

BUILDING A BUSINESS IN THE BAYOU CITY: HOUSTON AND WOMEN'S
ENTREPRENEURSHIP, 1945-1977

by

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CHAPTER 1: WOMEN AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE “STATE OF NEVER MIND”

City Café at 513 College Avenue is an institution in south Houston. It is an “old-school diner” serving chicken-fried steak, eggs, and gallons of black coffee, and the current proprietors assert that the café dates to at least 1952, proudly proclaimed on the outside sign. Some of the regulars have been coming to the restaurant for decades, maintaining a long-running thread in the establishment’s history.¹ The location, most of the menu, and the clientele, though, are the only things that have remained the same; the proprietorship of City Café has changed hands a multitude of times. Myrtle Choate filed the first confirmed business license for City Café in 1946, six years prior to the estimate of the current proprietors, following a trend of more women opening businesses across the nation, supported by a federal government eager to move women out of industrial jobs as men returned from their positions in the military. Following Choate, several other women owned City Café into at least the 1960s, reflecting the high turnover in the restaurant industry.²

Although the current owners of City Café have no connection to Myrtle Choate or the other female owners of City Café at mid-century, upon seeing that City Café was still open at the same location, I called to see if perhaps there was any knowledge of the former owners or any way of tracking down more information. A few other Houston restaurants, such as Pizzitola Bar B Cue, despite changing hands, continue to retell the

¹ “City Café: South Houston’s Charmingly Old School Diner,” *Houston Press*, January 17, 2012, accessed on June 15, 2016, <http://www.houstonpress.com/slideshow/city-cafe-south-houstons-charmingly-old-school-diner-6253560>.

² A more complete analysis of the women owners of the City Café is in Chapter 2. “New Firms,” *The Daily Court Review*, (Houston, TX), August 17, 1946, 4; “New Firms,” *The Daily Court Review*, (Houston, TX), February 14, 1956, 4.

legacy of those who founded the establishment, using the information to establish deep ties to their community and assure patrons that the new owners will continue and honor what makes the establishment good. The manager on duty informed me that, although the owners were not available for me to talk to, as far as she knew, no woman had ever owned City Café or been involved in the direct management of it. As I sputtered about the city records that proved multiple women had been involved in owning the restaurant in its early years, the manager continued to politely and firmly state that a woman owning City Café was not possible. It had been run by men for several decades, and it is true that a line of men owned the restaurant beginning in the 1970s, so, for the manager and many patrons, the history of City Café is dominated by male proprietorship. Myrtle Choate and the multiple women who followed her had been erased.³

The deletion reflects a truism in women's business history: women have always worked, and women have always run businesses, but their existence and the expansion of their numbers in the post-World War II years and beyond was met with surprise by the media and became the cause of government and academic study in the 1970s.⁴ The numbers for women's entrepreneurial efforts are difficult to gather, because many women did not declare themselves as owners of businesses in census records or other data collections, but a 1972 study, one of the most thorough up to that date, argued that women owned about 5 percent of the nation's firms. This number, which used a narrow

³ Telephone Conversation. City Café. June 17, 2016.

⁴ The federal government commissioned the "Report of the President's Interagency Task Force on Women Business Owners," *The Bottom Line: Unequal Enterprise in America* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1978) and, in academia, one of the first studies of contemporary women's business ownership was Nancy Flexman, "Women of Enterprise: A Study of Success and Failure Rates from Self-Employed Women," (PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1976).

definition of “firm,” does not account for home-based businesses, one of the primary centers for women’s entrepreneurial activities, and minimized the efforts of women proprietors by focusing on the total receipts and earnings of those businesses as compared to the rest of the businesses in the nation.⁵ Thus women’s business ownership appears as a small niche in the larger, male-dominated economy.

Women’s entrepreneurial efforts in the years following World War II never rivaled those of men in terms of numbers or revenue, but they were, for the most part, not intended to do so. Women’s proprietorship came from economic need, opportunity, and drive, as it had in decades past; the postwar years only heightened and increased the number of women pursuing their own establishments. It is, as historian Debra Michals has asserted in her broad overview of women’s small business ownership from 1945-1980, a story of continuity on an ever-increasing scale.⁶

Women’s entrepreneurship, however, provides a lens into women’s broader experience during the postwar years, particularly in areas of spectacular economic growth, like the “belt-buckle of the Sunbelt,” Houston.⁷ Women are everywhere in Houston’s booming postwar economy. They used their skills, coded as “female,” in cooking, homemaking, child care, and beautification, and they created enterprises in real estate, restaurants, beauty salons, and retail shops as well as in less-feminine sectors like construction and architecture. A study of the women who ran their own businesses and

⁵ “Census Bureau Conference on Issues in Federal Statistical Needs Relating to Women,” US Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1978, 60.

⁶ Debra Michals, “Beyond Pin Money: The Rise of Women’s Small Business Ownership, 1945-1980,” (PhD diss., University of New York, 2002), 11.

⁷ Barry Kaplan, “Houston: The Golden Buckle of the Sunbelt,” in Richard M. Bernard and Bradley R. Rice, eds., *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth since World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 196.

shops in post-war Houston suggests that business ownership allowed American women an alternative to the traditional choices of working in a low-paying pink-collar job or attending solely to domestic responsibilities. Women could combine their prescribed position as homemaker and mother with a place in the business world, expanding American women's roles in the years following World War II. Women's entrepreneurial efforts were a phenomenon that crossed racial and class boundaries, particularly in a city as fiercely up and coming and yet solidly southern as Houston. This dissertation asserts that Houston's intense devotion to being business-friendly, a trait of most Sunbelt cities, provided fertile ground for women seeking to make their own way. It was a place that was so aggressively pro-business and forward-looking that one journalist referred to the vast majority of the citizens as existing in a "State of Never Mind," always moving ahead, taking risks, and shaking off adversity with a "we-can-do-anything spirit."⁸ Women responded in kind to that encouragement; although data is extremely difficult to find, a conservative estimate reveals that well over five thousand woman-headed businesses opened in Houston from 1946 to 1960. This does not count businesses founded prior to 1946 that continued into the postwar years or those that operated without a business license, which encompassed many small home-based salons, music instruction, and crafts.⁹

The women business-builders of Houston contributed to the phenomenal growth of the city, which came into its own as one of the largest in the nation after World War II.

