

Civil Rights in San Antonio: WWII to Mid-1960s

CAREY H. LATIMORE, PH.D.

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About the Project

History

This report is a response to a query by the Alamo Trust Inc., in conjunction with the Alamo Master Plan Management Committee who wanted clarification on questions raised about the African American Civil Rights Movement in San Antonio and how the experiences of African Americans in our city are connected to the national African American Civil Rights Movement. Specifically, some organizations and news outlets have inquired about the status of historical structures and their connection to the national Civil Rights Movement. The building at the center of this controversy is the Woolworth Building located at the corner of Houston and Alamo Street at Alamo Plaza and what role incidents at this building may have played in the lunch counter movement of 1960.

On May 29, 2019, I entered into a contract with the Alamo Trust to “conduct a historical study of the involvement in the Civil Rights Movement of the African American community in San Antonio.” The study, funded by the City of San Antonio, that follows includes my research and presents my analysis to the best of my historical abilities.

I have entered this study without prejudice on any side as my profession as a historian demands. It is my intention to present an unbiased historical study of the Civil Rights Movement in San Antonio. I hope that this study will provide clarity to the aforementioned questions.



Carey H. Latimore, Ph. D.
Chair, Associate Professor, History
Trinity University

Carey H. Latimore is Associate Professor of History at Trinity University, where he is the Chair of the History Department. He holds a M.A. and Ph. D. in United States History from Emory University and a B.A. from the University of Richmond. A specialist on African American and Southern History, Dr. Latimore is particularly interested in the construction of African American communities from Reconstruction through the civil rights era.

His academic and public scholarship has been published in a number of venues including *Slavery and Abolition*, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, *Our Daily Bread Ministries*, *Urban Ministries*, *Austin American Statesman*, and the *San Antonio Express-News*, among other newspaper outlets. He is also a frequent commentator for various outlets on current issues such as land ownership, political identity, and religion.

An ordained Baptist minister, Dr. Latimore serves his community in a number of ways that connect his scholarly interests with his community concerns. He is currently an Associate Minister at Mt. Zion First Baptist Church, where he has been a member since 2004.

Scope

In conducting this study, I first had to focus on several large questions which I will list here:

1. What years will the report cover?
2. Should San Antonio be considered a Southern or Western city?

I have decided to focus this analysis of civil rights history in this report on the World War II era extending into the mid 1960s, even though I devote time to examining the pre-World War II era and how the African American community in San Antonio emerged during the years after the Civil War. In my interpretation, the presence of military bases in San Antonio necessitates an earlier start date for the African American Civil Rights Movement than the 1954 date that we often use. Indeed, the presence of the military industry transformed and moderated San Antonio's racial climate. I believe that the location of military bases in San Antonio and its more progressive racial views compared to other places in the South meant that, at the beginning of the traditional date (1954) of the civil rights movement, it was well-positioned to be at the forefront in the South. I have decided to end this study in the mid 1960s because this is the point at which San Antonio finally decided to pass a non-discrimination ordinance, a fact that came after Congress passed the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The second question requires much less time in this introduction. It is my opinion that San Antonio is both a southern and a western city. San Antonio's distinctness is that it has many characteristics not commonly linked to traditional Southern cities. However, in some regards its racial and ethnic makeup align it more closely with other traditional Western cities.

As you can see throughout this study, it is my conclusion that our city needs to act soon in order to preserve and to accurately tell the story of African American civil rights in our city. I hope that the Alamo Trust, City of San Antonio, General Land Office, preservation stakeholders, civil servants, and others will carefully examine this paper and take appropriate steps to preserve and present San Antonio's special heritage.

Executive Summary

Purpose

This report is a response to a query by the Alamo Trust Inc., in conjunction with the Alamo Master Plan Management Committee who wanted clarification on questions raised about the African American Civil Rights Movement in San Antonio and how the experiences of African Americans in San Antonio are connected to the national African American Civil Rights Movement. The following is a summary of my most important conclusions.

San Antonio was neither Southern nor Western.

One of the main points that this paper argues is that race relations in San Antonio do not neatly tie the city to either a traditional southern or western city. Although classified as a southern city, in some respects our city has traits more traditionally associated with western cities like Portland or Seattle, cities where segregation existed but in more less physically obtuse ways than other southern cities.

The military had a major role in civil rights.

The presence of military bases in San Antonio had a major impact on race relations. The easing of racial restrictions (not completely) in the military during the World War 2 era created an environment in San Antonio where racial collaboration was more plausible. The city's reliance on its military bases meant that the city-- at least on the surface—did not centrally rely as much on segregation as other large Texas cities. San Antonio's military bases also became a space of black political activity as African Americans who worked there had more protections giving them more coverage to engage in civil rights activism.

African Americans made significant progress pushing for civil rights from 1950 through 1960.

The Sweatt v. Painter decision in 1950 had a significant impact on civil rights in San Antonio. In this case the Supreme Court determined that the Texas State University for Negroes was insufficient because it was inadequately funded and unequal to the University of Texas Law School. This decision provided an opportunity for African American leaders in San Antonio to challenge segregation in local schools, or at least unequal funding of black schools.

The Supreme Court's Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954 determined segregation of public schools was unconstitutional brought even more changes to San Antonio. The first major changes in desegregation, however, came in public recreation, hospital facilities, and hospital staffing.

However, the push by local African Americans and other supporters to desegregate these spaces led to significant push back. Responding to these challenges, San Antonio's city council voted on June 19, 1954 to integrate public facilities with one exception-- swimming pools. The "Juneteenth ordinance" was the city's first segregation ordinance. Although the ordinance was rescinded a year later, it demonstrates that significant opposition to desegregation existed in San Antonio.

By 1959, all of San Antonio's local school districts had desegregated but the city's numerous school districts meant that its schools were not as integrated as one might think. Even in "integrated schools," however, black teachers were not hired during the early years of desegregation.

Integrating lunch counters to the failure of a Non Discrimination Ordinance.

San Antonio's success desegregating public facilities and schools by 1959 provided momentum for the push to integrate other areas of black San Antonians' daily lives. At the same time, national issues quickly drew black San Antonians into the larger civil rights landscape. In February 1960, four African American students at North Carolina A&T sat down at a F.W. Woolworth and Company lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. Black San Antonians decided that the time was right to challenge lunch counter segregation in downtown San Antonio.

San Antonio was not the first Texas city forced to deal with lunch counter protests nor were the events that occurred on March 16, 1960 the first desegregated lunch counter in San Antonio. At least one store in Corpus Christi desegregated its segregated lunch counters by 1952. Additionally, sometime in the 1950s, Sears quietly desegregated its lunch counters in San Antonio. Finally, according to some sources, some of San Antonio's lunch counters had already allowed some African Americans servicemen to be served even before 1960.

None of this is to dismiss the importance of the desegregation of seven downtown lunch counters on March 16, 1960. It was a major event in the national civil rights movement that provided the larger movement much needed inspiration at a time it desperately needed it. Nonetheless, there are some misconceptions of the event. One, the sources for this report seem to confirm that the first lunch counter entered and formally desegregated on that day was the Kress Store and not Woolworth. Two, the news pictures and reporting of the desegregation of lunch counter seems to have been staged. Local press provided little reporting of the event and most African Americans in the city probably did not know about the desegregation until after the first African Americans had been served at the Kress Store. Three, not all local downtown lunch counters desegregated on March 16. Finally, San Antonio's peaceful desegregation of lunch counters did not extend to local restaurants that largely remained segregated.

San Antonio's failure to fully integrate led African American leaders to push harder as they concluded that the only way to achieve the freedoms they desired was for the city to pass a non-discrimination ordinance.

By late 1963, however, the city had failed to pass a non-discrimination ordinance and it was clear that racial progress in San Antonio had stalled. The council would not pass a non-discrimination ordinance until after Congress and President Johnson approved the Civil Rights Act of 1964. When city council finally passed the ordinance, Ordinance 33863, in 1965, it placed San Antonio behind the tone of the nation.

Conclusion

San Antonio's civil rights legacy is secured in how for a brief moment, local leaders from all backgrounds in our city came together to forge a new vision

of equality. Coalitions of San Antonians united to peacefully make progress unheard of in most southern cities. Although the vision that many San Antonians embarked on in the 50s and early 1960s was not entirely realized, the work of many San Antonio's true leaders, many who have received very little attention even now, stands as a beacon for hope for our city even today.

Historical Background

Unlike Dallas, Houston or even its northern brother city, Austin, San Antonio has never had a very sizeable African American population. Even today, African Americans only comprise roughly 7 percent of the city's population. This percentage is almost the same as it was almost 170 years ago. In 1850, the black population of the city was only 6.7 percent, most of whom lived as slaves. Twenty years later however, the percentage of African Americans had increased to almost 16 percent. Beginning in 1880 however, the percentage of black people in San Antonio had gradually decreased. For example, in 1930 it stood at 7.7 percent.¹

Even today, African Americans only comprise roughly 7 percent of the city's population. This percentage is almost the same as it was almost 170 years ago.

As antebellum free blacks and freed persons forged lives on their own in the years after the Civil War, one of the most important things they wanted to do was to purchase land and a home. As was the case throughout the entire South (defined here as the states that seceded from the United States during the Civil War), black people moved to places that provided them space to live. In San Antonio, and throughout the entire South, African Americans had a difficult time finding skilled work and found themselves increasingly segregated into unskilled and semi-skilled occupations. White skilled laborers were apprehensive of competing with black workers and did their best to keep black skilled laborers out of jobs that they desired themselves. A similar pattern had already played out in the urban north where, after the end of slavery, black workers were forced into unskilled work even if they had the knowledge and skill to perform the tasks. For example, when Alexis de Tocqueville, the prominent French diplomat,

¹ *Federal Manuscript Census, San Antonio, 1850-1930*, Schedule 1. Also see Kenneth Mason, *Paternal Continuity: African Americans and race relations in San Antonio, Texas, 1867-1937* (PhD Dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin, 1994), 30.

visited America during the 1830s, he noted this irony. De Tocqueville stated that the “Negro [in the North] is free, but he cannot share the rights, pleasures, laborers, griefs, or even the tomb of him whose equal he has been declared; there is nowhere where he can meet him, neither in life nor in death.”² De Tocqueville continued examining that “the prejudice of race appears stronger in the states that have abolished slavery than in those where it still exists.”³

This employment pattern also occurred in San Antonio. Black San Antonians quickly learned in the Reconstruction and Jim Crow eras they were not always welcome. Many African Americans had few options of where to live, often finding lodging in low level areas prone to flooding or in alleyways. The expansion of railroads in the region helped spur a move for many white residents from the downtown centers to more suburban communities. While this trend did open up land and some jobs to black people, the rapid industrial improvements to the city also necessitated heavy construction and industrial sites. It was often in these polluted spaces that black people purchased land. At the same time the newer suburban communities created during these early postwar years more often than not had restrictive covenants in their deeds that barred African Americans from renting or owning a home there.⁴

As a result of the trends, black people found themselves segregated to the city’s westside and eastside communities, although black people also continued to live in other areas of the city. By the early 20th century, communities such as the Baptist Settlement and Newcombville had predominately black populations.⁵

Over time, the city’s eastside emerged in the twentieth century as the political, social, and economic mecca of the African American community. Although black people were a small percentage of the population in the city, the African American eastside community had significant political clout. Because black people had the ability to participate in municipal elections, their vote often served as

2 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America vol.1*, trans. Henry Reeve (New York: The Colonial Press, 1899), 364, https://books.google.com/books?id=xZfiBEzcPTEC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false (assessed December 1, 2019)

3 Ibid.,

4 Mason, 37-41

5 Mason, 41-46.

a swing vote. For example, local African American political boss Charles Bellinger, understood the power of an African American block vote. Beginning in the first decade in the twentieth century when Bellinger opened a saloon in the city, he quickly emerged as the preeminent African American political leader and negotiator in the city. Bellinger used his control in the black community to deliver votes to local politicians in return for their support of the city's black community, primarily on the city's eastside. According to some reports, Bellinger could deliver anywhere between five and eight thousand votes to politicians who Bellinger supported.⁶

Bellinger's rise occurred at a time when black people faced increasing scrutiny. Indeed, Bellinger's control over the black community must be understood within the rise of Jim Crow racism, both legal and de jure, which dealt a devastating blow to black Americans and erased most of the political and economic gains African Americans had made during Reconstruction.

