



HOUSTON
history

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FOR THE CITY



Center for Public History
College of Liberal Arts
and Social Sciences

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR – Houston History is for the City



Debbie Z. Harwell, Editor.

This issue marks twenty years of *Houston History* and our fiftieth magazine! Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine when the magazine's editor-in-chief, Joe Pratt, hired me as a graduate student in December 2008 that I would still be here fifteen years later. The first seven years, Joe was my supervisor, professor, mentor, and friend. Whenever I dropped by his office,

he dispensed with our magazine business quickly before sharing his wisdom on writing techniques and building my confidence to be an effective editor – even when revising the work of accomplished authors. Then, we chatted about the Astros and laughed a lot about life!

Joe also pushed me out of my comfort zone, including when he insisted that I get permission from Pulitzer Prize winner Larry McMurtry to reprint a piece he wrote poking fun at the new Astrodome.¹ Eager to show my worth, I called McMurtry's bookstore in Archer City and was told they could not help me. As I considered other options, my phone rang, and it was Larry McMurtry! *The Larry McMurtry!* I was literally doing a happy dance as we discussed how the magazine would use the essay, and he graciously allowed us to reprint it for a modest honorarium.

While the magazine has not worked with other Pulitzer Prize winners, we encourage our students to step out of their comfort zones to meet, interview, and write about history makers. For the past three years, students have done that through the 100 Years of Stories: Documenting a Century at the University of Houston project. It is exactly the kind of public history project that Joe Pratt and Marty Melosi had in mind when Pratt brought the *Houston History* magazine to the Center for Public History (CPH). We train students in new skills through real-world experiences. The work exposes them to multiple disciplines and engages them directly with community members, often in a way that is pivotal to the students' academic and personal development. Although this issue represents the final installment made possible by Carey Shuart's 100 Years of Stories gift, we will continue to include UH-centered stories.

Throughout the 100 Years of Stories project, we have reported on people and programs "for the city" that have improved life for Houstonians in some way. This issue includes articles about former Houston mayor Kathy Whitmire, the Phi Slama Jama basketball team, sports

commentator Jim Nantz, *Master Chef* winner and restaurateur Christine Hà, and business leader Elizabeth Rockwell – all UH alumni. Other articles feature UH President Philip Hoffman, who led the university through desegregation and expansion as a state university; the Blaffer Museum, highlighting its contributions to contemporary art; and the UH Muslim Student Association, one of the nation's first to form.

The opening article in this issue details the history of this magazine and some of the 400+ articles in the fifty issues we have published over the last twenty years. You can also visit exhibits detailing the magazine's history and highlights from the 100 Years of Stories project on the second floor of the UH MD Anderson Library through May 31, 2024. ++



Monica Perales

We wish our colleague and friend Monica Perales all the best in her new adventure as associate vice provost of the University of Texas San Antonio's Institute of Texan Cultures (ITC). Monica taught history at UH for almost twenty years and served as CPH director for the last five. An award-winning teacher and scholar, she led the way on our

most recent public-facing CPH projects, staying true to the center's mission while expanding its reach. Although we will miss Monica, we know she will excel at the ITC and look forward to new opportunities to collaborate with her.



Mark Goldberg

Our UH History Department colleague, Mark Goldberg assumed the role of interim CPH director in September, making the transition as seamless as possible. A key CPH affiliate faculty member, he has contributed to the Resilient Houston and Gulf Coast Food Projects. Mark has taught numerous graduate and undergraduate courses in public history, including for his project, La Hora: Jewish Latina/os and Explorations in Jewish History and Identity, where students received training in oral history and podcasting, and presented their work at the Holocaust Museum Houston. Please join us in welcoming Mark to the team.

HOUSTON history

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For the City

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EDITORIAL POLICY

Houston History is published twice a year by the Welcome Wilson Houston History Collaborative in the Center for Public History at the University of Houston. We welcome manuscripts, interviews, photographic essays, and ideas for topical issues on the history and culture of the Houston region, broadly defined.

Please send correspondence to *Houston History*, University of Houston, Center for Public History, 3455 Cullen Blvd., Room 521, Houston, TX 77204-3007 or email HoustonHistory@uh.edu. Phone 713.743.3123.

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Cover photo: *In the 1970s, hallmarks of the modern University of Houston campus are clearly visible with downtown Houston in the background. Key points include Moody Towers dormitory, in the center foreground, and the Cullen Family Plaza's blue reflection pool in front of the Ezekiel Cullen Building, housing UH administrative offices.*

Photo courtesy of UH Photographs Collection, Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries, ark:/84475/d07098zb941.

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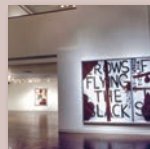
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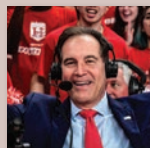
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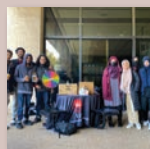
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Houston History covers for the past twenty years illustrate its diverse subject matters.

Our goal ... is to make our region more aware of its history and more respectful of its past; we hope to contribute to the development of a stronger historical consciousness in Houston.¹

— Joe Pratt, on establishing the Houston History magazine

Celebrating Twenty Years Discovering the Past at Houston History Magazine

By Debbie Z. Harwell

In 1999 one door closed on Houston history and a new one opened thanks to the vision of Joe Pratt, then the University of Houston's (UH) Cullen and National Endowment for the Humanities Chair in History and Business, and Marty Melosi, director of the Institute for Public History, now the Center for Public History (CPH). When the Houston Public Library ceased publication of its academic journal after twenty years, Pratt reimagined it as a popular magazine that could be combined with an oral history project and an archive to gather, store, and disseminate the information under one roof, known as the Houston History Project.

First called *The Houston Review of History and Culture*, now *Houston History*, the magazine debuted in fall 2003. It was the only publication devoted exclusively to educating and entertaining readers while exploring aspects of the region's past. Pratt contended, "Much of the detail we know about the evolution of Houston first came to light in these articles." By presenting rigorously researched material in a "lively, illustrated style," he believed the magazine could reach beyond historians to attract a public audience. Melosi suggested Pratt look at *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*, which had a similar format to what he envisioned.²



Joe Pratt and Marty Melosi taught and led public history initiatives at UH for over thirty years, earning a local and global reputation for the Center for Public History.

All photos courtesy of *Houston History*, unless otherwise noted.

CPH, established by Melosi in 1984, offered the magazine critical administrative support and a base of operations. In reflecting on the magazine's importance to CPH's endeavors, Melosi noted, "I've always been a great believer and advocate in the maintenance of the magazine. Without it, we'd be something different. We'd be something less."³ A generous grant from Pratt's friend, civic leader Ben Love, helped get the magazine started, while Pratt's endowed chair provided longer-term support. Pratt served as editor/editor-in-chief while community historians contributed articles, public history students assisted with writing and editing, and CPH staffer Christine Womack acted as business manager.⁴ The UH printing department handled design and production.

A native of Port Neches, Texas, Pratt grew up in the region and graduated from Rice University. He earned a Ph.D. at Johns Hopkins and taught at UC Berkley, Harvard, and Texas A&M before coming to UH in 1986, where he found his calling. A refinery worker's son who worked in a refinery himself on school breaks, he is passionate about the area's history and telling stories of people left out of traditional historical narratives. This made him a perfect fit to lead a publication exploring under told stories about Houston "broadly defined." Pratt observed, "[Houston] is a city of opportunity. Of everything else, that's what defines us from other cities. ... It's particularly an opportunity for working people, an opportunity to make something for your kids." He wanted to inspire others to care about the past, saying, "I'm a committed teacher of history and this is an effort to teach to a broader classroom."⁵ Pratt quickly developed a reputation as someone who loved Houston, history, and conversation.

Evolution

Those early issues of *The Houston Review of History and Culture* looked like a magazine but still read like a journal, with many articles as long as book chapters. Printed in black ink with a single-color cover, the magazine documented important and overlooked elements of Houston history: notable women, civic leadership, the Texas Medical Center (TMC), World War II veterans, migration and immigration, and Houston's fraught relationship with historic preservation.



Mayor Annise Parker declared December 11, 2012, Houston History Day, recognizing the magazine's tenth year "present[ing] original research ... and feature articles of people and communities who might otherwise be neglected from the historical record." Left to right: Council Member Ed Gonzalez, UHAA president Mike Pede, Mayor Parker, and magazine and CPH staff members Debbie Harwell, Aimee Bachari, Wyndham Bailey, Anne Lynd, and Natalie Garza.

Photo by Jeff Sutton courtesy of UH Alumni Association.

Members of Houston's historical community served on the advisory board, including David Bush, Audrey Crawford, Barbara Eaves, Steven Fenberg, Cliff Gillock, Will Howard, Harold Hyman, William Kellar, Louis Marchiafava, Marty Melosi, Mary Shiflett, Elizabeth White, and Cary Wintz. Crawford and Eaves served as guest editors for the "Women" and "San Jacinto" issues, respectively. Kellar, executive director of the UH Scholars' Community and visiting assistant professor in History, was guest editor for the TMC issue before volunteering to assist Pratt as editor.⁷ Another board member, Betty Trapp Chapman, remains a stalwart friend and one of the magazine's most prolific authors.

The magazine's evolution to its present form began when it shifted to full color and incorporated more images for the fall 2006 issue, "The Arts in Houston." Color enabled people to fully appreciate the images and enhanced the reading experience.

In 2007 the name changed to *Houston History*, shedding the journal's final vestige. The magazine continued its thematic approach but incorporated "department" articles on preservation, museums, culture, communities, and, later, archival collections. The latter is done with UH Libraries Special Collections. At subscribers' requests, the articles' length shrank, making them easier to read in one sitting. In 2010 the magazine launched its website to highlight the current issues and make back issues freely available as a community service.

A Training Ground

As part of CPH, *Houston History* has always served as a training ground for students who learn to conduct academic research combined with public history methods to write in a style with broad appeal. Kellar recalled Pratt "constantly found energetic, talented students to work on the magazine

staff. Early on it was Jenna Berger [Leventhal] and Leigh Cutler [Tucker] who brought creativity and energy to the editorial team ... Later, Kimberly Youngblood, Katy Oliveira, and Diana Sanders worked long and hard to ensure the high quality of the articles and that the magazine was published on time."⁷ These students set a high standard, earning the respect of community members and libraries that added the magazine to their offerings.

History Ph.D. student Debbie Harwell joined the staff as managing editor in 2009, working under Pratt's tutelage to manage the daily operations just as Pratt became interim dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CLASS).⁸ Operating on a lean budget, Harwell and associate editor Aimee Bachari began hiring undergraduates through the government's College Work Study (CWS) program and recruited volunteers to meet their staffing needs.

Relying on students to produce *Houston History* became a cornerstone of UH public history pedagogy. Graduate and undergraduate students receive real-world experience researching, conducting oral histories, writing, editing, selecting images, preparing content for publication, proof-reading, creating webpages, making design recommendations, and representing *Houston History* at public events. Equally important, they gain experience working on a team that is productive and fun while creating published magazines to include on résumés.



A student in Harwell's first *Houston History* class, Aaron Goffney, who joined the magazine staff, based this 2013 article on an oral history he conducted with activist Bobbie Lee. Lee's thoughts about the importance of keeping Black history alive inspired Goffney, and he now teaches history at Tarrant County College.

When Harwell completed her doctorate in 2012 and began teaching *Houston History* in the UH History Department and Honors College, the magazine emerged as a key training ground for undergraduates. She requires students to write an article for the magazine and conduct an oral history or produce a short film on their topic, creating a pipeline for magazine articles while teaching students valuable skills. Harwell has since developed other classes that also feed into the magazine.

Challenges

Funding always presented the greatest challenge to the *Houston History* Project, especially the magazine.

Nevertheless, Melosi contended that despite the time and money it took to produce an issue, the cost-benefit analysis proved fruitful: “[M]y conviction was that the magazine was always a stalking horse for the center that is our identity. How people got to know us was going to develop first through the magazine and then through other things.”⁹

While Pratt provided the bulk of the funds, the Houston History Project also received early funding from the Brown Foundation, the Joe B. Foster Family Foundation, the Albert & Ethel Herzstein Charitable Foundation, Houston Endowment, Ben Love, the Summerlee Foundation, Tenneco through the Kenneth W. Reese Library Fund, the West Endowment, and individual donors.

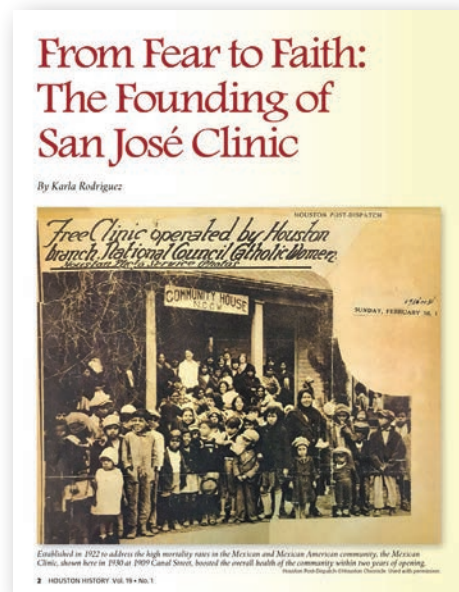
In 2014, CPH received a generous gift from business leader and 1949 UH graduate Welcome Wilson, Sr., under which the Houston-related projects became the Welcome Wilson Houston History Collaborative. In announcing the gift, Wilson said, “Tracking the history of Houston has been a passion of mine since I came here for college 68 years ago [now 77 years]. I am very honored that this important UH endeavor will bear my name.” Melosi called it “the most important financial gift that the center has yet received by an individual synonymous with the history and heritage of the University of Houston and our community at large.”¹⁰

Although recognized as a valuable training platform and an engaging publication, the magazine lost the funding from Pratt’s chair when he retired. Thus, CPH sought new partnerships to keep the magazine in print. CLASS, under Deans Antonio Tillis and Dan O’Connor, invested in student research and training and the magazine’s community outreach. The Summerlee Foundation provided grants for students as well as production costs for specific issues, such as the one on Hurricane Harvey (2020). *Houston History* collaborated with community partners like Houston Fire Department Emergency Medical Services (2016), Offshore



Houston History held its first Welcome Wilson Houston History Collaborative launch in 2014 at the Buffalo Soldiers National Museum for the issue, “Military Might.” Shown left to right are Joe Pratt, museum founder Captain Paul Matthews, and donor Welcome Wilson, Sr.

Students in the Oral History Methods and Public History Writing classes conducted thirty oral histories and wrote articles for a comprehensive history of the San José Clinic, for its centennial. Houston History followed this prototype for histories of Houston EMS, Hurricane Harvey, and the University of Houston.



Technology Conference (2018), and San José Clinic (2021) to produce magazines about their organizational histories. Additionally, UH Office of the Provost programs like Cougar Initiative to Engage (CITE) and Research for Aspiring Cougars in the Humanities (REACH) support student co-curricular activities on specific projects.

From 2020 to 2023 the Center for Public History took the lead on the 100 Years of Stories: Documenting a Century at the University of Houston project, funded by a grant from Carey Shuart and done in partnership with Houston Public Media (HPM) and UH’s MD Anderson Library. Then CPH director Monica Perales observed that the collaboration “really raised our profile.” Speaking about the hallmarks of public history, she added, “True collaboration means working together, sometimes compromising, sometimes pivoting, learning how different groups work and respecting that, [and] it’s been a success.”¹¹

Financials involve more than generating income; they often include cutting expenses, usually payroll. The oral history director’s position, held by graduate students Ernesto Valdes and then Natalie Garza, was eliminated in 2014. They collected oral histories that provided the basis of many magazine articles; most noted are Valdes’s interviews on Houston’s response to Hurricane Katrina and Garza’s work documenting the Mexican American community. Garza said conducting interviews made her realize “how much information is available from the people that’s not necessarily in the archives.”¹² Now, CWS students prepare oral histories for the archives, albeit sporadically.

Lack of funding also led to elimination of the Houston History archivist position in Special Collections held by environmental historian and certified archivist Teresa Tomkins-Walsh for seventeen years. Beginning in 2005, she processed oral histories and collections focused on energy, environment, and diversity that researchers used in several magazine articles. She recalled, the initial processing was a massive undertaking in the days before digitization, with 500



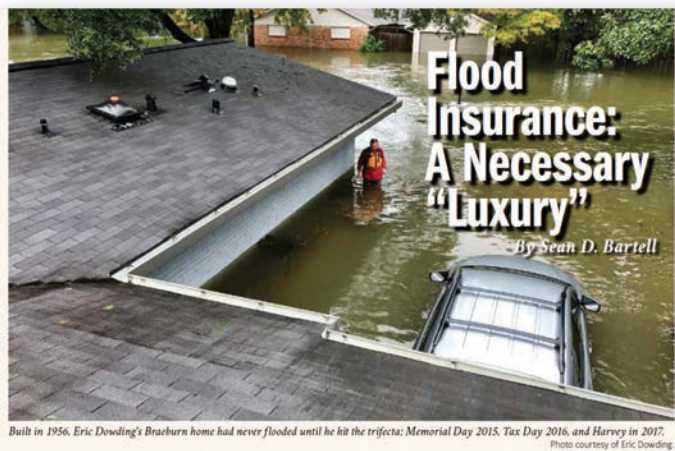
Environmental historian and archivist Teresa “Terry” Tomkins-Walsh wrote this article about Terry Hershey who became a leader in Houston’s environmental community when she led a movement to protect Buffalo Bayou. Tomkins-Walsh worked closely with Hershey for many years to accession and process her papers.

interviews coming in the first batch, some with six cassette tapes.¹³ Other archivists now oversee these collections.

Today, the magazine’s graduate student position is filled only when funds become available through grants for that purpose. Thus, *Houston History* still relies heavily on undergraduate CWS students and volunteers to provide the labor required to produce the magazine and classes to produce the content.

