College Par Excellence students serve at a formal dinner for the international G7 Economic Summit held in Houston, 1990.

Hilton Hotel people the latest in hospitality training. Later, Barron stated how impressed he was with the facility and thought it an appropriate way to honor his father.

Reflecting the increased status of the Hilton program, the University of Houston changed the status of the school to a college in 1978, making it an independent college among the other colleges on campus.

In 1980, the American Hotel and Motel Association held its annual meeting in Houston. While in town, Barron Hilton, speaking to enthusiastic faculty and students, announced his desire to establish the Conrad N. Hilton College as the "No. 1 hotel and restaurant program in the world." Afterwards in a discussion with Taylor and Prof. Clint Rappole, Barron told the men to put together a plan of action to bring the Hilton College to the status of number one.

Soon, Taylor, Rappole, and others created a plan of action that not only expanded the physical size of the college but also increased the numbers of courses and students. Taylor flew to California to deliver the plan to the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, where Barron Hilton served as president and Eric served on the board. Plus, most of the foundation's board members were longtime Hilton executives who recognized the needs of the college and what it would take to reach the stated goal.

In 1983 the foundation awarded the Hilton College $21.3 million to build the South Wing of the college's hotel complex, which was completed and opened in 1989. This addition with more than 94,000 square feet of space once again took the college to a new level of excellence. The college now had its own lab space for the students and faculty, a library and archive for hospitality papers and memorabilia, and faculty offices. The facility included an instructional kitchen, food science lab, a food demo kitchen, a food research lab with taste test facilities, a new student-run restaurant and a 6,300-square-foot ballroom, appropriately named the Conrad Ballroom.

The premiere student-led event at the Hilton College is the annual Gourmet Night dinner. For over forty-five years, students have served guests a delicious five-course meal with fine wines, incredible food, and decadent desserts. What makes Gourmet Night so special is that it is an entirely student-run event, with the exception of a guest chef who helps guide the students in their meal execution. Gourmet

Hilton College students produce the annual Gourmet Night, a culinary extravaganza and college fundraiser, to show their creativity and ability to orchestrate a large-scale event from menu selection to food prep, synchronized service, marketing, and a silent auction. Each year has a unique theme, such as this 2013 program for the Wizard of Oz Gourmet Night and the 2017 Kentucky Derby theme with women donning unique hats.

Photo at right by Steve Lee Photography, courtesy of Hilton College.

Night features the synchronized service of the meal at the thirty-six tables with ten place settings each in the Conrad Ballroom. Each year has a different theme that has varied from the Wizard of Oz to An Evening of Carnivals to Hats off to Hilton. The night's theme is a closely guarded secret that is unveiled in the invitation and carried through the night of the dinner.

As the Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management reaches its fiftieth anniversary, the program is consistently ranked as one of the top hospitality programs in the world. The diversity of the students and faculty reflects the international stature of the college. At home, the University of Houston administration has consistently supported the growth, expansion, and enhancement of the college. In 2019 Dean Dennis Reynolds, the college's seventh dean, announced the approval of funding for another hotel tower adding seventy guest rooms to increase the total number of available rooms to 150. This much-needed addition will provide more rooms for guests in the largely student-operated hotel and is one more symbol of the college's future growth.

Mark E. Young, Ph.D., is a historian and the archivist for the Hospitality Industry Archives, Massad Family Research Center in the Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management at the University of Houston.

Hilton College

- Has grown from 39 students in 1969 to over 1,000 in 2019.
- Has more than 30 full-time faculty.
- Offers six degree plans, including a Ph.D. program.
- Has a diverse student body from over 54 countries.
- Experiences a 92% student job placement rate.
- Offers over 12 student hospitality organizations.
- Hosts the annual student-led Gourmet Night initiated in 1974.
- Is home to the Hospitality Industry Archives, the largest repository devoted to the hospitality industry, founded in 1989.
- Houses the Hospitality Industry Hall of Honor, started in 1996.
- Opened the student-operated coffee bar Cougar Grounds in 2008.
- Added the Spec's Beverage & Food Appreciation Laboratory in 2014.
- Opened the Conrad N. Hilton College–San Antonio campus in 2014.
- Received approval for a new hotel tower opening in 2022 or 2023.
- Received approval for a brew pub, for the beverage management program, opening in 2022 or 2023.

Dean Dennis Reynolds in the Hospitality Industry Archives, Massad Family Research Center, at the Hilton College.

"Celebrating the College's 50th anniversary has provided a wonderful opportunity to look back at our past and ahead to our bright future. It's only fitting that for fall 2019 we launched our new, innovative undergraduate curriculum, which consolidates our areas of emphasis into four tracks – Lodging, Foodservice, Wine & Beverage Studies, and Project Management & Analytics – allowing our students more latitude in customizing their academic experience. Additionally, we changed our core classes to better serve the changing needs of our industry and increased our work-experience requirement to 1,000 hours. Our undergrads are also expected to complete a practicum in professional development as well as a hospitality internship, all of which will better prepare them to lead this industry.

"Our forward-thinking curriculum, a $30.4 million hotel expansion, an impressive 92 percent job-placement rate, 100 percent placement of our first cohort of doctoral students, our faculty's record-setting research productivity (an 81 percent increase since 2013), and successive years of positive financial performance are all markers of success that truly portend what we will achieve in the next 50 years."

– Dean Dennis Reynolds
Conrad N. Hilton College of
Hotel and Restaurant Management

The Houston Furniture Bank moved to its current location at 8220 Mosley Road in 2015. All photos courtesy of the Houston Furniture Bank.

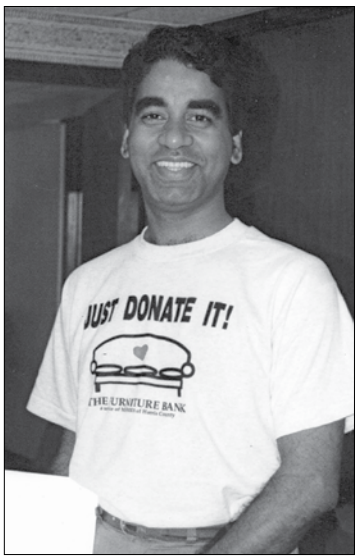
HOUSTON FURNITURE BANK – A BANK THAT WANTS TO GIVE

By Ruben Castro

Imagine how it feels to be without a bed, a table and chairs, or a dresser and a couch. "It is estimated that three hundred thousand children sleep on the *floor* in this great city of Houston, Texas," exclaimed Oli Mohammed, founder of the Houston Furniture Bank, which celebrated its twenty-sixth anniversary on March 30, 2019.[1] What exactly is the Houston Furniture Bank, you might wonder. For starters, it is not a typical bank, which created some confusion initially. Oli recalls with amusement that, when founding the furniture bank, he had to get permission from the Texas Banking Commission before the organization could register the name using the word "bank." The Houston Furniture Bank was not dealing with money, but with something worth more, the love for families who were looking at financial hardship, facing life transitions, or had come to the city as newly arrived refugees. The furniture bank's slogan is "to make empty houses homes," and with it, they provide "a little bit of dignity" to the people living in those homes by taking care of their needs with furniture.