Considering the plight African Americans faced in other places during the time of Bellinger's ascendancy, his success in negotiating services from the local political power structure is noteworthy. In the first decades of the twentieth century, race riots and white capping (a ritual-like practice where white farmers threatened and destroyed black property) forced many black people off their rural land. African Americans also saw a decline in their political rights. African Americans and progressive white Americans responded to this negative turn by founding a number of organizations to attempt to turn the tide. Most notable of these societies was the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, formed in 1909, and the National Urban League, established in 1910.

Even though these organizations helped somewhat, the downward spiral of race relations continued. By 1915, many black people in the South had been completely disenfranchised. Race relations in the North were bad as well, although their plight was much more de facto racism

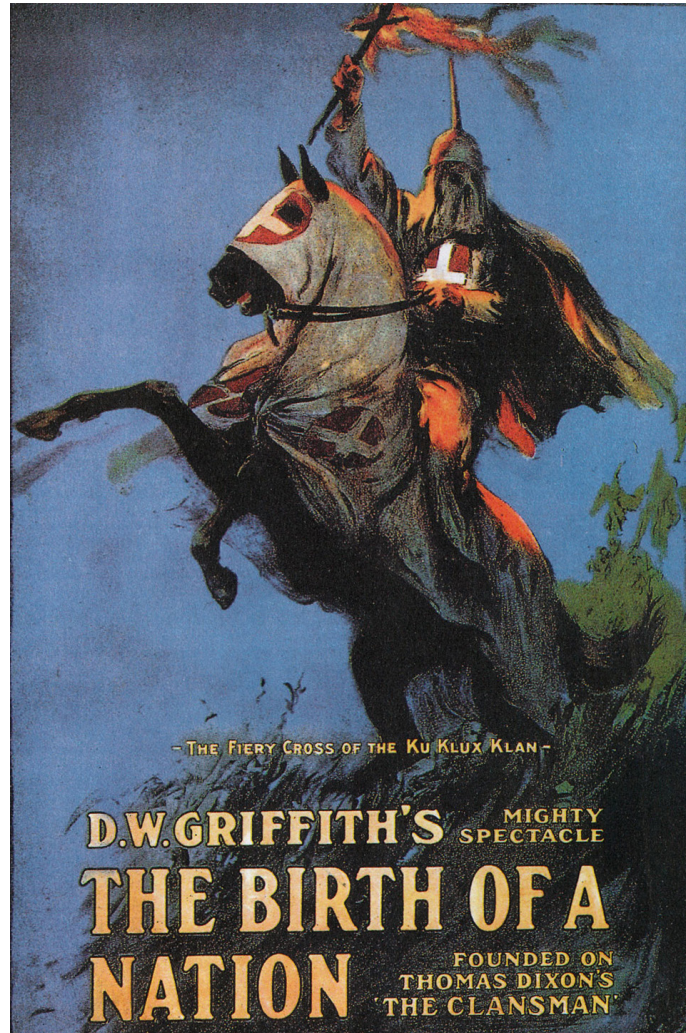


Charles Bellinger. Courtesy of Lewis Woods. Image available on the Internet and included in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107.

Local African American businessman and political operative Charles Bellinger, used his control in the black community to deliver votes to local politicians in return for their support of the city's black community, primarily on the city's eastside. Considering the plight African Americans faced during the time of Bellinger's ascendancy, his success in negotiating services from the local political power structure is noteworthy.

⁶ Mason, 188

than de jure. Making matters worse, the film *Birth of a Nation*, which came out in 1915, with its racial depictions of African Americans and negative images of miscegenation, led to a reemergence of the Ku Klux Klan throughout the nation. The film only served to increase racial violence.⁷ Responding to these challenges,



Wikipedia contributors. (2019, December 19). The Birth of a Nation. In Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Retrieved 15:50, December 20, 2019, from https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=The_Birth_of_a_Nation&oldid=931528999

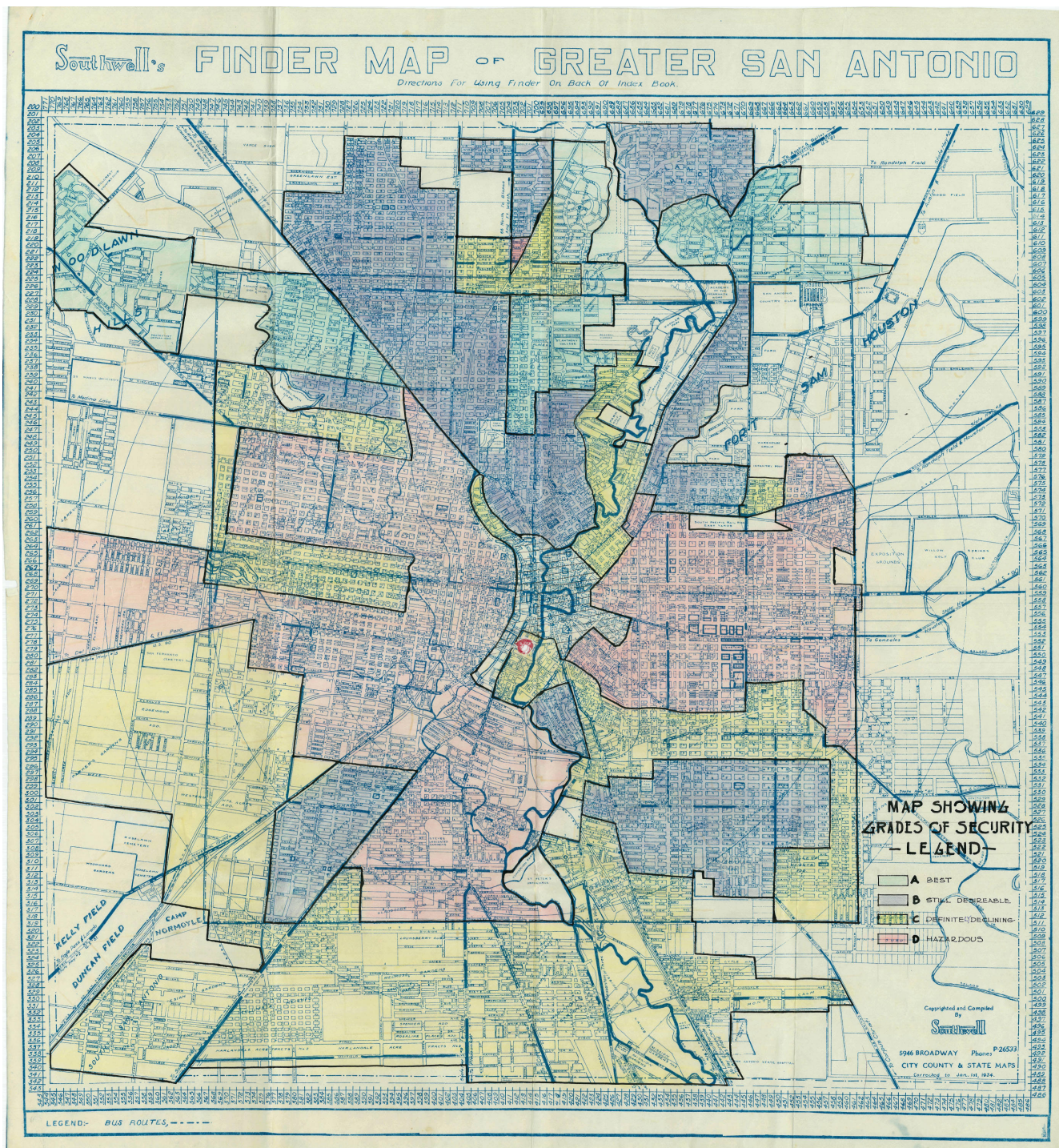
Theatrical release poster for The Birth of a Nation, distributed by Epoch Producing Corporation, 1915.

in 1917 San Antonio became the second city in Texas to start a local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. El Paso was the first city in Texas to start one in 1915. Starting around World War I, black Southerners, frustrated with their downward plight, began to leave the South en masse in what we now refer to as the Great Migration.

⁷ James Weldon Johnson opinion piece in *New York Age* in *The Selected Writings of James Weldon Johnson* vol. 1 ed. Sondra Kathryn Wilson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 12. Dick Lehr, *The Birth of a Nation: How a Legendary Filmmaker and a Crusading Editor Reignited America's Civil War* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2014).

The social and political lives of African Americans continued to decline during the Great Depression. However, some of the policies adopted by the Roosevelt administration to help poor Americans only served to enhance the racial gap. Redlining, a policy that gained prominence after the creation of the Federal Housing Authority in 1934, was a policy of denying loans or insurance to people who lived in areas deemed to be a financial risk. With the assistance of the Home Owners Loan Coalition, areas of cities were color coded to determine the financial risk of loans. Considering that many of the areas of the new suburbs (such as Alamo Heights and Olmos Park) had restrictive covenants that effectively banned African Americans from living there, the policies of the Home Owners Loan Coalition actually made San Antonio more segregated by the World War II era. Furthermore, by allocating “green” marks to the new suburbs that effectively banned African Americans and allocating “red” marks to the areas with more minorities, in particular to the city’s west and east sides, the areas that had the largest black populations. This meant that these areas were deemed high risk, making it basically impossible for the people who lived there to have access to loans. This policy pushed the people who lived there to seek out loans from unscrupulous persons or loan sharks who often charged extraordinarily high interest rates. Indeed, federal government policy not only helped San Antonio as a city become increasingly segregated, but it also led to the city becoming increasingly economically unequal. Black people in the more underserved parts of town found it difficult to acquire loans, while the residents of the more affluent parts of the city (almost always white) increased their prosperity. Indeed, the influence of these forces continues today as San Antonio has the distinction of being perhaps the most economically unequal city in America.⁸