⁸ George Fuermann, *Houston: Land of the Big Rich* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1951), 11.

⁹ Data compiled from *The Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977.

The story of Houston's massive economic growth often focuses on oil and gas and the expansion of large corporations, but the full story cannot be represented without the small businesses that helped make the city tick and the women who created many of those enterprises. Women's business history is integral to the history of postwar Houston. Thus, to paraphrase historian David Montejano, this is a local history with regional pretensions; the geographic scope is mostly limited to Houston, Texas, but the pattern established in Houston, while exaggerated due to its hyper-aggressive business stance, could be replicated throughout the rest of the postwar Sunbelt.¹⁰ Moreover, due to early efforts at self-help and organization spearheaded by business owners, by the time the mainstream feminist movement reached Houston in the late 1960s, Houstonian women proved among the most active and organized in the nation. For that reason, in addition to the available resources in the form of good hotels and conference facilities, organizers chose Houston as the site for the National Women's Conference in 1977. A study of Houston's female business population has broader implications for the history of the women's rights movement.

The history of women in post-World War II America often focuses on conformity and a retrenchment of gender roles. As Joanne Meyerowitz writes in the introduction to *Not June Cleaver*, works on women and the postwar era published prior to the 1990s emphasized conservatism and the constraining forces arrayed against women in the 1945-1960 period to the extent that the field "erase[d] much of the history of the postwar years" and "tend[ed] to downplay women's agency and portray[ed] women primarily as

¹⁰ David Montejano, *Quixote's Soldiers: A Local History of the Chicano Movement, 1966-1981* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 1.

victims.”¹¹ Textbooks that lumped women’s postwar lives under headings pertaining to home, the suburbs, or the family maintained that depiction, and influential monographs like Elaine Tyler May’s 1988 work *Homeward Bound* sustained it.¹² Yet scholars both before and after May have rejected the all-encompassing idea of women’s position in the postwar era in an explosion of works on women’s history and, more specifically, women’s *labor* history following the advent of the New Social History. In 1982, for example, Alice Kessler-Harris provided an overview of women’s working lives and labors, demonstrating that, not only were women working outside the home during the “containment” era, but they also had been working throughout all of American history.¹³ Historians have created multiple excellent works on the history of women and work in the 1945-1970 period. Standouts include Dorothy Sue Cobble’s *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* and Nancy Gabin’s *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935-1975*.¹⁴

Aside from what many historians saw as exceptional women in women-oriented sectors of the economy, like Madame C.J. Walker, Mary Kay, or Elizabeth Arden, women’s entrepreneurship fell beneath the notice of most business historians and between the cracks of labor history and women’s history as those fields developed and

¹¹ Joanne Meyerowitz, “Introduction,” in Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 4.

¹² Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), xviii.

¹³ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

¹⁴ Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) and Nancy Gabin, *Feminism in the Labor Movement: Women and the United Auto Workers, 1935-1975* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

began to flourish in the 1970s. Business history has slowly started incorporating women, coinciding with a call to arms by Joan Scott in a 1998 issue of the *Business History Review*.¹⁵ These historians argued that the language of business history is “profoundly” gendered with expectations that “entrepreneur” reads as male, and they pushed back against those assumptions. Wendy Gamber’s 1997 work on the millinery and dressmaking trades in the nineteenth and early twentieth century provided one of the first examinations of women’s entrepreneurial pursuits, highlighting their instrumentality to the economy and the complexity of their endeavors. Other works followed in quick succession, including Angel Kwolek-Folland’s general history of women and business.¹⁶

Historians next focused their attention on specific sectors of the economy, like Kathy Peiss’s work on the beauty industry, or on geographic areas.¹⁷ Two fascinating place-based studies on female entrepreneurship appeared within three years of each other, in 2006 and 2009: Edith Sparks’ *Capital Intentions: Female Proprietors in San Francisco, 1850-1920* and Susan Ingalls Lewis’ *Unexceptional Women: Female Proprietors in Mid-Nineteenth Century Albany, New York, 1830-1885*.¹⁸ While these works contribute to an understanding of women’s history in their respective industries and regions, they confine their analysis to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A

¹⁵Joan Scott, “Conceptualizing Gender in American Business History,” *The Business History Review* 72 (1998): 242-49.

¹⁶Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women: A History of Women & Business in the United States* (New York: Palgrave, 1998).

¹⁷Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998).

¹⁸Susan Ingalls Lewis, *Unexceptional Women: Female Proprietors in Mid-Nineteenth Century Albany, New York, 1830-1885* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009) and Edith Sparks, *Capital Intentions: Female Proprietors in San Francisco, 1850-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

dissertation by Debra Michals in 2002 provided an overview of how the state and federal programs for women small business owners interacted in the post-World War II years. Due to the broad nature of her scope, she focused on “big” names in women’s business history and government policy.¹⁹ This scholarship provides a foundation for scholarship on women’s entrepreneurship in the post-World War II years.

Taken together, the historiography of women’s entrepreneurial endeavors reveals the context and narrative in which the women business owners of Houston operated. As Wendy Gamber, Susan Ingalls Lewis, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Edith Sparks, and others have shown, women successfully operated businesses and engaged in the broader marketplace from the colonial period through the nineteenth century. Ulrich’s description of women in colonial northern New England demonstrates how “good wives” grew gardens to make money in the marketplace or trade for other goods and acted as “deputy husbands,” running the family’s farm, business, or other economic endeavors when the head of the house was indisposed.²⁰ By the Early Republic, tens of thousands of American women provided food and lodging, sold groceries, books, and jewelry, and even acted as “lady embalmers.” Gamber estimates that women constituted at least a tenth of all urban proprietors in 1850, mostly capitalizing on skills that acted as an extension of domestic roles.²¹

¹⁹ Michals, “Beyond Pin Money.”

²⁰ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980).