The man behind the Houston Furniture Bank (HFB), Oli Mohammed, is a buoyant, optimistic person. He was born and raised in Bangladesh in the city of Dhaka. While attending school there and acquiring his master's degree in political science from the University of Dhaka, he earned the opportunity to work for the United Nations Environmental Programme as an intern consultant in Nairobi, Kenya, in the 1980s. In 1987 Oli immigrated to the United States, where he worked at a transmission shop and delivered pizza and newspapers to make ends meet. He then volunteered for UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund) and helped pioneer a Bangladesh Community Center in Houston.[2]

As a UNICEF volunteer, Oli met Dr. Walter Black who helped him join the Mental Health and Mental Retardation Authority of Harris County in Houston (MHMRA), now the Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD (Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities). His official title was housing specialist, and his job was to find apartments for people coming out of the mental health facilities. Due to the low subsidies, the only apartments Oli could find for his clients were in rough neighborhoods considered "slums." This was an eye-opener for Oli, who witnessed poverty not seen in his homeland of Bangladesh. Intellectually he knew poor people lived in America but not at the level he witnessed. Not only were the apartments substandard, but the residents also had no furniture to start their new lives. After seeing families and especially children sleep and eat on the floor, Oli spoke to his then boss Dr. Steven Schnee



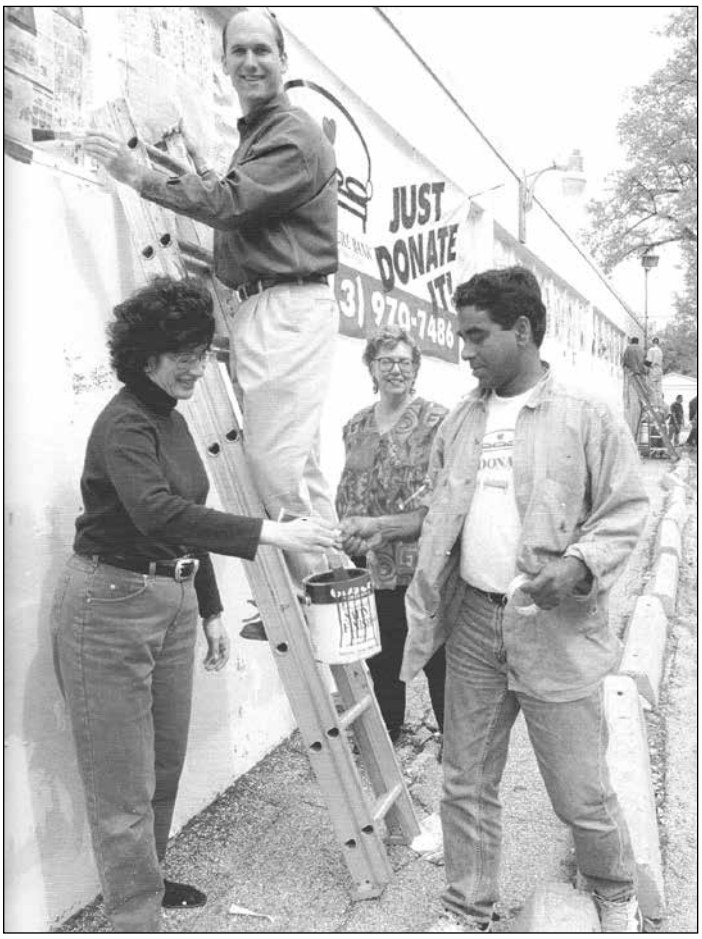
HFB founder Oli Mohammed sports a t-shirt with the organization's slogan "Just Donate It" in 1995.

and the rest is history – the HFB was born in 1992.[3]

The first years presented challenges that required a lot of footwork. Oli borrowed a truck and started going to apartment association meetings and knocking on the doors of furniture companies and retailers. Jodie Hoffer, owner of Hoffer Furniture, was one of the original supporters of the furniture bank. Initially, the mission of the Houston Furniture Bank was to provide furniture to families or individuals who were transitioning from mental health facilities back into society, but the mission eventually expanded. The first pilot program was a success and the furniture bank collected furniture for 140 families.

From 1992 into 1995, the furniture bank served the MHMRA clients only and, in the middle of 1995, opened its doors to other agencies. By 1997 the bank provided furniture to 487 clients and donations were organized through companies like Star Furniture, Oak Crafters Furniture, Hoffer Furniture, Tandem Staffing, Kaplan Educational Centers, Houston Apartment Association, Cotton Moving & Storage, and Bankhead Thompson Media. The furniture bank's slogan at the time was "Just Donate it!"[4]

The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD (HCMH) is the biggest organization in size and has brought in the most clients since 1992. Other agencies include the YMCA, St. Vincent de Paul, Star of Hope, Catholic Charities,



Shown left to right, Pam Goodfriend, member of the board; Steve Finger, chairman of the board at that time; Susie White, member of the board representing the Houston Apartment Association at the time; and Oli Mohammed, founder, paint the new warehouse in 1998.

The 2100 Hussion Street warehouse was located off I-45, the Gulf Freeway.

Bridges over Troubled Waters, Houston Area Women's' Center, and many more, totaling eighty-five agencies. The Houston Furniture Bank also started working with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) through the Healthcare for The Homeless Veterans Program (HCHV) and the Texas Veterans, thus helping many veterans struggling financially with acquiring furniture. Former mayor of Houston Lee P. Brown proclaimed March 5, 1998, as the Furniture Bank Day in recognition of the organization's service.

By 1999 the Finger and Hoffer families donated a 20,000-square-foot building with two acres of land on Bowling Green Street. HFB started to grow not only with furniture and volunteers but also love throughout Houston. In 2003 HFB became a 501(c) (3) enabling it to help many Houston families through donations. On April 15, 2004, another former mayor, Bill White, again bestowed the honor of Furniture Bank Day.

Unfortunately, the following year, the roof caved in on the furniture bank's Bowling Green warehouse, forcing it to relocate. The search brought HFB to 2100 Hussion Street, where it was settled in time to assist new Houstonians driven from their homes by Hurricane Katrina, which struck the Mississippi and Louisiana coasts on August 29, 2005.

The Furniture Outlet opened to the public with great furniture at a fraction of the retail cost.

THE FURNITURE OUTLET CENTER

The first few years were tough for the furniture bank financially. Oli explains that the organization collected furniture and distributed it to clients but struggled to run its operations within its means. It is said that "necessity is the mother of invention," which proved correct as the furniture bank looked at avenues to increase its revenues. To reduce dependence on monetary donations, the Houston Furniture Bank created the Furniture Outlet Center in 2008. Select pieces of donated furniture, such as those that are oversized or impractical for the average family, are sold through the retail store, adding to the income. The outlet offered a variety of great furniture pieces in a place next to the HFB then at 2100 Hussion Street and the Gulf Freeway donated by the Finger family to make this possible.