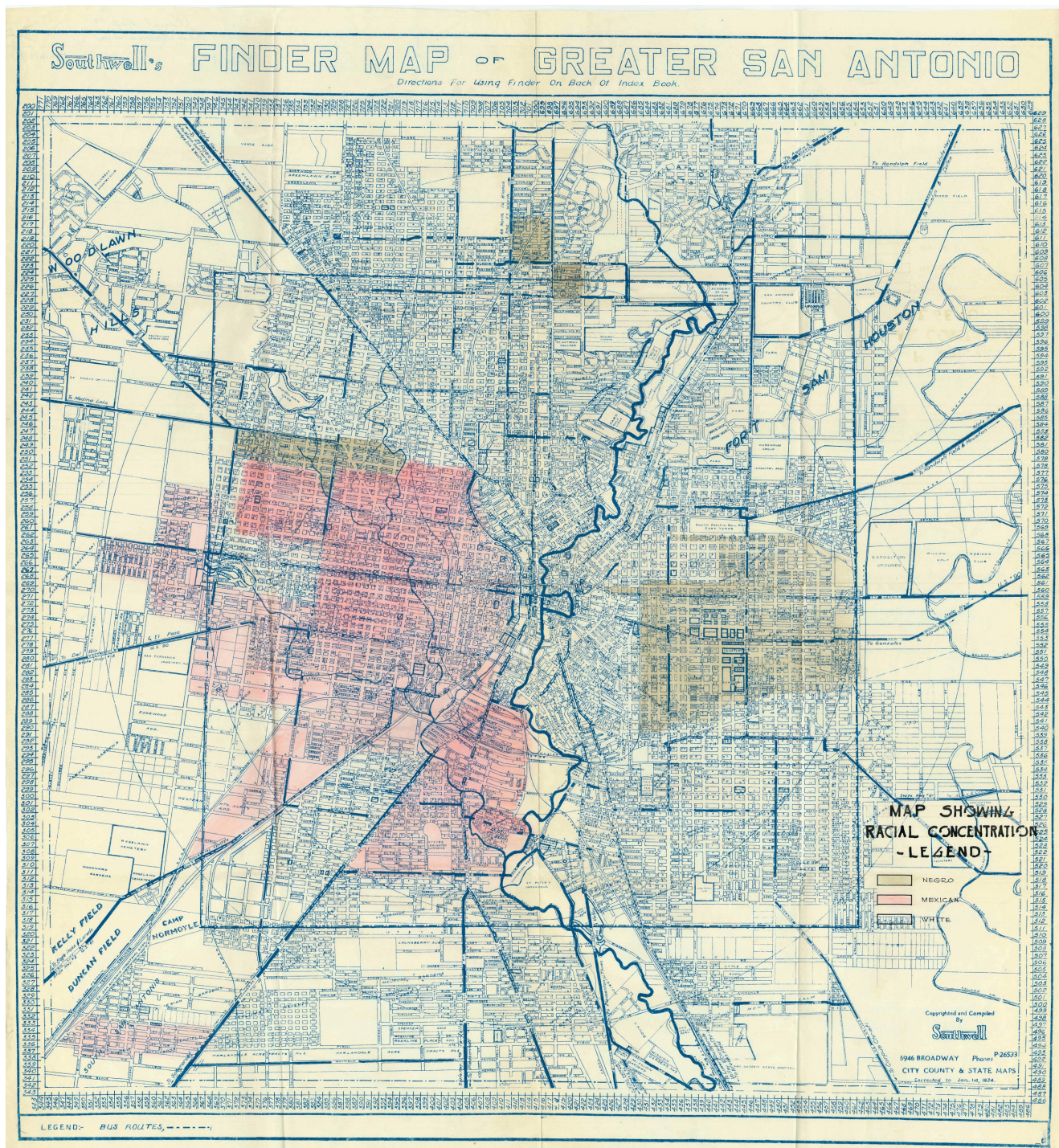
8 Shelley D. Kofler and Jan Ross Piedad, “San Antonio Leads the Nation in Economic Inequality, TPR, June 17, 2017, <https://www.tpr.org/post/san-antonio-leads-nation-economic-inequality>, assessed July 30, 2019; Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of how our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Company, 2017)



Courtesy UTSA Special Collections

HOLC San Antonio City Survey Report 1 Exhibit A: Grades of Security

In this HOLC map of San Antonio, note the four designations. Green meant that the HOLC viewed the neighborhood as exceptional for investment. A blue line meant that the HOLC viewed the neighborhood as safe and still worthy of investment. Yellow meant that the neighborhood was declining but still worth some investment. Red was used to classify the neighborhood as not worthy of investment.



Courtesy UTSA Special Collections

HOLC San Antonio City Survey Report 1 Exhibit B: Racial Concentrations

Please note that the designations closely follow racial and ethnic neighborhoods with Mexican and African American neighborhoods "redlined."

Even though they faced increasing scrutiny of their political and social privileges, the first few decades of the twentieth century in particular, saw a flowering of black culture. Increasingly segregated, black people throughout the United States turned inward to strengthen their own communities. While academics have often focused on the emergence of a black cultural and social movement in larger cities such as Harlem and Chicago, the same trends happened in San Antonio. San Antonio became a place of tremendous community, artistic and creative expression particularly from the 1920s throughout the 1940s.

As part of this transformation, black San Antonians established local and nationwide social clubs and organizations, uniting the community. Some of the most prominent included the Knights of the Pythias, the Van Courtlandt Social Club, PALS Social Club, the Pullman Porter Social Club, and the Greater La Golondrina Girls. Black churches also served not only as religious centers, but places of social and economic transformation. Some of the more prominent black churches included the Second Baptist, Mt. Zion First Baptist, Zion Star, and St. Paul's United Methodist Church. The most prominent schools in the city included St. Philip's Junior College and the schools located on the city's eastside including Wheatley High School.

The Carver Library, once located on Hackberry Street at the Colored Community Center but currently located on E. Commerce Street, served as a hub of artistic and intellectual expression. The community also had two theater groups. The Negro Little Theater, led by John Hemmings, put on well-reviewed plays throughout the city. For example, in 1932, their production *In Abraham's Bosom*, directed by John Hemmings, was presented at the Municipal Auditorium. Members of the city's political and social elite, including then San Antonio Mayor C.M. Chambers, went to view the play. Chambers was so impressed by the play that he characterized it as a "most praiseworthy event."⁹ *In Abraham's Bosom* was also noteworthy because the play explores the ways black people were overcoming current obstacles and forming

⁹ San Antonio *Register*, April 29, 1932, San Antonio Register in The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/explore/collections/SANR/accessed December 5, 2019>.

their own identity.¹⁰ These themes are traditionally associated with the Harlem Renaissance, a movement that flourished during the 1920s. The *San Antonio Register*, the city's major African American newspaper of the period noted that the play explored "the struggles and sacrifices of the negro for education and good citizenship."¹¹ Myra Hemmings, the wife of the aforementioned John, organized the Phyllis Wheatley Dramatic Guild Players during the 1920s. As a result of the artistic community in San Antonio, Spencer Williams, the preeminent black film director of the 1940s, produced and filed several films on the city's eastside with black actors from the city.



Funeral Program for Myra D. Hemmings, December 14, 1968, pamphlet, December 14, 1968; (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph246982/m1/1/?q=myra%20hemmings%20accessed%20October%2018,%202019%20accessed%20November%2026,%202019>), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting San Antonio Public Library

One of the founders of Delta Sigma Theta sorority when she was a student at Howard, Myra Hemmings also helped found the Phyllis Wheatley Dramatic Guild Players in San Antonio. She was a collaborator with the pre-eminent African American director, Spencer Williams. She was an actor in three of his films during the 1940s.

Black San Antonians did not have to leave the community to see the best films and performances since they had the Cameo Theater on Commerce Street and the Ritz Theater in Denver Heights. Black people could also attend some white theaters, such as the Majestic, but the theater was not integrated. Throughout the 1950s however, African Americans were not allowed into the Aztec theater.¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., For an examination of the meaning of "New Negro" please consult Alain Locke forward to *The New Negro, An Interpretation*, edited by Alain Locke (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925), ix.

¹¹ *San Antonio Register*, April 29, 1932, University of North Texas Libraries. [https://texashistory.unt.edu/explore/collections/SANR/accessed December 5, 2019](https://texashistory.unt.edu/explore/collections/SANR/accessed%20December%205,%202019)

¹² Interview with George Winn, 2002, UTSA Special Collections.

The Beginning of a Movement: A Double V in San Antonio

In 1942, an African American named James Thompson wrote an opinion piece to the *Pittsburg Courier*, an African American newspaper. In his editorial, Thompson provided a number of reasons that African Americans should indeed fight in World War II:

Like all true Americans, my greatest desire at this time, this crucial point of our history; is a desire for a complete victory over the forces of evil, which threaten our existence today. Behind that desire is also a desire to serve, this is my country, in the most advantageous way. Most of our leaders are struggling that we sacrifice every other ambition to the paramount one, victory. With this I agree; I also wonder if another victory could not be achieved at the same time.

Being an American of dark complexion and some 26 years, these questions flash through my mind: 'Should I sacrifice my life to live half American?' 'Will things be better for the next generation in the peace to follow?' 'Would it be demanding too much to demand full citizenship rights in exchange for the sacrificing of my life?' 'Is the kind of America I know worth defending?' 'Will America be a true and pure democracy after this war?' 'Will colored Americans suffer still the indignities that have been heaped upon them in the past?' These and other questions need answering.¹³

¹³ James G. Thompson, "letter to the editor," *Pittsburgh Courier*, originally printed January 31, 1942; reprinted April 11, 1942, page 5 as reprinted in, <https://www.pcsb.org/cms/lib8/FL01903687/Centricity/Domain/7034/james-thompson-letter.pdf>, assessed December, 5, 2019.

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Thompson's words rang true with the direction that black San Antonians pursued in the World War II era. African Americans, including those in San Antonio, wanted something more than victory over fascism. They wanted to see racism and unequal treatment eradicated.

African Americans were not the only people interested in addressing America's race problem. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's election in 1932 led to some gradual changes for the Democratic Party and the nationwide conversation on race relations. Although Roosevelt had to deal with segregationists in his party, some members of his cabinet were racial progressives who helped promote the ideals of racial liberalism throughout the nation. While many of the New Deal policies helped further segregate black Americans some policies did help African Americans. Roosevelt's wife Eleanor, who was much more progressive than him on racial issues, helped him build connections to the black community. President Roosevelt even maintained a "Black Cabinet." Although the people who comprised this group were not official presidential staff, they served as a think tank that assisted the President on issues important to the black community. At the same, they stirred up support for Roosevelt's New Deal within the black community.¹⁴

Another major step forward for African Americans occurred when A. Phillip Randolph threatened to lead a march on Washington in 1941 to protest segregation and employment bias in the defense industry.¹⁵ Randolph's proposed strike concerned President Roosevelt, who worried

14 Derrick A. Bell Jr., "Brown v. Board of Education and the Interest-Convergence Dilemma," *Harvard Law Review*, 93 (Jan. 1980):m518-33; Eric Schickler, "New Deal Liberalism and Racial Liberalism in the Mass Public, 1937-1968," *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 1 (2013): 75-98. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43280690>.

15 David Lucander, *Winning the War for Democracy: The March on Washington Movement, 1941-1946* (University of Illinois Press; 2014)

about how a strike of hundreds of thousands of blacks in Washington might look to the international community with Nazi Germany asserting its way throughout Europe. In response, Roosevelt negotiated with Randolph to see if the strike could be postponed. As a concession, Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802, which stated that there would be no discrimination in the defense industry.¹⁶ Although the order was not perfect, it was a start. The order was strengthened two years later by another Roosevelt executive order, 9346, which gave the Fair Employment Practice Committee independence, a major victory for African Americans who worked in the defense industry.¹⁷

In the aftermath of the war, President Harry Truman continued the work Roosevelt started when he issued Executive Order 9981, which finally integrated the armed services. In a city such as San Antonio with Fort Sam Houston, Brooks Air Force, Kelly, Lackland, Medina, and Randolph bases, the importance of these presidential executive orders cannot be overestimated.¹⁸ In 1941, San Antonio had passed an ordinance apparently responding to Roosevelt's order outlawing discrimination in the Armed Forces against Latin Americans or persons of Latin ancestry.

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¹⁶ U.S. President. Executive Order, 8802, Fair Employment Practice in Defense Industries, June 6, 1941.

¹⁷ U.S. President. Executive Order, 9346, Remembering our Nation's Commitment to Equality during World War II, May 27, 1943.

¹⁸ U.S. President. Executive Order, 9981, Establishing the President's Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, July 26, 1948.



Courtesy UTSA Special Collections



Portrait of Ruth Ann Bellinger, MD, photograph, Date Unknown; (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph598568/m1/1/>; accessed October 18, 2019); University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting University of Texas Health Science Center Libraries

African Americans in San Antonio had little to no ability to change the status quo with the exception of through the military or defense industries. This did not mean that African Americans did not try to make changes but they were often unsuccessful. In 1951, Hattie Briscoe (top), a teacher at Wheatley High School was fired for a racial incident described as “insubordination.” The black community protested and even formed a committee for Teacher Security led by community and NAACP leaders Ruth Bellinger (bottom) and Rev. John D. Leon Walker. All of the community protests in support of Briscoe were unsuccessful.

