

“Beautiful People”

Community Agency, Work, and The Great Migration Phenomenon in Houston, Texas, 1900-1941

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The following essay outlines African American self help in the first half of the twentieth century. Specifically, it highlights two well-known self-help strategies utilized by internal migrants who moved to Houston, Texas, between the years 1900 and 1941. Motivated by the city's numerous socioeconomic determinants, African American newcomers from eastern Texas and Louisiana uprooted to Houston for three fundamental reasons: to better provide for their families; to become beneficiaries of individual and collective civil liberties, thereby spurring racial advancement; and to regularly visit loved ones back in the nearby countryside. They not only found decent-paying jobs, better schools, spirit-filled congregations and numerous social clubs; in doing so, newcomers showed their gratitude by helping others, even when unable to adequately do so. Motivated by cultural tradition, familial/community obligation, and political climate, internal migrants provided for both their communities of origin in the surrounding hinterland and recent places of settlement in Houston. Migrants and established residents—whose parents moved to the city as slaves right before or immediately following the Civil War as freed people—alike, regardless of class, ethnicity, hue, and political affiliation, invested in the welfare of others, through charitable means and relationship building, and in doing so, helped formulate two well-known self-help strategies. From the days of slavery to the end of World War I, African Americans utilized accommodation as an effective political posture; then from the end of World War I to the end of World War II, Blacks adopted the “New Negro” philosophy of the interwar era. Both philosophies—sociopolitical and socioeconomic in nature—relied upon self-help agency as a transformative measure. African American agency, the means of building, caring for, stimulating, and loving, has sustained people of color for millennia, inevitably, precipitating new forms of protest in recent years, including the highly-successful modern Civil Rights Movement.

Born in 1881 in the town of Clinton, a tiny farm community west of the Guadalupe River, just ninety miles north of the Gulf Sea in DeWitt County, Texas, Jennie Belle Murphy—known to friends and family as Ladybelle—was raised by relatives, perhaps after the death of her mother, Rachel Thomas. The teenager with a passion for sewing, gardening, and service left home at the turn of the century to study domestic science at Guadalupe College, a private Baptist school for African Americans in Seguin, Texas. Already a sought after seamstress, Murphy worked to help defray tuition and board costs, even on occasions doing alterations for the spouse of the school's president, David Abner, Jr. Murphy, possibly while still attending Guadalupe College, married Benjamin Jesse Covington of Falls County, a recent Meharry Medical College graduate. Born in 1869 in tiny Marlin, Texas, a cotton-farming community twenty-four miles south of Waco and one hundred and twenty-one miles south of Dallas in the middle of the Blackland Prairie region in central Texas, the studious, handsome chocolate-complexioned son of former slaves was bedazzled by the caring, lovely, tall, fair-skinned beauty. The couple married on September 30, 1902, in Seguin, perhaps following the completion of her studies, and settled briefly in Wharton and Yoakum near Jennie Covington's hometown before moving to Houston in 1903.¹

Covington, who described herself as "a plain woman from the country," no longer struggled to make ends meet, being the wife of one of the most well-known professionals in the City of Houston. So prominent were the Covingtons by the late 1900s that luminaries such as educators Booker T. and Margaret Washington, contralto singer Marion Anderson, entertainer and activist Paul Robeson, concert tenor Roland Hayes, writer and activist William Pikers and boxing champion Joe Lewis enjoyed the splendor of their stately two-story home on Hadley and Dowling streets while visiting the city. A caring Covington used her local and national connections to draw attention to the plight of the poor, especially African Americans. The privileged, empathetic woman made it her life's mission to care for others as her

aunt and uncle, Jane and Will Jones, provided for her. For the next sixty-five years the upper middle-class homemaker from the country worked to improve the lives of thousands.²

Civic leader and humanitarian Jennie Covington helped establish numerous social service agencies that reached out to African Americans in need. Covington, housewife Martha Sneed, educator Mary L. Jones, and other community organizers founded the Blue Triangle Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in 1920, and through the years provided Houston Blacks, especially women and girls, with an employment office, cafeteria meals, a travelers aid program for recent migrants in need of assistance, public aid to families in need, recreation facilities for children, a camp retreat and educational and Christian conferences. Because of the generosity of Covington and others, the Blue Triangle YWCA during its existence, from 1920 to 1998, served over 30,000 people.³ Her commitment to young people motivated others to open the Darcus Home for Delinquent Girls, another facility for African Americans. Homeless mothers, schoolchildren, the poor, and the unemployed benefited from her volunteer efforts at the Houston Settlement Association, Bethlehem Center, C. U. Luckie Elementary School Mothers' Club, Antioch and Bethel Baptist Churches, and Married Ladies Social, Art & Charity Club. As a Bethlehem Center volunteer, she headed the center's Social Service Advisory Committee, a group that investigated family welfare matters in the African American community.⁴

Jennie Covington promoted racial cooperation and equality as well. She worked with educators on the Texas Commission on Interracial Cooperation, serving as its chair for at least a decade. Whites founded the first Commission of Interracial Cooperation in Atlanta in April 1919 as a response to the turbulent postwar racial climate. Statewide commissions with local committees sprang up across the South over the next few years, with the Texas commission forming in 1920. The commission addressed lynchings, inequitable healthcare, racial intolerance and mutual cooperation between the races. A committed Covington also served as cofounder and first head of the Houston Commission on Interracial

Cooperation, an affiliate of the state commission. Later in the 1950s, Covington chaired the Texas Commission on Interracial Cooperation.⁵

While the presence of Covington, Prairie View College administrator W. R. Banks, and other members of the African American elite was noteworthy, the commission failed to adequately address racial bias in Texas since the group's white conservative moderates opposed racial equality. To most white members of the commission, the problem had less to do with white hostility, but rather ineptitude on the part of people of color. At the same time, Covington and other African American community leaders rarely challenged the racist views of whites. They generally took an accommodating position on racial matters, hoping instead to win white approval for present-day individual victories and more substantive changes over time. Covington eventually realized the sobering fact that white Texans, for the most part, cared very little about toppling racial injustice.⁶