²¹ Wendy Gamber, “A Gendered Enterprise: Placing Nineteenth-Century Businesswomen in History,” *The Business History Review* 72 (1998): 189.

The nature of women's entrepreneurship changed little in the years encompassing Gamber's study to the middle of the twentieth century. Women clustered in retail and service related sectors of the economy. As Gamber notes, more than 80 percent of the women listed as business owners in the Boston Directory in 1876 prepared food, owned hotels, or produced clothing and hats. The majority of the remainder owned retail shops and stores.²² While sex segregation within entrepreneurial endeavors shifted over time, women's clustering in more "feminine" pursuits remained the norm. In a 1954 Business and Professional Women national survey, 32.5 percent of the women entrepreneurs polled worked in non-specified retail and 11.2 percent owned personal service establishments like beauty salons. An estimated 10.7 percent worked in real estate, 10.1 owned educational institutions and the remainder operated hotels, restaurants, farms, medical practices, and media firms.²³ With notable exceptions, women remained proprietors in economic sectors deemed appropriate for women's ventures.

A change took place in the relationship between women's needs and motivations, and the new and expanding economy that followed World War II. From 1945 to 1950, the number of women-owned businesses leaped from 650,000 to 1,000,000. As Debra Michals persuasively argues, the contestation over women's role in the social, political, and economic realm directly impacted women's business ownership. Government officials and policymakers encouraged women to transition out of war work and into small business ownership. Texan Maury Maverick, the director of the Federal Smaller

²² Ibid., 204.

²³ Babette Kass and Rose C. Feld, *The Economic Strength of Business and Professional Women* (New York: National Federation of Business and Women's Clubs, 1954), 115.

War Plants Corporation, argued that business ownership would be a natural shift for women to make in the new postwar economy. Women's businesses, unlike women industrial workers, posed, in the eyes of male policymakers, less of a threat to traditional gender roles. Both federal and state level governments began promoting female-headed small businesses by setting up a system of small-business clinics, which heavily emphasized home-based production of food, crafts, and clothes. Unfortunately for those who enjoyed the small business clinics and the tacit government-level support of women entrepreneurs, the 1950s brought the destruction of the government programs and initiatives that had encouraged women's economic participation as the emphasis on women's domesticity and starkly divided gender roles heightened.²⁴

At the same time, women continued to build their own enterprises, articulating a reconciliation between their domestic roles and business pursuits and pushed by several motivating factors. First and foremost, the postwar period increased the role of Americans, particularly women, as consumers. Women's roles as consumers redefined their traditional gender role; the desire for economic stability, consumer power, and the ability to purchase what they and postwar society deemed necessary caused them to venture into the business world. The new postwar economy created what historian Lizabeth Cohen has termed "a consumer's republic" which fundamentally changed how Americans worked and consumed. Mass consumption was a civic responsibility, which created new jobs and a higher standard of living for all Americans, who in ever-growing numbers bought new houses in new suburbs and required everything from washing machines to new silverware. In an era of "keeping up with the Joneses," many women

²⁴Ibid., 42-75.

found that an extra income proved invaluable to maintaining a middle-class standard of living. This went beyond paying for extras; a second flow of money was a necessity, not a luxury. As many women in the postwar period learned, one income could not always cover a mortgage, car note, and payments on appliances that dictated the “norms” of life.²⁵ Moreover, studies beginning in the early 1980s of women entrepreneurs, including several who opened shops in the 1950s, showed that one of the key motivators for women embracing proprietorship was the possibility to resolve work-family conflict issues by having the freedom and flexibility to set their own schedules.²⁶ Turning a talent for baking cakes or interior design into a small business, bridging the gap between employment outside the home and attending to domestic duties, proved useful.

For other women, the motivation to move into entrepreneurship came from their own histories. Many women proprietors had a family history of entrepreneurship. Among women polled in the 1970s who had begun businesses in the postwar era, 70 percent asserted that their family had a history of business ownership. Of that number, 72 percent noted that their father either passed his business on to them or encouraged them in their own endeavors.²⁷ The postwar period saw a decline in the number of self-employed men, who tended to avoid the risk of small-business ownership in favor of perceived stability in the corporate sphere. The number of self-employed women, on the

²⁵ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

²⁶ Andrea E. Smith-Hunter, *Women Entrepreneurs Across Racial Lines: Issues of Human Capital, Financial Capital and Network Structures* (Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2006), 9-10.

²⁷ James W. Schreier, *The Female Entrepreneur: A Pilot Study* (Milwaukee: The Center for Venture Management, 1975), 7.

other hand, continued to climb.²⁸ Whether because they took over the family business due to a lack of interested sons or started their own, many women asserted that the opportunity had presented itself and they seized it. Only 15 percent of the women who participated in the 1975 survey asserted that they started their postwar business as a stereotypical “hobby” designed to pay for extras or “pin money.” The remainder either needed the money as a substantial portion of their family’s income or were actively pursuing a business venture in which they strongly believed and invested.²⁹

For those women who wanted to pursue business opportunity in the postwar years, there was no better suited place than the emerging Sunbelt. The first use of the term “Sunbelt” came in political strategist Kevin Phillips’ 1969 work on how the strength of the region, which has no firmly agreed upon boundaries but is generally acknowledged as including both the southeast and southwest, could benefit the Republican party. While it took a bit longer than Phillips anticipated for the Sunbelt’s political economy to affect national politics in the way he articulated, the idea of the Sunbelt caught on in national dialogue. The term remained in the political lexicon throughout the 1970s and 1980s, coming to define an idea that “a mix of economics, conservative politics, and demographic change generally associated with the observation that the southeastern and southwestern sections of the country have been growing and preparing more than the Northeast and Midwest. . . .”³⁰ The southeast and southwest, while geographically

²⁸Michals, “Beyond Pin Money,” 209.

²⁹Schreier, *The Female Entrepreneur*, 6.