In the years leading up to the Brown decision in 1954, however, African Americans in San Antonio had little-to-no ability to change the racial status quo, with the exception of through the military or defense industries. This did not mean that African Americans did not try to make changes, but they were often unsuccessful. San Antonio’s racial climate was one of segregation without any legal ordinance of segregation ever passed by the city. This fact meant that local custom defined the racial climate in the immediate post-war period.

San Antonio’s racial climate was one of segregation without any legal ordinance of segregation ever passed by the city.

While it is clear that San Antonio was much more advanced, in terms of race, than most southern cities, life in the city for African Americans was certainly not as progressive as it was in most northern cities. Indeed, black San Antonians found themselves segregated in almost all public spaces including movie theaters, check-out counters, etc. Black teachers did not have it easy either, even though they taught in black schools. Black teachers could be fired from their positions if they challenged the racial status quo. For example, Hattie Briscoe, a teacher at Wheatley High School, was fired for a racial incident described as “insubordination” in 1951. In this case, the black community protested and even formed a committee for Teacher Security led by community and NAACP leaders Ruth Bellinger and Rev. John D. Leon Walker. All of the community protests in support of Briscoe were unsuccessful.¹⁹

¹⁹ “School Hiring Data Sought,” *San Antonio Express*, December 6, 1951, https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLD-NEWS&t=pubname%3A10EEA20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/year%3A1951%211951/mody%3A1206%211206&sort=rank_%3AD&fld-base-0=alltext&maxresults=20&val-base-0=briscoe&docref=image/v2%3A10EEA20F1A545758%40WHNPX-161F38630085B26D%402433987-161DA1E0090E9459%403-161DA1E0090E9459%40; and “Backers of Ousted Teacher Will Carry Fight to Austin,” *San Antonio Express*, December 14, 1951, https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLD-NEWS&t=pubname%3A10EEA20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/year%3A1951%211951/mody%3A1214%211214&sort=rank_%3AD&fld-base-0=alltext&maxresults=20&val-base-0=Briscoe&docref=image/v2%3A10EEA20F1A545758%40WHNPX-161F386A41A32A17%402433995-161DA1F0D147120A%4047-161DA1F0D147120A%40; Interview with Hattie Briscoe, February 21, 1997, UTSA Special Collections. Briscoe would later enter St. Mary’s Law School and become a prominent lawyer in the city.

Throughout the city, black students were forcibly segregated into the districts of the city where they lived. If an African American student happened to live in an ISD with a small black population and not enough for a segregated school, that student was forced to attend a black school in another district. This forced migration continued after high school.

Charles Anderson was probably the first African American accepted as an undergraduate at St. Mary's in 1955, but his acceptance was later rescinded for reasons that are still unclear but hint of a racial undertone. Giving up a scholarship to Loyola University in Louisiana to attend St. Mary's, he wanted to live in San Antonio. St. Mary's decision to not allow him to register forced him to attend St. Philip's Junior College instead.²²

The situation for African Americans in San Antonio was difficult because there were no four-year colleges or universities that accepted African Americans.

22 While St. Mary's regularly celebrates Hattie Briscoe's admittance to its law school, its resistance to rectifying Mr. Andrews situation remains problematic; Interview with Charles and Irma Anderson, 12-4-2017; Interview conducted by Carey H. Latimore and Nina D. Nevil.

its early years. Harry Burns, a World War II veteran, stated “I began to exercise my rights with the GI Bill for education...but there was no school in this area that I could attend that would admit me to the school of accounting...I began to apply at the local colleges—St. Mary’s, Trinity, and so on and they would not accept me.”²³

The Sweatt v. Painter decision in 1950 had a significant impact on education in San Antonio. In 1946, the University of Texas Law School had refused to admit Herman Sweatt on the grounds that the state constitution outlawed integrated education. Recognizing the likelihood that the Supreme Court may decide against them, the state hastily created the Texas State University for Negroes at Texas Southern University as a way to keep the University of Texas Law School segregated. By creating the Texas State University for Negroes, the state believed that it could make a case that it followed a Supreme Court decision in a 1938 landmark decision, *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada*. In this case, the Supreme Court required the state of Missouri to either integrate its state law school or to provide a separate law school for African Americans in compliance with the *Plessey v. Ferguson* case in 1896. When the Supreme Court finally decided the case in 1950, it determined that the Texas State University for Negroes was insufficient because it was inadequately funded and unequal to the University of Texas Law School.

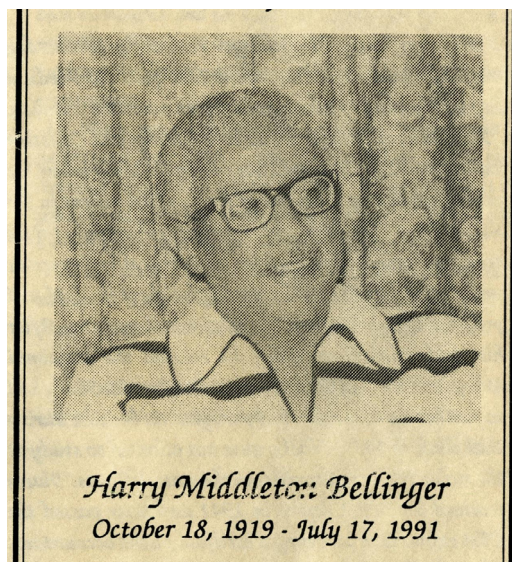
The Sweatt decision was an important moment because it provided a framework to challenge school segregation. At the same time, Sweatt v. Painter encouraged law schools to desegregate throughout the state of Texas. Harry Burns, once

²³ Interview with Harry V. Burns, 11-16-1993, UTSA Special Collections; David A. Nichols, *A Matter of Justice: Eisenhower and the beginning of the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007)

refused admittance into accounting school, applied for law schools “just because that was the only area that would accept me.”²⁴ Eventually, Burns was admitted into St. Mary’s law and business schools, helping to open up St. Mary’s to other black graduate students.²⁵

In response to the Sweatt case, black San Antonians prepared their own civil rights case protesting segregation. Since the justices in the Sweatt case had made it clear that educational facilities must be equal, NAACP leaders in San Antonio believed they could use the Sweatt case as a model to challenge the statewide ban on integration in all levels of education.

Two cases, both argued by local NAACP attorney Harry Bellinger, deserve attention. The first case involved the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD). The case began when the San Antonio chapter of the NAACP, in cooperation with African American parents, attempted to enroll black students at Burbank and Tech Vocational High Schools, Jefferson High School, Irving Middle School, and Fannin Elementary Schools. This was after the school principals refused to admit them on the grounds that the Texas’ constitution forbade integrated schools. Article VII, Section 7 of the Texas State Constitution stated that “separate schools shall be provided for the white and colored



Funeral Program for Harry Middleton Bellinger, July 20, 1991, pamphlet, July 20, 1991; (<https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph225655/m1/1/?q=harry%20bellinger>; accessed October 18, 2019), University of North Texas Libraries, The Portal to Texas History, <https://texashistory.unt.edu>; crediting San Antonio Public Library

Bellinger and other black leaders hoped the threat of litigation might pressure the San Antonio Union College District to improve the facilities at St. Philip's College in the short term. The tactic worked. Almost immediately, Walter W. McAllister, president of the Union Junior College District, appointed a committee to determine if St. Philips had inferior facilities when compared to San Antonio College. The committee determined that St. Philips did indeed have inferior facilities. Instead of risk a court case, the Union Junior College District quickly pushed through a bond measure increasing the funding for St. Philips.

²⁴ Interview with Harry V. Burns, 11-16-1993, UTSA Special Collections.

²⁵ Ibid.,

children, and impartial provision shall be made for both.”²⁶ The second case was about unequal funding and course offerings at St. Philip’s College, the African American junior college in the city, when compared to its counterpart San Antonio College.

Harry Bellinger believed that both cases made a convincing argument that black students in San Antonio were forced to attend inferior schools. Moreover, both cases demonstrated that San Antonio was part of a national conversation. At the same time as the SAISD case, the seminal Brown case was moving toward being decided by the Supreme Court. The case against the Union Junior College District was tied to already-decided Sweatt case. In this case, Bellinger and other black leaders hoped the threat of litigation might pressure the San Antonio Union College District to improve the facilities at St. Philip’s College in the short term. The tactic worked. Almost immediately, Walter W. McAllister, president of the Union Junior College District, appointed a committee to determine if St. Philips had inferior facilities when compared to San Antonio College. The committee determined that St. Philips did indeed have inferior facilities. Hoping to avert a court challenge, the Union Junior College District quickly pushed through a bond measure increasing the funding for St. Philips.²⁷

The bond did not satisfy Bellinger and other local leaders. Bellinger eventually filed two injunctions against SAISD and the Union Junior College District in 1952. The Brown decision in 1954 basically determined these cases. However, Bellinger kept both cases on file for some time after so that if needed it could be

26 Texas State Constitution, Article VII, section 7.

27 Roy Grimes, “School Segregation Test Seen for City, San Antonio *Express*, October 19, 1950, https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A10EE-A20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/year%3A1950%211950/mody%3A1019%211019&sort=_rank_%3AD&fld-base-O=alltext&maxresults=20&val-base-O=Bellinger&docref=image/v2%3A10EE-A20F1A545758%40WHNPX-161DEF74B57AE545%402433574-161DADOC38BA5137%4020-161DAD-OC38BA5137%40; “Segregation Court Test Promised, San Antonio *Express*, September 8, 1951, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A10EEA20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/year%3A1951%211951/mody%3A0908%21September%2B08&action=browse&format=image&docref=image/v2%3A10EE-A20F1A545758%40EANX-16203926C8EA8ED1%402433898-161DA0CAEC80FB03%400Q>; “Negro School Fight Planned,” San Antonio *Express*, December 4, 1952, https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A10EEA20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/year%3A1952%211952/mody%3A1204%211204&sort=_rank_%3AD&fld-base-O=alltext&maxresults=20&val-base-O=Bellinger&docref=image/v2%3A10EEA20F1A545758%40WHNPX-161F9014EE6B-60F4%402434351-161AFA7EB1ED06FC%4021-161AFA7EB1ED06FC%40; “Two Injunctions Attack Segregation Barriers, San Antonio *Express*, November 25, 1952, https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A10EEA20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/year%3A1952%211952/mody%3A1125%211125&sort=_rank_%3AD&fld-base-O=alltext&maxresults=20&val-base-O=McAllister&docref=image%2Fv2%3A10EEA20F1A545758%40WHNPX-161B584A034BE52E%402434342-161AFA7362EB33E4%400&origin=image%2Fv2%3A10EEA20F1A545758%40WHNPX-161B584A034BE52E%402434342-161AFA736D8DCC1C%403-161AFA736D8DCC1C%40.

“I think the Supreme Court ruling is one the most important steps we have ever taken. It should have been taken half a century ago or longer.

We are equals in the sight of God.”