Disillusioned and frustrated, Covington, in later years, publicly denounced the pro-segregationist platform of Texas politicians, civic leaders, and businesspeople. Like National Association of Colored Women founder Mary Church Terrell, Covington as a grey-haired senior, grew frustrated and angry. Racial bigotry, according to Covington, remained the most perilous challenge in the South, largely because of intolerance on the part of whites and inaction on the part of African Americans. A determined, mature Covington nevertheless advocated racial equality for people of color, even planting seeds of protest in her offspring, including grandson Thomas Dent, the eldest child of Ernestine Jessie Covington Dent, the only child of Dr. and Mrs. Covington, a classically-trained musician and music teacher who married Dr. Albert Dent, the future president of Dillard University. Award-winning writer and activist Tom Dent, like his grandmother, Jennie Covington, earnestly sought racial liberation for people of color, becoming a major grassroots and national leader in the modern Civil Rights Movement. Covington, once a Booker T. Washington accommodationist, years later following World War II, sponsored many of the philosophies of W. E. B. Du Bois integrationists such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.⁷

Numerous groups and individuals relied on the ancient self-help model, community agency, for the race's survival. Women's auxiliaries at churches and Roman Catholic nuns, clubwomen and boy scout leaders, medical professionals and social workers worked to improve conditions in African American neighborhoods and communities. So too did unskilled laborers, uneducated washerwomen and domestics, educators, ministers and priests, newspaper publishers and journalists, jazz and blues artists, businesspeople, civic leaders, attorneys, politicians, and students. Agency involved intergroup relationships, intraracial coalitions, cross-cultural ties and, sometimes, interracial community efforts. African Americans crossed lines of demarcation in an effort to give support and hope to others in need, even when in need themselves of respect, kindness, equitable schooling, good city services, fair wages, civil rights and social justice.⁸

This essay discusses African American agency in Houston between the years 1900 and 1941. The self-help efforts of African American migrants like the Covington Family hastened change for the city's African American community. Throughout the first half of the century, African Americans in the new industrial center subtly challenged the institutions, employers, and laws that relegated them to a debased position in society. As a result, a quietly heightened social protest consciousness and self-help emotion gave momentum to future possibilities. Blacks, increasingly aware of their abilities and resources, quietly worked for change. Houston's African American migrants and established residents collectively sought to improve the material conditions of others in need through familial support, neighborhood improvement, education, church work, social clubs, civic organizations, medical care and the media. "Beautiful people," a phrase my late father used to describe family, friends and community leaders he admired and respected, mainly for their notable deeds, aptly depicts the migrant community agents highlighted in this essay. Beautiful people, they were in the face of adversity and discouragement; even when their hopes waned, they still gave of themselves for the good of the community.⁹

Building on the work of James C. Scott, whose research forces scholars to look more closely at the terms protest and resistance, this essay calls these “hidden” acts of resistance important; if for no other reason, passivity or undercover aggression ensured the group’s survival.¹⁰ The author places these migrant community servants in two categories. The conservative Booker T. Washington constructionalists or accommodationists who dominated African American life for fifty years, from the end of slavery to the end of World War I, espoused economic independence and a cautious political philosophy that publically appeased white segregationists. The death of Washington in 1915 and emergence of a second movement signaled the slow death of this heralded group. Influenced heavily by W.E.B. Du Bois, the establishment of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), World War II and The Great Migration, and the emergence of the Universal Improvement Association and its national spokesperson, Marcus Garvey, the moderate to radical “New Negroes” of the interwar era advocated a more aggressive approach to racial segregation, one that combined cultural consciousness, stayed militancy, integration and economic autonomy with social justice. On occasions, New Negroes utilized constructionalism as well.¹¹

The two mainstream political voices of African America in the early twentieth century had profound implications on Black life and culture, including that of self-help agency. Individually and collectively, the camps advocated the use of agency as an important means to a successful, fruitful end. Mostly, the two philosophies pushed people of color to embrace socioeconomic independence and collective consciousness, the dual notion that articulated the following: (1) individual successes strengthened the community and motivated others to seek attainable goals; and (2) through the idea of shared responsibility, African Americans would help others in the community attain success. Of course New Negroes went further, pointing out that African Americans had an obligation to challenge white America to end racial oppression. While somewhat more radical in nature, the latter group essentially built upon the established, inherent doctrine of accommodating freed people of color.¹²

The two camps did something else in Houston and across the country: through their acts of self-help agency, that is, through their efforts to improve conditions within their communities, both influenced the emerging modern Civil Rights Movement. As Jacqueline Ann Rouse, Stephanie Shaw and other historians of African American agency assert, earlier forms of activism in the form of community building gave momentum to the later modern Civil Rights and Black Power movements. By providing their families with hope, stable homes, spiritual resolve and educational opportunities, migrants to Houston planted fertile seeds of fervent rebellion and protest in the psyches and souls of offspring, tools deemed invaluable for the radical integrationist and social-justice efforts of the 1950s through 1970s. Building on the successes and failures of foreparents, the civil-rights generation would confidently demand real, lasting change—economic, legal, political, educational, as well as global transformation.¹³

Houston's emerging industrial economy, especially after World War I, propelled migration streams and unprecedented population growth among whites, African Americans, and Latinos of Mexican ancestry, and from all socioeconomic classes as well as Christian religions. The city's success in commerce, railroad and waterway expansion, and oil refining following the Spindletop oilfield find outside Beaumont, Texas, in 1901, put in motion the city and Upper Texas Gulf Coast (UTGC) manufacturing region's twentieth-century economic surge. Houston-based industrial firms grew from seventy-eight in 1900 to four hundred and seventy-five by 1930, employing 26,213. In 1940, six hundred manufacturing firms employed 27,500 workers. Total bank deposits grew from five million in 1900 to over two hundred million in 1940. The city's improved business and manufacturing pursuits, stemming from ship channel trade, oil refineries, oil equipment and tool businesses, cotton compresses, steel foundries, railroads, service companies and petrochemical plants created a demand for both menial wage earners and professionals.¹⁴