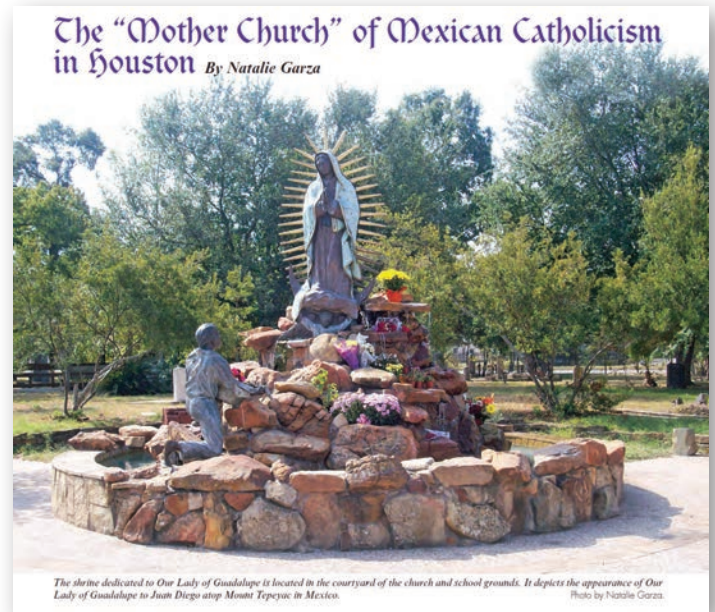
Opportunities

Although Pratt retired in 2016 and Melosi retired two years later, the spirit of what they initiated remains a guiding light for CPH and the collaborative. In following Melosi as CPH director, Monica Perales sought to build on their success “because they did so much to create the foundation for the center, particularly Joe Pratt with the Houston history piece ... doing public history for and with the community about the community, and Marty Melosi with his interest in the research.”¹⁴



Students conducted over ninety oral histories and wrote articles for a full magazine devoted to the Resilient Houston: Documenting Hurricane Harvey project, which offered a unique experiential learning opportunity. Stories came from responders, volunteers, and storm survivors like the magazine’s designer Eric Dowding, whose home flooded three times from 2015 to 2017.

Perales also considered “how to prioritize research that is useful to the wider world, so that it’s not just academics who are looking at each other’s work.” It requires asking, “What are [the community’s] needs in telling and capturing their histories, and how can we help them do that?” For Resilient Houston: Documenting Hurricane Harvey, a three-year project that collected over ninety interviews and produced a magazine, Perales observed, CPH fulfilled the historian’s responsibility to ensure society remembers events, to help people recall their experience and see the value of their memories, and possibly impact future policy.¹⁵ Although CPH has succeeded in getting people interested in the center’s work, a stable funding source that includes paid student internships would allow more students to take part and enable CPH to better serve the community.



While oral history director for the collaborative, Natalie Garza also wrote several articles for the magazine and served as guest editor for the 2011 issue, “Houston: Nuestra Historia,” in which her article on Our Lady of Guadalupe Church appeared.

Program director, Wes Jackson, who joined the center in 2015, assists in promoting the work being done at CPH and the collaborative. He plays a key role in enhancing the center’s profile, on and off campus, through social media strategies and supporting Harwell with magazine events, subscriptions, and staffing. With great vision for the future, Jackson also takes the lead in working with UH Development on fundraising and processing grants.

Reaching a Milestone

“As we approach the twentieth anniversary of Joe Pratt’s bold move to bring the *Houston Review* to UH,” Kellar reflected, “it is important to note how his vision for a ‘new’ look publication proved to be so successful.”¹⁶ First, the magazine, through CPH, has promoted student success by offering students opportunities to hone their skills as public historians and publish their work. Through the fall 2023



For the 2015 issue “Asian Americans in Houston: A Kaleidoscope of Cultures,” *Houston History* collaborated with *The Heritage Society* on a museum exhibit that featured artifacts representing the cultures discussed in the articles. The magazine staff strives to choose locations that add to the launch experience.

issue, the magazine has published 50 magazines with 463 total articles – 200 of those written by students, including 128 written by undergraduates in the last ten years.

Few universities have a resource like the magazine to offer their students. After completing her Ph.D., Garza joined Houston Community College as a professor. She explained the collaborative’s work is critical because “Houston [history] is not as studied ... so it is important to continue to document it and bring those stories to life. It’s important for the community, the people who read the magazine; it means a lot to them. ... There’s a service in doing that. It’s important to the university, and it’s definitely important to the students who work [there].”¹⁷

Garza pointed out, “We’re training historians, and we’re training people to go out in the workplace. Even if you just write an article for the magazine, that is marketability.” Using herself as an example, Garza credits her work as guest editor for the “Houston: Nuestra Historia” issue (2011) and her numerous articles with helping people discover her scholarship, leading to speaking engagements and the City of Houston choosing her to write historical panels now installed at Guadalupe Plaza Park.¹⁸

A second goal of *Houston History* is to broadly share its content with the public. Since 2011, the magazine website has provided free downloads of its back issues and most of the Houston Public Library’s journal articles. Additionally, the magazine sends 200 subscriptions to Houston area schools. Whether online or in print, the magazine provides a valuable resource to students, teachers, and anyone who is curious about Houston – especially since no overarching history of Houston has been published since 1981. Subscribers eagerly await new issues, and, Kellar observed, “In this way, Houston’s past is also a vibrant part of Houston’s present and a valuable resource.”¹⁹

For each new magazine, *Houston History* and the CPH Lecture Series host a launch event to highlight that issue at a related venue, a trend started by the magazine’s first graduate

students. In 2018, panel discussions were added to include the history makers and experts in the field. With audiences ranging from sixty to two hundred people, attendees enjoy these experiences and the opportunity to converse with panelists. Thus, *Houston History* brings information out of the academy and to the public, the definition of public history.

Beyond its content, *Houston History* can trace its success to the amazing designers and printers at UH Copy and Print Services, directed by Nalan Giannukos, who have produced the magazine since its inception (except 2007-2008). They continue to improve its professional layout and make it look sensational. Designers Eric Dowding and Marsha Van Horn have given *Houston History* its artistic flair, and the printing staff led by Sami Snelling make it flawless, aligning colors, matching photos across a fold, and binding and trimming it with perfection. The whole team devotes much time and care to the magazine and working with them is a joy.

Today, our goal at CPH and *Houston History* is to carry our founding traditions forward while changing with the times. We do this by training students for careers in the public humanities, by documenting our history in public-facing projects like the magazine, and by presenting public programming. The magazine’s content frequently focuses on people who do not appear in mainstream historical narratives but whose stories are critical to understanding the region’s past and present. *Houston History* remains the only publication dedicated to documenting Houston in this way and is proud to celebrate twenty years preserving Houston’s past with this, its fiftieth issue. 🇺🇸



Graduate students Jenna Berger Leventhal and Leigh Cutler Tucker played a critical role in getting early magazines ready for publication and writing articles, including one on war memorials. They also initiated the tradition of launch events for new issues, the first one held at the Holocaust Museum Houston in 2005.

Photo courtesy of Holocaust Museum Houston.

Debbie Z. Harwell, Ph.D., is the editor of *Houston History* and an instructional assistant professor in History and Honors at UH. Since 2009, she has worked on 38 *Houston History* issues, edited 337 articles, and written or cowritten 21 articles.

PHILIP G. HOFFMAN: BREAKING GROUND ON THE MODERN UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

By Megan R. Dagnall



In his nineteen years of service to the University of Houston and the UH System, President Philip G. Hoffman oversaw critical reforms, most significantly the start of campus desegregation.

Photo courtesy of *Houstonian*, 1975, Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

As one of the most ethnically diverse major research universities in the United States, the University of Houston's identity is intertwined with its varied, multicultural student body.¹ With students from 137 different nations, the University of Houston (UH) is a melting pot of cultures and identities that reflect the city's community. Knowing that makes it hard to imagine that UH was an all-white institution until it admitted its first Black students in 1962. The university's leadership has made significant progress in the past sixty years to become a more progressive and inclusive institution committed to the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion, beginning with former president Philip G. Hoffman. As the fifth president of UH and first chancellor of the University of Houston System, Hoffman obtained state support, expanded enrollment and facilities, created



Members of UH's 1961-62 Student Government Association watch as President Hoffman (center right) dons his inaugural robe. This picture depicts the still-segregated nature of UH as Hoffman assumed the office of the presidency.

Photo courtesy of *Houstonian*, 1962, Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

the University of Houston System (UHS), and opened the University of Houston to Black students. Known as the builder of modern UH, Hoffman initiated the processes that not only desegregated UH but also moved toward integrating it by making the campus a safe and accepting space for students and faculty of all backgrounds.

Philip Hoffman was born on August 6, 1915, in Kobe, Japan, to missionaries Benjamin Philip Hoffman and Florence Guthrie Hoffman. When Hoffman was five, the family moved to Oregon. He graduated with a business degree from Pacific Union College in 1938 and a master's degree in history from the University of Southern California in 1942. After serving his country in the Navy as an intelligence officer during World War II, Hoffman earned a doctorate in history at Ohio State University, where he lectured from 1948 until 1949. He subsequently taught at the University of Alabama, Oregon State System of Higher Education, and Oregon State University. In 1957, Hoffman came to the University of Houston as vice president, dean of faculties, and a history professor. When he began his tenure as president of UH in 1961, it was a segregated private institution facing financial troubles.²

In 1927 at the request of working students who wanted to further their education, Houston Independent School District (HISD) founded two segregated institutions,

Houston Colored Junior College for African American students and Houston Junior College for white students.³ Both met in local high schools and transitioned to four-year institutions in 1934, becoming the Houston College for Negroes (now Texas Southern University, TSU) and the University of Houston. Like most higher education institutions in the Jim Crow South, UH did not accept African Americans based on the U.S. Supreme Court's "separate but equal" ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896).

In 1935, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) began challenging segregation in schools through a culmination of cases taken by the Supreme Court to challenge the separate but equal doctrine.⁴ A critical case emerged from Houston in 1946, when Heman Marion Sweatt, a Black Houstonian, applied to The University of Texas at Austin (UT) law school. No law school in Texas admitted Black students at the time, and UT denied him admission based on his race. Sweatt, with the support of the NAACP, filed a suit against UT and the State of Texas. The U.S. Supreme Court heard the case in 1950 and ruled that the UT School of Law must admit Sweatt because the state had no equivalent institutions for Black students.⁵ The decision marked an essential step in desegregating higher education, prefiguring the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in which the Supreme Court unanimously ruled that separate but equal is inherently unequal and began the long process of desegregating public education.

Despite Supreme Court rulings prohibiting segregation in educational institutions, many schools disregarded the decisions with a determination to remain segregated. Public sentiment across the South resisted desegregation as colleges slowly began to welcome non-white applicants. The official conversation around desegregation at UH began on August 31, 1955, when then president Andrew Davis (A. D.) Bruce formed a committee to evaluate admitting Black students. After the three-person panel recommended to continue UH's discriminatory practices, Bruce formed a more extensive committee about two months later, who advised the administration to desegregate immediately and quietly. Despite the report, UH remained segregated until Bruce resigned, and Hoffman accepted the presidency.⁶

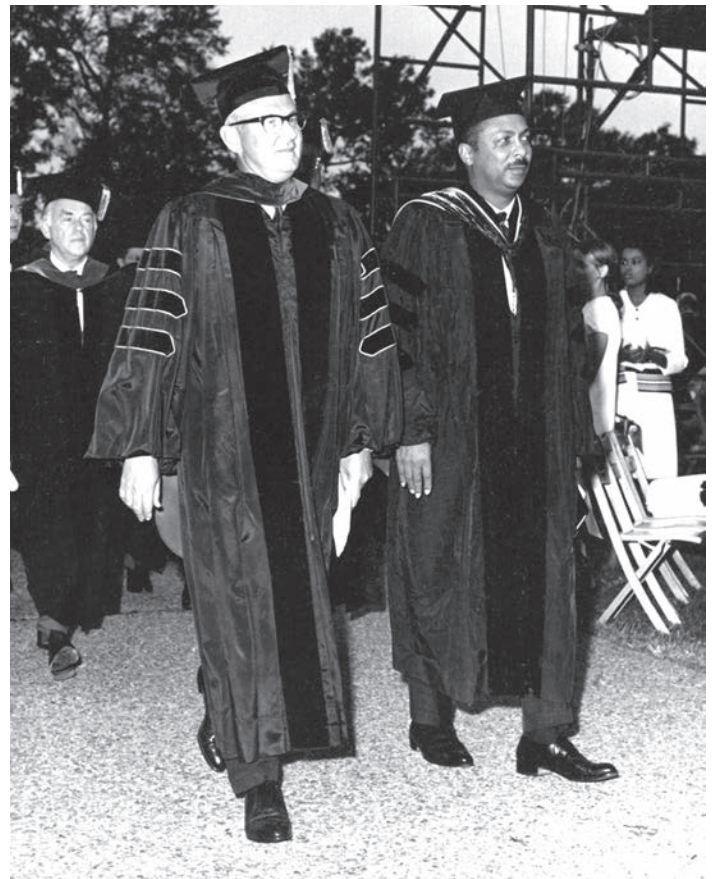
President Hoffman understood the solution to the university's financial troubles began with state affiliation, which could not be accomplished if the university remained segregated. Discussing desegregation of the university on January 22, 1962, Hoffman remarked, "Effective September 1963, the UH will become a state institution, and at that time it will be mandatory as part of the normal pattern of responsibility to integrate." Hoffman, eager to desegregate, did not want to wait that long, saying, "I have been thinking a little bit about our voluntary and privately moving toward this integration without waiting until we are forced to do it legally... and thus proceed by slightly more than a year before we have to integrate."⁷

In 1962, UH admitted its first Black graduate student, Charles P. Rhinehart, to the music department. The same

year, the university hired its first Black professional employee, Charles D. Churchwell, as the associate library director.⁸

President Hoffman wanted to desegregate UH "because it made good sense politically and, more importantly, it was the right thing to do." Nevertheless, he knew he had to proceed carefully to prevent public backlash. Hoffman invited the heads of newspapers, and television and radio stations for cocktails at the Houston Club. He told them the plans for desegregating UH, saying, "We could either do it quietly or we could have something that resembled Mississippi or Alabama," referring to campus riots in those states started by white students against admitting African Americans. Hoffman affirmed, "My choice was that students would look around (one day) and say, 'we are integrated.'" This same strategy had worked with desegregating Houston lunch counters and other public spaces following student sit-ins in 1960.⁹

According to UH alumni Richard and Cora Bily, the media blackout worked, as students remained largely unaware of the integration. Cora attended the university between 1962 and 1965, while Richard attended between 1960 and 1964. Despite attending UH at the beginning of the desegregation



President Hoffman, left, walks beside TSU President Granville M. Sawyer, right, at a commencement address in 1968. Though they remain separate institutions, UH and TSU continue to maintain a collaborative relationship.

Photo courtesy of the UH Photographs Collection, Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries, ark:/84475/doi136h166.

process, the couple did not recall seeing any African American students in their classes or on campus. Richard described the change as “a very slow process.”¹⁰

UH admitted the first African American undergraduate student in 1963; by March, the number had risen to twenty. The African American student body grew throughout the sixties, and Black students demanded more from the university. Hoffman led the way in changing policy, but changing attitudes proved more challenging. Fifty years after the admission of the first Black student, the University of Houston conducted a public symposium, “Revolution on Cullen,” moderated by Honors College professor Allison Leland, J.D., to discuss desegregation at UH and the personal struggles of two Black students, Don Chaney and Gene Locke. Chaney disclosed the initially isolating experience he had as one of UH’s first Black athletes when he arrived in 1964.¹¹

UH made history in 1964 as the first major predominantly white southern school to desegregate intercollegiate athletics by recruiting Don Chaney and Elvin Hayes to play basketball and Warren McVea for football. The three highly talented athletes overcame racial barriers and ruthless media attention, which pushed the school’s integration forward and opened doors for Black athletes in the following seasons. UH athletics dominated in the South during the following decades with seventeen winning football seasons



President Hoffman takes up the torch from senior John Mattern to light the 1966 Homecoming Bonfire. Hoffman happily spent time participating in student activities throughout his tenure.

Photo courtesy of the *Houstonian*, 1966, Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

under coach Bill Yeoman and five straight basketball seasons ranked in the top 20 with two NCAA Final Four appearances under coach Guy V. Lewis.¹²

Once the university began openly recruiting African American athletes, it attracted other African American students to apply as well. For example, Gene Locke recalled, “I was trying to make the decision on where to go to school. University of Houston had started to recruit African American athletes ... that little, small move by the U of H kind of sealed, for me, the decision

to come to Houston.” Locke enrolled in the political science department in 1965, which he called “the first year of a significant attendance of African Americans at the University of Houston.” Nevertheless, he felt like an outsider trying to fit into a predominately white campus. Locke described “the central contradiction that African Americans faced at University of Houston in 1965 and 1966 and 1967 was that the University had not readied itself to be integrated. The University was legally integrated, but it had not taken any steps ... to make it possible for there to be a smooth transition.”¹³

Influenced by the Black civil rights movement sweeping across America in the sixties, students identified institutional manifestations of racism at the university and called on UH to do more for Black students. In 1967, Gene Locke, Dwight Allen (now Omowale Luthuli-Allen), and Lynn Eusan, the first Black UH homecoming queen, formed the



President Hoffman, right, and Coach Guy Lewis, left, celebrate the men’s basketball team’s 1977 National Invitational Tournament (NIT) semi-final victory at Madison Square Garden.

Photo courtesy of Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries, ark:/84475/d0703opt80k..

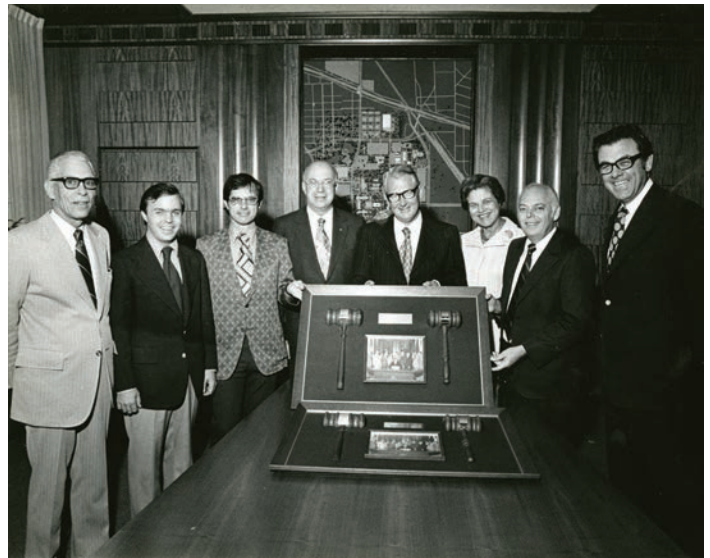


AABL supporters gathered outside President Hoffman’s office during the 1968-69 school year. Although the university had begun to desegregate, students from all backgrounds echoed AABL’s sentiments in calling for change.

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

Committee on Better Race Relations, which later became Afro-Americans for Black Liberation (AABL), to advocate for Black students. AABL presented Hoffman with ten demands on February 7, 1969, which called on the administration to create an African American studies program, hire additional Black faculty, increase wages for janitorial staff, provide adequate housing and financial aid for Black students, support Black athletes and hire a Black coach, create a committee to alleviate racist practices, and establish a Black Student Union. Hoffman took the demands seriously and responded on February 14, 1969, to each of the issues individually. Hoffman worked with AABL to establish the African American Studies program in May 1969, with history professor Robert Haynes as the first director.¹⁴

With integration, lower tuition rates as a state institution, excellent academics, and successful athletic programs, the University of Houston experienced significant growth, going from 12,187 to 29,297 students between 1961 and 1977. To accommodate the growing student body, Hoffman expanded the campus by constructing twenty-five buildings over a ten-year period. Notably, the university purchased Jeppesen



President Hoffman, center right, Alfred Neumann, center left, and others celebrate the passage of Senate Bill 2 in 1973, which established revenue bonds for the creation of UH Clear Lake. Neumann served as the founding chancellor from 1972 to 1982.