Dr. John Daniel Brown, pastor of South San Antonio Baptist Church

“brought up for future US Supreme Court action should the need arise.”²⁸

The Brown v. Board of Education in 1954 decision transformed the landscape of San Antonio. Black San Antonians celebrated the decision and were hopeful that their lives would soon change. Dr. Ruth Bellinger (daughter of Charles Bellinger), a local physician and former president of the local chapter of the NAACP and member of the Educational Committee, stated that, “the decision is a very fine thing and I think that it marks a milestone in the ethical and moral awakening of America.” Bellinger continued, “I don’t feel that it is going to mean any trouble for us in Texas or in San Antonio but rather that it will be accepted by all citizens.”²⁹

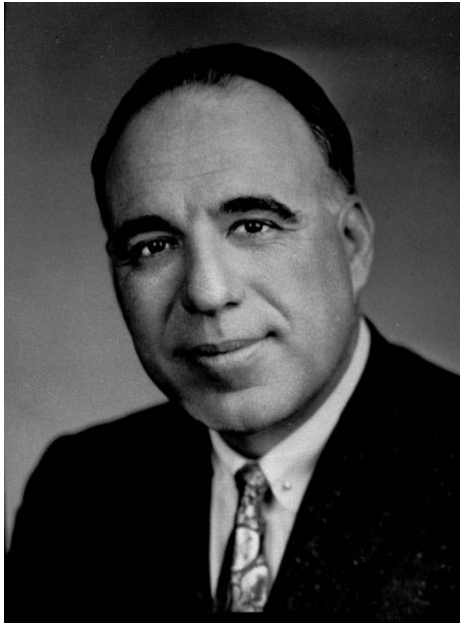
San Antonio’s religious community was largely supportive of the Brown decision and desegregation. Even before the decision, one denomination, the Catholic Church, had already desegregated their schools in the city under the directive of Archbishop Robert Lucey. On the Brown decision, Lucey commented, “it is absolutely marvelous...it is a great blessing to the people on the national level and internationally because the whole world has been waiting for this decision.” Dr. John Daniel Brown, pastor of South San Antonio Baptist Church, stated that, “I think the Supreme Court ruling is one the most important steps we have ever taken. It should have been taken half a century ago or longer. We are equals in the sight of God.”³⁰

The first two city council members to push for desegregation, Henry B. Gonzalez and Emil Schleren, cited their Catholic faith for convincing them that desegregation was

28 “Few S.A. Problems Seen in Ruling,” *San Antonio Express*, May 18, 1954, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A10EE-A20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/year%3A1954%211954/mody%3A0518%21May%2B18&action=browse&format=image&docref=image/v2%3A10EEA20F1A545758%40EANX-161D95264F3E-84AB%402434881-161D9499D1C7FACB%400>

29 *San Antonio Express*, May 18, 1954.

30 *Ibid.*,



Courtesy UTSA Special Collections

Henry B. Gonzalez (pictured) and Emil Schleren were the first city council members to lead the charge for desegregation, citing their Catholic faith for convincing them that desegregation was the way to go.

the way to go. Henry Gonzalez stated “I, as an individual who has suffered the poisonous stings of racial bigotry, could never tolerate that un-Christian practice. My own church (Catholic) firmly believes in the principles strongly against the sin of racial pride.”³¹

The Brown decision led to two major transformations in the city. The first one was that it led to local African Americans successfully challenging segregation in other arenas, including recreation, facilities and medical staffing. For example, African American doctors pushed for membership in the Bexar County Medical Society and for employment at the local hospitals. Within a year, Drs. Ruth Bellinger and Charles Whittier were both admitted into the medical society and had been declared staff members at Santa Rosa Hospital.

Another success was in local parks and facilities. Mirroring the arguments from both the Sweatt and Brown cases, local African Americans led by the NAACP argued that the resources allocated to black people by the parks division were inadequate to what white citizens received. African Americans also challenged for access to the city’s golf courses and tennis courts. While local leaders worked with authorities and local politicians to figure how to deal with the demands from the black community, a few African Americans pushed the agenda by entering the segregated Woodlawn pool. In response to African Americans swimming at Woodlawn, authorities closed all city pools.³²

In response to African Americans swimming at Woodlawn authorities closed all city pools.

³¹ San Antonio *Register*, July 15, 1955. San Antonio Register in The Portal to Texas History. University of North Texas Libraries. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/explore/collections/SANR/>accessed December 5, 2019

³² San Antonio *Register*, June 25, 1954; San Antonio Register in The Portal to Texas History. University of North Texas Libraries. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/explore/collections/SANR/>accessed December 5, 2019 San Antonio *Express*, June 12, 1954

The swimming pool incident in San Antonio pushed city council to act. Led by councilmen Gonzalez and Schleren, the council passed a resolution integrating public facilities with one notable exception. Ironically on June 19, the day which commemorated the date of the manumission of slaves in Texas, San Antonio would pass the city's first segregation ordinance, 20307.³³

African American leaders quickly assembled to fight the segregation ordinance. The local chapter of the NAACP, at that time lead by Reverend Emerson Marcee, appointed a Legal Redress Committee, headed by Frank Calmore to oppose the ordinance.³⁴ Calmore's committee prepared a petition for the council at the January 27, 1955 meeting that they attended with other community leaders. At the meeting, they sought to amend Ordinance 20307. The committee argued for a broad interpretation of the Brown decision, arguing that it declared "racial segregation unconstitutional." The petition went further, arguing that city council's decision was "a disgrace to our American democracy." The committee petition highlighted the presence of the military stating, "The city of San Antonio is a military center where men and women are trained to defend the cause of American democracy." However, the local chapter of the NAACP went even further by having Hugh Simpson Tate, a Dallas lawyer who served as legal counsel for the NAACP, attend the meeting. According to the city council minutes, Tate informed city council that the Brown decision mandated that "no state shall enact any law that will deprive any citizen of the equal protection of the law, and that had been done by the ordinance of June 19, 1954." Tate noted other types of discrimination in San Antonio, including the fact that local hospitals did not employ black doctors and that it also rented and leased city property to people who used that prop-

"The city of San Antonio is a military center where men and women are trained to defend the cause of American democracy."

- Frank Calmore's petition to city council

³³ *City of San Antonio Minutes of City Council*, January 27, 1955.

³⁴ Marcee was founder and Pastor of the Mt. Carmel Baptist Church.

erty to discriminate against African Americans. Although the council decided not to revise the ordinance at this meeting, two months later Henry B. Gonzalez spearheaded Ordinance 22555, which effectively rescinded the Juneteenth ordinance.³⁵

School desegregation in San Antonio did not occur immediately. Statewide it took a year after the decision for Texas schools to respond. The reason for the delay was that the Texas schools who may have wanted to be desegregated were waiting to see whether the Texas State Board of Education would punish them for desegregating their schools. Naturally, school districts would be even more reluctant to desegregate if the state Board of Education would rescind their funds. Some Texas ISD's pushed through even before the decision. In May 1955, Friona ISD became the first school district in Texas to desegregate. In June 1955, El Paso ISD made the decision to integrate, becoming the first major city school district in Texas to make the decision.³⁶

In early July 1955, the Board of Education decided to allocate funds "with no regard to whether their classes are segregated or integrated racially."³⁷ This decision led to a few other ISD's coming out to support desegregation. Brownsville ISD desegregated soon after releasing a statement that said, "no student shall be refused admission to any of the public schools of this system on account of race or color."³⁸ On the same day that the State Board of Education determined its stance on desegregation, E.W. Robinson, chair of the SAISD board, stated that he believed that SAISD was probably going to desegregate its schools. Shortly after Robinson's statement was reported in the *San Antonio Express*, SAISD superintendent Thomas Portwood announced plans to desegregate the school district. School integration however, would be gradual. Edgewood quickly followed pace by announcing their plans to integrate. Edgewood only had 304 black students and one African American elementary school. Lackland, the local school affiliated with the military, only had 12 African American students at its integrated school in 1956.³⁹

35 *San Antonio Minutes of City Council*, October 28, 1955 and March 22, 1956; "S.A. Segregation Ordinance Killed," *San Antonio Express*, March 23, 1956, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A10EEA20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/year%3A1956%211956/mody%3A0323%21March%2B23&action=browse&format=image&doref=image/v2%3A10EEA20F1A545758%40EANX-161BF17F60762AC8%402435556-161BEF5C10892545%400>

36 "Report of the Legal and Legislative subcommittee of the Texas advisory committee on segregation in the public schools", September 1, 1956, appendix. (Hereafter noted as Texas Advisory Committee)

37 "Texas School Desegregation Okayed," *San Antonio Express*, July 5, 1955, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A10EEA20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/year%3A1955%211955/mody%3A0705%21July%2B05&action=browse&format=image&doref=image/v2%3A10EEA20F1A545758%40EANX-161DA22B8FOA2EF0%402435294-161D5A8B23F135B0%400>

38 "Integration Voted by Brownsville," *San Antonio Express*, July 22, 1955, https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A10EEA20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/year%3A1955%211955/mody%3A0722%210722&sort=_rank_%3AD&fld-base-0=alltext&maxresults=20&val-base-0=Brownsville&doref=image/v2%3A10EEA20F1A545758%40WHNPX-161DA249ED8D0692%402435311-161CE77AC01C8812%401-161CE-77AC01C8812%40

39 Texas Advisory Committee appendix.

By late August, all of the school districts in San Antonio had announced their desegregation plans. Most San Antonio school districts, as we have seen, did not have many African American students. For example, Alamo Heights only enrolled three black pupils on the first day of school. Edgewood High School only enrolled 25 students, but that number increased to 69 one week later.⁴⁰ South San Independent School District only enrolled four students. SAISD, the school district with the most African American students, only initially integrated ten schools and only the 1st, 2nd, 7th, and tenth grade. James Shea, research director of SAISD, stated that African American enrollment in “former all white schools totaled 92 in elementary schools, 20 to 25 in high schools, and 7 to 14 in junior schools.”⁴¹ White students did have the option of attending the African American high school, Wheatley.⁴² Northside ISD only had nine African American students enrolled in integrated schools and was the only San Antonio district to maintain full segregation in its elementary and junior high schools.⁴³

Even though desegregation was a slow process, it was noteworthy in several regards. One, all of the school districts seemed willing to accept the Brown decision. Two, it happened relatively quietly and without the types of protests that happened in other southern cities. Indeed, very little was said about it in the newspapers. Perhaps this was a result of the fact that the number of African Americans in integrated classrooms was so small.

40 San Antonio *Express*, August 31, 1955.

41 “Negro Enrollment Still Light in Bexar,” *San Antonio Express*, September 7, 1955, <https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A10EE-A20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/year%3A1955%211955/mody%3A0907%21September%2B07&action=browse&format=image&docref=image/v2%3A10EEA20F1A545758%40EANX-161D0992E4523F-D6%402435358-161D01BE202B8FCD%400>

42 San Antonio *Light*, August 31, 1955.

43 San Antonio *Express*, September 7, 1955.

Statewide, however, the Brown decision faced significant opposition. In 1955, Texas Governor Allan Shivers announced his opposition to desegregation and began to look for ways to maintain the state’s legal segregationist stance that was part of the state constitution. In July, he appointed the Texas Advisory Committee on Segregation in the Public Schools with the charge to find ways that the state could impose “interposition.” Interposition is the theory that states have the right to protect their interests from laws passed by the federal government or the supreme court. The study noted that Texas was one of the few southern states, in addition to Tennessee and Arkansas, that had not “taken significant steps toward maintenance of their schools.”⁴⁴ The report concluded by arguing that the “dual school system shall be maintained, or the entire public-school system will be in jeopardy.”⁴⁵ The architects of the study were concerned that at the time of the study, eighty-four school districts in Texas had made steps toward integrating their schools. However, the study also noted that most of these were in districts that had less than a 10 percent African American student population. Of the few districts that did have larger than 10 percent, most of the districts were near San Antonio and including Marion, Navarro, and Seguin. Marion was the most important because it was the only school district in Texas, at the time of the study that had decided to integrate, that had more than a 20 percent African American student population.⁴⁶ San Antonio’s school districts all had less than 7.5 percent African American student population. Therefore, San Antonio’s schools viewed the Brown decision similarly to other districts in the area. The low African American student population probably made their decision

44 This meant that Texas had not made a formal statement on the Brown decision at this time and was behind other southern states; Report of the Legal and Legislative subcommittee of the Texas advisory committee on segregation in the public schools, September 1, 1956, page 8 (Hereafter noted as Texas Advisory Committee)

45 Texas Advisory Committee, 9.

46 Texas Advisory Committee, 11-12.

to desegregate easier. At the same time, however, San Antonio was one of the first major metropolitan areas in Texas to desegregate its schools, following El Paso.⁴⁷

San Antonio was one of the first major metropolitan areas in Texas to integrate its schools, following El Paso.