As migrants flocked to the city for jobs, Houston's overall and African American population figures swelled, although real growth occurred within the white community as Black percentage growth in the city's overall population plummeted from 38 percent in 1890 to 21 percent in 1930. Houston grew from a

medium-sized United States city in 1900 of 44,633 to the South's largest metropolitan center of 596,163 in 1950, with the city's Black population mounting from 14,608 in 1900 to 124,760 in 1950. Houston, the second largest city in the state in 1900 behind San Antonio and the eighty-fifth largest in the nation, had become by 1930, the most-populated city in Texas, the second in the South, behind New Orleans, and twenty-sixth in the United States. In 1950 Houston had become the largest urban center in the South and fourteenth largest city in the nation.¹⁵

Whether a recent migrant to the city or second-generation established resident, or an unskilled laborer or middle-class professional, African Americans accepted their greatest obstacle, racism, as a fact of life. In fact during this period, they preferred racial separation to integration. If for no other reason, segregation afforded African Americans the opportunity to maintain a separate identity, one far removed from ridicule, contempt and self-inflicted hatred. Equally important, they felt more at ease when in the presence of other African Americans. Whites perhaps reminded them of their inferior status; African Americans were therefore compelled to avoid constant reminders of this fact. More than likely, African Americans felt protected and even invulnerable inside their segregated homes, church houses, restaurants, clubs, businesses, and schools.¹⁶

Fear also motivated the first generations of free people of color to accept the white status quo, even if acceptance carried with it deeply-rooted psychological and spiritual scars. Although the guise of accommodation forced African Americans accepted this as fact, slavery and segregation ironically afforded them with the necessary survival skills that allowed them to subtly challenge their oppressors, even while outwardly acknowledging their inferior status. The survival strategies created in slavery and freedom created the basis for African American community agency in the migration phenomenon.¹⁷

Even before Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Compromise speech in 1895, Houston-area Blacks supported appeasement as a practical doctrine of survival and resistance. Born in Navasota in Grimes County on October 25, 1872, James Delbridge Ryan completed his initial education at Prairie View College

in 1890. That same year at the age of seventeen he relocated to Houston and began teaching mathematics for the Houston school system. A decade later he began a long career at Colored High School (now Booker T. Washington High School) in Fourth Ward, first as a math instructor. In 1912 he became the school's principal. He later earned a master's from Wiley College and became principal of the new Jack Yates High School in Third Ward in 1928. The racial inequities were obvious to Ryan. He discussed them at great length at a Colored Teachers' Association of Texas convention presidential address in 1927. By the 1920s, for example, Colored High School had an enrollment of 1,000 but seats for 500. While white schools saw state of the art science laboratories by the late 1920s, many African American schools had no science textbooks or equipment. African American teachers and administrators earned one-third to one-half less in pay than their white peers. Still like most Blacks at the time, Ryan never challenged white peers, administrators, or city officials to reform African American schools, pay equal salaries, and eradicate racial disparities.¹⁸

Instead, Ryan looked to the community for answers. When the school district refused to hire fine arts instructors and athletic coaches. "Professor Jimmie," as many beloved students called him, used his own money to fund programs, purchase school supplies, and finance the careers of skillful instructors. James D. Ryan persuaded mail clerk Will J. Jones in 1912 to form choral clubs at African American schools for a modest fee which Ryan himself paid. Jones, a former student of music at the reputable New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, loved teaching music. Regrettably, the school system at the time refused to pay the salaries of African American music teachers. Will Jones served African American schoolchildren for twenty-two years before the district officially recognized him as a music teacher. By the 1930s, African American schools, largely because of generous benefactor James D. Ryan, enjoyed choirs, music departments, bands, and textbooks. Ryan was also instrumental in the formation of the district's athletic programs for African American high schools. For example, before 1925, Ryan purchased uniforms and equipment for the Colored High School football team.¹⁹

Ryan always found ways to meet the needs of schoolchildren. A passive James D. Ryan used his personal finances and influence to improve Black schools and initiate policy. The actions of Ryan and other publicly passive educators actually paid off. Many of their students at Booker T. Washington, Jack Yates, and Phillis Wheatley went on to have fruitful and lucrative careers in medicine, dentistry, nursing, accounting, library science, mortuary science, music, journalism, business, higher education, and teaching.²⁰

By the second decade of the century, the constructionalists who had dominated African American life and culture since Emancipation, saw the rise of a second group of activists. The message of thrift and self reliance struck a cord with many in the community, including, ironically, a growing number of dissidents. A growing number of men and women looked to the popular "New Negro" Movement that followed World War I. Prompted by political and cultural changes, African Americans nationwide increasingly challenged the conformist creed of James D. Ryan and others who championed the Booker T. Washington platform.²¹

Growing racial tensions also spurred discontent in the African American community. Several riots predated Red Summer, with one being the Houston Riot of 1917. The Houston Riot occurred on the night of August 23, 1917, when one hundred armed infantrymen, angry over racist treatment, a police beating involving a fellow soldier presumed dead, and a circulating rumor that the camp would soon come under attack, disobeyed orders and marched through two neighborhoods, a working-class suburb, the Brunner addition, at Brunner Ave. and San Filipe, and a section of the Fourth Ward, spraying and bayoneting randomly innocent bystanders and police. In the end, nineteen died, including thirteen white and Hispanic Houstonians, four police officers, one Illinois national guardsman, and four African American troops. Twenty others were wounded. Three tribunals indicted one hundred and eighteen men, finding one hundred and ten guilty. Sixty-three men received life sentences, while nineteen died by hanging. Disillusionment over continuous charges of racism, the murder spree and swift courts-martial sparked the new movement in

the city, one involving a younger cadre of activists who appealed to the conventional wisdom of Ryan and other constructionalists, eventually founding a local branch of the NAACP in 1918. Bolder and less dependent on white approval, Houston's "New Negroes" espoused African American social justice, primarily through litigation.²²