Photo courtesy of the UHCL General Photographs Collection, University of Houston-Clear Lake Archives and Special Collections, Houston, TX.



President Hoffman discusses the football team's 1977 victory over Rice University with KPRC sportscaster and UH alumnus Bill Worrell. Athletic success helped unite the student body during Hoffman's long tenure as president.

Photo courtesy of the *Houstonian*, 1977, Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

Stadium from HISD, later renamed Corbin J. Robertson Stadium, in honor of Houston athletics' benefactor and grandson of Hugh Roy Cullen. At various times, the stadium hosted Cougar football, the American Football League Houston Oilers, and the Dynamo soccer team until the facility was replaced by TDECU Stadium in 2014.¹⁵

President Hoffman envisioned UH expanding further with the establishment of satellite campuses and the creation of the University of Houston System (UHS), becoming its first chancellor in 1977. Hoffman was instrumental in acquiring the land and facilities for the University of Houston Victoria Center, which opened in 1973 and became the University of

Houston Victoria (UHV) in 1977. Hoffman also worked to establish the University of Houston Downtown (UHD) in the heart of Houston's urban core. UH purchased South Texas Junior College and opened UHD as a four-year university, becoming an official part of UHS with approval from the Texas Legislature in 1974.¹⁶ Since its founding, UHD has grown to meet the educational needs of the Bayou City offering bachelor's degrees in forty-six areas of study and eleven master's degrees.

Under President Hoffman, UH connected with the Johnson Space Center to establish the University of Houston Clear Lake (UHCL). When NASA's demand for qualified graduates increased, Robert Gilruth, the then Manned Spaceflight Center's (MSC) director, stated that "the availability of the best educational opportunities for our employees is vital to the accomplishment of our Center's mission objectives." Therefore, Gilruth requested "that the University of Houston give immediate consideration to the establishment of a permanent graduate and undergraduate educational facility in the Clear Lake area." Hoffman replied, "It would be difficult for us to be unresponsive to vital needs of the MSC and its staff." Hoffman indicated that a crucial element in establishing the new campus hinged on acquiring the land. The Humble Oil & Refining Company initially donated fifty acres of land in Clear Lake City to UH, and its subsidiary Friendswood Development Corporation donated 487 total acres to become the University of Houston at Clear Lake City in 1974.¹⁷ The University's partnership with NASA helped connect students with jobs and train personnel needed to advance the country's space program.

Hoffman won many accolades for his achievements at UH and carried on successfully after leaving the university.

In addition to boosting enrollment, President Hoffman oversaw the construction of numerous buildings. The new building on University Park off Cullen Boulevard, with its recognizable archway in the center, was dedicated as Philip G. Hoffman Hall on April 27, 1980.

Photo courtesy of Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries, ark:/84475/d092150j901.



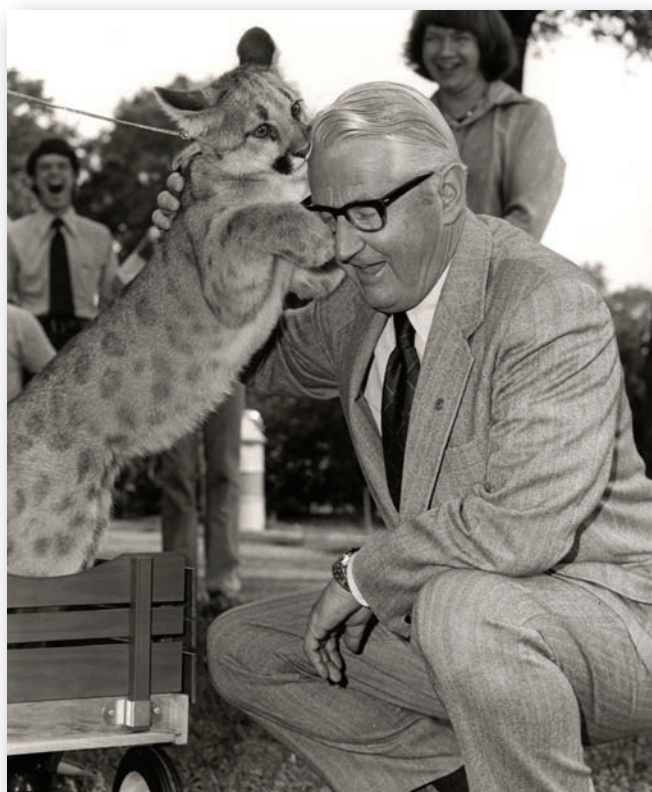
Hoffman earned the University of Houston President Emeritus Honorific, and in 1971, the school awarded him the Houston Alumni Organization's President's Award. When Hoffman retired as chancellor in 1979, UHS had an enrollment of over 29,000 students on four campuses.¹⁸ Hoffman continued to serve the city, becoming president of the Texas Medical Center from 1981 to 1984.

Sadly for his family and the Houston community, Hoffman died in October 2008, at the age of ninety-three. In memory of the beloved former chancellor, the current president of the University of Houston and chancellor of the UH System, Renu Khator, proclaimed Monday,

November 3, 2008, as Philip G. Hoffman Day, stating, "Dr. Hoffman served the university with loyalty, vision, energy, and commitment. Under his watch, the landscape of the University of Houston was forever transformed. We have lost a true Cougar friend."¹⁹

Hoffman began the desegregation process to make UH a more accepting and inclusive campus in the 1960s; and, since that time, the student body has diversified to reflect Houston's multicultural identity. In 2017, *U.S. News & World Report* recognized the University of Houston as the second most diverse public research university in the nation. As of 2022, eighty percent of the student body claims an ethnicity of non-white, a much better reflection of Houston's overall diversity than in the university's early years.²⁰

Hoffman is regarded by many as the builder of the modern University of Houston for the massive transformation he accomplished during his sixteen years at the helm. Hoffman integrated the campus, increased faculty and enrollment, launched fundraising campaigns that brought in millions of dollars, implemented the African American and Mexican American studies programs, and constructed or remodeled thirty-one buildings. He also brought jobs to Houston through the partnership with NASA and expanded educational opportunities with the establishment of UHD, UHCL, and UHV. Most significantly, he began the process of diversifying the campus to prepare students to work in a multicultural city and world. Dana Rooks, the former dean of UH libraries and friend and colleague of Hoffman, stated, "To many, Dr. Philip G. Hoffman is the University of Houston. His legacy to the citizens of Houston and the former and future students of the University of Houston is beyond measure. He is one of the great figures in Houston history whose contributions made this city what it is today."²¹ **HH**



President Hoffman gets some encouragement from young UH Cougar mascot Shasta IV in 1977.

Photo courtesy of UH Photographs Collection, Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries, ark:/84475/d060752h65g.

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50 Years of Blaffer Art Museum: A Historical Overview

By Pete Gershon

Dedication of the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Gallery, March 13, 1973.

Photo by Caudill Rowlett Scott courtesy of Digital Collections,
University of Houston Libraries, ark:/84475/do488ohv71b.



In the early 1970s, Houston was shaking off its mid-century identity as a provincial backwater. The Johnson Space Center directed regular flights to the moon. The city's major league ball club played in a futuristic, air-conditioned dome. The Texas legislature approved selling liquor by the glass in 1971, enlivening nightclub and restaurant culture. The rise of a new corrugated steel building for the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston catty-corner from the sleek Mies van der Rohe expansion for the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH) guaranteed that the arts would play an increasingly important role in the city's future. Within this forward-thinking environment, the Sarah Campbell Blaffer Gallery opened in the University of Houston's (UH) new Fine Arts Building in March 1973.

The gallery was conceived as the home of a teaching collection of twenty-seven old master paintings loaned or donated to the school by the wealthy and influential Blaffer family. This included Sarah Campbell Blaffer, the daughter of Texas Oil Company founder William Thomas Blaffer, and the wife of a cofounder of Humble Oil. "This remarkable woman planned and generously provided the Blaffer Collections of the University," reads a dedication in the catalogue documenting the gallery's inaugural exhibition. "In doing so, she combined a powerful teaching medium and the means of making students more aware of the work of master

artists and craftsmen, and capable thereby of sustaining themselves more fully in body as well as in spirit."¹

UH officials began talking publicly about a new building for the art department as early as 1964 with the enlistment of Caudill Rowlett Scott, a Houston-based architectural firm, which had designed high schools and college buildings and was already engaged in the Jones Plaza (1966) and Albert Thomas Convention Center (1967) projects. The new Fine Arts Building was part of a period of rapid growth at UH that saw twenty-five buildings constructed between 1963 and 1973. These included the 7,100-seat Hofheinz Pavilion, Bates College of Law, Stephen Power Farish Hall, Melcher Gymnasium, and the Moody Towers residence halls.

In April 1970 the Board of Regents approved a contract with Tellepsen Construction Company based upon their nearly \$4 million bid for the 100,000-square-foot complex. The Fine Arts Building would feature offices and classrooms for the art department, the 200-seat Dudley Recital Hall, another recital hall to house the school's Beckerath pipe organ, and a modest art gallery with reddish-brown glazed tile flooring and a prominent central staircase leading to a carpeted mezzanine.

The Blaffer Gallery, formally dedicated on March 13, 1973, opened with a display of the donated Blaffer Collection paintings. "Lots of pomp and circumstance," remembered UH assistant professor Richard Stout, who was named



Mike and Doug Starn with Blaffer staff in fall 1991. Left to right: the Starn brothers; Namita Wiggers, education programs coordinator; Catherine Angel, head gallery attendant; Marti Mayo, director; Alexandra Irvine, administrator; Davis Northcutt, gallery attendant and preparator; and Osamu James Nakagawa, graduate intern.

Photo © Osamu James Nakagawa.

acting gallery director. During a brief but impactful term, he organized a presentation of sacramental sculptural paintings by his close friend Michael Tracy and reinstated the Houston Area Exhibition, an annual juried competition of local work that MFAH had hosted until 1960.

A nationwide director search resulted in the September 1974 hiring of William A. Robinson, director of the Pollock Gallery at Southern Methodist University for the previous three years. Robinson established a rhythm that included annual student shows and exhibitions by graduating master of fine arts (MFA) degree candidates. The gallery served Houston's broader art community with ongoing Houston Area Exhibitions and rotating selections from the Blaffer collections. A touring program became so popular that the Blaffer Foundation reacquired many of these paintings in 1979, creating a small endowment for future programming. Most of the Blaffer Collection paintings are now on display in MFAH's Beck Building.

Often the gallery hosted traveling shows organized by other institutions, including the first posthumous American retrospective of Pablo Picasso's work, the first Frida Kahlo exhibition in the United States since 1938, and a show of new works by Willem de Kooning. Occasionally Blaffer curated original presentations, notably, an Edvard Munch retrospective produced by Peter Guenther in the spring of 1976. Robinson vied with the Museum of Modern Art in a David-versus-Goliath battle to land works for the two institutions' competing exhibitions of *fin-de-siècle* Viennese art and furniture presented three years later.²

In its first decade the Blaffer operated as a teaching gallery, bringing students into close contact with the Blaffer family's old masters. Its second decade saw the gallery coming into its own as a venue for more contemporary, multimedia work by emerging and established artists of international prominence. When UH hired Contemporary Arts Museum Houston (CAMH) curator Marti Mayo to assume leadership

of the Blaffer in 1986, the gallery's exhibition policies had just been updated to emphasize contemporary art and maintain a more vigorous local presence. With the support of curatorial assistant Liz Ward, Mayo authored a series of exhibitions that broke new ground for the Blaffer and the careers of its featured artists. A small group survey of work by women artists, *6 Artists/6 Idioms*, was organized in conjunction with national conferences for the Women's Caucus for Art and the College Art Association. *Gael Stack: A Survey* was the first solo museum show for the painter and longtime UH faculty member.

Julian Schnabel: Crows Flying the Black Flags of Themselves is arguably the most high-profile of Mayo's headline shows, as Blaffer's first solo offering of work by a UH graduate held



Installation view of Julian Schnabel: *Crows Flying the Black Flag of Themselves*, on view June 1-July 31, 1988.

Photo courtesy of the Blaffer Art Museum.

in conjunction with an expansive exhibition at the MFAH when Schnabel's popularity was at its peak. Mayo remembers it as the pinnacle of both quality and attention during this era. When Mayo left in September 1994, she had more than doubled the Blaffer's annual attendance and developed a program for teenage docents that served several thousand Houston students each year.

Following a search for a new director, the university chose alum and *summa cum laude* graduate Don Bacigalupi. Bacigalupi's crowning curatorial achievement was the eight-year survey of work by Michael Ray Charles, a then thirty-year-old UH alum represented by Barnes-Blackman and Moody Galleries. For years, Bacigalupi had followed Charles's work referencing stereotypical images of African Americans from the antebellum South. The exhibition met with backlash even before it opened. "The work was [labeled] 'too incendiary,' 'too dangerous,' and 'too hot to handle,'" recalls Bacigalupi. "One advisory board member quit in protest, colleagues in town worried for me, and the media began to swarm. I felt confident, however, that the Blaffer team could and would present an exhibition that would facilitate dialogue, offer robust educational opportunities, and foreground the important challenges the work contained."³

After a dazzling retrospective of the drawings and sculpture of UH professor Luis Jimenez, the Blaffer galleries

closed in 1999 for remodeling, including a new climate control system, passenger elevator, and over 3,000 square feet of office and gallery space. During the pause in on-site programming, Bacigalupi announced his resignation and longtime Blaffer registrar Nancy Hixon stepped in as interim director. The annual MFA show was held off site at Lawndale Art Center, a nonprofit art space that emerged when fire displaced the UH art department in 1979.

Terrie Sultan, former curator of contemporary art at the Corcoran Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., was selected as the Blaffer's next director in May 2000. Sultan's exhibition program focused on developing original shows featuring a more diverse selection of emerging and established artists, including Jessica Stockholder, Angela Grauerholz, Bob Knox, and James Surls, as well as the first show of prints by the conceptual portraitist Chuck Close, which traveled to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and twenty museums worldwide. Most of the shows originating at the Blaffer during this era went on to other institutions and were accompanied by catalogues.

The nature of the Blaffer and its relationship with the university changed in 2004 with the establishment of the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts, an interdisciplinary programmatic alliance between the UH School of Art, Moores School of Music, the School of Theatre & Dance, the Creative



Chuck Close with Terrie Sultan.

Photo courtesy Blaffer Art Museum.

Writing Program, and the Blaffer Art Museum. The first collaborative project featured the work of visual and performing artist Terry Allen and actress Jo Harvey Allen in a theatrical performance of the Allens' *DUGOUT III* at the Wortham Theater, presented in conjunction with the 2005 Blaffer exhibition *Terry Allen: Stories from the DUGOUT*. Workshops within Allen's two-week residency engaged twenty students in fine arts, theater, creative writing, and music programs.

By the time Sultan departed in April 2008, Blaffer's operating budget and staff size had doubled, and it enjoyed an enhanced reputation as one of the country's finest noncollecting university museums. Sultan's successor was found close at hand. Claudia Schmuckli had joined the Blaffer in 2004 as its director of public relations and marketing, before being elevated to adjunct

curator in 2006 and taking up the fundraising and curatorial oversight duties when Sultan resigned.

Schmuckli organized a run of shows by Leonardo Drew, Jon Pylypchuk, Gabriel Kuri, and Johan Grimonprez that cemented Blaffer's reputation as a place for emerging contemporary artists dealing with site-specific installation, new media, and research-based practice. In 2010, underscoring the gallery's evolution and refreshed sense of identity, the board approved changing the name from Blaffer Gallery, the Art Museum of the University of Houston to the more succinct Blaffer Art Museum at the University of Houston.

The 2008 recession crushed nascent plans for a new museum building, but a comprehensive, \$2.5-million architectural redesign in 2012 by New York-based firm WORKac—working with Gensler's Houston office—substantially improved visibility and accessibility. A new street-facing entry featured a modern, translucent glass façade containing cantilevered interior steps to the second floor. The gallery's outdated glazed brick flooring was replaced with poured concrete. The original courtyard entrance remained, opening to a café and lounge space.

The updates necessitated a summer-long museum closure, during which Schmuckli kept up momentum with "Window into Houston," a series of off-site installations by local artists in a row of downtown display windows at 110 Milam Street, and with the Blaffer's presentation of an exhibition by Anton Ginzberg at the 54th Venice Biennale.

The new galleries opened in the fall with *Room to be (Ms.) understood*, a feminist reclamation project and an exercise in participatory social sculpture by Mitchell Center artist-in-residence Lynne McCabe. The exhibition was a series of classes, lectures, discussions, and performances featuring visiting artists and thinkers that brought new meaning to the old idea of a "teaching gallery." Schmuckli's career-spanning survey of sculpture by Tony Feher followed, the product of three years of planning and research (during which the artist advised on the gallery's redesign). Feher died unexpectedly less than three years later while planning an



Programming during Lynne McCabe: *Room to be (Ms.) understood*, on view August 28–December 4, 2012.

Photo courtesy of the Blaffer Art Museum.

expansive public art project for the university, his Blaffer exhibition becoming a career capstone.

Following Schmuckli's departure in 2016, Tony Kamps assumed the director's role for a year, curating works by Alfred Leslie and Amie Siegel, before Blaffer's eighth director, Steven Matijcio arrived in March 2019. He commented, "I envision a more active, porous organization that pushes its art and artists to flow through the gallery, campus, community, and city. Research-based inquiry will meet relational aesthetics, and I aspire to integrate more actions and performance into the program."⁴

Since the interruption by the COVID pandemic, the Blaffer has presented defining exhibitions by prominent contemporary artists like Jamal Cyrus, Molly Zuckerman-Hartung, Simon Fujiwara, Stephanie Syjuco, Monira Al Qadiri, and Hugh Hayden. Matijcio's promise of more performance and community partnerships has manifested in such programs as "A Time for Action," a six-night survey of community-curated dance, theater, music, spoken word, and visual art, and "Convergence Research," a recurring platform for cross-disciplinary experimentation by students and faculty, with the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center.