Anyone can come to the Furniture Outlet Center and look for and purchase furniture like mattresses, bed frames, dressers, mirrors, dining tables, couches, and much more. This helps people save as much as a couple of hundred dollars or more per item, especially for people with limited or fixed incomes and those just starting out in life like newlyweds or college grads.

Used mattresses are recycled into carpet padding and other items, keeping 15,000 mattresses from the local land fill in 2018.

The Furniture Outlet became the HFB's first "social business," a model inspired by Nobel Peace Prize winner Mohammed Yunus. The social business concept allows non-profit organizations to be self-reliant and not depend on charitable funding. This was Oli's vision and so far it has covered about 40 to 45 percent of the operating budget.[5]

MATTRESS RECYCLING

Another social business venture began taking shape by 2010, after Oli learned about a Saint Vincent de Paul Society program in Eugene, Oregon, that had been recycling mattresses for about twenty years. Oli got to work, and in 2012, with the help of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and a private grant from Larry Cress he was able to buy equipment and begin recycling mattresses in Houston.[6]

At first many of the mattresses donated by the public had to be discarded due to their condition. HFB was taking in mattresses for free and losing money with a sky-high dumpster bill to dispose of them. Recycling mattresses, on the other hand, could protect the environment by keeping mattresses out of landfills and add revenues to the furniture bank. The foam and padding from mattresses are recycled into carpet padding and the wood and metal are used for other things.

In 2018 the furniture bank recycled 15,000 mattresses, but that is just scratching the surface. Every year Houstonians send roughly 750,000 to one million mattresses to landfills according to the International Sleep Products Association. Oli puts that in perspective, saying, "You can fill NRG stadium twice all the way to the top with the number of mattresses going to our landfill yearly."[7] Although the Houston Furniture Bank currently recycles over 1,000 mattresses a month, Oli would like to see that number reach 10,000 mattresses a month in the future. Today, people can donate their mattresses by dropping them off and paying a $10 fee to cover the cost of recycling the mattress. The HFB will also pick up mattresses for a fee of $25 by sending a truck and two men.[8]

In 2015 the Houston Furniture Bank had a major blow to its future when the warehouse near I-45 Gulf Freeway on Hussion Street was engulfed in flames when a fire broke out in the middle of the night. The fire may have turned out to be a blessing in disguise in some ways, though. The furniture bank moved its operation to a 75,000-square-foot warehouse near Hobby Airport that looks and feels like a good fit to handle the furniture donations, the outlet center, and mattress operations. It also includes five acres of land that will be helpful when expanding operations and new construction in the future. This move was made possible through a Housing and Urban Development program with assistance from the City of Houston, and Housing and Community Development.

Oli (right) walks through the warehouse with an employee inspecting all donated furniture.

HURRICANE HARVEY

Houstonians will never forget 2017 after Hurricane Harvey hovered over the city for days. The storm left most of Houston under water, and the disaster caused $125 billion in damage, the second most costly hurricane since 1900. An estimated 13 million people were affected by Hurricane Harvey alone, and nearly 135,000 homes were damaged or destroyed throughout Texas.[9] Although the Houston Furniture Bank could not open for a few days after Harvey, when the doors finally did open, Oli got to work calling many companies in the mattress and furniture business to ask for help. The excitement to help caused shipments of trailers after trailers, totaling twenty-three trailers of furniture and mattresses, from within Houston and nationally.

In mid-September, people started to line up outside the furniture bank, which caused problems since HFB can only serve up to seventy families per day. People had to show some proof of their damage, usually from FEMA. When Oli came in at 5:00 a.m. he started noticing people sleeping outside on the parking lot. The crowds got difficult, and it had to come to a halt. The furniture bank began to reroute people through agencies, requiring them to come in by appointment, which made things go smoother. To speed up the process, HFB issued families a Harvey package, which included a mattress, box spring, and an individual furniture piece. The furniture bank has helped three thousand families affected by Hurricane Harvey thanks to a $750,000 grant from the Greater Houston Community Foundation. Grants have also come from the Red Cross and other organizations totaling over $1.5 million to purchase furniture and mattresses since the storm hit. The Harvey program came to an end in September of 2019.

MATTRESS FACTORY

Always striving to go the extra mile to help those in need, the HFB invested in equipment to start manufacturing mattresses in 2018. This social business was birthed out of the need created by Hurricane Harvey. A person can purchase a new mattress made at the furniture bank at a fraction of the price charged in a furniture store. Moreover, the quality, feel, and appearance are just as good as what you find at a mattress store. Currently, production of mattresses and box springs each average 680 monthly. Oli would like to see that average reach 2,000 a month for each.[10]

Flor Espinoza sews a new mattress together at the HFB.

Oli assists an HFB recipient picking out furniture.

As the HFB provided furniture to those in need, it also began providing jobs for people fresh out of the prison system, giving them hope of getting back to work as productive, self-supporting citizens. Most of them are assigned in the warehouse with the hands-on operations in recycling and manufacturing mattresses; others unload new furniture and organize the warehouse or distribute furniture. So far the HFB has been providing work and a future for six months to a year to those who would otherwise find it almost impossible to get employed. In addition to holding a job, some have taken on leadership responsibilities, moving into a managerial position.

In another program HFB works with the court system to let those assigned to community service fulfill their duties by helping in the warehouse. Recycling mattresses, cleaning, or performing other needed tasks, they work a minimum of four to eight hours a day, depending on the total hours they are required to serve. Some might only have ten hours to complete, while others have two hundred hours. The number of community service workers ranges from fifty to one hundred a month.

Volunteers represent another important group working with mattress recycling, manufacturing, and warehouse needs. Summer is the busiest season for volunteers. For example, a local high school brings about thirty students for a weekend volunteering four hours a day. The University of Houston and Rice University also have groups of students volunteering at the furniture bank, with most of them helping in the warehouse, mattress recycling, and organizing.

To receive free furniture, families are required to go through one of the 85 partnering agencies. A representative provides vouchers, assists in making an appointment at the furniture bank, and then accompanies the family to pick out their furniture during their appointment.

Richard Mitchell, the HFB distribution manager, and Romie de Leon attend the twenty-sixth anniversary celebration; Romie was one of the furniture bank's beneficiaries. Visit the Houston History *website to hear Romi's story.*

The furniture bank accepts both furniture and monetary donations to make this possible. Companies that continue to donate furniture, or have done so in the past, include Hoffer Furniture, Finger Furniture, Gallery Furniture, Landmark Furniture, Mattresses For Less, Rooms To Go, Serta Mattress, and many other Houston companies. Furthermore, the furniture bank also receives donations of gently used furniture and décor from hotels undergoing renovation, which is made possible through the Hotel & Lodging Association of Greater Houston.[11]

Currently HFB helps about 100 families a month, and its goal is to increase that. At this time they make up to eight appointments a day and families get to choose from bed frames, dining tables, dressers, mirrors, lamps, and more. The process takes about an hour per family to choose furniture, which is one of the reasons they can only take a few appointments a day. The Houston Furniture Bank has received donations of almost a quarter-million pieces of furniture, which has made it possible to serve over 21,000 families in the first couple of decades. Over 50,000 children have slept in beds rather than on a cold, hard floor and have been able to be seated at a table to share their meals instead of using discarded cardboard boxes. In total, the Houston Furniture Bank has served more than 80,000 individuals since 1992.