While most "New Negroes" of the period both distanced themselves from the politics of Booker T. Washington, and, at the same time, occasionally utilized the safety valve of constructionalism, a few "New Negroes" demanded immediate equal treatment under the law, especially the right to vote and equal pay. These individuals rarely appeased whites. To the contrary, the actions and statements of so-called extremists like Richard Randolph Grovey made people, including Blacks, nervous. Born in Brazoria County in 1889 to the middle-class farm family, Grovey moved to Waco to attend high school, graduating in 1910, and that same year, entered Tillotson College in Austin, earning his degree in 1914. After a brief stint as a rural principal, Grovey married a Prairie View College coed studying to become a schoolteacher, permanently settling in Houston, only months before the Houston Riot. Tired of taking orders and feeling undervalued, Grovey left his skilled position at Houston and Texas Central Railroad and enrolled in barber school, in time opening a barbershop in Third Ward on Dowling St. down the street from the Covington home. He took the conversations he heard at his place of business, and by the late 1920s, founded a political-action organization, the Third Ward Civic Club, one that intersected community needs with labor organizing. Unlike most middle-class African Americans, Grovey attracted working-class laborers to his organization, a decision he relished up to his death in 1961. He respected the rank and file and bitterly recognized their need to collectively organize on their jobs. By the mid-1930s, Grovey left the organization he founded to actively organize for the local CIO.²³

Prior to his departure, however, he ruffled feathers when he filed a lawsuit against election judge Albert Townsend, charging the official with violating his constitutional rights when he refused to issue him a

ballot in 1932. With the financial backing of a businessman with mobster ties Julius White, and legal expertise of attorneys Carter Wesley and Jasper Austin (Jack) Atkins, he took the case to the Supreme Court. A loophole allowed his lawyers to forego the Texas Court of Appeals and Supreme Court and take the case directly to the United States Supreme Court. In *Grove v. Townsend* (1935) the court however ruled in favor of the defendant, arguing that the white Democratic primary law did not violate African Americans' constitutional rights if the primary itself was operated by a private group, not the state. This challenged two earlier Supreme Court rulings, both of which originated in Texas and addressed the constitutionality of the white primary law, formed in 1923 (*Nixon v. Herndon*, 1927; and, *Nixon v. Condon*, 1932).²⁴

Instead of rallying behind Grove, members of the community expressed anger for generating what they perceived to be negative attention from the media and white community. Residents, mostly middle-class professionals, threatened him, criticized his wife, verbally attacked his children, and stopped patronizing his barbershop. Even members of the NAACP, including, according to daughter Nell Grove Cole, attorney Thurgood Marshall, branded Grove a dangerous lunatic, mainly because they saw the defeat as a devastating blow to their plan of attack, although they did eventually see victory with the *Smith v. Allwright* decision (1944). Still retired guidance counselor Nell Grove Cole remembers the pain and humiliation the family suffered at the hands of schoolteachers, neighbors, acquaintances and strangers on the city street who saw R. R. Grove as selfishly pretentious and unqualified to lead the city's fight for racial equality. For her, the "New Negro" Movement represented painful contradictions in a community she called home. Nevertheless, the four Texas white primary cases that reached the Supreme Court had important implications for the *Brown* decision of 1954, the unofficial start of the modern Civil Rights Movement, since it proved to activists that African Americans could in fact successfully challenge local and state laws that harmed them as citizens.²⁵

In conclusion, migrants and established residents gave back to their communities in numerous ways. In doing so, they offered African Americans alternative solutions to the pressing problems and challenges facing their families, neighborhoods and larger society. Interestingly these institutions and self-help programs did something else. They precipitated the rise of an articulate, educated, confident and somewhat militant group of race leaders who through nonviolent, quiet means, along with more combative, self-defense methods, contested racial oppression. Increasingly, political action for African American Houstonians meant confrontation. The emerging direct assault on white hegemony would differ considerably from the accommodating posture of Old Guard elites like James Ryan who generally believed that direct confrontation had unpleasant consequences for African American individually and collectively. Ironically, as New Negroes came on the scene, many of their views mirrored those of the Old Elite. In fact, even within the ranks of this new Houston militancy, differing viewpoints, class bias, and sexism threatened the untied assault on white supremacy. The constructionalists and New Negroes did something else: they inspired later generation of activists and activism in Houston, the United States and around the world. Human-rights leaders Eldrewey Stearns, Ella Baker, Rosa Parks, MLK, Jo Ann Robinson, Malcolm X, Roy Wilkins, Bobby seales, Angela Davis, Maulana Karenga, Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba and other hunan-rights activists owed much to their predecessors. Beautify people they were, for their commitment to both community building and social equality in the face of unending racism.²⁶

Endnotes

¹*The New Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v., "Jennie Belle Murphy Covington" (by Mary M. Standifer), <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/fcoyp.html> (accessed May 20, 2008); *New Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v., "Benjamin Covington" (by John S. Gray III), <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/fcocc.html> (accessed May 20, 2008); Obituary, "Funeral Service: Mrs. Jennie B. Covington," 1966, Dr. Benjamin Covington Papers, 170:1, folder 1, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas (hereafter cited as Dr. Benjamin Covington MSS); Jean Walsh, "Dr. Covington, at 90, Is Still Practicing," Dr. Benjamin Covington Papers, 170:1, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas (hereafter cited as Dr. Benjamin Covington MSS).