"Today, the Blaffer plays a crucial role in the School of Art as an . . . inspiring model of professional best practices for our students in both studio art and art history," says Natilee Harren, associate professor and chair of the university's art history program. "Remarkably, in the very same building where students are honing their skills as art workers and learning the history of their craft, they have ongoing, close, and free access to high-profile exhibitions of international contemporary art. The Blaffer has become one of the very best places to see contemporary art in Houston, and our students—through their participation in annual School of Art exhibitions or as members of the museum's staff—share in that success."⁵ **HH**

Pete Gershon is a writer, researcher, and curator of programs at the Orange Show Center for Visionary Art. He is the author of *Painting the Town Orange: The Stories Behind Houston's Visionary Art Environments* and *Collision: The Contemporary Art Scene in Houston, 1972-1985*.



Installation view of Tony Feher, on view October 13, 2012 to March 30, 2013.

Photo courtesy of Iwan Baan.



Katherine Veneman and YAAP participant Jessica Flores accept the Coming Up Taller award from First Lady Michelle Obama, November 4, 2009.

Photo courtesy of Steven E. Purcell.

BUILDING A CREATIVE COMMUNITY THROUGH BLAFFER ART MUSEUM'S EDUCATION AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS

By Katherine Veneman

The Blaffer has a particular energy, sparked by intellectual freedom and curiosity that motivates the best programs. Programs often begin with a simple query, "What if?" Their subsequent development is driven by a combination of perceived community needs, availability of funding, strong leadership, collaboration, and teamwork. Directors and curators continually bring challenging new ideas to the fore, and the education department follows suit.

When I became Blaffer's curator of education, I found a myriad of educational programs already in place and the real challenge was to make a roadmap for the future. Before my arrival, the museum laid a foundation to prioritize learning through its programming. In 1988, under director Marti Mayo, the Blaffer Gallery began UH Reach, a tour program for elementary, middle, and high school students from surrounding neighborhoods, led by a team of education assistants. By the late 1990s, UH Reach had built partnerships with eighteen schools and Susana Monteverde, Blaffer's curator of education from 1996 to 2001, organized multilingual tours for more than 8,000 school children a year as well as visitors from community centers, daycare centers, and organizations for people over sixty-five. Monteverde also generated two new initiatives, the Young Artist Apprenticeship Program (YAAP) and the Mobile Art Quest (MAQ).

Between 1998 and 2013, YAAP evolved into an after-school workshop for students from nearby high schools. The

program was held twice each year in two six-week sessions, four days per week. Students worked with artist mentors to make artwork informed by concepts and materials used in museum exhibitions. Program goals included building students' critical thinking and collaborative abilities, developing art-making skills, and increasing their self-confidence as active participants in a university environment. Each workshop culminated with an exhibition at the Blaffer and the awarding of scholarships. In 2009 YAAP alumna Jessica Flores and I traveled to Washington, D.C. to accept the Coming Up Taller award from First Lady Michelle Obama at a White House ceremony. The prestigious award recognizes outstanding afterschool and out-of-school arts and humanities programs that provide young people with learning opportunities and skill-building exercises.

MAQ was a "museum on wheels" that traveled across the region to reach more than 23,000 students in its three years of operation, from 2001 to 2003. MAQ's goal was to "encourage creativity and discussion of the wonders of looking at art and making art." Beginning and ending with classroom discussions, MAQ coordinator Carrie Markello and her team guided elementary school students through the "Concept" space and the "Action" room before finishing with a "Critique," where students received a printout and photo documenting their journey.¹

Programs incorporating mentorship forged a dynamic community by connecting museum constituents. Mentorship happens in a university setting in a way that it cannot in other museum environments. For example, internships promote peer learning between graduate students and undergraduate interns; teaching artists guide K–12 learners who envision themselves as prospective university students; docents with different experiences— as professionals and as students—learn from each other.

Established in 2005, the Blaffer Art Museum Student Association (BAMSA) is a vibrant forum for students to discuss, engage with, and contribute to artistic expression. A generation of BAMSA members have studied a range of subjects, from the arts and humanities to engineering and business. Current president, Rothnica Marin describes her vision for the BAMSA as "the central highlight of the art scene at the University of Houston and in the wider city community. Our plan is to expand the community we have created, where individuals can connect with others who share their passion for creativity and build an inclusive and collaborative environment."²

Over the years, the Blaffer has organized innumerable public programs spanning artist talks, roundtables, and



YAAP participants at the Blaffer exhibition of *Exquisite Corpse*, fall 2008.

Photo courtesy of Blaffer Art Museum, Jeff Bowen.

scholarly lectures to performances, workshops, and artist-led participatory projects. Programs directed to students have advanced curricular outcomes while building a creative, social community that extends off campus. From its inception in 2004 to the present, the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Center for the Arts has been the most

extensive and consistent partner for the Blaffer's programs. For example, from 2006 to 2009, Artists Up Close—started by Terrie Sultan, Karen Farber (then the Mitchell Center's director), and me—presented a series of lectures, performances, and engagements with artists featured in current Blaffer exhibitions.

The Blaffer's Guided Tour program reaches more than fifty school groups, community organizations, and university classes annually, with free in-person and virtual tours. We work together to craft tours that are individual, inquiry-based, and audience driven. The close-knit team meets at the start of new exhibitions to tour with artists and curators, to analyze and find connections between exhibition content, and to anticipate visitor reactions. Ultimately, they hope to spark inquiry for each tour member. "I think that our tours promote an inquiry-based teaching approach, and usually it's something completely different from what students are used to," remarks Yuna Dranichnikova, a Blaffer docent and MA graduate in Arts Leadership. "Because we don't simply lay out facts, the students tend to get more engaged in the process, and for some, it feels like a breath of fresh air when they are able to speak up and share their own ideas and interpretations."³

Today, the Blaffer's programming is more robust after a resurgence of in-person attendance following the pandemic. In 2022, we presented sixty public and educational programs, an increase of 20 percent from pre-pandemic levels. I am fortunate to be part of the Blaffer Art Museum as we position ourselves as a nexus for learning, engagement, and the generation of new ideas. Bolstered by the leadership of Steven Matijcio, who prioritizes public and educational, student-centered programming, and the increased resources of the Kathrine G. McGovern College of the Arts, the Blaffer will continue to innovate and provide value to our community. **HH**

Katherine Veneman is curator of education at Blaffer Art Museum and has overseen the museum's nationally recognized education program since 2004. She also teaches in Arts Leadership at UH and maintains a studio practice.

Both of these essays are excerpted from longer narratives included in *Two Front Doors: 50 Years of the Blaffer Art Museum*, published this fall by Blaffer Art Museum, www.blafferartmuseum.org.



Breaking the Glass Ceiling in Houston Politics: A Conversation with Former Mayor Kathy Whitmire

By Cameron Thompson

Kathy Whitmire led Houston during a ten-year, five-term tenure as mayor from 1982 to 1992.

Photo courtesy of the Kathy Whitmire Papers Collection, box 5, folder 6, University of Houston Libraries.

Kathy Whitmire brought many firsts to Houston during her rapid rise in local politics. A native Houstonian, she spent her childhood in Huntsville and Houston, attending Berry Elementary School and Marshall Junior High in Northeast Houston, before graduating from San Jacinto High School. Acknowledging her keen interest in politics in her youth, Whitmire’s path towards a political career began at the University of Houston (UH), where she received her bachelor’s in business administration and master’s in accountancy, and where she met her husband Jim. After a few years in local activism and working as a certified public accountant (CPA), she launched her fourteen-year political career with her election as city controller in 1977. By the time she departed elected office in 1992, after five two-year terms as mayor, she had led Houston through multiple decade-defining crises, while spearheading reforms in city government and leadership.

UH history major Cameron Thompson met with Kathy Whitmire via Zoom on October 29, 2022, for the UH Center for Public History’s 100 Years of Stories: Documenting a Century at the University of Houston project. What follows are excerpts from their conversation.¹

Cameron Thompson: What made you decide to major in business at UH?

Kathy Whitmire: My very first semester that I was there, I had already decided on accounting. And that had to do with the way things were in those years; [1964-65 was] my freshman year, and opportunities for women were really not what they are today. ...

I didn’t know exactly how things would open up for women. I was not involved in the women’s movement at that point, which became a very big force in my life later. I had a math teacher who I liked very much, and she helped me in developing my interest in math. But I thought, “Why is she teaching?” It’s because she didn’t have any other job opportunities, and ... that wasn’t something I wanted to do.

I looked for a way that I could get involved in something that I enjoyed, and I was interested in business, and in the financial side of business. That’s why I took that path, and it ended up being the right one for me. ... My first semester, I took a job on campus, ... It didn’t pay very much, ... but every job I’ve ever had has taught me a lot. ... [Working as a temporary employee in several offices that summer] gave me the opportunity to focus on what I could do, and how I could use my accounting degree and what the opportunities would be. ... [I] learned about specific kinds of businesses that existed in Houston — everything from a mortgage company to an oil company to a company that manages the ships in the ship channel. I started in my sophomore year taking all my classes at night, so that I could take those jobs in the daytime. ...

There was one night that the professor didn’t show up, and we were all sitting around waiting for our next class. That was when I met my husband, Jim Whitmire. He was doing what I was, working a day job and going to school at night, majoring in economics in the College of Business Administration. We started dating, and five months later, we got married. That was the next part of my extracurricular activities, starting a home

Kathy and Jim Whitmire, shown here in a pamphlet from Jim's 1973 city council campaign, shared a dual passion for business and politics.

Photo by Jack Hay courtesy of the Kathy Whitmire Papers, box 1, folder 4, University of Houston Libraries.



with Jim, and the two of us working, finishing our [degrees], and then deciding what to do next. ...

CT: When and how did you get involved with the women's movement?

KW: [In] 1973, there was a national conference that was held in Houston for the National Women's Political Caucus, and by that time, my husband and I were both involved in campaigns. ... My husband was getting ready to run for city council that year. ... [I]n January, he saw something in the newspaper about the National Women's Political Caucus holding its first national convention ... in Houston at the Rice Hotel, [and he said], "You should go to this." ...

The Harris County Women's Political Caucus had not existed before the national group [held the] convention. They organize[d] a caucus at that time, I signed up..., and within a few weeks, ... we were having a meeting of local women who wanted to get something done in politics. That became a big part of my life. ... I always assumed I would be a politician's wife, and I did do that. But it was that turning point in 1973 that caused me to realize ... that I could also run for office.

CT: You said that was in 1973, but your first run for office was in 1977. Tell me about the years in between.

KW: ... Jim, my husband, was getting ready to run for city council. He had thought about running for city controller. [He] decided ... not to run that year in '71. Someone else stepped in, ... a man named Leonel Castillo. ... [He] won the election, and he, [like the incumbent], didn't have a background in accounting. ... [Jim] was going to run and say, "You know, we ought to have a CPA in this job." ...

Jim passed away at the end of November in '76. ... He was losing his vision to diabetic retinopathy, ... having end-stage renal disease, and had to go on dialysis during the last year of his life. Because of those developments, I decided I couldn't continue my career at the CPA firm.

I resigned ... turned back to [UH] and looked into going on the faculty at the downtown campus, which had just moved into the old M&M Building on Main Street. ... [T]he faculty members had a heavy teaching load, fifteen hours a semester, because we were not expected to do research at the same time, just to focus on the students. ... That was a lot of fun. I taught advanced accounting classes there and had a chance to work with students who were going to school at night like I did, ... keeping their jobs and trying to finish that accounting degree [to] become CPAs.

[Teaching] was something I enjoyed doing, but ... I had the political bug. As my husband's health declined, he did tell me that he thought I ought to run for office, and ... he [encouraged] me to look in that direction. Right before his passing ... Jimmy Carter was elected president, and Carter appointed my friend Leonel Castillo to be the head of the Immigration Service. ...

When Leonel got the appointment, the city council had a big fight over who they were going to appoint for the interim basis, and they finally decided to appoint someone who would agree not to run for reelection; that left it as an open seat. ... I ran on, "We ought to have a CPA for city controller." But another CPA was also running, ... and he and I ended up in the runoff. ...

Whitmire distributed cards like this one emphasizing her business experience as part of her campaign for city controller in 1977.

Her victory marked the first time Houstonians elected a woman to citywide office.

Photo courtesy of the Kathy Whitmire Papers, box 1, folder 17, University of Houston Libraries.

CT: What was your experience like as city controller?

KW: It was my dream job because I had a chance to be in the business world and learn about a lot of different industries and a bit about government accounting. Because Jim ran for city council twice, we had done some research on the city's finances. ... I was very excited to be the elected person who was responsible for producing those financial statements and overseeing the staff that did that work.

I had things that I wanted to emphasize. One was that most cities don't have an elected city controller. New York does, and at that time Minneapolis did, but there weren't many others. I thought it was a good system because it created an independent watchdog over the city's finances. What I emphasized in my campaign was not only that I had the professional experience but that I would be an independent voice. ... [That] didn't make me very popular with the city council because they kind of were a backroom in operation ... There were no women on the city council at the time, so they considered me an outside troublemaker who didn't fit in with the way things were at City Hall. But that did not slow me down because I had a lot of supporters. ...



Many Houstonians hosted bustling events in support of Whitmire's campaign. The jovial atmosphere of these events reflected the hopeful attitude she and her supporters held during the race.

Photo by John C. Lindy courtesy of the Jack Drake Collection, box 3, folder 1, University of Houston Libraries.

CT: What was your process in deciding to run for mayor in 1981?

KW: That was a very tough decision to make ... [B]eing city controller was my dream job and ... being able to break that glass ceiling of being the first woman elected to anything in city government, and then, two years later, ... no one ran against me; that was pretty amazing. City council was expanded from eight members ... to fourteen [that year, and] ... the first two women were elected. ...

I was enjoying what I was doing. I felt I was making a difference. ... If I wanted to run for mayor, I was going to be challenging Jim McConn. He and I were good friends at the beginning, but he was in a lot of trouble because he had some scandals in his administration, and he had [many] people wanting to run against him. ... I knew that odds might not be in my favor by taking on the incumbent, and I was having to give up the job of city controller. I thought long and hard about that. ... I had to face the fact I might lose. ... I decided that I enjoyed my teaching career so much that, if I did lose, I was going to enroll in a Ph.D. program and go back into education. But I didn't, and the rest is history.

I was running because I felt we could be making our tax money go further, which had not been a focus of [McConn,] and that my experience with the city finances would allow me to get some things done that were not getting done. ... I wanted to have a detailed capital improvements budget, which had not been done. ... City Council members just decided amongst themselves in the backroom, and then they would bring forward the projects. ... I wanted to have public hearings. ... I wanted to bring about some reforms in the police department. ... [The department] had been through several police chiefs. ... [R]eforms needed to be made in the civil service laws, and we needed to have more focus on professionalism and more accountability for police misconduct.

I thought there needed to be more transparency about the way contracts were awarded because there were many contracts that were being awarded for millions of dollars without any kind of competitive system. ... Bringing accountability to the city was the thing that I wanted to stand for.

As it happened, ... there were twelve other people besides me who decided to run against Mayor McConn and with so much opposition, [he] did not make it into the runoff, and that opened up the opportunity for me to be successful in that campaign. ... A lot of things just fell into place in terms of the people that I was able to recruit to work on my campaign. ... Until the runoff, we didn't raise nearly as much money as several of the other candidates ... but we had the energy and the enthusiasm of the volunteers. ... [B]y 1981, the women's movement had come a lot further and there were a lot of people interested in seeing the first woman elected to the mayor's office in Houston. ...

CT: What were your biggest accomplishments as mayor?

KW: The most significant decision that I made in my entire ten years ... was to bring in Lee Brown as the police chief because we never would have been able to make the improvements in the police department that we did had we not taken that step. ... The other accomplishments we had in



Kathy Whitmire delivers her inaugural address in 1982. She became the first woman elected mayor of Houston.

Photo courtesy of the Jack Drake Collection, box 3, folder 1, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.



Kathy Whitmire stands with Lee Brown (center front) and members of her staff, celebrating his first day on the job. Whitmire's appointment of Brown as the city's first African American chief of police highlighted her efforts to increase diversity in city government.

Photo courtesy of Kathy Whitmire's staff and Twila Coffey.

our administration were improving our emergency preparedness. We were hit with Hurricane Alicia right towards the end of my first term in office, and ... we learned a lot about [our] lack of preparedness. ... [We] went through a revision of ordinances and restructuring of our civil defense activities, ... and that's been important because there's been even more weather and hurricane issues since then.

The development of the capital improvement program was another accomplishment that I was very proud of because the program didn't have much planning to it beforehand. It was basically a "pork barrel" program where each city council member got to decide on some things that they wanted. [I]nstead, ... we put together a long-term plan ... for capital improvements. We held hearings in every council district to let people have input before the council finally adopted it, and we passed ... a number of bond elections as a result. ...

We made some major reforms in our ambulance system, and ... I give a lot of credit to councilmember Eleanor Tinsley who [spearheaded that]. ... We upgraded our emergency medical service, brought in medical supervision for it, and got the technology set up so that a lot of lives were saved.

CT: What were some of the biggest challenges during your time in office?

KW: The biggest challenge was the economic downturn; there's just no doubt about that. That started in my first term, right at the beginning of my second year in office. ... Reporters started asking me, "Well, Mayor, what are you going to do about the fact that the economy is in trouble, and we're starting to lose jobs in Houston?" And I said, "Well, I'm really focused on trying to bring some reforms here at City Hall, and I really thought Chamber of Commerce would take the lead on working on turning the economy around." Well, that was the wrong answer. I had that one played back to me a thousand times.

[I] learned what it takes to be a leader in political office and in a large organization. While I was focused initially on the

city government, ... I had to learn that an equally important part of my responsibility was to provide community leadership. ... Whatever problem is facing the community [it] is something that the mayor and other political leaders have to give priority. ...