³⁰ Richard M. Bernard and Bradley R. Rice, “Introduction,” in Richard M. Bernard and Bradley R. Rice, eds., *Sunbelt Cities: Politics and Growth since World War II* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), 2. For more on how this played out specifically in the South, see Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). For more on how the religious component of this economic

disparate, were linked in the postwar years by a booming economy and population. With an extremely business-friendly ideology that emphasized growth and progress, the Sunbelt grew and thrived during the years following World War II.

World War II, in fact, was the single most important factor in the creation of the Sunbelt. During the war, approximately 40 percent of military expenditures went to the South, and a substantial portion of the remaining 60 percent went to the West. Training facilities, military bases, industrial facilities, and at least 12 million workers and their families came into the region during the war. The federal government poured over \$100 billion into the region, and the cities that benefited, including Atlanta, Phoenix, Dallas, most major cities in California, and Houston left the war years with an astonishing economic strength that they could build on in the years to come.³¹ These cities became, in the terminology of sociologist Harvey Moloch in his pivotal article on political economy and place, “growth machines,” dedicated almost exclusively to creating the physical conditions that best serve industrial growth while maintaining the business incentives that attracted industry, like favorable taxation, low unionization or “right to work” laws, and a minimization of social conflict, particularly racial, but also restricting anything that resembled socialism. This meant that money flowed into expanding the kind of infrastructure appealing to business, particularly major roads and emerging industrial parks, but the cities provided little investment into basic services for its citizens. The city leaders also, despite their professed projected disdain for federal

shift impacted politics, see Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sun Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2011).

³¹ Kenneth Jackson, “Introduction,” in Robert B. Fairbanks and Kathleen Underwood, eds., *Essays on Sunbelt Cities and Recent Urban America* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1990), 4.

intervention in the economy, relied heavily on federal funding and investment for their continued growth and development.³² “Growth machines” required federal pump-priming but resented interference in the form of labor, environmental, and safety legislation.

Historians of the Sunbelt agree that no city better encapsulates the idea of the Sunbelt better than Houston. As Bradley R. Rice and Richard M. Bernard asserted, “Every mythical belt—cotton or corn, Bible or borscht—must have a ‘buckle.’ Atlanta, Phoenix, Dallas, and Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, have vied for the title, but Houston usually wins.” Other historians have referred to the city as the “shining buckle” and as the “golden buckle” of the Sunbelt.³³ Indeed, even prior to World War II, Houston made its mark as a place “founded on myth and greed,” seizing opportunity to grow and expand, often at the expense of other cities.³⁴ Created in 1836, Houston came into existence as real estate speculation by two New York brothers, John Kirby and Augustus Chapman Allen. In his article on the relationship between Houston and history, author Benjamin Moser opined that “Great cities often have myths explaining their foundation. Rome began where twin boys were suckled by a wolf . . . Boston was literally meant to be heaven on earth. Atlanta rose from the ashes of a horrible war.” Houston’s origins are far less glamorous and, in Moser’s estimation, embarrassing. “Its inhabitants know this, and are a little ashamed of the fact, but nothing could be more appropriate: it is a city

³²Harvey Moloch, “The City as a Growth Machine: Toward a Political Economy of Place,” *American Journal of Sociology* 82 (1976): 312.

³³ Bernard and Rice, *Sunbelt Cities*, 6; Kaplan, “Houston: The Golden Buckle of the Southwest,” 196.

³⁴Barrie Scardino, “H2ouston,” in Barrie Scardino, William F. Stern, and Bruce C. Webb, eds., *Ephemeral City: Cite Looks at Houston* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 24.

made rich by commerce, and its history is the history of the development of that commerce.”³⁵

That narrative begins with the city’s founding, highlighting the long history of those who controlled Houston pursuing revenue at breakneck speed. Houston benefitted from the chaos of the Texas Revolution and demonstrated an early commitment to bending natural resources to the citizens’ will. The Battle of San Jacinto, the final battle of the Revolution, destroyed Harrisburg, the better location for a capital for the new nation, and the Allen brothers made Houston the new capital through an aggressive lobbying effort. The capital remained in Houston for two years before leaving for the new city of Austin, due to a combination of politics and Houston’s swampy and miserable climate. Despite the loss of the capital, the city continued to grow and prosper on an economy based upon cotton, cattle, and timber.

In 1840, Houston’s city government received permission from the state congress to build and maintain wharves, leading to the establishment of the Port of Houston the following year. At the time, only shallow-draft vessels could navigate Buffalo Bayou. This waterway, despite its limitations, proved instrumental for Houston during the Civil War. Galveston, Houston’s neighboring city and economic competition, faced occupation from federal troops, but Houston did not suffer the same fate. As a result, Houstonians, like the Rice family, made a fortune through blockade running on the Buffalo Bayou throughout the war and by supplying troops further inland. Unlike major cities in the South, like Atlanta, the war spared Houston economic and physical

³⁵ Benjamin Moser, “Houston and History,” *The American Scholar* 73 (2004): 62. For what most people acknowledge as the best overview of Houston’s history to date, see David McComb, *Houston: A History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982).

devastation, and within a few years, Houston early committed to using the federal government to further its own ends, receiving a grant in 1872 to complete the dredging of Buffalo Bayou. In 1876, the first ship sailed through the new Houston ship channel, although it was still not adequate to meet the needs of most commercial shipping. Ending the nineteenth century and beginning a new Houston-prominent era, the Great Storm of 1900, which virtually destroyed Galveston, left Houston in an advantageous position to take over the majority of Gulf Coast shipping. Houston had, once again, capitalized on both chaos and a dedication to shaping nature to great advantage.³⁶

Houston's political and business community continued to benefit from the largess of the federal government and nature. In 1909, the city gained more federal money for a widening and deepening of the channel, resulting in the 1914 opening of the Houston Ship Channel. As a result, Houston became one of the nation's leading ports. Part of the reason that Houston's officials were successful in convincing Congress to approve a \$1 million dollar appropriation for the channel was the discovery of oil at Spindletop near Beaumont in 1901. Following Spindletop, oil companies invested in running pipelines from the field to the Ship Channel, creating, by the 1920s, a Houston dependent upon oil for the bulk of its economic success. Oil companies established their headquarters in the Bayou City, and business activity, particularly in the establishment of refineries to turn oil into gasoline, multiplied. The city grew in size ten fold from 1900 to World War II.³⁷ By 1940, the Port of New York was the only port passing Houston in tonnage, and the industrial strength of the city was also on the rise. Sixty percent of the population was

³⁶ Scardino, "H2ouston," 26-27.