²*The New Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v., "Jennie Belle Murphy Covington"; *New Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v., "Benjamin Covington"; Obituary, "Funeral Service: Mrs. Jennie B. Covington," 1966, Dr. Benjamin Covington MSS, 170:1, folder 1; Jean Walsh, "Dr. Covington, at 90, Is Still Practicing," Dr. Benjamin Covington MSS, 170:1.

³ *The New Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v., "Jennie Belle Murphy Covington"; *New Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v., "Benjamin Covington"; Obituary, "Funeral Service: Mrs. Jennie B. Covington," 1966, Dr. Benjamin Covington MSS, 170:1, folder 1; Jean Walsh, "Dr. Covington, at 90, Is Still Practicing," Dr. Benjamin Covington MSS, 170:1; "Seventeen Years with the YWCA in Houston," Dr. Benjamin Covington Papers, 170:1, folder 1, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas (hereafter cited as Dr. Benjamin Covington MSS); Ira Bryant, *Houston's Negro Schools* (Houston: Informer Publishing Co., 1935), 58-63; Shaw, "Black Club Women and the Creation of the National Association of Colored Women, 433-42; Rufus E. Clement, "Educational Programs for the Improvement of Race Relations: Interracial Committees," *Journal of Negro Education* 13, No. 3 (1944), 316-20; *The Blue Triangle, Inc.*, "Basic History," *The Blue Triangle, Inc.*, <http://thebluetriangle.org/page6.html> (accessed May 29, 2008); Alice Dunbar-Nelson, "Negro Women in War Work," in *Scott's Official History of the American Negro in the World War*, ed., Emmett J. Scott, (Washington, D.C., Emmett J. Scott, 1919), <http://net.lib.byu.edu/estu/wwi/comment/Scott/SCh27.htm> (accessed May 29, 2008); Historical Context Sheet, Sneed Family Collection, 293-1:1, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas (hereafter cited as Sneed Family MSS); Lullelia Harrison, interviewed by Bernadette Pruitt, tape recording, Houston, Texas, 23 September 1999, in the possession of author; "History of the Blue Triangle Branch," Houston Young Women's Christian Association Collection, RG F 017, Box 1-1, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas (hereafter cited as Houston Young Women's Christian Association, "YWCA Marking 50 Years Service to Houston Women," Dr. Benjamin Covington MSS, 170:1, folder 1; "Seventeen Years with the YWCA in Houston," Dr. Benjamin Covington MSS, 170:1, folder 1; Thelma Scott Bryant, interviewed by Bernadette Pruitt, tape recording, Houston, Texas, 26 July 1996, in the possession of author; and Thelma Scott Bryant, *Pioneer Families of Houston as Remembered by Thelma Scott Bryant* (Houston: N.P., 1991), 7.

⁴ Obituary, "Funeral Service: Mrs. Jennie B. Covington," 1966, Dr. Benjamin Covington MSS, 170:1, folder 1; Jesse O. Thomas, *A Study of the Social Welfare Status of Negroes of Houston, Texas* (Houston: Webster-Richardson Publishing CO., 1929), 10, 79, 84. The Blue Triangle branch opened in 1918 but became a member of the Houston Central Association of the YWCA in 1920. See Winegarten, *Black Texas Women*, 202; Winegarten, *Black Texas Women*, 97; Ethel Ransom Art and Literary Club Records, RG E59; "Who's Who in American Education," Olee Yates McCullough MSS, 370:1, folder 9; "To Protect, to Feed, and to Give Momentum to Every Effort," 15-23; "A Musical Panorama , 42[nd] Anniversary of the Married Ladies Social, Art and Charity Club," General and Mary Jones Johnson, MSS 119: 4-Programs; Seals interview; Photo identification sheet, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Alpha Kappa Omega Alumnae Chapter, circa 1942, Sneed Family, MSS 293-26; Photo identification sheet, Members of the Houston Chapter of The Links, Inc., MSS 293-33; Unidentified group photograph of Constance Houston Thompson and other with Mary McLeod Bethune—probably an annual convention of the Council of Negro Women, circa 1940s, Joshua Houston Family, MSS 437-1; Ledé, *Precious Memories of a Black Socialite*, 124-66; Ledé, "Constance Houston Thompson," 70-72; Ledé, Hortense Houston Young," 82-84; Bryant, *Pioneer Families of Houston*, 1-36; "To Protect, to Feed, and to Give Momentum to Every Effort," 20-21.

⁵ "The Texas Commission on Inter-Racial Cooperation, 1920-1940: A Southern Organization for the Promotion of Racial Goodwill," Dr. Benjamin Covington Papers, 170:1, folder 1, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas (hereafter cited as Dr. Benjamin Covington MSS); *The New Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v., "Jennie Belle Murphy Covington"; Rufus E. Clement, "Educational Programs for the Improvement of Race Relations: Interracial Committees," *The Journal of Negro Education* 13, No. 5 (Summer 1944), 316-20; William E. Cole, "The Role of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation in War and Peace," *Social Forces* 21, No. 4 (May 1943), 456-63.

⁶ "The Texas Commission on Inter-Racial Cooperation, 1920-1940: A Southern Organization for the Promotion of Racial Goodwill," Dr. Benjamin Covington MSS 170:1, folder 1; *Handbook of Texas*, s.v., "Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching" (by Nancy Baker Jones), <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/AA/via1.html> (accessed May 30, 2008); "Travesty of Justice, Says Mrs. Covington," *Houston Post*, n. d., Dr. Benjamin Covington Papers, 170:1, folder 1, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas (hereafter cited as Dr. Benjamin Covington MSS).