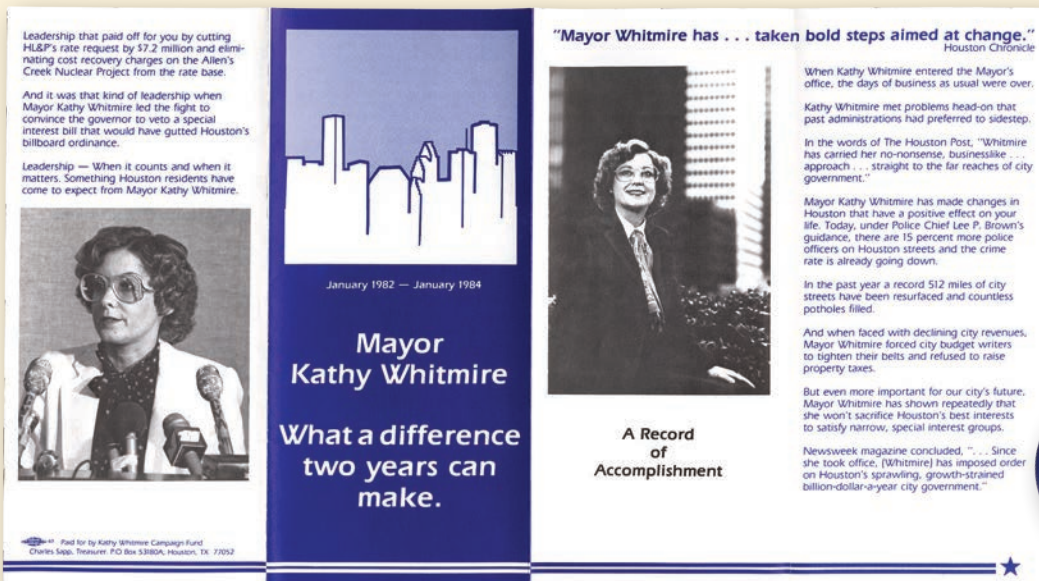
Another issue that came up that required public leadership was the AIDS epidemic. ... [U]ntil my first term in office we had not even heard of it. I had a lot of support, always, from the gay community in Houston because I believed in openness and participation for everyone. ... I can't even begin to tell you how many friends, people that I knew well, and people who worked on my campaign died of AIDS because, at the beginning, everyone who got AIDS was dying. It was a very long and difficult process to get anything done.

Ed Koch was Mayor of New York [City] the same time that I was mayor, and I can recall him bringing the [U.S. Conference] of Mayors together in New York to try to develop some strategies of what we could do. So many big cities were just being



Eleanor Tinsley, right, served in Houston's city government for decades, most prominently as a vocal member of the city council. She and Kathy Whitmire, shown here in 1982, paved the way for more women to run for and be elected to political office in Houston.

Photo courtesy of the Jack Drake Collection, box 3, folder 1, University of Houston Libraries.



Kathy Whitmire often took questions from the press during her time as mayor, as seen in this campaign pamphlet. These interactions offered valuable opportunities to show Houston residents the role she played in solving problems.

Photo courtesy of the Kathy Whitmire Papers, box 2, folder 16, University of Houston Libraries.

devastated with the AIDS epidemic, and it was creating a lot of fear in the community. [We were] dealing with that fear, ... trying to provide resources for people who were suffering, and to try to encourage something to be done nationally. That was something that I ultimately got involved in, mostly through the U.S. Conference of Mayors. ...

CT: It's good to hear that mayors around the country, yourself included, took the initiative on that.

KW: Ultimately, we did because no one else was, and we were the ones who were dealing with it on the front lines. I remember a woman volunteer ... saying, "Well, Kathy, I can't see that you've taken any leadership on this issue." So, that really brought it home to me. ... The county was managing the healthcare system, and of course, the private sector was managing the healthcare system, and the city didn't have a direct role. And yet, we did because we have a Public Health Department. Just as it has to deal ... with COVID-19, the Public Health Department has to be the one to take a stand and say, "No, here's what the facts are." ...

In my last term in office, [another challenge was that] we had two freezes in Houston that were colder than ever before. ... [Houston] didn't get down to single digits and stay there for four or five days at a time, and yet, two years in a row, that happened. From the city government point of view, it was horrifying. ...

We didn't have the foresight back in those years to really see that this was a process ... that there were reasons that we were having weather disasters that were worse than we'd seen before.

CT: What advice would you give people my age, about getting into local politics?

KW: I think everybody needs to be involved in politics, both locally and nationally. That is what democracy is based on, the participation of the citizens. ... You can run for office, or you can work on other people's campaigns, or you can give

money, or volunteer time to campaigns or issues. ... There is no limit on the ways that you can get involved, and if you don't, ... then you're just allowing somebody else to make all those decisions for you.

In the decades since her mayoral tenure, Kathy Whitmire has continued to promote her values. She pursued her teaching career at Rice University, Harvard University, and the University of Maryland. Though she moved to Hawaii, where she lives with her husband Alan Whelms, she remains active in local politics there with a strong focus on environmental protection. **HH**

Cameron Thompson is a student at the University of Houston, where he studies history and political science, with a focus on the intersection of the American legal system and American society. He served as an intern for the 100 Years of Stories project in the Center for Public History and *Houston History* magazine.



Kathy Whitmire and members of her staff met for a friendly softball game between "Whitmire's Winners" and the press corps team. Whitmire's decade as mayor relied heavily on the support of her loyal staffers.

Photo courtesy of Twila Coffey.

PHI SLAMA JAMA: TEXAS'S TALLEST FRATERNITY



By
Daniel
Melian
with
Steven
Miller

The 1982-83 University of Houston Cougars. Front row, left to right, Reid Gettys, Eric Dickens, Alvin Franklin, David Rose, Derek Giles, and Renaldo Thomas. Back row, Benny Ander, Gary Orsak, Larry Micheaux, Dan Bunce, Akeem (later Hakeem) Olajuwon, David Bunce, Clyde Drexler, and Michael Young.

Photo courtesy of UH Athletics.

Beginning in 1981, the University of Houston (UH) basketball team with its ground-breaking style of play drew sold-out crowds and became must-see TV. The team's performance on January 4, 1983, sparked *Houston Post* writer Thomas Bonk to give the team a fitting name – Phi Slama Jama – based on its ability to dunk over its opponents. Bonk thought, "It's college, so if you had a college fraternity, what would a dunking fraternity be named?" After considering several possibilities, he landed on Phi Slama Jama, "and it worked."¹ The term became a sensation as people nationwide tuned in to watch the leading Houston Cougars, and it has remained as iconic as the team itself.

The UH basketball team rose in popularity for two reasons: the team's talent epitomized the caliber of many professional teams, and their style of play was fast. In general, basketball teams at the time played more deliberately than today and ran a half-court offense. By contrast, the Cougars tried to score in under ten seconds,

leading to many fastbreak points – especially dunks. This was significant because the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) banned dunking from 1967 to 1977, stating the dunk "was not a skillful shot."² The Cougars made it a hallmark of their success.

Team Building (1981-82)

In 1981, UH Athletics set its sights on building a contending NCAA Division I basketball program, not yet knowing the Cougars' future potential. Coach Guy Lewis, a former UH player (1946-48), was in his twenty-fifth year as head coach, and big-name players like Clyde Drexler, Rob Williams, Larry Micheaux, and Michael Young led the team to numerous victories. The team's more notable wins that season included a game against the sixth-ranked Iowa Hawkeyes on December 19, 1981, that the Cougars won comfortably, 62-52, elevating them to the eighteenth-ranked team in the Associated Press

*Olajuwon to Clyde,
back to Olajuwon for
the SLAM DUNK!!*

(AP) Top 25. On February 8, 1982, the Cougars played at The University of Texas at Austin where they defeated the twelfth-ranked Longhorns, 77-63. The Cougars triumphed five days later at home in Hofheinz Pavilion against the eighth-ranked Arkansas Razorbacks, revenge for Arkansas's domination over Houston earlier in the season.

After putting up a 20-6 record in the regular season, UH advanced to the Southwest Conference (SWC) tournament in Dallas versus the Texas A&M Aggies on March 3, 1982. Rob Williams led the team and went 9-13 with twenty-five points from the field, meaning all shots excluding free throws. One element that took their opponents by surprise was the play of Hakeem Olajuwon, who came off the bench early in the first half. He finished the game with ten rebounds, twelve points, five blocked shots, and two steals in just twenty-two minutes of play.³ After an 89-76 win, the Cougars advanced on a nine-game winning streak.

The consecutive UH tournament victories ended against Arkansas. After the teams split two games in the regular season, the Razorbacks implemented a defensive game plan that prevented the Cougars from making any layups in the first half. Houston kept the game close until the 7:55 mark in the final half, when Arkansas extended its lead, and the Cougars fell 84-69.⁴

Despite the loss, Houston qualified for the NCAA March Madness Tournament. As a sixth seed in the Midwest region, UH went on an improbable run as the team beat eleventh-seeded Alcorn State, third-seeded Tulsa, and second-seeded Missouri before making it to their first Elite Eight since 1969. Two days later, the Cougars defeated Boston College 99-92 in the Checkerdome, St. Louis, Missouri. Williams led the team with twenty-five points while shooting 9-17 from the field.⁵

This victory propelled the Cougars into the Final Four against the daunting, top-seeded North Carolina (UNC) Tar Heels team that included future basketball great, Michael

Jordan. UNC jumped off to a 14-0 lead and never looked back. Although Houston tried to claw its way back, the team only shot 36.8 percent from the field in the second



Larry Micheaux playing center for the Coogs, fends off West Texas opponents while going up for a shot.

Photo courtesy of *Houstonian*, 1982, Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

Michael Young drives up the court in a game against SWC rival Arkansas. Young was inducted into the UH Hall of Honor in 2004.

Photo courtesy of *Houstonian*, 1982, Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries.



half. Lynden Rose led the team going 10-15 while Young and Olajuwon shot a combined 2-10. After the game Coach Lewis emphasized that the team had several returning players, and UH would be back the next year.⁶

Key Players in the Birth of Phi Slama Jama (1982-83)

In the 1982-83 season, when Bonk coined the moniker Phi Slama Jama, the Cougars put up a 31-3 record, went undefeated in SWC play, and advanced to the first national title game in program history. Coach Lewis's team was led by future NBA Hall of Famers, Olajuwon and Drexler and returning players, Young and Micheaux, who had played a significant role in the team's success.

Guy V. Lewis was born in Arp, Texas, in 1922 and grew up loving basketball. After serving in World War II, he enrolled at UH where he was the starting center until he graduated in 1948. Lewis returned in 1953 as an assistant basketball coach, and UH named him head coach three years later. He won a school record 592 games, reached the Final Four five times, and received AP Coach of the Year honors in 1968 and 1983.⁷



Clyde Drexler was born in Houston, Texas, on June 22, 1962. Drexler was not heavily recruited

Phi Slama Jama made its way onto the fan gear, with the tagline Texas' Tallest Fraternity.

Photo courtesy of *Houstonian*, 1983, Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

Coach Guy Lewis was known for carrying his signature red and white checked towel during games. Lewis was inducted into the Texas Sports Hall of Fame in 1994, National Collegiate Basketball Hall of Fame in 2007, and the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2013.

Photo courtesy of UH Athletics.



out of Sterling High School nor was he on the Cougars' radar until a Texas Tech coach mentioned Drexler to Lewis. In 1980, Drexler had already verbally committed to Texas Tech, but after Lewis personally visited Drexler's home and offered him a scholarship, Drexler signed with UH, where he would play with his friend Michael Young.⁸ Drexler was a perfect fit for the style of play Lewis demanded.

One of Phi Slama Jama's brightest stars, Hakeem Olajuwon, was born on January 21, 1963, in Nigeria, where he grew up in Lagos with his parents and three brothers. In his early years, Olajuwon was a soccer goalie, developing his agility and footwork. He started playing basketball in high school where he gained the notice of international coach, Christopher Pond, who identified talent for U.S. university athletic departments. During a title game in Angola, Olajuwon put on such a great performance that Pond urged him to play in the United States and secured a verbal commitment from Lewis so the U.S. Embassy in Nigeria could issue Olajuwon a visa. Olajuwon planned to try out for St. John's University, University of Louisville, and University of Houston.⁹

In January of 1981, Olajuwon landed in New York to visit St. John's and immediately disliked the cold winter weather. He approached an airport worker and asked which of his three schools had weather most like Nigeria. Olajuwon then boarded a plane to Houston, which felt right. "Moving from Nigeria to Houston was so natural," he recalled. "I went to boarding school in Nigeria so coming to Houston, was the same kind of campus lifestyle."¹⁰

Apex: The Houston Cougars (1982-83)

The Cougars started the 1982-83 season with five straight wins until they dropped back-to-back games to the Syracuse Orange and the number-one-ranked Virginia Cavaliers. The losses helped spark a comeback as the Cougars won twenty-six straight games and went undefeated in the regular season.

On January 2, 1983, the team dominated against University of the Pacific winning 112-58. Young scored a career high twenty-nine points and went 14-22 from the field. Olajuwon made all his shots from the field, scoring eighteen points, and Drexler went 5-11 from the field, tacking on thirteen total points.¹¹

Pacific's twenty-nine turnovers and the Cougars' ten slam dunks precipitated Thomas Bonk's article and his creative moniker, Phi Slama Jama, signifying the team's ability to dunk. UH went on to claim the SWC tournament championship.

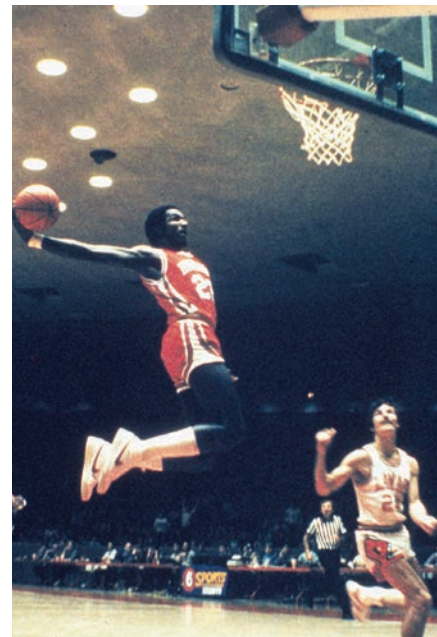
The Cougars earned a number one seed in the NCAA March Madness bracket and were ranked first in the nation after going 27-2 overall and winning the SWC. The Cougars beat Maryland, Memphis State, Villanova, and the number-two-ranked Louisville Cardinals. The game against Louisville on April 2, 1983, showcased what dunking meant for the future of basketball, with Texas's tallest fraternity, Phi Slama Jama, going up against Louisville's Doctors of Dunk. Drexler and Olajuwon led the team with twenty-one points each, and the game ended with a 94-81 Cougar victory, thrusting the Cougars into their first national title game.¹²

Although heavily favored to win the NCAA tournament, UH fell to the North Carolina State University Wolfpack (NCSU) 52-54. The loss was heartbreaking for the UH players and fans. Basketball spectators nationwide, however, called it one of the best college basketball games ever played.¹³

The End of a Dynasty (1983-84)

Clyde Drexler declared for the NBA draft following the Cougars' national title loss, but eight UH players committed to staying in the program, including Olajuwon, Young, Alvin Franklin, and Reid Gettys.

The Cougars started the 1983-84 season with a rematch of the previous year's NCAA Final and lost to unranked NCSU 64-76. Seasoned pros in following losses with wins, the



Cougars won twenty-six of the next twenty-nine games, ending the season 32-5 overall and ranked fifth in the nation. Once again, Arkansas proved the

Clyde "The Glide" Drexler exemplified Phi Slama Jama basketball. Here he demonstrates the abilities Lewis sought in his players.

Photo courtesy of UH Athletics.

Cougars' toughest SWC tournament competition. In the last game of the regular season on March 4, 1984, the twelfth-ranked Razorbacks defeated the Cougars 68-73, but the Cougars returned the favor a week later, defeating Arkansas 57-56 in a nail-biter to claim their second straight SWC title.

Houston earned a second seed position in the Midwest Region bracket of the March Madness tournament, playing Louisiana Tech, Memphis State, Wake Forest, and Virginia on their way to their second consecutive title game. Olajuwon led the team in rebounds all four games and scored the most points in three of them. Young led the team with seventeen points in the semi-final game versus Virginia.

Once again, Phi Slama Jama made a deep March Madness run, meeting the Georgetown Hoyas, led by future NBA Hall of Famer Patrick Ewing, in the finals. Franklin led UH in points with twenty-one, and Olajuwon had nine rebounds, but Houston fell short of the championship, losing 75-84. Fordham University's coach at the time, Tom Penders, who later coached the Cougars (2004-2010), recalled, "I remember feeling really bad for Coach Lewis. He had been to the Final Four. It was his third trip there. I was rooting for the Cougars."¹⁴ This marked the end of an era for Houston Cougar basketball as Olajuwon declared for the NBA draft in the summer of 1984.

The Legacy

Phi Slama Jama undoubtedly left its mark on Division I college basketball though the team fell just short of checking off the final thing on its to-do list: winning a championship. Nevertheless, from 1981 to 1984, the Cougars had advanced to two straight national championships and three consecutive semifinals, gone 88-16 overall, and earned an AP Coach of the Year award.¹⁵

After thirty years as head coach of the Houston Cougars, Guy Lewis retired in 1986. He was inducted into the UH Hall of Honor as a player in 1971 and as a head coach in 1998. Coach Lewis's UH resume featured a 592-279 record, five NCAA Final Four appearances, fourteen March Madness tournaments, and six SWC titles.¹⁶

Many players from the Phi Slama Jama era went on to play professionally. The Denver Nuggets drafted Rob Williams in 1982, the Chicago Bulls drafted Larry Micheaux in 1983, and the Boston Celtics took Michael Young in the first-round of the NBA draft in 1984.¹⁷ All three played in the NBA before joining European leagues.



Olajuwon remains virtually untouchable as he handles the ball with ease, luring Louisville opponents.

Photo courtesy of UH Athletics.

Drexler and Olajuwon also had bright futures ahead of them. The Portland Trailblazers drafted Drexler in 1983, and the Houston Rockets drafted Olajuwon first overall the following year. Olajuwon led the team to its first NBA championship in a seven-game series against the New York Knicks in the 1993-94 season and was named MVP. The Trailblazers traded Drexler to the Rockets in 1994, reuniting the college teammates. The two proved they were still a force to be reckoned with as the Rockets swept the Orlando Magic in the 1994-95 NBA Finals. The victory meant Olajuwon and Drexler had finally brought Houston a championship as teammates.¹⁸

The accolades soon followed. Drexler was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2004. Olajuwon, the first player to record 2,000 blocks and 2,000 steals in an NBA career, was inducted in 2008. Both had their numbers retired at UH and with the Houston Rockets, and both are listed among the fifty all-time greatest players in the sport.

During the next decades, Cougar basketball did not generate the level of excitement that inspired Bonk's Phi Slama Jama moniker until Kelvin Sampson joined the team as head coach in 2014. Between 2017 and 2023, the Cougars won at least twenty games in six consecutive seasons. Coach Sampson led the team to Sweet Sixteen, Elite Eight, and Final Four appearances in the NCAA tournament from 2018-23. They won two American Athletic Conference (AAC) tournament championships and four season championships, while Sampson was named ACC Coach of the Year four times. In 2023, UH had two players, Jarace Walker and Marcus Sasser, selected in the first round of the NBA draft, a milestone the Cougars had not achieved since 1984 with Olajuwon and Young.

The team's recent successes have resurrected the moniker Phi Slama Jama in spirit and on fan merchandise. Fans watch the new generation of players win games surrounded by banners showing the retired numbers of Drexler, Olajuwon, and Young. As Houston fans recall the 1981-84 squads, they cheer the current Cougar team looking to make its mark on history, now that UH has entered its first season in the Big 12 with promising talent, a seasoned coaching staff, and the city behind them. **HH**

Daniel Melian is a junior psychology major at the University of Houston whose career goals include helping young adults who struggle with depression and other issues.