Governor Shivers' decision to not seek reelection in 1956 did not mean that segregation and desegregation would not be a major conversation during the new election cycle. Eventually, Price Daniel, an ardent supporter of segregation, became the next governor. In the 1956 election cycle, voters also supported a referendum to support "interposition" as suggested by Shiver's committee. In this case, Texas voters believed that the Brown decision violated their right as determined by their state constitution to segregated schools. Price Daniel made good on his opposition to the Brown decision and helped the 1957 Texas Legislature pass two major laws aimed at maintaining segregation. The first of these laws, House Bill 231, supported the types of pupil placement options that provided leeway for school boards to assign students to specific schools. Texas pupil placement laws were similar to those in other states that all emerged throughout the south as a means to maintain segregation. The second law passed, House Bill 65, required voter approval before desegregation. While the first law could impact San Antonio districts, the second law, since it was passed after all San Antonio districts made the decision to push toward integration, it did not have an impact.⁴⁸

The other major event during this election cycle was the seizure of NAACP records by the Texas Attorney General. The trial of the NAACP in district court in 1957 led to the suspension of many local offices and a court decision in May 1957 that briefly curtailed the activities NAACP organizations could participate in.⁴⁹ This began a period during 1956 and 1957 when the State Legislature also passed a series of bills intended to hurt the NAACP. In San Antonio, investigators attempted to seize the local records of the NAACP office located on Commerce Street. The local chapter did not allow the seizure of records and hid them. However, because so many members of the NAACP in San Antonio either worked for the defense industry or had white employers, members feared

⁴⁷ Texas Advisory Committee appendix.

⁴⁸ Gene B. Preuss "Public Education in West Texas" in Paul H. Carlson and Bruce Glasrud, *West Texas: A History of the Giant Side of the State* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014), 234-249; Charles Waite, "Price Daniel, Texas Democrats, and School Segregation, 1956-1957" *East Texas Historical Journal* vol. 48 (October 2010), 110-122.

⁴⁹ San Antonio *Register*, May 17, 1957, San Antonio Register in The Portal to Texas History. University of North Texas Libraries.

losing their jobs. Harry Burns, who was an employee at Kelly Air Force base during this period stated, “we were threatened. They were always threatening us who worked at civil service about membership in NAACP. They considered that subversive.” The Texas Attorney General also brought a lawsuit against the NAACP in an attempt to bar the organization from the state. Throughout the state, membership in the NAACP declined, and in San Antonio, the organization did not hold any meetings for several months.⁵⁰

In evaluation of this period, San Antonio’s school districts made stronger steps than the districts in all of the state’s larger cities with the exception of El Paso. However, one can make the argument that some of the smaller districts outside San Antonio were even more exceptional. Marion ISD in Guadalupe County desegregated their schools even though they had a larger percentage of African American students. Marion ISD was the only ISD in the state that desegregated during this earlier period with more than a 20 percent black student population. Indeed, only six districts in the state that desegregated during the first two years had more than 10 percent African American student population. Two other districts that were near San Antonio made plans to desegregate. Seguin ISD made plans to desegregate even though it had a 16.7 percent black student population. The other, La Vernia ISD, even though it was a small school district, began desegregating its schools which had a 10.8 percent African American student population.⁵¹

Nonetheless, San Antonio was a place where integration was able to find a space in a large metropolitan area with a small but sizeable black population and did so peacefully. This fact alone makes San Antonio noteworthy in terms of its legacy of civil rights and desegregation. Moreover, the fact that it was a strong military stronghold where integration was required made the city much more open to integrated spaces.

San Antonio was a place where integration was able to find a space in a large metropolitan area with a small but sizeable black population and did so peacefully. The fact alone makes San Antonio noteworthy in terms of its legacy of civil rights and desegregation.

⁵⁰ San Antonio *Register*, May 31, 1957, San Antonio Register in The Portal to Texas History, University of North Texas Libraries . Neil Sapper, “The Fall of the NAACP in Texas,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* vol. 81 (April 1978)pp. 393-416.

⁵¹ Texas Advisory Committee appendix.

Lunch Counters and Protests

As we have seen, World War II did lead San Antonio on a path to an eventual Double Victory. The fact that it was a military town meant that African Americans had an opportunity in San Antonio to achieve some measure of prosperity. As a military city, African Americans, particularly those who worked for the military, had an opportunity to protest their treatment. In a city that depended on military money, San Antonio had to ensure that the city was a place that, at least on the surface, attempted to integrate African Americans. This inclusion, as we have seen, however, did not mean full inclusion.

Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas in 1954 provided an opportunity for African Americans to demand equal access. One of the things that stands out about how African Americans sought their civil rights in San Antonio is the fact that initially, the community seemed to strongly favor equal access rather than full integration. Perhaps African Americans viewed equal access as a preferable way to full integration. Equal access means that African Americans wanted access to opportunities and places they perceived that whites and Latinos had. At the same time, perhaps some members of the community worried about full integration because they feared it might lead to the end of their black communities, black schools, and other aspects of their community life. African Americans demanded an opportunity to enjoy the opportunities created by a desegregated society.⁵²

In San Antonio, desegregation came at the cost of black institutions and black empowerment and agency.

African Americans quickly learned however, that the meaning of desegregation and integration for most San Antonians meant something much different than it did for black San Antonians. For many white San Antonians, desegregation and integration meant the opportunity for blacks to participate in but not to have positions of authority. Therefore, in San Antonio, desegregation came at the cost of black institutions, black empowerment and agency. It is for these reasons that African Americans reluctantly concluded that equal access to education, public spaces, and in employment required citywide protections.

⁵² It is also possible that African Americans saw the equal access argument as a way to fight segregation.

The progress African Americans made in San Antonio between 1954 and 1957 was astounding. Golf courses and tennis courts were desegregated in 1954. By 1957, public facilities such as swimming pools and public recreational facilities were also desegregated. Although some historians have argued that the period from 1957-1962 was one where African Americans were primarily unsuccessful in pursuing a strong civil rights agenda, the evidence demonstrates that this was far from the case. While the local NAACP struggled over specific issues to address, the black community continued to push for fuller access to movie theaters, schools, and jobs. Additionally, it was during this period that black people in San Antonio became more fully engaged to national trends in the civil rights landscape.⁵³

The state legislature's moves to stall desegregation of schools and tying school funding to public referendums on integration in 1956 prevented other districts in the state from following the path forged by San Antonio and other localities. Between 1957 and 1958, only two additional Texas school districts were able to pass a referendum on school desegregation.⁵⁴

With school desegregation largely realized in San Antonio by 1959, the first school year that all grades of the San Antonio Independent School District were fully integrated, black San Antonians pushed more aggressively on other issues. For example, black teachers pushed to teach at white schools, whereas the earlier push had been for student desegregation.⁵⁵ A reinvigorated NAACP proposed to SAISD that black teachers be employed in all schools and not just primarily black schools. SAISD was not the only school district that had a policy of not hiring black teachers at integrated schools. Harlendale and Edgewood ISD's had similar policies. For example, SAISD employed about 160 teachers in 1958 but all of those teachers taught in all, or almost all, black schools. In Edgewood, all of the 17 black teachers were teaching at the one all black school. It would take until 1963 for San Antonio schools to hire African American teachers at the integrated or formerly white schools.⁵⁶

53 Frederic Bruton "Desegregation in San Antonio," (Master's Thesis, Trinity University, 1971), 85

54 Bruton, 73; US commission on Civil Rights, Report of the US COCR, 1959, pg. 269

55 "Negro Teachers Seek Posts In All White S.A. Schools," *San Antonio Express*, September 18, 1958, https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/documentview?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A10EE-A20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/year%3A1958%211958/mody%3AO918%210918&sort=_rank_%3AD&fld-base-O=alltext&maxresults=20&val-base-O=integration&docref=image/v2%3A10EEA20F1A545758%40WHNPX-161DEF94AB1E1892%402436465-161DEACFDEB-8D162%4022-161DEACFDEB8D162%40

56 *San Antonio Register*, September 6, 1963. San Antonio Register in The Portal to Texas History. University of North Texas Libraries However, one catholic school had employed a black teacher since 1958.

African Americans also pushed for the full desegregation of movie theaters by organizing pickets outside the theaters. The protesters wanted much more than separate access, they demanded equal access to all areas of the theaters and were unwilling to accept any form of segregation at the theaters. The theater companies, recognizing the potential loss of business, quickly set up negotiations with leaders of the black community. By the end of 1959, all theaters in San Antonio had agreed to integrate, on the condition that there was not publicity granted to the integration. Therefore, by March 1960, African Americans were successful in their protests to open all the downtown theaters, although some reports argue that one theater still prohibited African Americans. In the Majestic, separate entrances were erected, and black customers were forced to sit in the balcony. It would take protests of the theaters and movie houses by

numerous groups, including the Students for Civil Liberties, to force the Majestic to change its policy several years later.⁵⁷

The initial success of the partial desegregation of the local downtown theaters provided momentum for the push to integrate other areas of black San Antonians' daily lives. At the same time, national issues quickly drew black San Antonians into the larger civil rights landscape. In February 1960, four African American students at North Carolina A&T sat down at a F.W. Woolworth and Company lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. When they were refused service, they left and returned a few days later with 300 students to protest the policy at the lunch counter. The next day a larger group of students arrived at the same lunch counter. Word spread to other students and eventually to members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE),

⁵⁷ San Antonio *Light*, March 9, 1960; Goldberg, 363



Postcard image of East Houst St. mid-'60s humming with activity. "Gone But Not Forgotten in San Antonio! - Part II", www.city-data.com, 03-08-2010. <http://www.city-data.com/forum/san-antonio/604076-gone-but-not-forgotten-san-antonio-100.html#ixzz5ry0hQbJa>

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which sent students from New York to help organize sit-ins at local downtown stores. The Greensboro lunch counter demonstrations set off a wave of activity across the south and west to integrate lunch counters. One of the protestors stated that, “We believe, since we buy books and papers in the other part of the store, we should get served in this part.”⁵⁸

Woolworth and Kress stores were two of the primary targets of the student activists because both stores were well-represented throughout the south. By the end of February 1960, violence had engulfed the student protests. On February 27 in Nashville, white teenagers attacked a group of African Americans engaged in peaceful demonstrations.⁵⁹ The police did not arrest the white teenagers, but they did arrest the black protestors. Although police may have believed that arresting the protestors may have stopped the movement, the arrests of the students only served to increase the profile of sit-ins.

The lunch counter movement, primarily led by students, led to the organization of a new civil rights organization in May 1960, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). The creation of SNCC transformed the type of protest throughout the United States, with students increasingly taking the reins of protest. Even integrated settings were not spared as picketers protested outside stores such as Woolworths in cities like New York and Boston. The aim of the students was to be a deterrent to business in places black people were not provided equal access.

It is important to recognize that sit-ins did not originate in Greensboro. In 1943, African Americans protested lunch counters at Jack Spratt’s Coffee House and Stoner’s Restaurant in Chicago. The sit-ins were led by members of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), an organization organized formed in 1942 by black

It is important to recognize that sit-ins did not originate in Greensboro. In 1943, African Americans protested lunch counters at Jack Spratt’s Coffee House and Stoner’s Restaurant in Chicago.