Romie de Leon was one of the furniture bank's beneficiaries. She came to Houston in 2007, and through the help of organizations like Bridges over Troubled Waters she was able to overcome and had furniture delivered to her apartment by HFB in 2008. She now works for HCMH and was invited to the twenty-sixth-anniversary celebration with current Mayor Sylvester Turner. She shared her experience and says, "There are no words to describe the joy in my heart when the Houston Furniture Bank brought furniture for my apartment. It was the beginning of a new life for me and they were there to help me succeed."[12] Romie now does the same for other families in need. Through the HCMH, she sets up an appointment and takes them to the HFB and gets to rejoice with the families when they pick out their furniture, bringing the experience full circle.

The biggest furniture need is for bunk beds since most families have more than one child and limited space. However, HFB receives few donations of bunk beds. Ever the entrepreneur, Oli is working with the environmental director from the Port of Houston to make use of the approximately twenty-three to twenty-five shipping containers of wood pallets going to the landfill or being burned for energy at the port per year. Those pallets may soon be the much-needed bunk beds if the right woodshop and crew can be found. Oli has approached the Windham School District and the Texas prisons to get assistance in possibly working together with the wood-working shops inside of these institutions.

The HFB is only twenty-six years old but has already made a big impact on Houston and Houstonians from the humble beginnings to the current location at 8220 Mosley Road. Oli still sees much work to be done and he is not about to quit. If the past is any indication, the Houston Furniture Bank has a bright future ahead … making empty houses homes.

Ruben Castro is a U.S. Marine Corps Veteran attending the University of Houston and majoring in supply chain logistics technology and minoring in political science. Throughout his life he has shown a passion for history and is currently an intern at the *Houston History* magazine and for the UH-Oral History of Houston Project.

At HFB's twenty-sixth anniversary celebration, Mayor Sylvester Turner proclaimed March 30, 2019, as Houston Furniture Bank Day in the City of Houston. Shown left to right: Mayor Turner, Oli Mohammed, HFB board chairman Hal Lynde, and HFB board vice chairman Larry Cress.

HFB Outlet hours of operation: Mondays–Saturdays: 8:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. HFB Donations: By Appointment Only

Gravestones Tell Stories: Photos from San Isidro Cemetery in Sugar Land, Texas

By Marie-Theresa Hernández

"Photographs do not translate from appearances. They quote from them."

–John Berger

Long before Sugar Land was an affluent suburb of Houston, it was known as the home of Imperial Sugar. The company produced and imported sugar cane and processed it in a red brick, six-story building that still stands alongside U.S. Highway 90. Imperial Sugar initially used convict labor to work the fields and refine the sugar, but when this practice finally came to an end in 1914, the company began recruiting Latinx workers from Central Texas and Northern Mexico. The company allotted a cemetery near Oyster Creek for Latinx workers.

The cemetery was first called Gran Centro. Later, workers changed the name to Cementerio San Isidro, the patron saint of farm laborers. It has withstood economic and demographic changes over an entire century; and, through these changes, Cementerio San Isidro found itself locked inside a prosperous subdivision, where, initially, the striking differences between the old and new created significant tension.

The land was sold to developers in the 1960s, and the communities bordering the sugar cane fields were obliterated, but the cemetery remained. The fields became neighborhoods with brick homes. Tension between the old and the new was palpable. In the 1990s, litigation sought to block access, yet the cemetery survived and has evolved into a cultural and psychological home for Imperial Sugar's Latinx workers, their families, and their descendants.

The story of Felix Tijerina, a prominent leader of Houston's Mexican American community, is entangled with San Isidro. In 1915, Tijerina took a train with his family from Nuevo León to Sugar Land, and though the family's stay was short-lived, it is reported that one of the children passed away and was buried in San Isidro.

In 2019 Cementerio San Isidro is a serene space, bordered on one side by Oyster Creek. Family members of the deceased farm workers visit often. As the descendants would say, "San Isidro contains the story of the old Mexican community." It holds the memories of the past, made tangible by the innumerable objects placed on each grave.

The Center for Public History worked with University of Houston students from the History Department and the World Cultures and Literatures Program to produce a series of photographs of San Isidro for the Visual Stories: Local and the Global class taught by Marie-Theresa Hernández. Carmen Flores Perez, who grew up in Sugar Land reminds us there are many stories to tell.

Marie-Theresa Hernández is Professor and Undergraduate Director of the World Cultures and Literatures Program at the University of Houston. She is the author of *Cemeteries of Ambivalent Desire: Deep South Narratives from a Texas Graveyard.*

Leslie Gonzalez "Angel Wings"
I saw the angel wings as soon as I walked into the cemetery. They immediately caught my attention. The marker in the middle displays the name of Adrian Rodriguez, who was thirty-one years old when he passed away. My sense is that he left this world too early, and his family placed the wings on his grave like that so that he will forever be remembered as an angel flying high with his angel wings. LG

Carolina Aguado "Cherub Beneath a Tree"
Many small objects are hidden within the cemetery residences. As I walk through the cemetery, I am filled with a thought of wonder and an odd sort of thrill in finding something new among the graves and greenery. There is so much visual stimulation. I am trying to catch every little detail and am often surprised by the figures and gifts placed at tombstones. This cherub, in particular, took some time to find. He is hidden in plain sight. CA

Cristian Torres "Jimenez"

If I am correct, this tombstone honors a couple buried together. The dates signify when they were born and when they passed away. This gravesite tells us about their relationship. Through the good and bad, they were always by each other's side, even after they passed away. I hope that in the future, the woman I marry spends the rest of her life with me, just like Mr. and Mrs. Jimenez. CT

Mayra de la Garza
"Tree as Protector"

Even though I took this photograph on a beautiful spring day, the resulting image reflects a gothic, eerie and magical vibe in the cemetery. The tree branches reach outward towards the graves in all directions. In my mind, the tree symbolizes a deep-rooted connection between those buried there and the history of the cemetery. The tree acts like a protector for the graves and watches over them. MDG

Josefina Arguello "Crystal Virgins"
The ornaments our loved ones place on our graves say much more about who we were as people than our physical appearance does when we were alive. Our death is not the end because we will live on in the people who remember us. The ornaments reinforce our presence to our loved ones who will not forget us but will pass on our stories until they, too, cease to exist. JA