³⁷ Kaplan, "Houston," 197.

connected to the oil industry or related fields. This contributed to Houston weathering the Great Depression comparatively better than most major cities.³⁸

During World War II, military demands created new industries and expanded existing ones. The war contributed to an increased demand for gasoline, particularly aviation gasoline. Petrochemicals also could be turned into explosives and synthetic rubber, which the war effort desperately needed. By the end of World War II, sixteen industrial plants, including Armco Steel and Goodyear Tire and Rubber, had plants in Houston. The city's port, oil supply, and skilled workers proved enticing for the military-industrial complex as they sought ideal locations for the war effort. Federal money flowed into the region; in February 1941, more than \$250 million in defense spending went to the Texas Gulf Coast. By 1943, more than a billion dollars in defense contracts went to Houston for shipbuilding alone. People streamed into Houston from the rural areas of East Texas and Louisiana, resulting in population growth from 384,000 inhabitants in 1940 to 467,000 in 1945.³⁹

Following the end of World War II, Houston's business and political leaders planned for the city to continue its unprecedented growth. As its chamber of commerce reflected later, Houston had many things in its favor going into reconversion. Bank deposits were estimated at about three times the prewar period. There was a pressing need for durable goods, like automobiles, refrigerators, and washing machines. Housing was in short supply, and business itself needed to upgrade facilities and build new plants. In January 1946, the chamber declared that "1946 is a year of opportunity for Houston.

³⁸ Leah Brooke Tucker, "The Houston Business Community, 1945-1965" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1979,) 15-16.

³⁹Ibid., 20-31.

During the shift of national and world economics from war to peace, the vast potentials of Houston and this area are greater than ever before.”⁴⁰ Postwar Houston became the heart of the oil and petrochemical industry and one of the dominant market centers of the South and Southwest, positioning itself as a pivotal point for both regions. Beyond the petrochemical industry, business in general boomed. From 1950 to 1960, retail sales in the city increased over 90 percent. Beginning in 1950, Houston held the rank of America’s fastest growing city for three decades, growing at more than 50 percent every ten years.⁴¹

Several factors contributed to the postwar boom and the maintenance of Houston’s growth. One innovation that even the chamber of commerce recognized as pivotal was the introduction and expansion of air conditioning. First introduced in 1923, air conditioning did not become prevalent throughout the city or used widely until the postwar years. Houston’s humid and swampy climate had been a deterrent for many new economic enterprises; people simply did not want to live in or visit a city that was practically unlivable during the summers. During the first five postwar years, the city expanded air conditioning from public to private buildings and businesses and gained a reputation as the “world’s most completely air-conditioned city.” The chamber of commerce then used that status to court businesses and try to gain a foothold as a city to hold conventions. These efforts proved successful; Houston scheduled more summer

⁴⁰ Marvin Hurley, *Decisive Years for Houston* (Houston: Houston Magazine, 1980), 81-88.

⁴¹Ibid., 156.

conventions than the average city by 1950, and the city as a whole benefitted from the new technology.⁴²

The physical climate tackled and as controlled as possible, Houston created a business-friendly economic climate. This meant an anti-government, anti-regulation, anti-planning, anti-taxes, and anti-labor ideological discourse and policy creation.⁴³ Houston historian David G. McComb argued that Houston's economic conservatism "is the conservatism of a nineteenth-century robber baron—exploitative, laissez-faire, and at times generous in philanthropy. Its roots lie in the Southern heritage of the town, the expansive, opportunistic nature of the area, and the strong business orientation of the economy."⁴⁴ The city's government and the business community worked in tandem to promote the growth and progress of the city, with the city government often appearing to be a subsidiary of the chamber of commerce. So linked were the chamber and the city's government that when Louie Welch stepped down as mayor in 1973 to become the head of the chamber, it was viewed by many as a promotion.⁴⁵ Houston's corporate law firms maintained an active lobbying staff at the state capital in Austin to help defeat any legislation deemed "anti-business." These Houston-based businesses argued that in order to keep people and capital pouring into the city, a pro-business status was necessary. Local business leaders combined a hatred of communism, or anything bearing any

⁴² Ibid., 99.

⁴³ Robert Fisher, "The Urban Sunbelt in Comparative Perspective: Houston in Context," in Robert B. Fairbanks and Kathleen Underwood, eds., *Essays on Sunbelt Cities and Recent Urban America* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1990), 40.

⁴⁴ McComb, *Houston*, 145.

⁴⁵ James Fallows, "A Permanent Boomtown," *The Atlantic* (July 1985): 19.

resemblance to it, with anti-labor laws to create a commitment to strong business growth and as much of a laissez-faire political-economic relationship as possible.⁴⁶

Free enterprise in Houston included an aversion to government intervention in the economy that was so strong that it resisted traditional zoning laws. The anti-zoning campaign of 1962 branded zoning laws as socialistic and contrary to liberty and freedom.⁴⁷ It also went beyond policy and into a spirit within the citizens. Journalist George Fuermann referred to it as “an independence of spirit—it has been called a mind-your-own-business spirit—which implies that they [Houstonians] are merely warming up.”⁴⁸ Another journalist asserted that “No historian analyzing the city of Houston should underestimate its brash can-do attitude, which for more than 150 years has shaped and reshaped its natural resource to great advantage.”⁴⁹ The overarching spirit of the city in the postwar years was an aggressive forward push toward the future, a juggernaut fueled by oil, expansion, and an unbridled business community, given free rein to grow.⁵⁰

While the climate and ideology certainly exist, the idea of Houston as a purely “free enterprise” city has been a myth for decades. From Reconstruction onward, Houston benefitted from both federal and state intervention. The creation of the ship channel, the defense contracts of World War II and after, the freeway system, and the development of what would become the Johnson Space Center all funneled federal

⁴⁶ Kenneth Lipartito and Joseph Pratt, *Baker & Botts in the Development of Houston* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991), 158.