⁷ "Travesty of Justice, Says Mrs. Covington," *Houston Post*, n. d., Dr. Benjamin Covington MSS 170:1; Ann Lundy, "Pioneer Concert Pianist: Anne Lundy and Ernestine Jessie Covington Dent," *The Black Perspective in Music* 12, No. 2 (Autumn 1984):245-65; "Newspaper Clippings," Dent, Albert Walter and Jessie Covington Collection, 1908-1985, **29, Box 1, folder 1**, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana; *Other Free Biographies: Brief Biographies: African American Biographies*, V. 4, s.v., "Thomas Covington Dent Biography: From Academia to Activism, Worked with Free Southern Theater, Oral Historian, Selected Writings" (by Kari Bethel), <http://biography.jrank.org/pages/2514/Dent-Thomas-Covington.html> (accessed May 20, 2008); *Chickenbones: For Literary and Artistic African American Themes*, s.v., "Thomas Covington Dent, 1932-1998: New Orleans Writer and Cultural Activist," www.nathanielturner.com/tomdentbio.htm (accessed May 20, 2008); *Black Collegian Online*, "Tom Dent: New Orleans Writer," *Black Collegian Online*, May 26, 2008, <http://www.black-collegian.com/african/dent9.shtml> (accessed May 26, 2008); *The New Handbook of Texas Online*, s.v., "Jennie Belle Murphy Covington"; *Handbook of Texas*, s.v., "Covington, Benjamin Jesse" (by John S. Gray III), <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/fccocp.html> (accessed May 30, 2008). Thomas Dent, the eldest grandson of Jessie and Benjamin Covington, graduated from Morehouse College in 1952 with a degree in political science, while working as the editor of the school's literary journal, *Maroon Tiger*. He did his graduate work at Syracuse University, leaving before completing his doctorate in political science. Stirred by the emerging Civil Rights Movement, Dent joined the Army, serving from 1957 to 1959. After leaving the military, he relocated to New York where he joined the NAACP legal defense fund, working as a press attaché and public information director, working under Thurgood Marshall. He also became an active participant in the fledgling Black arts movement in Manhattan, working a brief stint as a reporter for the *New York Age*, and later founding Umbra Writers Workshop, the first post-sixties African American literary society. He also founded On Guard for Freedom, a Black nationalist literary protest group that opposed US and pro-US foreign policy directives, especially the UN response to the Bay of Pigs incident. Dent also worked as a social worker for the New York City Welfare Department. Returning home in 1965, Dent joined the Free Southern Theater. The New Orleans-based community theater performed many of Dent's plays, and along with the organization's magazine, *Nkombo*, combined literary creativity with human-rights activism. He continued his literary activism in the 1970s, putting on productions and teaching classes at Mississippi and New Orleans colleges. Eventually he earned his master's degree at Goddard College in Vermont, resuming his community activism and literary work in New Orleans following graduate school. He published a series of poetry collections, and eventually founded new local arts groups and prestigious literary journal *Callaloo: A Quarterly Journal of African and African American Arts and Letters* in 1977. The highly-acclaimed journal is published by the Johns Hopkins University Press. An acclaimed writer, Dent also founded a series of oral history workshops and conducted several oral history series with Mississippi civil rights activists as well as New Orleans Acadian musicians. He served as executive director of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Foundation, from 1987 to 1990. He remained a cultural and political activist in New Orleans until his death in 1998 due to complications from a heart attack. At the time of his passing, Dent was working on several projects, including an autobiographical piece. Interestingly, Dent preceded his mother, pianist and former educator Ernestine Jessie Covington Dent. Mrs. Dent died in 2004. His works can be found in the Dent Collection at the Amistad Research Center.

⁸ Howard O. Beeth and Cary D. Wintz, eds. "Economic and Social Development in Black Houston during the Era of Segregation" in *Black Dixie: Afro-Texan History and Culture in Houston* (College Station: Texas A. & M. Press, 1992), 88-89; Richard Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It: Building Black Community in Detroit, 1915-1945* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), xiii, 175; Merline Pitre, *In Struggle against Jim Crow: Lula B. White and the NAACP, 1900-1957* (College Station: Texas A. & M. University Press, 1999); Bernadette Pruitt, "For the Advancement of the Race": African-American Migration and Community Building in Houston, 1914-1945," (Ph.D. diss., University of Houston, 2001), 455-67.

⁹ "A Life Sketch of Dr. M. L. Price," Rev. Moses L. Price Papers, 277:1, folder 1, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas (hereafter cited as Rev. Moses L. Price MSS 277); Obituary, "Funeral Service: Mrs. Jennie B. Covington," 1966, Dr. Benjamin Covington MSS, 170:1, folder 1; Photo Identification Sheet, Sneed Family Collection, 293-1:1, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas; Lullelia Harrison, interview by author, tape recording, Houston, Texas, 23 September 1999, in the possession of author; Hazel Young, interview by author, tape recording, 7

August 1996, in the possession of author; Vivian Hubbard Seals, interview by author, tape recording, 17 May 1999, in the possession of author; Thelma Scott Bryant, interview by author, tape recording, 25 July 1996, in the possession of author; Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It*, xiii, 175; Howard Jones, *The Red Diary: A Chronological History of Black Americans in Houston and Some Neighboring Harris County Communities—122 Years Later* (Austin: Nortex Press, 1991), 83-153; Andrew Webster Jackson, *A Sure Foundation* (Houston: Webster-Richardson Publishing Co., n. d.), 45-46, 116-17, 238, 264-65, 385-86.

¹⁰ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), xv-xix; James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), ix-xiii.