Cristian Torres "Virgin Mary of Guadalupe"
As an Hispanic, I believe the Virgin Mary delivers miracles when we pray for them. In return we light a candle in her favor signifying that we thank her for the miracle she has delivered and for answering our prayers. This image means a great deal to me because the image of the Virgin reminds me of my mother. My mother has supported me through all my bad and good times, and the moments when I need the most support, she is always by my side. Whether it is a financial, health, or school related situation, she is always answering my prayer and helping me get through everything in a positive manner. CT

Leslie Gonzalez "Untitled"
The angels appear as if they are placed with purpose, the larger one watching the smaller ones. There is a small pecan tree coming up between them, something living and growing among the dead. Marie-Theresa Hernández, caption

Carolina Aguado
"Of Lone Headstone with Daisies"
Headstones are like sturdy and visible time capsules remembered by those who witness their installation. Over time, they could be forgotten until they are found once more by new visitors. The style and writing will forever hold a special place to those who know the history of those at rest there. Even though wildflowers may grow around the grave and the world around it may change, the tombstone stays to witness those changes, standing tall even though seemingly broken from its original perch. CA

Kayla Ausman "Shadow Tree"
The tree and the lone grave. In life and death, the man buried here brought the town together. His spirit lives on after death, and through the shadows of the tree branches, he connects the community. He seems to stand alone, with no graves around him, but the tree's shadow connects him to the others buried there. The shadows represent how the people are only shadows now, but they are always there because of the memories they hold. The man buried here sees the cemetery as his old neighborhood. He can go grave to grave and see his neighbors and friends and family. His memory lives on in his love for his community. KA

Carolina Aguado "Recuerdos"
Someone in Arturo Jimenez's family used their own hands to make the cross over his grave. The memory of creating the marker is deeply embedded. It has been forty years, the moment the cross was placed in the ground must have been so important.
Marie-Theresa Hernández, caption

Kayla Ausman "Sleeping Angel"

The angel's eyelids close as the sun rises on the cemetery. As the world wakes, the young angel sleeps. He rests his head on his arm and pulls his legs towards his stomach in the perfect, comfortable position to fall asleep quickly. He eagerly awaits his dreams in the peaceful cemetery where he relaxes into a deep slumber and dreams of the people buried here. He knows them only in his dreams. He sees their lives, and their happiest moments bring a smile to his face. He also sees tragedies, which brings tears to his eyes. He sees their memories through their emotions and feels what they do. He tries to forget the night when he can no longer see the good spirits and only the evil ones. KA

Dylan Ramirez "Jesus Villarreal's War Memories"

He wears Mardi Gras beads and sits over the grave of Jesus Villarreal who was an infantryman in World War II. The angel is on a bench that covers the gravestone noting Mr. Villarreal's service. We can barely see the letters in the image, but it is not completely out of sight. Jesus Villarreal's war memory was probably like that during his lifetime. A soldier never forgets his combat experience. It was not at the forefront but always present in everything he did.
Marie-Theresa Hernández, caption

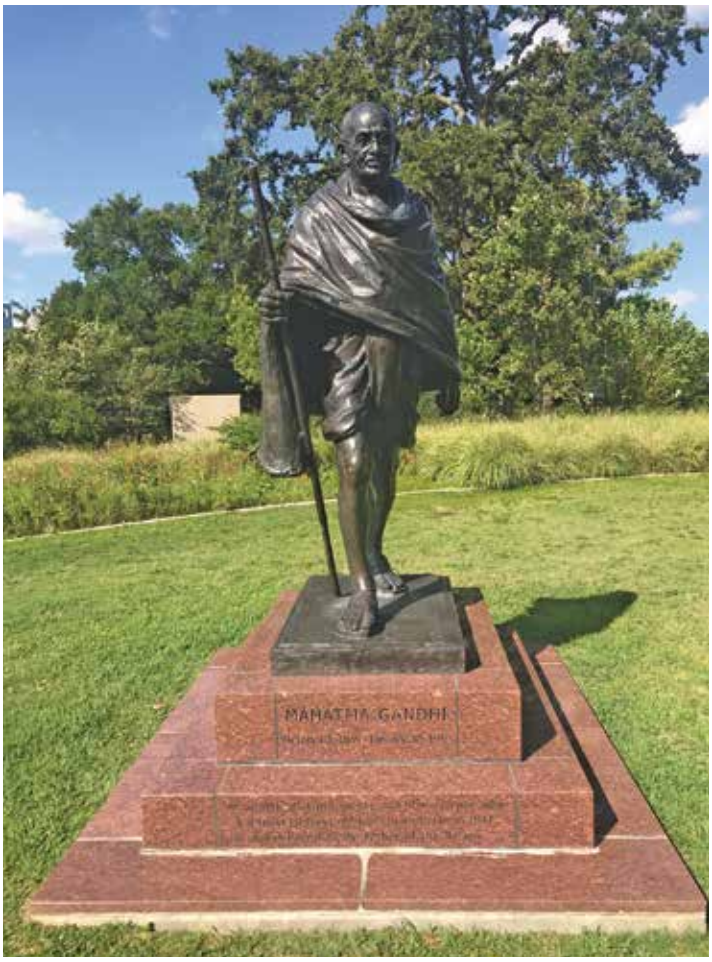
Commemorating Gandhi's Legacy of Peace and Justice in Houston

By Manuel Martinez Alvarenga

If you find yourself in the heart of Houston, chances are you have driven by Hermann Park, a green and interactive park with a large recreation area for picnics, casual strolls, and sightseeing nestled within an arm's reach of the Texas Medical Center, the Museum District, and Rice University. The park is the perfect place to enjoy a little taste of nature in the city's asphalt jungle and houses many eye-catching landmarks, such as the Houston Zoo, Miller Outdoor Theatre, the Japanese Garden, a golf course, pedal boats, public artworks, and a miniature railroad.

Located on the north side of Hermann Park, the McGovern Centennial Gardens is a serene enclosure of themed gardens and the Hawkins Sculpture Walk, a collection of statues and sculptures of historic figures from around the world, including Confucius, José Morti, Simon Bolivar, Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and others.[1]

The year 2019 marks 150 years since Gandhi's birth and fifteen years since the venerable leader's statue was unveiled and welcomed into Houstonians' hearts. The story behind Hermann Park's Gandhi statue represents the best qualities attributed to Houston and Houstonians, and the statue's anniversary offers a fitting time to recognize the people who made its installation possible. Likewise, it seems fitting to meditate on the legacy of a great man who ushered India and Pakistan on the path to independence and then served as a role model for the many known and unknown heroes who risked their lives in the fight for equality. The work of Houstonian Krishna Vavilala proved crucial in the completion of the statue project and helped create a physical connection between the work of Gandhi and his influence on the U.S. civil rights movement.



The Mahatma Gandhi statue in Hermann Park. Photo courtesy of author.