⁴⁷ Kaplan, “Houston,” 205.

⁴⁸ Fuermann, *Houston*, 13.

⁴⁹ Scardino, “H2ouston,” 27.

money into the city's coffers and were instrumental to the expansion of Houston. The myth of free enterprise and the idea of endless possibility for anyone also runs into resistance when considering the nature of the city as both southern and segregated in the postwar years. African Americans had been a central component of Houston's population since they streamed into the city following emancipation in large numbers from rural areas. As a southern city, Houston practiced legal, residential, economic, and social segregation through the 1960s and informally decades later. African Americans were denied the franchise, precluded from economic opportunities, and required to be submissive in their contact with whites in Houston. The African American population hovered at around a quarter of the entire population of Houston for most of the twentieth century, marking the community as important and necessary for the growth and success of Houston, but for most of the African American experience in Houston, segregation and Jim Crow confined African Americans to the poorest jobs and inferior housing; in 1940, more than 75 percent of black workers in the city worked in the three lowest job categories (domestic, service workers, and laborers).⁵¹ For those with the means, skills, and drive, however, entrepreneurship could serve as a pathway from those positions.

By the 1930s, as historian Merline Pitre asserts, "Houston was probably the most segregated city in the Southwest."⁵² The city had increased and expanded Jim Crow laws, including new laws segregating the library and all civic and public spaces in the city. Houston's Democratic party voted in 1921 to limit voting in the primary to whites

⁵¹ Cary D. Wintz, "Blacks," in Fred R. Von der Mehden, ed., *The Ethnic Groups of Houston* (Houston, Rice University Studies, 1984), 23.

⁵² Merline Pitre, *In Struggle against Jim Crow: Lulu B. White and the NAACP, 1900-1957* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 18.

only. This decision spread to other places, and in 1923, the Texas Legislature followed the path of Houston and restricted primary voting to whites. The deeply embedded system of segregation and disfranchisement continued in Houston throughout World War II and into the postwar years, despite the massive changes the city went through during that time. In the 1940s and 1950s, most white-owned establishments either refused to allow black customers inside or provided subpar services. In all the major department stores in Houston, African Americans could not try on clothes or hats. They were forced to enter restaurants and other establishments through the back door and usually had to take their food to go.⁵³

Black Houstonians reacted to these everyday forms of discrimination by building one of the largest and most vibrant communities in Texas. The city became an “urban enclave” for African Americans with five newspapers and an extensive professional and entrepreneurial class as early as 1902. This large business-owning group, the largest of any city in the South, provided a base that was not dependent on whites for employment.⁵⁴ Historically, business ownership has long been a strategy used by African Americans to combat economic discrimination. As business scholar John Butler demonstrates in his work on African American entrepreneurship, African American entrepreneurial activity dates to colonial America. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, free blacks and a very small number of those enslaved owned enterprises in fields like merchandising, manufacturing, construction, tailoring, food

⁵³ Robert Bullard, *Invisible Houston: The Black Experience in Boom and Bust* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1987).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

production, and blacksmithing. While African American entrepreneurs faced limitations on gaining credit and investing and the very real possibility that their enterprise might become the victim of resentful whites, business ownership continued to offer a way to achieve both economic stability and autonomy up to and following the Civil War throughout both the North and South.⁵⁵ Following the Civil War, African American leaders like Booker T. Washington advocated for entrepreneurship as a strategy for advancement. However, African American entrepreneurs faced segregation laws in the South that legally prohibited them, at least on paper, from opening their businesses to diverse markets. Butler argues that this practice “was disaster for Afro-American business” in general, although people continued to open and operate businesses.⁵⁶

African American women actively participated in the long tradition of African American entrepreneurship. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, they worked as dressmakers, seamstresses, restauranteurs, laundresses, midwives, and hair stylists. Historian Tracy Poe noted that African American women business owners did not shrink from view; they were visible members of their respective communities. As early as 1912, Chicago’s *Negro Business Men and Women and Where They are Located* listed a wide range of women, including approximately one-fifth of all the African American restaurant owners.⁵⁷ While some women opened businesses in non-traditional

⁵⁵John S. Butler, *Entrepreneurship and Self-Help among Black Americans* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 36.

⁵⁶Under segregation, whites could not frequent African American businesses, but a few exceptions seem to exist, particularly in food, and it was considered to be within the bounds of propriety for an African American who worked for him/herself to come and do work in white neighborhoods. *Ibid.*, 73.

⁵⁷Tracy Nicole Poe, “Food, Culture, and Entrepreneurship among African Americans, Italians, and Swedes in Chicago” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1999), 53-54.

fields such as banking and real estate, most African American women remained in the service industry into the late twentieth century.⁵⁸

Spatial segregation limited where African American women could open their enterprises. In his work on “invisible Houston,” Robert Bullard, a sociologist, described how Houston’s black business community developed outside the view of white society. Until the late 1940s, Freedmen’s Town, which developed into the Fourth Ward, was the center of African American cultural and social life. As the original name suggests, Freedmen’s Town had been the primary neighborhood for former slaves and their descendants, who acquired ownership of the land by the 1880s. By the Great Depression, African American landownership in the Fourth Ward eroded as Houston’s downtown area began to expand. Prior to World War II, more than 95 percent of Houston’s black-owned businesses were in the Fourth Ward. It was the site of the Houston Citizens Chamber of Commerce, originally named the Negro Chamber of Commerce, office space for Houston’s black professionals, and a center for cultural events.⁵⁹ After World War II, the Fourth Ward suffered from the construction of Interstate 45, which destroyed the original building for the Negro Chamber of Commerce and significant sections of the Fourth Ward, and the construction of Allen Parkway Village, a public housing project that covered much of the original site of Freedmen’s Town and discriminated against African Americans in housing policy upon its completion in 1949.⁶⁰ In response to those pressures, the African American business community re-centered first in the Fifth Ward,

⁵⁸Juliet Walker, *The History of Black Business in America* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 129.