¹¹ James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), xv-xix; James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), ix-xiii; William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (1899; reprint with a new introduction by Elijah Anderson, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); W. E. B. Du Bois, *Souls of Black Folk: A Norton Critical Reader*. Edited by Henry Lewis Gates, Jr. and Terri Hume Oliver (1903; New York: Norton, 2000); David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995); David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and the American Century, 1919-1963* (New York: Henry Holt, 2000); Louis Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Making of a Black Leader, 1856-1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 115-210; and Louis Harlan, *Booker T. Washington: The Wizard of Tuskegee, 1901-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture Presents: *In Motion: The African-American Migration Experience*, <http://www.inmotion.org/> (accessed 15 April 2006); Robert A. Hill, ed., *Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers*, V. 1-10 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983-2006); Amy Jacques Garvey, *Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey*, with a new preface by Tony Martin (1969; Dover, Massachusetts: Majority Press, 1986); Davis, Lenwood G. and Janet L. Sims, compilers, *Marcus Garvey: An Annotated Bibliography*, Forward by John Henrik Clarke (Westport: Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980); and E. David Cronon, *Black Moses: The Story of Marcus Garvey and the Universal Improvement Association* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969). Increasingly scholars are reevaluating the "accommodationist" label of Washington and his supporters. Maceo Dailey, for example, defines Washington's political stance as one of "constructionalism," not accommodation. See Maceo Crenshaw Dailey, Jr., "Neither 'Uncle Tom' Nor 'Accommodationist,' Booker T. Washington, Emmett Jay Scott, and Constructionalism," *Atlanta History*, 38, No. 4 (1995): 20-33.

¹² Alain Locke (the first black Rhodes Scholar to study at Oxford University, the Howard University professor of philosophy and the noted scholar/artist of the Harlem Renaissance) coined the term "New Negro" in 1925 to describe a cultural and social movement among blacks after World War I. The "New Negro" combined Booker T. Washington's self-help and accommodation philosophy, Marcus Garvey's Pan-Africanism, and Du Bois' social and political integrationist creed with economic radicalism. See Alain Locke, *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1925); Cary D. Wintz, *Black Culture and the Harlem Renaissance* (Houston: Rice University Press, 1988), 1, 30-31; Cary D. Wintz, *The Politics and Aesthetics of "New Negro" Literature: The Harlem Renaissance, 1920-1940* (New York: Routledge, 1996); and *Encyclopedia of the Great Black Migration*, s.v., "New Negro" (by Davarian L. Baldwin), V. 2, ed., Steven A. Reich (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2006), 610-14.

¹³ "A Life Sketch of Dr. M. L. Price," Rev. Moses L. Price MSS, 277:1, folder 1; Obituary, "Funeral Service: Mrs. Jennie B. Covington," 1966, Dr. Benjamin Covington MSS, 170:1, folder 1; Harrison interview; Young interview; Seals interview; Thelma Scott Bryant interview; Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It*, xiii, 175; Jones, *The Red Diary*, 83-153; Webster Jackson, *A Sure Foundation*, 45-46, 116-17, 238, 264-65, 385-86; Jacqueline Ann Rouse, "Out of the Shadow of Tuskegee: Margaret Murray Washington, Social Activism, and Race Vindication," *Journal of Negro History* 81 (1996): 31-46; *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, s.v., "Wells-Barnett, Ida Bell" (by Wanda Hicks), V. 2, ed., Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, Rosalyn Perborg-Penn (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 1245-46; Bernadette Pruitt, "In Search of Freedom: Black Migration to Houston, 1914-1945," *Houston Review of History and Culture*, 3 (Fall 2005): 48-57, 85-86.

¹⁴ David McComb, *Houston: A History* (1969; reprint, Austin: University of Texas, 1980), 65-82; Obadele-Starks, *Black Unionism in the Industrial South*, 3-6; Thomas, *A Study of the Social Welfare Status of the Negro in Houston, Texas* 7-8; Bruce Andre Beaubouef, "War and Change: Houston's Economic Ascendancy during World War I," *Houston Review: History and Culture of the Gulf Coast* 14 (Fall 1992): 89-112; Pruitt, "For the Advancement of the Race," x-xi, 21-26, 70-71; Pratt, *Growth of a Refining Region*, 3-11, 13-30, 33-56, 69-75; Beeth, "Historians, Houston, and History," in *Black Dixie*, 3-5; *HoustonHistory.com/171 Years of Houston History*, s.v., Decades, 1930-1940, "Progress Despite Depression" (by Marvin Hurley),

<http://www.houstonhistory.com/decades/history5j.htm> (accessed May 26, 2008); *HoustonHistory.com/171 Years of Houston History*, s.v., Decades, 1920-1930, "Period of Accelerated Growth" (by Marvin Hurley), <http://www.houstonhistory.com/decades/history5i.htm> (accessed May 26, 2008); *HoustonHistory.com/171 Years of Houston History*, s.v., Decades, 1910-1920, "Industry for War and Peace," <http://www.houstonhistory.com/decades/history5h.htm> (accessed May 26, 2008). The Spindletop discovery signaled the formation of the Upper Texas Gulf Coast (UTGC) manufacturing region, a one hundred mile coastline of factories from Corpus Christi in the south to Beaumont and Port Arthur in the north, with Houston in the center. The discovery at Spindletop led to the greatest period of United States oil refining, with the UTGC refining region leading the way with crude oil production of 900,000 barrels daily by 1941.

¹⁵ Bureau of Census, *Negro Population in the United States, 1790-1915* (1918; reprint, New York: Arno Press, 1969), 92, 205; Bureau of Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1900. V. 1. Population* (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1901); Bureau of Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910. V. 3. Population* (Washington, D.C.: United States Printing Office, 1913); Bureau of Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, V. 2, Population: General Reports and Analytical Tables* (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1923), 354; Bureau of Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States: Population: Characteristics of the Population, V. 2, Characteristics of the Population. Part 6: Pennsylvania-Texas* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1943), 1044; Bureau of Census, *A Decennial Report of the Seventeenth Census of the United States: Census of Population: 1950, V. 2, Characteristics of the Population, Part 43, Texas* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1953), 43-63, 43-358.