From Humble Beginnings

The statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Hermann Park is a wonderful addition to the city's overall cultural landscape…[I]t is significant because the city of Houston takes such pride in its diversity and inclusion – traits that the great Indian leader also valued highly. That statue serves as a prominent reminder that we share those important ideals.[2]

– Dr. Renu Khator,
President and Chancellor of the
University of Houston System

In 2001 members of Houston's Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi communities met with representatives of local nonprofit organizations to discuss and suggest ways that Houston could propagate a message of peace. With tensions between India and Pakistan having flared to a critical point, many worried that war between two of Asia's nuclear powers was on the horizon. Representatives of the India Culture Center (ICC) attended the event to speak on behalf of the Indian Community. As fate would have it, the discussion finished earlier than expected, and the microphone opened for anyone wishing to speak.[3] Krishna Vavilala, who was an ICC board member but did not plan to speak, approached the microphone and proposed that a statue of Mahatma Gandhi be erected as a perfect symbol for peace.

In Vavilala's eyes, Gandhi represented the ideal figure to promote the message of peace in Houston and serve as a connection between the Indian American community and the city as a whole. He pointed out that Gandhi also represented the unity and brotherly love between Hindus and Muslims, reflecting his wish for a united India. Additionally, Vavilala wanted to promote Houston's

Krishna Vavilala and former Indian ambassador to the United States Ronen Sen with Mayor Bill White (left to right) at the Gandhi statue's unveiling ceremony in 2004.

All photos courtesy of Krishna Vavilala unless otherwise noted.

Indian American community and believed that a statue represented the best visual medium to bring "Gandhi into the mainstream" and convey his legacy and teachings to a broader audience.[4]

Vavilala wanted Houston's Indian American community to feel a sense of ownership and pride towards the statue, so he proposed that the communty gift the statue to the citizens of Houston. Following the meeting, the ICC endorsed the idea and named Vavilala project chair. The ICC's endorsement gave the project the leverage it needed to receive the City of Houston's approval. Founded to promote the Indian American community socially and culturally in Greater Houston, the ICC began as a student-led organization and rapidly grew into a professionally administered non-profit organization by 1973.[5] The installation of the Gandhi statue in Hermann Park became one of the ICC's first major permanent projects.

The Gandhi statue was flown to Houston in a large crate, arriving at George Bush Intercontinental Airport in 2003. Shown from left to right, ICC president Ramesh Chirivirala, Lachhman Das, Krishna Vavilala, Mr. Malhotra of the Indian Consulate in Houston, and Dr. Durga Agarwal.

Under Vavilala's direction, the ICC hoped to create a landmark around which the Indian American community could rally and find commonality with Houston's diverse population. He saw this as one step in a multifaceted project to promote the Indian American community as an integral part of the Greater Houston area that eventually culminated with the creation of the Mahatma Gandhi District in 2010.[6]

One Step at a Time

… I'm delighted that Mahatma Gandhi and his teachings have found a home in Houston. India and the United States are the world's largest and oldest democracies bound together…by our shared beliefs in openness, inclusiveness and tolerance. The Mahatma's statue in Houston, to my mind, emphasizes these common values and aspirations that Indians and Americans share.[7]

– Dr. Anupam Ray,
Counsel General of India in Houston

The ICC coordinated with Mr. S. R. Tayal of the Consulate General of India in Houston and the office of outgoing mayor Lee P. Brown and incoming mayor Bill White to secure funds, rights, and city approval. Vavilala spearheaded the fundraising efforts, focusing on a grassroots campaign. He "went from shop to shop" securing donations from Indian American residents and businesses to raise the bulk of the funds and give the local community a sense of ownership in the effort. The undertaking was challenging, but ICC members were adamant in pursuing their goal and succeeded in raising the necessary funds in record time. As a gesture of goodwill, the City of Houston donated land for the sculpture and agreed to maintain the statue in perpetuity.[8]

Mayor Lee P. Brown, center, attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the Mahatma Gandhi statue project in 2003. To his right, holding a shovel stands special guest, and former chairman of the upper house of the Indian Parliament, Dr. Najma Heptulla.

On October 14, 2003, the City of Houston hosted the groundbreaking ceremony. Those attending included prominent members of the Indian American community, ICC board members, Mayor Brown, Najma Hepdulla representing India's Parliament, India's Consul General Skand Ranjan Tayal, and others.[9]

Former mayor Lee P. Brown throws flower petals at the statue of Mahatma Gandhi. In Indian culture, flowers are associated with purity and generosity in connection with deities in the Hindu pantheon.

A year later the statue was unveiled to a gathering of the Indian American community in a grand ceremony with a myriad of dignitaries present, including India's ambassador to the United States Ronen Sen and U.S. Representative Sheila Jackson Lee.[10] Likewise, a large crowd gathered to witness the unveiling and pay their respects to the iconic figure it represented. The ceremony featured the presentation of both the United States and Indian flags followed by their respective national anthems. Special guests and key participants in the Gandhi statue project received commemorative awards to honor their contributions. Mayor Bill White recognized Ambassador Sen as an honorary citizen.

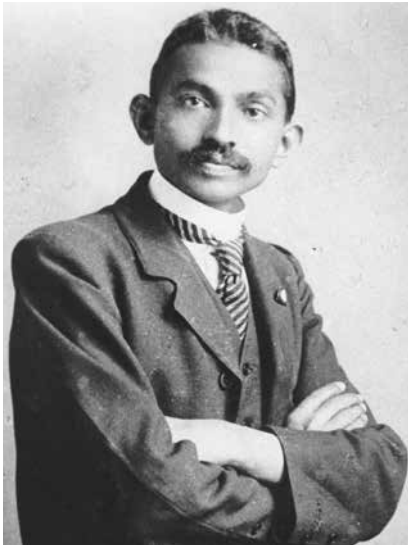
The work of renowned artist Ram V. Sutar, the life-sized bronze statue of Gandhi stands six feet tall over a three-tiered granite base in the McGovern Centennial Gardens at Hermann Park. It portrays Gandhi in a simple dhoti and shawl holding a walking stick. Each side of the rectangular base showcases an engraving with Gandhi's words of wisdom.

Former Indian ambassador to the U.S., Ronen Sen looks at the unveiled statue of Mahatma Gandhi at Hermann Park.

Remembering Gandhi and his Journey

Mahatma Gandhi is an epitome of determination and strong will through his lifelong teaching & practice of "nonviolence and truth." Truly, Houston is blessed to have his presence in spirit and an edifice where we as mortals can pay homage to the torchbearer of "peace."[11]

– Swapan Dhairyawan, President of the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston



A young Mohandas Gandhi in SouthAfrica, 1906.
Photo courtesy of WikiCommons.

The 2019 sesquicentennial of Gandhi's birth is a solemn occasion for the Indian community and all people who struggled for social equality and world peace. The local Indo-American community organized celebrations at the Miller Outdoor Theatre on October 6th, and the Mahatma Gandhi Library of Houston organized a walk for peace that culminated with a ceremony called One Thousand Lights for Peace. The Gandhi sculpture stands in the Centennial Gardens as a testament to the leader's legacy for Houstonians and all who visit there.