Steven Miller is a senior history major at the University of Houston.

Jim Nantz was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, and relocated multiple times as a young boy. He went to high school in New Jersey prior to attending the University of Houston (UH) where he was recruited as a member of the golf team. During his junior year as a radio and television broadcasting major, he got his first opportunity with KTRH radio and Houston's CBS affiliate, KHOU 11, where he did studio work covering local sports. Then, he became an anchor at KSL-TV in Salt Lake City. While in Utah, he also broadcast Utah Jazz basketball games and did play-by-play with Steve Young for Brigham Young University football games. In 1985, the national CBS Network offered him a job, and he has been there ever since, covering golf, the National Football League (NFL), and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Men's Basketball Tournament. He has called six Super Bowls, thirty-eight Masters' tournaments, and thirty-seven NCAA basketball tournaments, with his final one taking place in 2023. Nantz is a proud Houston Cougar and now resides in Tennessee and California.

In November 2022, UH history student and sports enthusiast Steven Miller had a dream come true when Jim Nantz agreed to be interviewed for the 100 Years of Stories: Documenting a Century at the University of Houston project. The two discussed Nantz's time at UH, how it molded him into a successful sports broadcaster, the Cougar basketball program, and UH Athletics' move to the Big 12 Conference.¹

Steven Miller: What led you to the University of Houston and how would you describe your time there?

Jim Nantz: I came to the University of Houston in the fall of 1977. I was introduced to the school by a former famous golfer who played on national championship teams for the legendary coach, Dave Williams. His name was Ron Weber. ... He made a phone call and said, "I think you should take a look at this kid. He's got some game, but what he really wants to do is to come to school to study sports broadcasting." The next day Coach Williams



The Man Calling the Shots: A Conversation with UH Alumnus and Sports Commentator Jim Nantz *By Steven Miller*

Jim Nantz is recognized as a major voice for the sports world and the University of Houston family. A multi-E Emmy-award winner, he was inducted into the Sports Broadcasting Hall of Fame, and the Pro Football and Naismith Memorial Basketball Halls of Fame. He received an Honorary Doctorate of Human Letters and the Distinguished Alumni Award from UH.

Photo courtesy of UH Athletics.

it can't happen. You've got the game that is suited for that course. You have the passion, the desire, [and] the ability." In 1992, he won the Masters. If I was to say that I wanted to work for CBS one day, ... which I said quite often, my teammates and friends made me feel like that was completely

attainable and believable. They helped me get there. My goal was to one day broadcast the Masters, the NFL, and the Super Bowl, and all those dreams have come true. They wouldn't have if I wasn't at the

David Williams coached UH Men's Golf from 1952 to 1987, winning sixteen national championships and becoming a collegiate golf legend. Nantz credits Williams and the golf team's support for his early development as a sports commentator. In 1980, the UH men's golf team won the Southwest Conference championship. Standing left to right: Ray Barr, John Horne, and Fred Couples; and kneeling: Terry Snodgrass, Coach Williams, and Blaine McCallister.

Photo courtesy of Houstonian, 1980 Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries.





In 1979, Nantz (seated second from the right) lived in Taub Residence Hall, which was part of the original Quad dormitory complex.

Photo courtesy of Houstonian, 1979 Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

University of Houston around people that were positive, supportive, and emboldening me to maximize my abilities.

SM: It sounds like you were with some influential people. You said that you always wanted to be a part of sports broadcasting. Where did you get that passion?

JN: ... For me, it was watching sports events at home, listening to the voices of my youth, and just [being] completely awestruck at their ability to tell a story and take me places I could only dream of visiting. ... They made the world feel like it was small and that people from different cultures were so similar to ours. ... Live television in my youth was different from live television today. ... Back in my days as a young boy growing up and even in my college years, the world seemed like a very spacious and faraway place. Your ability to be able to see it all sounded a bit far-fetched, but I had people at Houston who supported what I was thinking. They were all in on what I wanted, and they helped me get there.

SM: Today, the hot topic around the university is the basketball team. How would you say the Phi Slama Jama days [1982-1984] influenced college basketball?

JN: The [UH] basketball program ended up being my entry way into the business. My golf coach, Dave Williams, introduced me to Guy Lewis, the legendary Hall of Fame basketball coach. Coach Lewis asked me to be the public address announcer at what is now called Fertitta Center [formerly Hofheinz Pavilion.] ... I was telling people to stand for the national anthem, introducing starting lineups, and all that went with that job. ... It also led me to hosting Guy Lewis's television show. ... That was a big opportunity for a kid, just a sophomore in college. So, the basketball program ... was my gateway to my career.

We are a basketball program with a deep and rich history. It is all connected from Elvin Hayes and Don Chaney [the first Black UH basketball players] in the sixties ... to

Phi Slama Jama teams, which was my time in school with Clyde [Drexler], Hakeem [Olajuwon], Michael Young, Larry Micheaux, Alvin Franklin, Benny Anders, Rob Williams, and Reid Gettys. These were great, great friends of mine, still to this day. I gave Clyde his nickname, "Clyde the Glide." ... To see the program that they helped rise to such prominence and to see it return, we're a bunch of proud Cougars today.

SM: Love to hear that. If I'm not mistaken, this is your last year calling the Final Four.

JN: It is, and I hate to give anything up. I'll still maintain my NFL role with Tony Romo and golf, but after thirty-seven years calling the NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament and being a part of it, it's time someone else [got] the opportunity. ... I'm enjoying the ride, ... but I got to tell you, I'm enjoying it a lot more now that our basketball program has been Elite Eight, Final Four, [and] Sweet Sixteen the last three years. We're in a good place. ... It feels like my youth all over again.

SM: Do you see any similarities between the 1982-84 teams and now? Basketball has changed so much since then.

JN: You have got to remember back when Phi Slama Jama was around, we didn't have the three-point shot. That didn't come into college basketball until 1987. The game was radically changed by that, but I know this, we're tenacious. [UH basketball coach] Kelvin [Sampson] has his team fighting for every loose ball. We're always a great rebounding team. ... I love the way this team plays. It's a scrappy bunch that is always prepared and that is always fighting for everything.

I'm proud of the way we play, and it all starts with Kelvin. ... When he first arrived, his belief was that we had the potential to come back again. ... We were really left for dead. We went thirty years without even competing in the NCAA tournament. Then Tommy Penders got us back into the tournament [and] started building up the program. But along comes Kelvin, ... and he's faithful to the old guard from the UH. It's a family business with him, which I love. ... I've always felt like we as Cougars are united, so we need a basketball program that embodies the vibe of the school.



While still a student, Jim Nantz hosted Coach Guy V. Lewis's show on Houston's NBC affiliate, KPRC on channel 2.

Photo courtesy of UH Athletics.



On April 3, 2016, UH men's basketball coach Kelvin Sampson, Jim Nantz, and UH women's basketball coach Ron Hughey, shown center left to right, join student athletes at the opening of the Guy V. Lewis Development Facility for the basketball programs. Photo courtesy of UH athletics.

... We're family, and Kelvin has, in perfect harmony, brought that to our basketball team.

SM: After graduating from the University of Houston, you got a job in Salt Lake City, is that correct?

JN: Yeah ... I was working in the Houston market. I had some amazing opportunities with KTRH radio and KHOU Channel 11. ... I went to Salt Lake City a year out of college and left behind some very good jobs, ... but I felt like I needed to go sharpen my skills somewhere else. In Salt Lake City I was given the opportunity to do play by play. ... I didn't want to just be a studio host. I wanted to call games, the Super Bowl, the Final Four, and the Masters! ... [N]ot many people get to call a Super Bowl.

Out of the blue after two years [in Salt Lake City], I got a call from the network, and CBS had been running a national talent hunt. They had been taping my shows unannounced to me and asked me to come back as one of five people to audition for a role. This was in August of 1985, and fortunately... I won the audition.

SM: It's like everything you sought, you did. Can you tell me how you felt when you found out you were going to call your first Super Bowl?

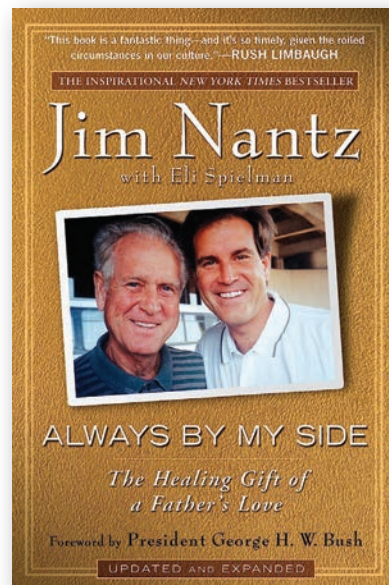
JN: That didn't happen until I was about twenty years at the network. ... [I]t's the biggest show in television, ... there will be 150 million people that are going to tune in. It is overwhelming. I try not to deal with that mentally because it's just too big. If you try to see what 150 million people look like in one place, you could not find a way to physically see that. You get to a point, though, in your career where you [can] trick your mind into not thinking that. You get skilled enough to get lost in the broadcast, and you let what you

prepared for ... just take over ... instincts, your ability, and your experience tosses all that bigness aside.

I always like to feel it doesn't matter if I'm calling the Super Bowl or the lowest-rated golf tournament we have that year, I'm still going to give it the same exact effort level. You never know who's watching, and why wouldn't you give it your best? There aren't nights off [or] broadcasts that you take off. It's live television. You have to navigate your way through it and be prepared for it.

SM: Now that you said that it made me try to imagine 150 million [people]. I just can't.

JN: Yeah, it's crazy ... I always tried to talk to one person. I've always tried looking into that lens and think I'm talking to my father. That's why I say, "Hello Friends!" because that is a line that I mentioned to my father when he was incapacitated



Jim Nantz released his book *Always By My Side: The Healing Gift of a Father's Love* in 2008, detailing his father's impact on his journey to becoming a successful sports broadcaster. Nantz's opening line, "Hello Friends," began as a special message to his father.

Photo courtesy of Penguin Random House Publishing.



Jim Nantz meets with legendary UH head coaches. Left to right: Rolan Walton, former baseball player (1947-1951) and coach (1975-1986); David Williams, men's golf coach (1952-1987); Jim Nantz; Bill Yeoman, football coach (1962-1986); and Guy V. Lewis, former player (1946-48) and men's basketball coach (1956-1986).

Photo courtesy of UH Athletics.

with Alzheimer's. I told him, "Dad, if you can remember this, ... this weekend I'm going to open up my broadcast with saying 'Hello Friends!' and that means that at that very moment, I'm talking to you. I want you to know that's my special signal that I'm thinking of you, and I love you." ... It freed me, relaxed me, and made me feel that I was talking to him. It enabled me to have a nice little moment of gratitude that I can feel that connection more with my father at that moment in time.

SM: I have to ask. Is an announcer's jinx real? You supposedly experienced one Thanksgiving Day [2022].

JN: That was one of the all-time ones! ... I set it up just perfectly ... "Don't talk to me about any silly announcer jinx, so and so hasn't missed all year long [on] a field goal or a PAT." ... [I]t was only a 29-yard attempt, ... and it goes wide left, ... you have one of the most hilarious moments in the history of the NFL ... [Many people] think I have some sort of influence on affecting that moment, obviously I can't ... [I]t's not like [the kicker] could hear me. ... It did bring on some really good reactions. My boy [Tony] Romo apologized to all the Lions fans ... but it was a great moment in television. I loved it.

SM: Can you speak on UH's move to the Big 12 and what it means for athletics and the whole university?

JN: This is a long overdue recognition for our university. ... We should have been in the conference from the get-go. ... There are a lot of people who have worked on it behind the scenes. Our athletic director, Chris Pezman, was brilliant through all of that navigating. So was Dr. [Renu] Khator, [and] Tilman [Fertitta] has been an unbelievable backer. In the decision-making process, ... we had a lot of people believing in the Cougars.

We will make the Big 12 a better conference. It is indisputable our football team will be able to compete. ... As far as the basketball program, we deserve to be in the best conference available. ... We had to upgrade everything about our athletic teams and facilities. ... [T]his affects the golf team, the baseball team, ... all the women's sports that we have at our school, which is a vital part of our history of Houston. It's going to be gigantic.

SM: One last question, what does the University of Houston mean to you?

JN: Everything. My whole life was launched as a student athlete at the University of Houston. My best friendships in life were formed there. ... I know what it's like to have been a Houston Cougar, to have had the many thrilling victories and painful losses.

I am proud of our school for all that it represents. ... We are the most ethnically diverse university in the country. I am really proud we give people opportunity and people have made their lives through our school. ... We have had tremendous leadership and vision. ... We are a family of almost 40,000 strong, but I feel like it's a family of forty strong because you know everybody. I really believe in the next half century, with all the things that are now falling in place: the growth of the school, the stature of our academic standing, our medical school commitment, our Big 12 entrance. ... the University of Houston is going to be recognized as the greatest university in the land. It's not entitlement, ... it's that the potential is there and now the potential is going to be realized. We are opening up that opportunity, and I'm just so thrilled to see it all coming into existence. 🇺🇸



During the 2023 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament, Jim Nantz received proclamations from the State of Texas, Harris County, City of Houston, and University of Houston Alumni Association (UHAA). Shown left to right as Nantz receives the key to the city: UHAA president Mike Pede, Mayor Sylvester Turner, CBS Sports lead reporter Tracy Wolfson, and Jim Nantz.

Photo courtesy of CBS Sports and Nantz Enterprises.



Christine Hà had plans to go into business and finance before discovering her love of cooking and losing her sight. Today she is defying the odds as a renowned chef and restaurant owner.

Photo courtesy of John Suh.

How “The Blind Cook” Christine Hà Gathered the Ingredients for Greatness

By Katherine R. Galland

Imagine cooking without seeing the ingredients, the measuring utensils, knives, pans, or burners on the stove. Add to that, the kitchen is considered one of the most dangerous rooms in the home with house fires, burns, spills, and cuts all being possibilities that could arise. Although cooking can be enjoyable and rewarding, some people find food preparation to be a daunting task under the best circumstances, but for people who are legally blind, putting together a meal can be especially challenging. Only about 4,000 people in the United States live with neuromyelitis optica spectrum disorder (NMOSD), the condition that caused the first and only blind *MasterChef* winner, Christine Hà, to lose her vision. Hà once compared her declining vision to “looking at a very foggy mirror after a hot shower.” She navigated the *MasterChef* kitchen using a masterful sense of touch – one that might fool an audience into believing she has been blind her whole life.¹

Born in Long Beach, California, in 1979, Hà and her family moved to Houston for her father’s work when she was two years old. Although she was not fond of the city when she was young, Hà later found Houston’s diversity inspired her love for the city. Another attractive feature, she added, is that Houston has “this big city feel, but, at the same time, it has the southern charm.”²

Hà left Houston to attend The University of Texas at Austin (UT) where she received a bachelor of business administration degree in finance and management information systems in 2001 and unexpectedly found her passion. When she had to move out of her dorm, following her freshman year, Hà no longer had easy access to food, so she decided to learn to cook. She began buying cookbooks, reading recipes, and whipping up their contents. She found a love for cooking that reminded her of her mother, who died when Hà was a teenager. Hà felt inspired to return to her roots and learned to cook the Vietnamese food she grew up eating. She explained, “I enjoyed being able to make raw ingredients into something that could feed people.”

Trying everything she could afford to make, Hà’s much-loved hobby soon developed into skills that allowed her to strengthen the valuable connection between her family and culture.³



Christine with her mother and father.

Photo courtesy of Christine Hà.

After completing her bachelor's degree at UT, Hà had job offers in Austin and Houston. Reflecting on past times, she said, "I can pick a single moment that made me decide to move back to Houston." As she found herself walking through an Asian grocery store in Houston, she realized how much she missed access to the foods she loved. She explained, "This was before I got into the culinary arts. I was coming out of undergrad with a degree in business and about to work in oil and gas, but the food was what made me come back to Houston."⁴

Though Hà found she loved cooking as a hobby, and food was the reason she returned to Houston, she did not immediately enter the culinary scene. Instead, she pursued a master's degree in creative writing at the University of Houston (UH) in 2013, which was state funded because of her impaired vision – something that was not offered for culinary school. It was at UH that she began navigating her significant vision loss.

Hà's journey with NMOSED began with impaired vision, but it was not her only symptom. Initially her vision changed in one eye, which she first thought was simply a dirty contact lens, but the issues persisted. After a few years of dealing with the change in her sight, Hà noticed bouts of paralysis in her arms and legs. "In your twenties, you're supposed to feel invincible, but while my friends were building careers, I was losing my vision and my ability to move," she remembered. She eventually was diagnosed with NMOSED, a disorder that attacks optic nerves and nerves in the spinal cord. She described her vision loss as making her feel like a fish out of water at UH, and said, "I had just learned to read braille, to navigate with a white cane, and figured out the public transportation system to get from home to campus."⁵

When Hà could no longer drive, she utilized METROLift to get to campus, which allowed her to schedule when and where she would be picked up, so she did not have to worry about navigating other aspects of Houston's public transportation system. Although she did not have to deal with



Hà competed, judged, and appeared as a guest on various cooking competition shows before being a cohost on a Canadian cooking program, Four Senses, for four seasons.

Photo courtesy of Varner Productions LTD.

transferring between trains or buses, METROLift required Hà to schedule her rides two hours in advance, which meant planning ahead. Although she had access to on-campus accommodation through the Center for Students with Disabilities (now known as the Justin Dart Jr. Accessibility Center), a variety of difficulties persisted.



Chef Tony Nguyen, Christine Hà, and John Suh, Christine's husband and business partner, collaborated to open Xin Chào, a modern Vietnamese restaurant, in 2020.

Photo courtesy of Xin Chào.

Hà recalled being thankful for her small class size in the graduate program and believed that navigating larger classes would have been more difficult. She worried about some of the decorative fountains, at least one of which did not have a railing around it then – and still does not – which meant she could step or fall in when walking on campus. When reflecting on UH's accessibility at the time, she noted that Manhattan is easier to navigate.

While completing her master's degree and coping with NMOSED, Hà auditioned for *MasterChef*. She attended not expecting to win, hoping simply to return home with some useful content to write a story. Nevertheless, she was chosen to compete, and won that season. Ever humble, Hà explained her mantra in life is to "hope for the best but to expect the worst" and that she would have been happy if she finished each day simply knowing that she did her best and gave it her all.



Christine found a love of cooking as a hobby that reminded her of her late mother. Here, the two enjoy a trip together in 1985.

Photo courtesy of Christine Hà.