¹⁶ Howard O. Beeth and Cary D. Wintz, eds. "Economic and Social Development in Black Houston during the Era of Segregation" in *Black Dixie: Afro-Texan History and Culture in Houston* (College Station: Texas A. & M. Press, 1992), 88-89; Pruitt, "For the Advancement of the Race," 435-478; Harrison interview; Young interview; Seals interview; Thelma Scott Bryant interview; Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It*, xiii, 175; Webster Jackson, *A Sure Foundation*, 45-46, 116-17, 238, 264-65, 385-86; Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas* (1979; new edition with essays by Darlene Clark Hine, Steven F. Lawson, and Merline Pitre (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 95-102; Merline Pitre, *In Struggle Against Jim Crow: Lulu White and the NAACP, 1900-1957* (College Station: Texas A. & M. University Press, 1999), 24-30; James M. SoRelle, "The Darker Side of 'Heaven,': The Black Community in Houston, Texas, 1917-1945" (Ph.D. diss., Kent State University), 337-49; James M. SoRelle, "Race Relations in 'Heavenly Houston,' 1919-45," in *Black Dixie: Afro-Texan History and Culture in Houston* ed., Howard O. Beeth and Cary D. Wintz (College Station: Texas A. & M. Press, 1992), 177-80.

¹⁷ Howard O. Beeth and Cary D. Wintz, eds. "Economic and Social Development in Black Houston during the Era of Segregation" in *Black Dixie: Afro-Texan History and Culture in Houston* (College Station: Texas A. & M. Press, 1992), 88-89; Pruitt, "For the Advancement of the Race," 435-478; Harrison interview; Young interview; Seals interview; Thelma Scott Bryant interview; Thomas, *Life for Us Is What We Make It*, xiii, 175; Andrew Webster Jackson, *A Sure Foundation*, 45-46, 116-17, 238, 264-65, 385-86; Darlene Clark Hine, *Black Victory: The Rise and Fall of the White Primary in Texas* (1979; new edition with essays by Darlene Clark Hine, Steven F. Lawson, and Merline Pitre (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 95-102; Merline Pitre, *In Struggle Against Jim Crow: Lulu White and the NAACP, 1900-1957* (College Station: Texas A. & M. University Press, 1999), 24-30; James M. SoRelle, "The Darker Side of 'Heaven,': The Black Community in Houston, Texas, 1917-1945" (Ph.D. diss., Kent State University), 337-49; James M. SoRelle, "Race Relations in 'Heavenly Houston,' 1919-45," in *Black Dixie: Afro-Texan History and Culture in Houston* ed., Howard O. Beeth and Cary D. Wintz (College Station: Texas A. & M. Press, 1992), 177-80.

¹⁸ Jackson, *A Sure Foundation*, 116-17; Thelma Scott Bryant, *Pioneer Families of Houston*, 9-56; Ira Bryant, *The Development of Houston Negro Schools* (Houston: Informer Publishing Co., 1935), 115-20, "The Handbook of Texas, s.v., Ryan, James Delbridge" (by Peggy Hardman), <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/RR/fry5.html> (accessed May 30, 2008); James M. SoRelle, "The Darker Side of 'Heaven,': The Black Community in Houston, 1917-1945," (Ph.D. diss., Kent State University, 1980).

¹⁹ Jackson, *A Sure Foundation*, 116-17; Thelma Scott Bryant interview; Harrison interview; Young interview; "The Handbook of Texas, s.v., Ryan, James Delbridge."

²⁰ Jackson, *A Sure Foundation*, 116-17; Thelma Scott Bryant interview; Harrison interview; Young interview; "Ryan, James Delbridge."

²¹ Jackson, *A Sure Foundation*, 116-17; Thelma Scott Bryant interview; Harrison interview; Young interview; "Ryan, James Delbridge."

²² Thelma Scott Bryant interview; Young interview; *Handbook of Texas*, s.v., "Houston Riot of 1917" (by Robert V. Haynes), <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/HH/jch4.html> (accessed May 31, 2008); Garna L. Christian, *Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas, 1899-1917* (College Station: Texas A. & M. University Press, 1995), 145-72; Robert V. Haynes, *Night of Violence: The Houston Riot of 1917* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 90-170.

²³ Richard Grovey, World War I Draft Registration Card, Precinct 13, June 5, 1917, Houston, Texas, "Military Records, Ancestry.com, <http://content.ancestry.com/iexec/?htx=View&r=an&dbid=6482&iid=TX-1953564-1954&fn=Richard&ln=Grovey&st=r&ssrc=&pid=16905724> (accessed May 30, 2008); Manuscript Census, Brazoria County, 1900, roll 1614, Bureau of Census, Series T623, Clayton Genealogy Library, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas; Manuscript Census, Brazoria County, 1910, roll 1534, Bureau of Census, Series T624, Clayton Genealogy Library, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas; Manuscript Census, Harris County, 1930, roll 2347, Bureau of Census, Series T626, Clayton Genealogy Library, Houston Public Library, Houston, Texas; Hine, *Black Victory*, 164-67; *Handbook of Texas*, s.v., "Grovey, Richard Randolph" (by Douglas Hales), <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/GG/fgrat.html> (accessed May 30, 2008).

²⁴ *Grovey v. Townsend*, 295 U.S. 45 (1935); Hine, *Black Victory*, 164-72, 193-96, 209-51; *Handbook of Texas*, s.v., "Grovey, Richard Randolph."

²⁵ *Grovey v. Townsend*, 295 U.S. 45 (1935); *Nixon v. Herndon* 273 U.S. 536 (1927); *Nixon v. Condon* 286 U.S. 73 (1932); *Smith v. Allwright* 321 U.S. 649 (1944); Hine, *Black Victory*, 164-72, 193-96, 209-51; *Handbook of Texas*, s.v., "Grovey, Richard Randolph."

²⁶ Hine, Darlene Clark, William C. Hine, Stanley Harrold. *African-American Odyssey*, 3rd ed. Complete Volume. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006, 563-634.