⁵⁸ New York *Times*, “Carolina College Students Fight Woolworth Ban on Lunch Counter Service,” February 3, 1960.

⁵⁹ The *Tennessean*, “75 Students Arrested Here,” February 28, 1960.

students to push for integration through non-violence. These early sit-ins however, did not spread to other localities such as the protests of 1960.⁶⁰

San Antonio was not the first Texas city forced to deal with lunch counter protests. Even before the 1960 protests, one store in Corpus Christi apparently desegregated its segregated lunch counters. In 1950, an African American customer approached a store manager at a H.E. Butt Grocery Store in Corpus Christi requesting to be served at their lunch counter. When the store manager rejected his appeal by suggesting that he address the matter with the owner of the store, the African American man did just that. After a conversation with H.E. Butt, it was decided that he could be served. Butt then ordered store managers to serve all customers in the manner that whites were served. Even though it took two years for all store managers of H.E. Butt in Corpus Christi to comply with the decree, this was a major step to desegregation. Similarly, in fall 1958, black and white students from an integrated school sat in at a lunch counter at a Woolworths. When the black students were not served, the white students walked out with them. Eventually the local manager of the store decided to allow African Americans to sit at his lunch counter.⁶¹

Thus, there was a precedent in the state as well as a national movement in place to set the scene for African Americans in San Antonio to engage with the larger lunch counter movement. Indeed, sometime in the 1950s, Sears had quietly desegregated its lunch counters. Additionally, San Antonio's lunch counters had already allowed some African Americans to be served even before 1960 as, according to a contemporary source, "lunch counters have for some time served uniformed Negro soldiers and air men, especially when accompanied by white military personnel."⁶²

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⁶² Morland, 6.

⁶⁰ Michael Gerbert, "Chicago's Forgotten Role in the lunch counter sit-in movement," *New Yorker*, January 16, 2012; Aarushi H Shah, "All of Africa Will Be Free Before We Can Get a Lousy Cup of Coffee: The Impact of the 1943 Lunch Counter Sit-Ins on the Civil Rights Movement," *The History Teacher* 46, no. 1 (2012): 127-47. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43264079>.

⁶¹ J. Kenneth Morland, *Lunch Counter Desegregation in Corpus Christi, Galveston, and San Antonio, Texas* (Atlanta, Georgia: Randolph-Macon Women's College, 1960), 2-3

Another major development in the lunch counter movement in San Antonio was the presence of the Council of Churches, a primarily protestant organization of church leaders. Imbued by their religious values, wary of violence and the effect on local business, the Council of Churches wanted to find a peaceful solution. They understood that in some respects San Antonio resembled most southern towns and cities in America. Just like Greensboro and other cities that witnessed sit-ins, San Antonio's downtown had Kress and Woolworth stores, the two stores perhaps most impacted by the sit-in protests that were occurring throughout the south. The Council of Churches decided to work with local businessmen who were worried about the potential effects protests might have on local businesses, particularly if local businesses were forced to close. One local business manager stated that business had fallen off between 45 to 60 percent in some of the stores in his chain where demonstrations existed.⁶³

However, the group most instrumental in pushing for the integration of lunch counters was African Americans themselves. The NAACP and other city leaders adeptly leveraged their economic power to push for opening up of the lunch counters. On March 7, the president of the San Antonio Youth Group of the NAACP, Lillian Andrews, a seventeen-year-old college freshman at Our Lady of the Lake College, sent letters to the local businesses requesting access to local lunch counters. Assisting Andrews was Harry Burns, the leader of the statewide Youth Group of the NAACP.

As the second week of March approached, the threat of the trouble in San Antonio was palpable. In Austin and Galveston, demonstrations had become testy and teetered on the edge of breaking into violence. On March 12, African Americans in Galveston protested the lunch counter segregation by entering three downtown Galveston stores with lunch counters and demanding service. Another group of African Americans entered a cafeteria the same day. The store managers subsequently closed all of the counters without serving them.⁶⁴ Lunch counters at two stores remained closed the next day. The two other stores opened in the morning but were closed when African Americans entered them asking to be served.⁶⁵ The situation was considered so bad that extra police were called out that Saturday. In Houston, five lunch counters were closed by demonstrators and one was closed the following Monday. Nationally, the situation was even worse. On March 12, 1960 more than 200 student protesters were arrested in Tallahassee.⁶⁶

⁶³ Morland, 6-7.

⁶⁴ San Antonio *Express*, March 13, 1960.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁶ Gerald Ensley, "The ride to equality started 60 years ago," Tallahassee *Democrat*, May 20, 2016; San Antonio *Express*, March 15, 1960.

The time was right for black San Antonians to move. On Sunday, March 13, a group of 1,500 African Americans met with NAACP leaders at the Second Baptist Church to begin plans to protest lunch counters. Harry Burns stated to the press after the meeting that, “we are hoping a solution can be worked out so there will be no demonstrations. We will decide our course of action on Thursday.”⁶⁷ Throughout the nation, student protesters were being harassed and arrested.



Courtesy UTSA Special Collections

Pictured: Harry V. Burns

African Americans saw this as an opportunity and threatened protests, perhaps by Thursday of that week, if action was not taken. The move by African American leaders forced a group of business, religious, and civil leaders to action. The Council of Churches and business leaders moved up a scheduled meeting from Wednesday to Tuesday to address the concerns. At this meeting, the group approved a

⁶⁷ *San Antonio Express*, March 14, 1960.

plan to quietly integrate lunch counters on March 16. The decision made several important concessions to business leaders. One, business owners demanded that black leaders inform African Americans to not rush to the stores too quickly. Store managers did not want lunch counters to be flooded with too many African Americans at one time. Two, the business leaders requested that African Americans not take any action on non-conforming stores in San Antonio for thirty days.⁶⁸



Courtesy UTSA Special Collections

On March 16, 1960, four African American men entered the Kress Store on Houston Street and were provided service; pictures, including this one, were taken for the newspapers.

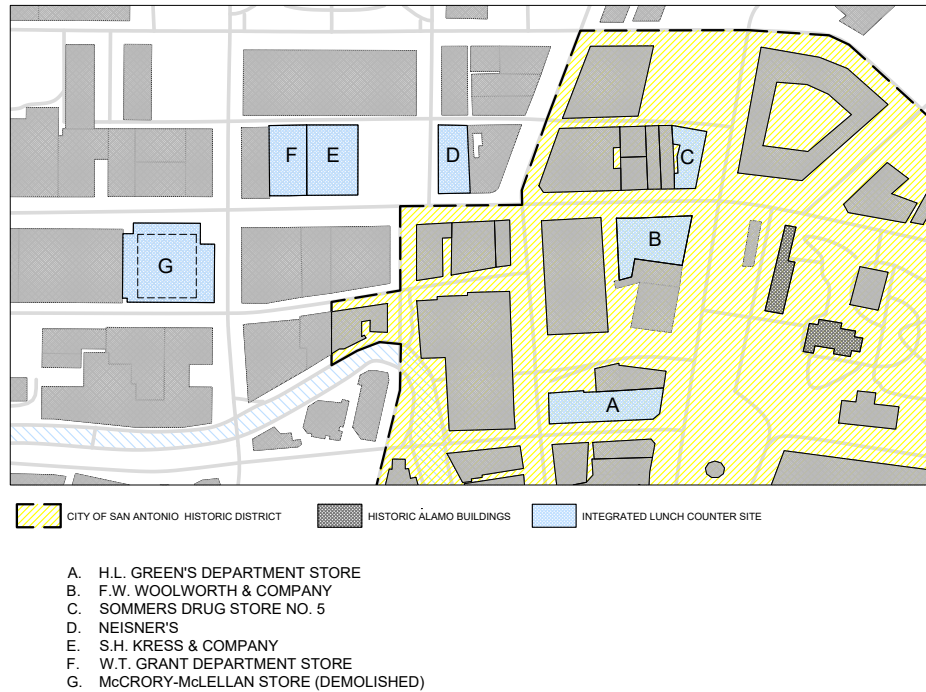
Newspapers and other media handled the situation quietly and very little publicity was given to the event. On Wednesday, four African American men entered the Kress Store on Houston Street and were provided service.⁶⁹ Pictures were taken for the newspapers from the Kress Store. Alamo Trust researchers found evidence in the National Building Museum archives that the photographs similar to the one above, have been misattributed as Woolworth's.⁷⁰ Six other restaurants

⁶⁸ Morland, 7-8.

⁶⁹ The evidence from local news and pictures show that Kress was the first counter integrated that day. Moreover, reports reveal that blacks and whites sat separately, although not by force or requirement, at these local restaurants for some time after the "integration." *Austin Statesman*, March 16, 1960.

⁷⁰ Alamo Trust has matched archive photographs with building interiors to establish the correct location in each image.

- Neisners, F.W. Woolworth, Sommers, H.L. Green, Grant's, and McCrory's - also quietly integrated their lunch counters that day. A few things should be noted about the integration of lunch counters. One, eight downtown stores were part of the meetings called for by the Council of Churches. However, only seven of the restaurants (Neisners, F.W. Woolworth, S.H. Kress, Sommers, H.L. Green, Grant's, and McCrory's) agreed to desegregate their lunch counters. Two, Joske's,



Courtesy John G. Waite Associates Architects, PLLC

Map showing the locations of the seven stores that integrated their lunch counters on March 16, 1960

the most prominent downtown lunch counter, refused to open its lunch counter to African Americans. Even after thirty days Joske's continued to deny African Americans access and service to its Camellia Room. Joske's actions led to protests and pickets of the popular downtown store. After major protests, including some lighter skinned African Americans passing for white to receive service in May 1960, Joske's closed all of its lunch counters. It would take until the late summer for Joske's to reopen these facilities. This time, however, Joske's integrated all of its lunch counters.⁷¹

71 Robert A. Goldberg, "Racial Change on the Southern Periphery: The Case of San Antonio, Texas, 1960-1965," *The Journal of Southern History* 49, no. 3 (1983): 358. doi:10.2307/2208100; Morland, 8. Harry Burns interview.

Joske's, the most prominent downtown lunch counter, refused to open its lunch counter to African Americans. Even after thirty days, Joske's continued to deny African Americans access and service to its Camellia Room. Joske's actions led to protests and pickets of the popular downtown store. After major protests, including some lighter skinned African Americans passing for white to receive service in May 1960, Joske's closed all of its lunch counters.



Vintage San Antonio - a photo history. (n.d.). In Facebook [group page]. Retrieved December 20, 2019, from <https://www.facebook.com/VintageSanAntonio/photos/a.148456255318256/1420865421410660/?type=3&theater>



Klein, Stanley. (1976) National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form - Alamo Plaza Historic District. Retrieved from <https://www.thc.texas.gov/public/upload/preserve/survey/highway/Alamo%20Plaza%20Historic%20District%20San%20Antonio.pdf>



Postcard image Houston St. West. "Gone But Not Forgotten in San Antonio! - Part II", [www.city-data.com, 03-08-2010. http://www.city-data.com/forum/attachments/san-antonio/59281d1268099275-gone-but-not-forgotten-san-antonio-houston-st.-west.jpg](http://www.city-data.com/forum/attachments/san-antonio/59281d1268099275-gone-but-not-forgotten-san-antonio-houston-st.-west.jpg)

From top to bottom: 1) A view of Neisner's at Christmas, looking west on Houston. 2) Green's, looking north on Alamo. 3) Woolworth's, across from Sommers in this photo, looking west down Houston.

Importantly, the integration of seven downtown lunch counters happened without any sit-ins and occurred without protest, even if it took protests to push Joske's to open the Camellia Room lunch counter. It followed a pattern of local leaders working together to seek voluntary action, something that national civil rights leaders including Jackie Robinson noted. San Antonio's Council of Churches demonstrated that it was capable of forming a diverse coalition to address some of the city's racial problems.