Gandhi's early life and his struggles in South Africa parallel the hardship faced by many Americans during the time of Jim Crow. As an inexperienced lawyer, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi struggled to establish a practice in India, until he accepted an offer to work in South Africa as a consultant for Dada Abdulla & Co., which marked a turning point in his life. This once-in-a-lifetime opportunity seemingly provided a young Gandhi with the perfect medium to succeed in life but also showed him the heavy hand of colonial racism.[12]

After arriving in South Africa by boat in 1893, Gandhi boarded a train in Durban heading inland to Pretoria. Having studied law in Britain, he felt confident in his ability to speak and write English, which had helped him secure the job in South Africa. His hosts had procured a first-class ticket for his trip, which initially passed without incident. The attendants treated Gandhi well and offered him the same level of service as the other first-class passengers. However, when the train reached its first stop at Maritzburg, one passenger noticed Gandhi and fetched the onboard officials.[13]

The aggravated passenger and two officials approached Gandhi and told him that he had to move to the back of the train in the van compartment. Gandhi protested, stating

that he had a first-class ticket, which gave him the right to be in the first-class compartment. The officials insisted he had to move or the constable would remove him from the train. Despite the threats, Gandhi remained resolute, reiterating his argument about the ticket and refusing to relocate. Tensions escalated, and the officials repeatedly threatened to forcefully remove him with the help of police if he continued to resist. Emboldened, Gandhi again refused to leave and dared the officials to follow through on their threats. Soon after, officials onboard the train along with a police constable escorted him off the train into Maritzburg station leaving him stranded for the night in the cold winter in South Africa's alpine region.[14] Gandhi learned that in South Africa, he and other Indians like him were seen as "colored people" and, thus, subjected to discrimination with impunity.

Shaken by his experience and without proper clothing for winter in the mountains, Gandhi spent the night enduring the frigid temperatures at the train station and contemplating his next course of action. He concluded that giving up, going back to India, abandoning his case, and overlooking the wrongdoing would be "cowardice." Although the event tarnished his pride, his spirit was emboldened, and he committed himself "to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process" to end "color prejudice."[15] This event became a cornerstone that led Gandhi down a path of spiritual and political awakening that placed him at the forefront of activism against discrimination and segregation against people of color in South Africa.

Upon his return to India in 1915, Gandhi used the experience he gained in South Africa to push for reforms in upholding the individual rights of the less fortunate. While in South Africa, Gandhi developed methods of passive, nonviolent resistance (*satyagraha*), combining elements of truth (*satya*) and nonviolence (*ahimsa*) to challenge British rule in India. Gandhi also campaigned for the rights of the poor in India and pressured the British authorities through the use of boycotts of goods (*swadeshi*) and the implementation of a non-cooperation movement against British authority.[16] His activism earned him the love of his people and catapulted him to the forefront of India's struggle for independence.

Through his modest and charming appearance, Gandhi earned the admiration and respect of those around him. At some point during his return to India, he received the title of Mahatma, or "great soul." Although the exact time and way in which Gandhi received the tittle remains a point of argument, Gandhi embodied the qualities of the Mahatmas in his deeds, piety, and conviction.[17]

Thanks to Gandhi's consistent activism over four decades, the British Empire agreed to negotiations for India's independence. Gandhi strongly supported a united India that welcomed Hindus and Muslims with open arms within a unified country; thus, he opposed the British plan to create separate states for each group. In the latter days of his life, Gandhi campaigned for peace between Hindus and Muslims, even threatening to fast until he died if ethnic riots and violence continued as fears of separating India and Pakistan flared. To his dismay, they became independent countries in 1947. A year later, a Hindu religious fanatic who resented Gandhi's calls for unity and brotherly relations between India and Pakistan shot and killed Gandhi, ending the great man's life but not his influence.

Relishing a Man's Legacy

The statue is a symbol, which represents many things to many people, including the Indian diaspora…It also symbolizes peace, harmony and concepts such as unity in diversity. While Houston is wonderfully diverse, the statue in Hermann Park reminds us that we are interconnected, and have more in common with each other than we think.[18]

– Dr. Anjali Kanoji,
Former Director of India Studies, University of Houston

The life-size, bronze casted statue of Martin Luther King Jr. stands on a granite base with its left hand reaching out as if talking or engaging in conversation.
Photo courtesy of author.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. traveled to the "land of Gandhi" in the spring of 1959. Before the trip, he spoke of how Gandhi inspired him and others in the U.S. civil rights movement. He claimed that "Gandhi was the guiding light of [their] technique of non-violent social change" and traveling to India would serve as a pilgrimage of sorts to pay homage to the man and his legacy.[19]

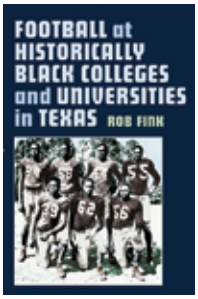
While in India Dr. King visited major cities, met with Gandhi's son and other relatives, and visited Gandhi's remains at Rajghat. The trip reinforced King's belief that nonviolence "is the most potent weapon available to oppressed people in their struggle for freedom."[20]

Today, the statue of Gandhi at the McGovern Centennial Gardens stands looking ever forward, as if in motion, moving towards the future. To his left, across the yard stands a sculpture of Martin Luther King Jr. looking at the people who walk by, as if he is admiring the openness and diversity of Houston. Perhaps the two men would rejoice at seeing the multitudes of people that visit the Centennial Gardens on a daily basis and delight in seeing the freedoms we gained thanks to their sacrifices. It is fitting that both men share the same space, both united under the ideals of *ahimsa* and *satya*, within the overarching action of *satyagraha*.[21]

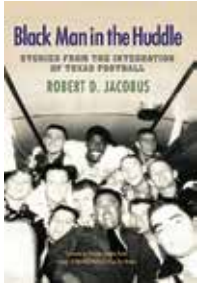
Manuel Martinez Alvarenga is a senior history major at the University of Houston. An intern with *Houston History* and a Mellon Scholar, he is writing his Honors thesis on Salvadoran Americans in Houston. Having studied nonviolence and one's duty to challenge society's wrongs, he plans to pursue a doctorate in Latin American studies focusing on Central America.

HOUSTON HAPPENINGS BY NADIA ABOUZIR

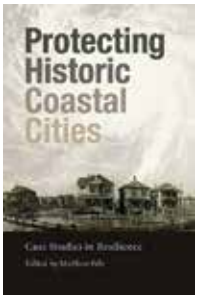
BOOKS:



Football at Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Texas by Rob Fink (Texas A&M University Press, $35.00). While focusing on themes of racial pride, empowerment, and civil rights, Fink traces the rich history of football in Texas HBCUs. The book offers a broad view into the struggles and motivations for establishing football at these institutions, including Houston's own Texas Southern University, how integration impacted them, and how they are surviving today. Fink's book is unique in its examination of programs in Texas as whole.