Hà's insecurity during the competition can partially be attributed to her vision loss, as she had no way to evaluate how successful the other contestants were in the heat of a challenge. This forced her to focus on herself and her abilities, putting her best foot forward. Unlike the other contestants, she had to cook using intuition, but it paid off for her. Her win and presence on *MasterChef* propelled her culinary career forward into judging on *MasterChef Vietnam* in its third season as well as co-hosting a Canadian cooking show, *Four Senses*. Hà led the show alongside *Top Chef Canada* winner, Carl Heinrich for fifty-two episodes from 2014 to 2017.

When discussing Hà's time on *MasterChef*, judge and Michelin-starred Chef Gordon Ramsay said, "The lady has an extraordinary palate, a palate of incredible finesse. She picks up hot ingredients, touches them, and she thinks about this image on the plate. She has the most disciplined execution on a plate that we've ever seen. But the palate is where it's just extraordinary. And honestly, I know chefs with Michelin stars that don't have palates like hers."⁶

Advocating for those with disabilities is particularly important for Hà, a discovery made after her *MasterChef* win on September 10, 2012. Following the show's completion, she realized that many people viewed her success as a chef, and her overall spirit, to be very inspirational. Since then, she has channeled this inspiration throughout her career, often speaking at events during National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October. She explained the importance of normalizing the discussion about accessibility, stating, "[Disability awareness] is still a conversation that a lot of people are uncomfortable or ashamed of having." She hopes that by being vocal she will inspire awareness, which will hopefully inspire legislation to remedy many issues that disabled Americans face.⁷

Though there may be many people who are not currently living with a disability, Hà pointed out, "Our population is constantly aging, so at some point we will all know someone who is disabled, whether it be our parents, our grandparents, our friends, even our children." The needs of people with disabilities cannot properly be addressed if they lack avenues to express themselves. Thus, Hà constantly pushes



An example of Hà's palate is her signature "Mom's Eggrolls" a dish she offers at her Houston restaurant *The Blind Goat*.

Photo courtesy of The Blind Goat.

and many other things." She went on to say, "I'm excited to be part of this initiative and to hear how others living with NMOSD define themselves, outside of the condition. For anyone who is part of a rare disease community, it's a shared diagnosis that brings us together, but I think it's through our individual triumphs and journeys that we can really learn from one another."⁹

Beyond her advocacy work, Christine Hà now splits her time between restaurants that she co-owns with her husband and business partner, John Suh, in her beloved city of Houston. *The Blind Goat*, which reopened in spring 2023 at its new location in Spring Branch, offers "food that suits chef Hà's goal of casual 'nhau' dining, of the sort you'd find at Vietnamese street or seaside joints," notes *Houston Chronicle's* Alison Cook.¹⁰ In 2020, the restaurant was a James Beard Award semifinalist for the best new restaurant in the country.

Xin Chào, on the other hand, offers a contemporary take on Vietnamese food using locally sourced ingredients. The spot is more upscale and has the duality of being a neighborhood spot as well as a place to celebrate special occasions. It was a semifinalist for the James Beard Award in 2022. Recently, Hà created a limited time ice cream flavor in collaboration with Van Leeuwen for their Montrose store. Inspired by her favorite childhood snack, "Bananas and Cheese" is made of Gouda mascarpone cheese with banana jam swirl, "plus some chocolate chips for a lil' extra."¹¹

The FOB Whole Fish at Xin Chào is a daily "fresh off the boat" market fish selection.

Photo courtesy of Xin Chào.





Christine Hà's first cookbook is a New York Times bestseller.

Photo courtesy of Christine Hà.

Hà's culinary success shows no signs of slowing down. With two booming restaurants and several awards under her belt, this Houston chef continues to flourish, fusing local influences and cultures. In June 2023, she and husband, John Suh, launched a sandwich shop, Stuffed Belly, steps from The Blind Goat in Spring Branch. Bao Ong reports on the new eatery, "[T]hey're departing from a playbook of classic and modern riffs on Vietnamese cuisine." Hà told Ong, "We love sandwiches because it's simple comfort food. ... I've also always wanted to break out of the mold of banh mi. I didn't want to be pigeonholed into Viet sandwiches." Stuffed Belly is a drive-through concept restaurant offering deliciously executed classics, including smashburgers and chicken and egg sandwiches accompanied by expertly seasoned tater tots.¹²

Hà still loves cooking but indulges in other creative endeavors to "keep her mind fresh" off the job. She enjoys reading, and writing, and has used that creativity along with her skill set from her master's in creative writing to secure multiple publications, including a *New York Times* bestselling cookbook, *Recipes from My Home Kitchen: Asian and American Comfort Food* released on May 14, 2013. Additionally, she is writing a memoir and a second cookbook in which she hopes to focus on cooking intuitively, an essential for her and a valuable skill for people looking to become proficient in their kitchen.

As a chef, writer, and person, Christine Hà's love for her community and her desire to inspire radiates through



The drink selection at The Blind Goat offers an array of familiar favorites in addition to innovative new combinations, such as the popular, taro colada.



Hà's vision for her first Blind Goat location in Bravery Chef Hall was a "place to kick back, enjoy the everyday, and celebrate the joys in life, both big and small."

Photo courtesy of Christine Hà

everything she does. She has built popular socializing spots through her restaurants, emphasized the beauty of life through her writing, and shown everyone that if you put your mind to something, nothing can stop you from achieving your goals. She has persevered through her life-changing vision loss and shined. Her story sends a powerful message to us all – sometimes in life you need to put your head down and focus on you,

sometimes you need to hope for the best but prepare for the worst, and other times you need a little love and a lot of good food to pull you through. **HH**



Christine Hà turned her favorite childhood snack into a menu item, bananas and cheese ice cream crumble.

Photos courtesy of The Blind Goat.

If you visit the University of Houston's Student Center South on a Monday, you might run into a group of students running the "Dawah Dollar Mondays" table event. They ask passing students one question about Islam, and if the participant answers correctly, they win cash.

The University of Houston Muslim Student Association (UHMSA) hosts the Dawah table as a form of community outreach and education. The association has existed at the University of Houston (UH) for approximately six decades; however, the organization's history has seen little coverage in yearbooks and school newspapers. Nevertheless, the Muslim Student Association has substantially impacted Houston, which boasts the largest Muslim population in Texas.¹

The introduction of Islamic thought in Houston came through the African American-led nationalist and religious movement, Nation of Islam (NOI), which differed in certain ways to mainstream Islam. African American Muslims created the first mosque in Houston in 1945 in a barbershop owned by Charlie Boyd. Barbershops soon became a way to spread the word about the NOI in Third Ward. The location of this Muslim community moved from place to place to accommodate their growing numbers, even settling in the historic El Dorado Ballroom for a time.²

The first permanent mosque, Masjid Al-Islam, opened in 1978 in a pre-existing building on Bellfort Avenue that formerly served as the First Church of Christ, Scientist. When Third Ward Muslim community members first set

A Pioneer of Local Diversity: University of Houston's Muslim Student Association

By Laura Mullis Brown

their sights on this building, they lacked the funds to buy the property. With the help of a generous donation from world champion boxer Muhammad Ali and his manager Jabir Muhammad, congregants purchased and quickly renovated the building as a mosque to fit their Islamic



Boxing champion Muhammad Ali donated money to establish Houston's first mosque.

Photo courtesy of John Matthew Smith, and Wikimedia Commons.

practices. The mosque served the community for decades, until Hurricane Ike damaged it in 2008.³

Ahmed Sharma, a Fox 26 reporter and UHMSA alumnus, was one of the first to bring this story to light. "The sad truth is, nobody knew [about the first mosque's founding] except for African American Muslims because their story was passed down through their community. It kind of upset [me]. Why had nobody told me that Muhammad Ali was part of Houston history? I was fortunate that I got to help tell that story, but that wouldn't have happened without African American Muslims being so open with sharing their stories with me. ... I wrote on it, but this is their story." Sharma has

UHMSA poses with their trophies after winning first place for the 2022-23 school year at the state-wide MSA Showdown. MSA organizations from across Texas compete in sports, Nasheed (singing), fashion, and more.

Photo courtesy of UHMSA marketing coordinator Zuhayr Haq.





Masjid Warithuddeen Mohammad is named after the son of Elijah Muhammad, Honorable Imam W. Deen Mohammed. A famous Muslim American scholar and Islamic trailblazer, he rejected his father's ideologies, discontinued the aggressive NOI policies, and created a welcoming community open to all practitioners of orthodox Sunni Islam.

Photo courtesy of Miranda Ruzinsky.

made it his life's work to continue to share the stories of Houston's Muslim community.⁴

After Hurricane Ike, a new masjid opened in the same location in August 2010. It was renamed Masjid Warithuddeen Mohammad, after the leader who eventually dissolved the NOI and converted many followers to orthodox Sunni Islam. The building became the "first mosque built in the United States (from the ground up) using West African architecture."⁵

During the 1950s and the 1960s, Houston's Islamic community saw a large influx of people seeking employment in the Texas Medical Center. With this growth, graduate student Mazhar Kazi (now Dr. Mazhar Kazi) and other UH students formed the Muslim Student Association in 1964 as one of the nation's first Muslim student organizations. Its initial purpose was to hold Friday prayer, or Jum'ah, which is Islam's dedicated day for congregational worship and sermons.⁶



Arriving in the United States as a UH graduate student in 1963, Pakistani native, Dr. Mazhar Kazi, shown on campus at left, has devoted his life to Islamic leadership. He created UHMSA as UH's first Muslim organization, became a founding member of Islamic Society of Greater Houston, and wrote over a dozen books on Islamic scholarship.

Photo courtesy of Yasir Qadhi.

Just a year after UHMSA's formation, Congress passed the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 under President Lyndon B. Johnson to end the restrictions imposed by the Immigration Acts of 1917 and 1924, which used quotas and literacy tests to limit immigration to the United States from most parts of the world except Western Europe. The end of these quotas in 1965 offered opportunities for Muslims around the world, especially those from South Asia who were previously barred, to immigrate to the United States. This act also opened the door for a population boom in various U.S. ethnic and racial communities, resulting in the diversification of many local cultures.⁷

UH students became a key force in bringing together Muslims across the Greater Houston area. The Islamic Society of Greater Houston (ISGH) is currently the largest Islamic society in North America, and it credits the beginning of the Houston Islamic community to a small group of UH students and other young professionals who created a network of Muslims who gathered to pray at each other's houses because they lacked a masjid of their own. This grew



The 1982 UH yearbook shows members of the "Moslem Student Society" supporting the struggle of political prisoners and Iranians.

Photo courtesy of *Houstonian*, 1982, Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

into the ISGH by 1969. Today, it oversees twenty Islamic centers across Greater Houston as well as six Islamic schools and a Muslim cemetery.⁸

Throughout the twentieth century, UHMSA changed its organization as new students brought in new perspectives, but it never abandoned the goal of bringing together Muslim students and helping them become active in the campus community. From its early years until the mid-1980s, the organization was called the "Moslem Student Society." During this time, the group was politically active in international affairs, but members were fearful about their place on campus because of the unstable political climate. By 1979, Muslim students and approximately 2,000 Iranian students

in the Houston area were on edge. Ruhollah Khomeini, a Shi'ite religious scholar, rose to political leadership after the 1979 fall of the Shah in Iran, resulting in the formation of the Islamic Republic of Iran. During the revolution, Iranians captured more than fifty Americans at the U.S. embassy and held them hostage for 444 days in what came to be known as the Iranian Hostage Crisis. UH students protested the new Iranian government with flag burnings and various demonstrations.⁹

The *New York Times* reported Iranian UH student Ali Amoron expressed fear of leaving his home, explaining, "I am afraid someone will kill me." Non-Iranian students confirmed that these fears were warranted. Many American Muslims at UH did not approve of Khomeini's actions. On February 2, 1983, Muslim students protested Khomeini's imprisonment of his political opponents and circulated petitions at the rally to send to the United Nations.¹⁰

In addition to its political activism, UHMSA played an active role in the more festive and light-hearted affairs of the university. In the 1990 International Food Fair, UHMSA



In 2002, UHMSA hosted Islamic Awareness Day where they displayed items from their religious heritage to connect with the student body after 9/11.

Photo courtesy of *Houstonian*, 2002, Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

ranked third for its booth that sported a replica of an "ancient place of worship."¹¹

Through the 2000s, the Muslim Student Association went through its own struggles. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Muslim students were thrust to the forefront of political discussion on campus. They reported being verbally harassed and attacked, and many opted to be escorted to class for their protection. UHMSA argued that non-Muslims and Muslims were all affected by the events, and that UH students should not be harassed for their faith. To better connect with other students and promote greater understanding of the Islamic religion after 9/11, UHMSA hosted Islamic Awareness Day, featuring an educational



UHMSA members at the Dawah table event of 2022.

Photo by Laura Mullis Brown.

display. Other students continued to hold various demonstrations to voice their beliefs on how Americans should react to the tragedy.¹²

During this time of turmoil, UHMSA played an integral role in making Muslim students feel at home at UH. They held their own summer orientations for incoming freshmen and practiced traditions that continue today. For example, they started a Dawah table in the Philip Guthrie Hoffman Hall breezeway where they shared food and pamphlets and informed students about Islam. More than ten years later, the Dawah table remains a regular event for the organization. As the United States moved closer toward a war against Iraq, which began in 2003, students rallied and protested. Pro-war and anti-war sentiments were often expressed, with many Muslim students joining in anti-war protests on the one-year anniversary of 9/11. These demonstrations ended up clashing, and police were present to prevent escalation.¹³

To continue community outreach and to fight Islamophobia, UHMSA began one of its largest campus initiatives: a charity event known as the Fast-a-Thon. During the month of Ramadan, Muslims abstain from food and



UHMSA members served food to UH students who pledged to participate in the 2009 annual Fast-a-Thon during Ramadan to raise money for charity.

Photo courtesy of *Houstonian*, 2009, Digital Collections, University of Houston Libraries.



UHMSA members meet in the UH MD Anderson Library basement.

Photo courtesy of UHMSA marketing coordinator Zuhayr Haq.

drink from dawn to dusk. All students were invited to sign a pledge to fast for one day of Ramadan. Local businesses sponsored non-Muslims who decided to fast, and UHMSA donated all proceeds to charity. The 2009 Fast-a-Thon pledged its funds to Target Hunger, a Houston-based charity that assists children, families, and seniors who experience food insecurity.¹⁴ At the end of the day, the UHMSA invited participants to join them in a meal to break their fast.

Today, UHMSA continues to be an active force in the lives of Muslims at the University of Houston. Starting in 2015, UH began collaborating with UHMSA to create more halal options on campus. Halal dining options were labeled in dining halls, halal food trucks were brought to campus, and halal snack options were made available in the campus convenience stores. UHMSA also started the American Muslim Mentorship Program (AMMP), which provides professional development training to underclassmen. This includes workshops, how-to activities on creating resumes, and a mentorship program that connects members to upperclassmen and alumni.¹⁵

Muslim students have continued to make their voices heard during politically turbulent times. In 2017, UHMSA members participated in protests that opposed Executive Order 13769 signed by former president Donald Trump that prevented travelers and refugees from seven Muslim-majority countries from coming to the United States. Ahmed Sharma recalled the fear that weighed upon the UHMSA members: "What did this mean for us or our parents? ... We were all so worried about what would happen." During this time, UHMSA leaders urged students, "If you don't feel safe, keep each other around. Please walk with each other and don't leave anyone behind." These measures were much like the ones put in place following 9/11; however, this time, little backlash occurred. "Fortunately, nothing happened because people at UH are so diverse." Sharma and his peers also participated in pro-Palestine protests across the Houston area.¹⁶

UHMSA has tried to further its community outreach in creative ways like its "Muslims Heart Jesus" discussion table where they challenged passing students to guess if quotes about Jesus came from the Quran or the Bible. This encouraged further conversation and curiosity about the topic. Members have also participated in numerous philanthropic projects such as UH's charity week, raising funds through a bake sale and a game night.¹⁷

In the fall 2022 semester, UHMSA members reported that their current prayer space in the MD Anderson library basement could no longer accommodate the number of students who came for daily prayers. The A. D. Bruce Religion Center opened in 1965, a year after UHMSA was founded, but the design had no accommodations for the Islamic practice of ritual washing or a wide-open space for prayer. Today, UHMSA members meet in the library basement and are working with the Student Government Association to find a place that is more suitable for their needs.¹⁸

UHMSA has provided a space of worship and connection for UH Muslims for almost sixty years and evolved into an influential organization. Its growth and diversity reflect the expansion of the Houston Muslim population, and the organization continues to cater to the needs of the community. The group welcomes Muslims "from all backgrounds and cultures to find a supportive community," and embraces practicing students with different levels of religiosity. The UHMSA website promotes religious, social, and professional development events, public service projects, and seeks to educate the wider UH community on "what Islam truly teaches and what being a Muslim is all about."¹⁹ UHMSA remains a beacon of kinship for local Muslims and an inspiration of diversity and equality for Houstonians. **HH**

Laura Mullis Brown earned her bachelor's degree in history from the University of Houston in 2023. She enjoys going on road trips with her husband, exploring museums, and learning new recipes.



Elizabeth D. Rockwell.

Box 12, folder, 49.

All photos courtesy of the Elizabeth D. Rockwell Papers, University of Houston Libraries.

The Story Behind a Familiar Name: Elizabeth D. Rockwell's Legacy at the University of Houston and Beyond

by Katy Allred

If you are familiar with the University of Houston (UH), you have probably seen or heard Elizabeth D. Rockwell's name: the Elizabeth D. Rockwell Pavilion in the MD Anderson Library, the Elizabeth D. Rockwell Center on Ethics and Leadership in the Hobby School, the Elizabeth D. Rockwell President's Suite in the Alumni Center, the Elizabeth D.

Rockwell Career Services Center in the C.T. Bauer College of Business, and the endowed chairs in her name for the deans of the MD Anderson Library, the Cullen College of Engineering, and the College of Education.

As of 2022, Rockwell's name can be found in one more place on the University of Houston campus, in the University of Houston Libraries Special Collections.

UH archivists fully processed the Elizabeth D. Rockwell Papers, originally accessioned in 1998, and made them available for research in February of 2022.

What this donor, and I believe most donors want, is a way to make a positive difference ... We want people to anticipate and solve problems, to listen and to act wisely. We are prepared to assist the universities we love. The problem-solving is never finished.¹

—Elizabeth D. Rockwell

When archivists process an individual's collection, they slowly get to know the person through their materials, like putting together a puzzle. Because Elizabeth passed away in 2011, I never had the privilege of meeting her before processing her papers. Fortunately, though, I did meet with Nancy Clark, who was Elizabeth's cherished friend and

colleague. Clark, who currently serves as the University of Houston's Alumni Legacy Programs director, met Elizabeth in 1991 when Clark was serving as the director of Donor Relations. When I asked about Rockwell's legacy, Clark said that her philanthropic and community efforts and her career were "totally interwoven. She was all of that, and she wasn't any one [of them]. She

wasn't a person who came home and put on her volunteer hat. Everything she did was connected."² The collection bears this out, telling the story of a woman wholly woven



Elizabeth Rockwell with longtime friend and director of the UH Alumni Legacy program, Nancy Clark, 1997.