At the same time, other groups within the African American community were left unsatisfied. While groups like the Council of Churches and others advocated for voluntary desegregation, African Americans increasingly determined that they needed much more from the city to ensure that their rights were protected.

The New Direction: A Push for a Nondiscrimination Ordinance

By 1962, black San Antonians had achieved some of their civil rights goals. But as they sought to take steps toward a more integrated society, the earlier progressive coalition fractured over the issue of voluntary versus mandated nondiscrimination. One of the problems African Americans faced in the city was the prevalent idea that there was no racial discrimination in the city, a belief that seemingly prevented some city leaders from taking any definite steps to eradicate other vestiges of discrimination. With some local leaders content with some progress toward full desegregation and limited signals of true integration, black leaders wondered if city leaders truly wanted to address other important issues in regards to racial discrimination. These issues included the hiring of school teachers in school districts, the continuing refusal of many stores to serve black customers, and the reality of employment discrimination.

As many San Antonians remained blind to the ways that black San Antonians encountered daily acts of discrimination, the enthusiasm that African Americans nationally had about San Antonio as a bastion of interracial collaboration and hope waned. Increasingly, African Americans no longer saw the city as a bastion of progressive race relations. For example, in October 1963, more than 750 Air Force civilian workers stationed in Washington D.C. petitioned the Air Force to not move them to San Antonio, citing the city's segregation problems. The city's mayor, W.W. McAllister (former president of the Union Junior College District), did not help the situation when responding that, "San Antonio has certainly had no integration problems at all."⁷² In February 1963, NAACP leaders in San Anto-

72 Bill Lee, "Local NAACP Head Says Discrimination Still Exists Here," *San Antonio Express*, October 14, 1962, https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A10EEA20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/decade%3A1960%211960%2B-%2B1969&sort=YMD_date%3AD&fld-base-O=alltext&maxresults=20&val-base-O=Housing%20is%20a%20serious%20problem%20confronting%20Negroes&docref=image/v2%3A10EE-A20F1A545758%40WHNPX-162285789ECD8D58%402437952-161E65241DF0F-4C0%403-161E65241DF0F4C0%40.

nio, including Harry Burns, the new president of San Antonio's NAACP, Claude Black, minister at Mount Zion First Baptist Church and president of the Baptist Ministers Union and several other leaders approached the city council demanding a non-discrimination ordinance.⁷³

Harry Burns noted the irony of the perception of San Antonio's progressivism and how that image of tolerance was a challenge to black San Antonians who wanted to make it a more equitable city. He stated that while, "San Antonio may be more advanced in certain areas of race relations than some other Texas and Southern cities...there still exists racial discrimination in federal civil service and in other areas of employment. The most qualified school teachers are not employed regardless of race. Housing is a serious problem confronting Negroes in San Antonio because of the racial pattern."⁷⁴



Courtesy UTSA Special Collections

Harry V. Burns (left) and another man protest segregation at City Hall on June 12, 1963.

At a city council meeting in February 1963, Harry Burns provided the council with a number of examples of incidents of daily discrimination. Most notably he brought up the case of a flight crew arriving at Kelly Air Force Base in 1962. When the crew learned that the quarters at the base were too crowded, they were taken to a local hotel where they were denied admittance because of their race.

⁷³ Ibid.,

⁷⁴ Ibid.,

“San Antonio may be more advanced in certain areas of race relations than some other Texas and Southern cities... there still exists racial discrimination in federal civil service and in other areas of employment. The most qualified school teachers are not employed regardless of race. Housing is a serious problem confronting Negroes in San Antonio because of the racial pattern.”

Burnes concluded that only a nondiscrimination ordinance would stop these examples of discrimination. Father Sherrill Smith of St. Joseph's Catholic Church attended the meeting with Burns, and lent his support by stating that it was time for San Antonio to “go on record” and that in doing that, “progress would be made at a faster pace.”⁷⁵

Once again, Burns argued that a non-discrimination ordinance was the only real solution to citywide discrimination against African Americans. He was also quick to note that “El Paso had already passed a non-discrimination ordinance.”⁷⁶ Thirty years later, Burns would elaborate on the fact that stores like Handy Andy refused to hire “blacks as clerks, cashiers in their stores.”⁷⁷ Indeed, one of the local Handy Andy stores that maintained this hiring discrimination was located near the eastside on the corner of Houston and New Braunfels.⁷⁸

Even though the Council of Churches was not as active during this state of civil rights as it had been in pushing for the integration of lunch counters, some religious leaders did speak up for a nondiscrimination ordinance. In November

75 “NAACP Asks City End All Segregation,” *San Antonio Express*, February 14, 1963, https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pub-name%3A10EEA20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/year%3A1963%211963/mody%3A0214%210214&sort=_rank_%3AD&fld-base-O=alltext&maxresults=20&val-base-O=Harry%20Burns&docref=image/v2%3A10EEA20F1A545758%40WHN-PX-162246055C4F1C78%402438075-1622454AF99AE57E%4042-1622454AF99AE57E%40. It should also be noted that the Good Government League and its support of local business did also help create an environment in San Antonio that in some ways facilitated some improvements in race relations but their pro-business policies did slow down a more progressive push.

76 Ibid.,

77 Burns interview

78 Ibid.,

1962, an interracial group of local ministers that included Claude Black (Mount Zion First Baptist), Claus Rolfs (City councilman and pastor McKinley Avenue Methodist Church), Sherrill Smith (St. Joseph's Catholic Church), and Rabbi David Jacobson (Temple Beth El) spoke in support of a nondiscrimination ordinance at city council. Citing an example where he and his family were denied service at a drive-in on Austin Highway, Rev. Black argued that the time had come for religious leaders to support and push for a non-discrimination ordinance to prevent further humiliation for African Americans. Moreover, Rev. Black stated that African Americans had no way of knowing which restaurants in San Antonio were indeed integrated.⁷⁹

Rev. Black stated that African Americans had no way of knowing which restaurants in San Antonio were indeed integrated.

San Antonio's city council resisted the calls for a nondiscrimination ordinance. At the February 1963 meeting, instead of approving an ordinance, they delayed action by appointing a three-person Committee on Discrimination, led by Jack Kaufman, Claus Rohlfs, and John Gatti. The committee found enough evidence of discrimination that it argued that the council should bring up a non-discrimination ordinance for discussion. In June, the council stalled action once again by appointing another committee, the Committee on Desegregation. The council charged the committee with "making such recommendations as it deemed necessary respecting desegregation legislation and its enforcement in the event that voluntary methods did not achieve anticipated speedy accomplishment of the objective."⁸⁰ This committee advocated for voluntary integration. The first step was to mail a letter to all businesses in San Antonio.

79 Sam Kindrick, "United Front Urged for Racial Fight," *San Antonio Express*, November 9, 1962, https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A10EE-A20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/year%3A1962%211962/mody%3A1109%211109&sort=_rank_%3AD&fld-base-O=alltext&-maxresults=20&val-base-O=Black&docref=image/v2%3A10EE-A20F1A545758%40WHNPX-1622336F2F203B3F%402437978-161E655270B-D2624%4029-161E655270BD2624%40.

80 *San Antonio Minutes of City Council*, July 3, 1963.

Although the committee tried to put the situation in San Antonio in the most positive light, the first report of the committee revealed numerous examples of discrimination in the city. The findings of the committee did not surprise African Americans who stood outside city council with pickets believing that the committee was little more than a stalling tactic by the council. While the committee took great note that most businesses were fully integrated, the

Roughly 40 percent of the city's restaurants and drive-ins were not fully integrated, and half of the motel rooms were not fully integrated.

committee did not emphasize its own findings, namely that roughly 40 percent of the city's restaurants and drive-ins were not fully integrated. Nor did the councilmen emphasize their own findings that half of the motel rooms were not fully integrated.⁸¹ At the August 1963 city council meeting, African Americans again picketed outside the city council meeting, this time not only asking for a non-discrimination ordinance but also a fair employment practices ordinance as well.⁸²

By late 1963, city council and many African American leaders had different opinions as to the success of the voluntary integration committee. African Americans, including Ruth Bellinger and G.J. Sutton, claimed many of the businesses

that signed a pledge to desegregate continued to discriminate against African Americans there. In an *Express News* report, G.J. Sutton and Ruth Bellinger expressed their disappointment of the downward plight of civil rights in the city.⁸³ The next week, one editorial expressed a tone that many in San Antonio had once hoped to avoid:

“San Antonio negroes fare as well as anyone else in this land of ours in spite of what G.J. Sutton and Dr. Ruth Bellinger may say or think. The white people of this nation are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and in my way of thinking the right to choose who we will live near and associate with. A little education has proven to be dangerous and it is time that these upstart Negroes realized it.”⁸⁴

83 Note how only nine years earlier that Ruth Bellinger had expressed such optimism about the Brown decision and how it would lead to integration in the city; Sam Kindrick, “Mortician Claims S.A. Negro Being Starved to Death,” *San Antonio Express*, September 20, 1963, https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A10EE-A20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/year%3A1963%211963/mody%3A0920%210920&sort=_rank_%3AD&fld-base-O=alltext&-maxresults=20&val-base-O=Bellinger&docref=image/v2%3A10EE-A20F1A545758%40WHNPX-16203D5CA9B76F76%402438293-161FA7AB-56B79C93%4039-161FA7AB56B79C93%40

84 M.E.H., ““Blames King for Birmingham,” *San Antonio Express*, September 26, 1963, https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&t=pubname%3A10EE-A20F1A545758%21San%2BAntonio%2BExpress/year%3A1963%211963/mody%3A0926%210926&sort=_rank_%3AD&fld-base-O=alltext&-maxresults=20&val-base-O=Bellinger&docref=image/v2%3A10EE-A20F1A545758%40WHNPX-16203D6B86546325%402438299-161FA7AD-CF6B9BE6%4045-161FA7ADCF6B9BE6%40

81 *San Antonio Light*, June 15, 1963.

82 Bruton, 108.

By late 1963 it was clear that racial progress in San Antonio had stalled. The nondiscrimination ordinance could have made San Antonio stand out among American cities. However, it remained stalled in city council. The council would not pass it until after Congress and President Johnson approved the Civil Rights Act of 1964. When city council finally passed the ordinance, Ordinance 33863, in 1965, it placed San Antonio behind the tone of the nation. By this time, racial progress in San Antonio was more closely aligned with other southern cities. At the same time, the interracial cooperation and collaboration that had existed in the late 50s and early 60s was gone too as the early civil rights coalition had largely fractured. While many traditional leaders supported the interracial and collaborative tone of the earlier victories, new leaders were increasingly disappointed about the lack of complete victories achieved. They believed that black power and black agency might be a better solution to voluntary integration. San Antonio, a city that had once led the way for an entire state in school desegregation and voluntary desegregation of many of its facilities, was ultimately unable to live up to and continue the legacy it once seemed sure to forge.⁸⁵

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San Antonio's civil rights legacy is secured in how for a brief moment, local leaders from all backgrounds in our Southwestern city came together to forge a new vision of a new city. Most profound in the period after the Sweatt decision in 1950 through 1962, San Antonio stood as a city where its residents pushed forward to a more equal city for all. Coalitions of San Antonians united to peacefully make progress unheard of in most southern cities. Although the vision that many San Antonians embarked on in the 50s and early 1960s was not entirely realized, the work of many San Antonio's true leaders, many who have received very little attention even now, stands as a beacon for hope for our city even today.

⁸⁵ Goldberg, 371. It would be an interesting study to examine the plight of the African American community's pursuit of civil rights in the immediate period after 1965 through the end of the Good Government League and the reformation of the city's charter in 1977.