⁵⁹ Bullard, *Invisible Houston*, 15.

⁶⁰ For more on race and Allen Parkway Village, see Carolyn Whitsitt, “Caught in the Crossfire: Public Housing and Race in Houston” (MA thesis, Stephen F. Austin State University, 2011).

during the 1950s, then the Third Ward, throughout the end of the 1950s and into the 1960s.⁶¹

Houston slowly desegregated its schools and public spaces throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Five African Americans, including Julius White, prominent businessman and husband of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) advocate Lulu B. White, successfully sued to gain access to city-owned golf courses in 1950. In 1953 and 1954, the public library and city buses integrated. A few other city institutions quietly followed, although as in other parts of Texas, school desegregation took longer, finally coming to pass in 1966. Public facilities and businesses, like stores and restaurants began to desegregate in 1960. Many Houstonians like to point to their city as a place that quietly desegregated due to how embarrassing continued segregation looked for business. Desegregation, in that assertion, came from city fathers and elites and did not require grassroots activism or effort. On the contrary, the leaders of Houston were devoted to maintaining the racial status quo and only relented upon increased pressure from activists.⁶² Texas Southern University students began the sit-in movement in Texas during a demonstration at the lunch counter at Weingarten's in the Third Ward. The movement quickly spread to other stores and even the city hall cafeteria. Fearing that the activists would continue to grow in numbers and begin demanding attention from national media, downtown businesses made an agreement with one another to desegregate their facilities. In 1963, city parks and swimming pools integrated.⁶³ These

⁶¹ Bullard, *Invisible Houston*, 95.

⁶² For oral histories of the civil rights movement in Houston that delve into the complex and lengthy struggle, see the Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project, accessed January 1, 2017, crbb.tcu.edu.

⁶³ Wintz, "Blacks," 34.

successes required the dedication of African American Houstonians and their allies, often backed, supported, and financed by the entrepreneurial class in the community, like Julius and Lulu B. White and Theodore and Euneida Hogrobrooks. Those who owned businesses in the African American sections of Houston had seized the opportunity to define a space outside the white power structure and used that space to fight for equality.

There was fear, understandably, from many African Americans that desegregation would weaken traditional neighborhoods and harm African American businesses. Moreover, African American women (and men) had more opportunity to pursue higher education following the end of formal segregation. This benefitted individual African Americans and the community as a whole, but sociologist Robert Bullard noted a troubling trend for the business community in Houston as it moved out of segregation: African American business owners who had established their businesses during segregation directed their children into the professions, articulating a vision that placed a career in law, medicine, or science above business ownership. Those businesses then passed from existence with the retirement or death of the owner.⁶⁴ While there was a decline in the number of African American businesses as a percentage of the proprietorships in Houston and “the self-contained black communities with their small-town atmosphere no longer exist,” for the most part, the kinds of enterprises African American women gravitated to, particularly restaurants and beauty salons, survived and thrived in the economic upheaval that followed desegregation.⁶⁵ While small-businesses

⁶⁴Bullard, *Invisible Houston*, 86.

⁶⁵ Beauty salons weathered the shift to natural hair styles in the late 1960s and 1970s better than had been predicted and feared in the industry. Wintz, “Blacks,” 36; Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010).

closed at high rates, as in the white business community, several African American Houston-based businesses founded and co-founded by women remain in operation into the twenty-first century.

As discussed above, Houston maintained rigid segregation between Anglos, African Americans, and Mexican-origin people. By the 1930s, Mexican Americans had settled in the Second Ward, forming a thriving business district around Congress Avenue comprised of drugstores, cleaners, herb shops, furniture stores, and cafes. The community organized into multiple civic groups for self-help including the Sociedad Mutualista Obrera Mexicana, which was a group of working-class women who helped organize donations for funerals and for the exceptionally needy, and branches of broader organizations, like the Bosque Women's Circle of the Woodmen of the World, which helped set up insurance policies for members and their families. Houston also boasted a chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), established in 1929, although the organization would not become an especially active advocate for the community until the post-World War II years.⁶⁶

By the 1950s, the city of Houston maintained what historian Thomas H. Kreneck has described as “ambivalence” toward people of Mexican descent. Kreneck cites the release of the novel *Giant* in 1952 and the subsequent movie in 1956 as a moment that white Houstonians caught a glimpse of the second-class treatment of Mexican Americans. In one scene, whites in a beauty salon refused service to a Mexican American woman, a nod to the common knowledge that the “better” beauty salons in the

⁶⁶ Angeline Morales., Interview by Tom Crinnick and Emma Perez, Houston, TX, February 19, 1979, Houston Public Library Digital Archives, accessed on October 15, 2016, http://digital.houstonlibrary.net/oral-history/felix-morales_OH246-2.php.

city did not serve Mexican American customers. Two years after the release of the movie, journalist Marie Dauplaise ran an eleven-part series in the *Houston Chronicle* giving readers an overview of the Mexican American community in the postwar years. She recounted how the Mexican American population comprised only 5 percent of Houston's total population but suffered discrimination in all realms of life, particularly employment. Ninety-five percent of the companies in Houston had an unwritten policy of not employing Mexican Americans and, even when Mexican Americans were able to obtain white-collar employment, earned less than Anglos for the same work.⁶⁷ Dauplaise only wrote what Mexican American citizens already knew. The white power structure deliberately limited Mexican American advancement. Discrimination was pervasive against those the Mexican American community, particularly those who were poor and/or did not speak English. Mexican American women, in particular, remained over-concentrated in low-paid and insecure jobs, suffering from a high poverty rate.⁶⁸

Following World War II, the Mexican American community's economic opportunity expanded along with the entire economy of the city. Mexican Americans found success in entrepreneurial endeavors, as they had in the city during the 1920s and 1930s, but, unlike African Americans, Mexican Americans clustered almost exclusively in the service-related sector, particularly restaurants and retail. This was true for both

⁶⁷Thomas H. Kreneck, *Del Pueblo: A History of Houston's Hispanic Community* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 73-74.