Box 12, folder 12.

into the fabric of the University of Houston and the broader Houston community from the very beginning.

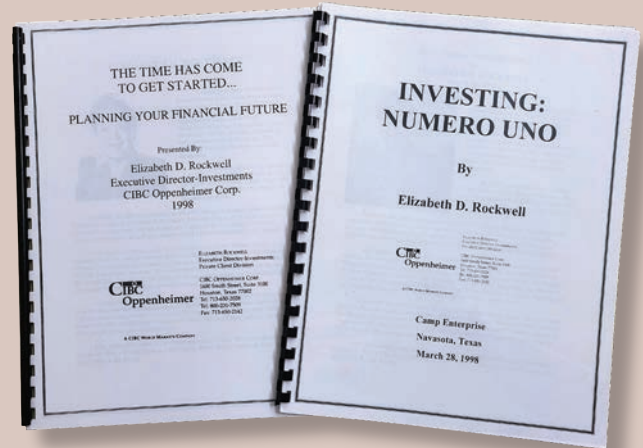
Rockwell was born Mary Elizabeth Dennis in Houston on May 19, 1921. She attended Miss Dangerfield's Kindergarten, River Oaks Elementary, Lanier Junior High, San Jacinto High School, and was a part of the first graduating class of Lamar High School in 1938. After high school, she enrolled at University of Houston, majoring in accounting and business administration.³ The student body was still largely male, and, like many places that initially excluded women, it was not always easy or pleasant for the trailblazers.

Over the years, Rockwell shared many stories with Clark about her early life, such as how she reacted to criticism of her academic abilities as a woman. Clark described one event: "She's in a geology class where there are only two females, and all the males are saying, 'Ah, you're here because you couldn't make it at Rice.' Well, you never threw a challenge to Elizabeth, so she finishes that semester, enrolls at Rice, and takes every business class they have, but it's not enough." Elizabeth reenrolled at UH to continue her studies, but ultimately did not obtain a college degree. (Happily, in 1999, she received an honorary doctorate from UH.) "She didn't finish because World War II came along, and all the men were gone," Clark continued. "But she knew they were coming back. She knew that if

she was going to get a good job, she needed to actually get out into the working world, so she went into the energy industry." Rockwell started her first job in 1944 at Shell Oil, then moved on to Standard Oil in 1945.⁴

Rockwell was singularly focused on being a career woman, but her family had expectations for her, too. "Her mom and her aunt told her, 'If you die with the name Dennis, we're going to be so ashamed of you,' so she ended up marrying ... Walter Rockwell who worked for Remington Rand," Clark said. Before the wedding, Elizabeth told her fiancé that she would never leave Houston, and that she planned to work. They married in 1951, and within six months, Walter received a promotion, and the couple moved to Boston that same year.⁵ She stayed in the northeast with her husband for a few years, but in 1954 she moved home to Houston, dissolved the marriage, and reentered the workforce.

Rockwell's career trajectory changed in 1967 when she took a position at Heights Savings & Loan. Retirement



Rockwell delivered numerous financial planning presentations such as these.

Box 5, folders 9 and 11.



Elizabeth Dennis Rockwell as a child in 1923.

Box 29, folder 41.



Sixth graders Rosemary McBride, Elizabeth Rockwell, Nancy Davis, and Sue Mottley Moursund, shown left to right, took part in the Lanier pep squad in 1932.

Box 29, folder 49.

and estate planning quickly became her true passion in the workplace and beyond; she gave presentations, workshops, and speeches frequently in Houston and around the country, even presenting before the United States Congress on multiple occasions. Correspondence with Congressman Bill Archer, photos with Congressman Eugene Keogh, copies of the Congressional Record, and the text from her presentations can be viewed in the collection.

Rockwell began working at the investment banking company Oppenheimer in 1982, entering into a partnership with John Phillips and Charles Fahy. She worked there until her retirement in 2001, although Clark says Elizabeth was not ready to go. "John had plans to travel, so he was going to retire. ...[and] she had to because there was no way she could do [everything] by herself." Rockwell left behind a legacy of many grateful clients whose futures were secured with her help. "In her office, along the windows were just bottle after bottle of champagne," Clark recalled. "She didn't drink, but she had all those [bottles] that her clients would bring to her saying, 'Just want you to celebrate with this. You changed my life.'"⁶



John Phillips, Charles Fahy, and Elizabeth D. Rockwell at the Oppenheimer office. Box 9, folder 20.

Of course, Rockwell's legacy did not end with her career. Elizabeth was incredibly invested in the success of the University of Houston and intentional with her generosity to the institution. Her contributions all promote networking and interconnectedness between UH and the surrounding Houston community – especially the Houston business world, which was what she understood best. She established the C.T. Bauer College of Business Elizabeth D. Rockwell Career Center because, Clark noted, "her friends, who were the CEOs of corporations, told her that they didn't have any place on campus to go when they wanted to interview students."⁷ The EDR Career Center helps business students connect with potential employers, and find job opportunities through recruiting events, job boards, and career planning resources.

Rockwell underwrote multiple lecture series, including Discover UH, which she hoped would be "a bridge between Main Street and Cullen [Boulevard]," where UH is located. There were forty-eight lectures in total from professors, playwrights, healthcare professionals, historians, and more. Rockwell was a no-nonsense person, and Discover UH was known for its punctuality. As an example, Clark related the following: "Gene McDavid, the CEO of the *Houston Chronicle* at the time, would tell all his friends, 'whenever I get an invitation to Discover UH, I accept right away because I know I'm going to learn something fascinating, I'm going to be able to network with top-level CEOs, and it's only going to take my lunch hour.'" Rockwell also underwrote the Elizabeth D. Rockwell Lecture on Ethics and Leadership series in 2004. In 2020, nine years after her passing, her endowment led to the opening of the Elizabeth D. Rockwell Center on Ethics and

Leadership at the Hobby School of Public Affairs, which offers scholarships and educational programming on ethics and leadership to students, faculty, and staff.⁸

Rockwell became a leading supporter of the university's libraries and archives. The first endowed chair she created was for the Dean of Libraries. "She understood it was one way that she could impact the most students because everyone uses the library," Clark pointed out. The Elizabeth D. Rockwell Pavilion (2005) on the second floor of MD Anderson Library has served as a hugely useful, centrally located event and meeting space for the campus community. Having seen the limited places available for meetings and events, "[Elizabeth] knew that that would make a difference," Clark said.⁹

Rockwell also funded archiving the Elizabeth D. Rockwell Papers in Special Collections and was involved in its curation in the early stages. The collection holds hundreds of tapes and transcripts of interviews with Rockwell and the archivists working at the time, and includes Elizabeth's personal commentary on the materials themselves.



Rockwell enjoyed needlework, such as these needlepoint Christmas ornaments that she made between 1972 and 1979. Box 47.

Much more could be said of Rockwell's contributions to UH, which make up the largest portion of the Elizabeth D. Rockwell Papers. However, Rockwell's philanthropy and interests extended beyond the university. She was extremely involved in community groups like River Oaks Business Women's Exchange Club, the Houston READ Commission, the Houston Heights Association, and the Galveston Historical

Society. She was interested in history, loved to entertain, and was masterful at needlework. She also regularly contributed to the 50 Plus column in the *Houston Chronicle*.

When I asked Clark what she liked most about Elizabeth as a person and a friend, she reflected on her pragmatism, her frugality, her excellent memory, and her thoughtfulness. Every time UH appointed a new president, "Elizabeth would give a Rolodex to the incoming spouse that had her recommendations for the best dry cleaner, the best hair designer, the best tailor – all the things that you would need to know." She was a remarkable person, and her impact on the University of Houston and the Houston community are still felt today. Clark reminisced, "Elizabeth wore so many hats: philanthropist, historian, businesswoman, community member, just a good person in Houston. I was very fortunate that our paths crossed."¹⁰ **HH**

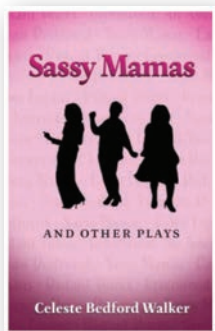
Katy Allred is the Project Archivist at the University of Houston Libraries Special Collections.

The Elizabeth D. Rockwell Papers reside in Special Collections in the MD Anderson Library at the University of Houston. Special Collections is open from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday to Friday.



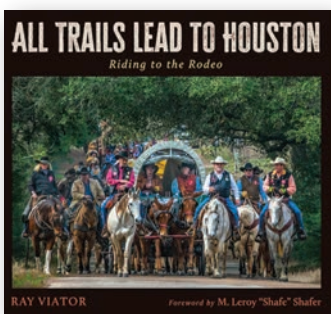
Rockwell observes the technology available during the grand opening of the C.T. Bauer College of Business Elizabeth D. Rockwell Career Center, 1997. Box 19, folder 31.

BOOKS



Sassy Mamas and Other Plays, by Celeste Bedford Walker (Texas A&M University Press, 2023). Walker is a native Houstonian and playwright who emphasizes the historical and everyday aspects of African American life. Featuring five of her most well-known plays, the book includes two related to Houston. *Distant Voices* explores death and memory in College Memorial Park, Houston's second-oldest African American cemetery, and *Camp Logan* remembers the execution of seventeen African American soldiers who rebelled against police brutality under Jim Crow in 1917.

American cemetery, and *Camp Logan* remembers the execution of seventeen African American soldiers who rebelled against police brutality under Jim Crow in 1917.



All Trails Lead to Houston: Riding to the Rodeo, by Ray Viator and foreword by M. Leroy "Shafe" Shafer (Texas A&M University Press, 2023). Viator celebrates Texas's ranching culture through the trail rides leading up to the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. His photos capture

the cowboy experience on the iconic Salt Grass Trail Ride, which started it all in 1952, and eleven other routes that culminate in a parade kicking off the rodeo season.

Thank You!



The Center for Public History Lecture Series sponsored two magazine launch events in 2023 related to 100 Years of Stories.

First, our thanks go out to panelists **John Lienhard**, **Cathy Patterson**, and **Paul Pendergraft**, and producer **Mark DiClaudio** who all contribute to the radio program *Engines of Our Ingenuity*. They enthralled the audience by discussing the ways history and technology intersect. Also, thank you to Houston Public Media for hosting the launch.

EVENTS



Through May 31, 2024: *Agents of Change: Celebrating Innovation at UH's Centennial* is an exhibit marking the culmination of the 100 Years of Stories:

Documenting a Century at the University of Houston (UH) project led by the Center for Public History, Houston Public Media, and UH Libraries.

Also on display, *Telling Stories of the Houston Region for Twenty Years*, portrays *Houston History's* progression from an academic journal to a popular magazine. Both exhibits are located on the second floor of UH's MD Anderson Library.



March 30, 2024: Old, Weird Houston shares the hidden histories of quirky and creative people, institutions, and events that highlight Houston's diversity. The Orange Show, collaborating with Archivists of the Houston Area and UH Center for Public History, bring together academics and enthusiastic laypeople for whom historical research is a passion.

Public and private archives display offbeat, rarely seen materials from their collections in a fair-style setting along with food trucks and vendors specializing in Houston-proud books, crafts, and apparel. <https://orangeshow.org>.



Second, we wish to thank UH alumni and history makers, **Gene Locke** and **Graciela Saenz**, for illuminating us about the challenges of bringing diversity to UH and Houston at the "Agents of Change" magazine and exhibit launch, and to **Grace Conroy** for discussing her work on the 100 Years project.

We are incredibly grateful to the UH Special Collections team who, over the past three years, have made the 100 Years of Stories articles and exhibit possible.



Downtown Houston at Main and Capitol, 1940.
Photo courtesy of Story Sloane III.



Emily Harris, left, and Megan Dagnall, right, received the inaugural Award for Excellence.
Photo courtesy of LaRahia Smith.

One Hundred Years

The Harris County Historical Society, 1923-2023

By Ann Dunphy Becker, President of Harris County Historical Society

On Saturday, September 22, 1923, the *Houston Post* announced the following:

Organization of the Harris County Historical Society will take place at 3 P.M. today in the rooms of the University Club, was announced by Colonel A. J. Houston of La Porte. A special invitation is extended to schoolteachers interested in Texas history. The meeting was called at the request of the State Historical Association, officials of which have asked that such organizations be formed in the many counties of Texas.

The Harris County Historical Society was founded on October 2, 1923, in honor of the eighty-eighth anniversary of the Battle of Gonzales. Early members were sons, daughters, and grandchildren of signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence or veterans of San Jacinto who had detailed knowledge of historical events. The Society's founding members were Andrew Jackson Houston, Adele Lubbock Briscoe Looscan, Clarence R. Wharton, Sam Houston Dixon, Mrs. I. B. McFarland, and Judge Lewis R. Bryan. The 1949 Roster had a membership of 334 names, including Birdsall Briscoe, George and Herman Brown, Will Clayton, Craig Cullinan, Jesse Jones, L. W. Kemp, Dr. Edgar O. Lovett, Andrew Forest Muir, Dr. Henry R. Maresh, Rev. Anton J., and Jesse Ziegler.

If you are a history enthusiast and want to join our organization, please visit our website shown below. Our monthly meetings are held from September through May on the second Wednesday evening of the month. We have met at the Houston Racquet Club for the past several years. During the pandemic, we successfully held live meetings via Zoom

to continue our mission which is: to encourage, advocate and administer the discovery, collection, preservation, and publication of historical information, records, oral histories, visuals, and other materials relating to the history of Harris County and to educate the public about the critical history of Harris County, Texas. We present exciting speakers who entertain and educate our membership and continue to publish local history.

Through Dr. Debbie Harwell's guidance, the current Harris County Historical Society board has partnered with the University of Houston Center for Public History to create an endowment, the first and only undergraduate endowment in public history at the University of Houston! A scholarship of \$1,500 will be awarded annually to an undergraduate junior or senior or a graduate student interested in general history. The inaugural award went to two students, Megan Dagnall and Emily Harris, for their well-researched public history projects related to Houston and Harris County history. We presented the awards at our organization's Centennial Celebration on October 3, 2023, a 1920s-themed event recognizing our one hundred years of advocating and preserving history for the public. Proceeds from the event will help fund the endowment for our Award for Excellence scholarship in future years. **HH**

For more information on how you can join or donate, go to our website, www.harriscountyhistory.org, or contact us via email, hchs1923@gmail.com.

Houston History is for the City

- 1 Larry McMurtry, "Love Death & the Astrodome," an excerpt from *In a Narrow Grave: Essays on Texas* (1968), reprinted with permission, *Houston History* 6, no. 3, Summer 2009, 29-31.

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- 2 Pratt, "The (new) *Houston Review*"; William Kellar, "Reflections on Houston History Magazine by Bill Kellar," email correspondence to author, June 23, 2023.
- 3 Martin V. Melosi, interview by Julian Silva, November 4, 2022, pending deposit, UH Oral History of Houston, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries (hereinafter UHOH). The Institute for Public History became a center in 2004.
- 4 Pratt, "The (new) *Houston Review*."
- 5 Marissa Ramirez, "UH Moment: 'Houston History Magazine,'" University of Houston, August 26, 2009, www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/shows/2009/08/26/16738/uh-moment-houston-history-magazine/.
- 6 Kellar, email. The magazine lists the names of advisory board members on the Table of Contents page for each issue. Click on the "Past Issues" tab on the magazine website to freely download the back issues. <https://houstonhistorymagazine.org>.
- 7 Kellar, email.
- 8 "UH Names Joe Pratt Interim CLASS Dean," University of Houston, February 26, 2009, <https://uh.edu/uhtoday/archives/2009/february-2009/022609joep Pratt-named-class-dean.php>.
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- 10 "Announcing the Welcome Wilson Houston History Collaborative," *Houston History* 11, no. 2, Spring 2014.
- 11 Monica Perales, interview by Jacob Loew, November 22, 2022, UHOH.
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- 16 Kellar, email.
- 17 Garza, interview.
- 18 Garza, interview.
- 19 David G. McComb, *Houston: A History* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981). An earlier version appeared in 1969; Kellar, email.

Philip G. Hoffman: Breaking Ground on the Modern University of Houston

- 1 "Center for Diversity and Inclusion," University of Houston, www.uh.edu/cdi/.
- 2 Lynwood Abram, "Philip G. Hoffman, UH President for 16 Years," *Houston Chronicle*, November 1, 2008; Richard Bonnin, "Philip G. Hoffman, Builder of the Modern University of Houston, Dies at Age 93," University of Houston, October 30, 2008, https://uh.edu/news-events/stories/2008/articles/oct08/1030_philip_hoffman.php.
- 3 "History," Texas Southern University, www.tsu.edu/about/history/index.html.
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- 5 *Sweatt v Painter*, 339 U.S. 629 (1950), www.oyez.org/cases/1940-1955/339us629.
- 6 Katherine E. Lopez, *Cougars of Any Color: The Integration of University of Houston Athletics, 1964-1968* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 13-16.
- 7 "Remarks Made by President Hoffman and Member of the Board," University of Houston Special Collections, January 22, 1962.
- 8 James L. Conyers, "Honoring the UH African American Studies Program's 50th Anniversary," *Houston History* 17, no. 1 (Fall 2019): 7-11; "Charles D. Churchill's Biography," The History Makers, www.thehistorymakers.org/biography/charles-d-churchill-41.
- 9 Bonnin, "Philip G. Hoffman"; Thomas R. Cole, *The Strange Demise of Jim Crow*, 1998, Thomas Cole Desegregation Papers, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.
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- 12 "Integrating Houston's Other Schools (1955-1980, Section 6)," To Bear Fruit for Our Race, Center for Public History, University of Houston, www.uh.edu/class/ctr-public-history/tobearfruit/story_1955-1980_section06.html; Lopez, *Cougars of Any Color*; "1962," University of Houston Libraries, <https://exhibits.lib.uh.edu/s/timeline/page/1960s>.
- 13 Gene Locke, interview by John Wilson, July 21, 2006, UH Oral History of Houston, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries, https://av.lib.uh.edu/media_objects/cc08hf75k_14.
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- 15 Bonnin, "Philip G. Hoffman"; "1963," UH Timeline, 1960s, University of Houston; "1970," UH Timeline, 1970s, University of Houston. Between 1968 and 1996, both the Houston Cougars and Houston Oilers played football in the Astrodome.
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50 Years of Blaffer Art Museum: A Historical Overview

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