Black Man in the Huddle: Stories from the Integration of Texas Football by Robert D. Jacobus (Texas A&M University Press, $29.95). Author and professor Robert Jacobus's new book is based on a collection of over 250 interviews with former players, coaches, and others involved in the integration of Texas public schools and college athletic programs. The book includes interviews from players such as Ben Kelly and Jerry Levias and discusses the integration of the University of Houston's football program in 1964 that saw Coach Bill Yeoman recruit Warren McVea. In exploring the personal narratives of these contributors, the book paints a comprehensive picture of the thoughts and stories of the men involved in the struggle for desegregation of Texas schools.



Protecting Historic Coastal Cities: Case Studies in Resilience, edited by Matthew Pelz (Texas A&M University Press, $30.00). From the 1900 Galveston Hurricane to Harvey, *Protecting Historic Coastal Cities* aims to understand the various ways that historic coastal communities tackle their unique climate in cities along the Gulf Coast and in the Netherlands. With contributions from several authors, the book explores topics such as the 1900 Storm, Hurricanes Katrina and Ike, and the impact of Hurricane Harvey on Houston's arts community. The authors argue that understanding how to deal with extreme weather conditions is key to building long-standing coastal communities.

A MILESTONE FOR PUBLIC ART AT UH

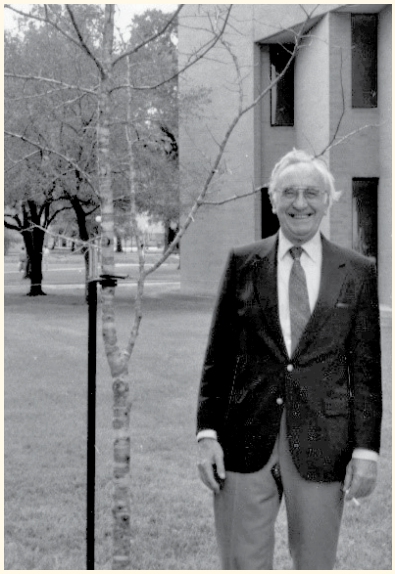
Fifty years ago Peter Guenther helped to establish the first Art Acquisition Committee for Public Art in the University of Houston System. The founding chair of the UH Art History Department, Guenther recommended the purchase of the university's first outdoor sculpture, *Albertus Magnus* (1955, cast in 1970), by one of the most renown German artists of the twentieth century, Gerhard Marcks. Installed in 1971 at the Bates School of Law, the sculpture sparked an interest in acquiring other large-scale outdoor works that are now an integral part of the system-wide public art program.

Albertus Magnus *by Gerhard Marcks.*

Photos courtesy of Public Art, UHS.

UH had no art history department prior to 1962 when Peter Guenther joined the faculty. Initially housed in one of the former World War II barracks buildings on campus, the Art History Department started with nothing, but within five years, Guenther's survey course had become one of the university's most popular electives. Guenther increased the department's visibility by holding lectures and public art exhibitions. His following spread from UH students to the larger community and notable art supporters such as Mary Cullen, Norma "Rocky" Franzen, and Sarah Campbell Blaffer.

Guenther's goal was to have students learn through art and by doing so to see the world differently. He explained, "If you get through the course and don't change, you have lost. Be willing to change." Upon Guenther's retirement in 1990, UH planted a stand of six red oak trees as "a symbol of strength and slow yet steady growth towards maturity." Today the mature trees offer a beautiful respite and remind us of the contributions art makes to life. To learn more about the UH System's public art collection, visit http://publicartuhs.org/.



When Peter Guenther retired after thirty years at UH, six red oak trees were planted between the fine arts and architecture buildings to honor him, his wife Andrea, and their four daughters Konnie, Sylvia, Annette, and Irene who teaches history in the UH Honors College.

EVENTS:

February 14-15, 2020: *The Science and Engineering Fair of Houston (SEFH)* will be hosting its 61st annual competition proudly sponsored by University of Houston STEM Center. On February 14-15, 2020, at the George R. Brown Convention Center, 1,200 students (grades 7-12) will compete at the fair and winners will advance to the Texas Science and Engineering Fair. In winning Texas's largest STEM competition, these young scientists and engineers will then compete for a top spot at the International Science and Engineering Fair. For more information, visit www.sefhouston.org, email info@sefhouston.org or call (713) 743-4923.

April 25-26, 2020: *The 18th annual CASETA Symposium and Texas Art Fair* promotes the preservation, study, and appreciation of early Texas art. CASETA encourages historians, art educators, college and graduate level students, and anyone interested in early Texas art to attend the symposium. Academic and museum professionals, as well as art collectors and dealers attend the meeting annually, offering excellent networking opportunities and time to engage with scholarly colleagues. To learn more, visit www.caseta.org, email caseta@samfa.org, or call (312) 212-4872.

Gracie mille!

Thanks a million does not even begin to express our gratitude to Damon Palermo, the Sacred Heart Society of Little York, and All Saints Catholic Church for making the launch event for our spring issue, "The Power of Place in Houston," such a tremendous success. Sabine Meyer Hill, author of the article "Italians Plant Roots in Houston," worked with Damon to interview members of the Italian community who trace their Houston roots to the late nineteenth century when their families established truck farms where the Galleria sits today. Mike (Monachino) Atkinson of Atkinson Farms, A. J. Camarata, Jimmy Tamborello, Pauline Ditta Tamborello, and Bernard Ditta took part in a panel discussion with Damon and Sabine to share their families' histories from farming to the produce and grocery business today. The Sacred Heart Society of Little York pulled out all the stops to provide an amazing "Pasta Thursday" dinner for the 225 attendees. All of us at *Houston History* and the University of Houston Center for Public History felt privileged to learn how Houston's Italian community has preserved its history and culture and to have them share that with us. A round of thanks to all! *—The Houston History Staff*

Panelists left to right: Sabine Meyer Hill, Bernard Ditta, Pauline Ditta Tamborello, Jimmy Tamborello, A. J. Camarata, and Mike Atkinson.

Photos courtesy of Scott Wharton unless otherwise noted.

The exhibit of historical documents and equipment as well as fresh produce from Atkinson Farms added to the atmosphere.

Diners enjoy a special "Pasta Thursday" at All Saints Catholic Church with food prepared by the Sacred Heart Society of Little York.

Damon Palermo stirs the special sugo for the pasta dinner.

Photo courtesy of Damon Palermo.

ENDNOTES

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HOUSTON MANNED SPACECRAFT CENTER

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MAKING A MIRACLE

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HILTON COLLEGE

1 The sources used for this article are located in the Hospitality Industry Archives at the University of Houston Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel and Restaurant Management. The archival collections consulted by the author include the papers of Dr. James C. Taylor, Conrad N. Hilton, Barron Hilton, and Eric M. Hilton. The author also relied on his oral history interviews with Barron Hilton, Eric M. Hilton, and Dr. Clinton L. Rappole.

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