⁶⁸This rate remained high throughout most of the twentieth century. The median annual income for Spanish-speaking women in 1972 was \$2,647, compared to African American women earning \$5,147 and Anglo women at \$5,998. Stephanie Schacherer, "Overcoming Triple Oppression: Identity, Power, and Feminism among Women of Mexican Ancestry in Texas, 1960-1980" (MA Thesis, University of Texas at Arlington, 2007), 24.

men and women who opened businesses.⁶⁹ This can partly be attributed to demand, as there were fewer Mexican Americans in Houston. One community leader estimated no more than 15,000 total in the Second Ward in the 1930s and early 1940s, and there were no more than 50,000 Houstonians with Spanish surnames in 1950. While segregation existed for Mexican Americans in the postwar years, it was less systematically enforced and, as a result, most Mexican Americans could shop in the stores of their choice.⁷⁰ The other reason for their preference for restaurants and retail is what drew all women to the service industry: the fact that those areas utilized lower capital in the beginning. Additionally, like many African Americans, Mexican American women often entered business, particularly restaurants, as co-owners, usually with their husbands, and continued the businesses as family operations after the deaths of their husband. The women's stories tended to follow a similar pattern: starting small, often as part of a husband-and-wife team, and building toward a larger business that simultaneously served as both a profit generator and a civic institution.

Gender proved a limitation for women wanting to enter the business community in Houston, particularly minority women, as it did throughout the country. Despite those limitations, though, women had a long history of entrepreneurship and investment in the city. For example, Charlotte Allen, the wife of one of Houston's founders, Augustus C. Allen, probably used some of her inheritance for her husband and his brother to purchase the land that became Houston. The city attracted many people in search of opportunity, and throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, women operated successful

⁶⁹ Ibid., 60.

⁷⁰ Angeline Morales, interview by Tom Crinnick and Emma Perez.

businesses. In Market Square Park, the center of commercial activity in the city shortly after its founding, women opened profitable enterprises, like Pamela Mann's Mansion House Hotel and Eliza Fox's grocery store. By the turn of the twentieth century, women assisted with family businesses, ran their own shops, sewed in their homes, and generally proved themselves essential to Houston's economy. One of the more prominent families in the city, the Scanlans, produced seven sisters who erected a building in honor of their father, T. H. Scanlan, Houston's Reconstruction mayor. The Scanlan sisters opened the building in 1909, ran a religious store on the first floor of the building, and rented the remaining offices to law firms and corporate headquarters.⁷¹ It was a very popular location for professionals seeking real estate and stayed in the sisters' hands until their deaths. The building remains standing in 2017.

The enterprising women of early Houston proved to be like their counterparts across the nation: "unexceptional women" who were everywhere in the economy up to and through World War II.⁷² Nevertheless, the city observers continued to find women's participation in business astonishing into the twentieth century. The *Houston Chronicle* proclaimed in 1954 that "not so long it was rare to find a woman in businesses The woman was told her place was in the home, and she stayed there." The journalist noted that women began moving into clerical positions and "the cycle was complete when Rosie the Riveter made her debut in the second world war." It was with surprise that the paper noted that in Houston there were over 112,000 women at work, their income

⁷¹ Betty Trap Chapman. "Walking in the Footsteps of Houston Women: A Historic Tour of Downtown Houston," *Houston Review* 1 (1979): 59-62.

⁷²Lewis, *Unexceptional Women*.

exceeded a quarter of a billion dollars, they were spread out across multiple industries, and at least 16,000 held executive-level or proprietor status.⁷³

Entrepreneurial women had a growing presence in Houston in the postwar years, but they were also relatively invisible to the media and other major observers, despite their high numbers in the second half of the twentieth century. Their ubiquity, the fact that they were everywhere in the economy, added to the lack of attention; woman-owned restaurants, shops, and salons did not merit increased study or media coverage due to their normality. This dissertation removes that invisibility, asserting that Houstonian women were instrumental to the economy of the booming city and, in turn, outside forces like gender norms, the economic nature of the Sunbelt, Cold War ideology, and segregation shaped the experiences of individual women as they sought to establish a proprietorship and carve out an economic position for themselves.

Chapters Two through Four emphasize the opportunities available to women in Houston for business ownership and how they used perceptions of their gender to their advantage, how they capitalized on successes, and the way they met collective obstacles and individual difficulties. Chapters Two and Three will examine women's usage of "traditional" female businesses in restaurants, bars, and the beauty industry. I argue that women in Houston capitalized on ideas about women's "place" to find their own place in the food and beauty industry. Even as they remained unacknowledged as "chefs," a masculine title, women dominated the rising number of cafes and eateries in Houston, and despite their lack of respect or acknowledgment as "experts," they capitalized on the beauty industry. Chapters Two and Three analyze the intersection between race, gender,

⁷³ "Women a Business Factor Here," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 29, 1954.

and entrepreneurship within restaurants and the beauty industry and the impact of the Civil Rights Movement. I explain how many female minorities had to present a certain narrative to the white business world that enabled them to obtain and maintain legitimacy and how they utilized their unique positions as entrepreneurs, free from the threat of repercussions from white supervisors or bosses to work within the Civil Rights Movement and to better their communities through activism and philanthropy.

Chapter Four similarly analyzes women's ability to capitalize on ideas of "femininity" in the retail and real estate in the postwar period. Consumption patterns of the Cold War era encouraged gender roles divided along strict lines, but it also allowed women to carve out a niche as these sectors of the economy became based around home and family where women were seen as having control and some level of authority. Women could turn the ideas of the Cold War into a justification for their presence in retail and real estate, defining a place for themselves as experts on choosing a home, purchasing furniture, and designing interiors. Women had long been associated with designing and creating clothes and selling items in small stores, but in the postwar period they increased their presence in the broader retail sector, establishing a multitude of shops selling everything from records to flowers to hardware.

Chapter Five further discusses how women used Cold War rhetoric, specifically about encouraging American children's creativity and imagination, to open music and dance studios as well as daycare centers. Ideas about "normality" led to an increased demand for services geared toward producing healthy and well-rounded children who would be prepared to fight for the American free market against the threat of

communism. Women answered that demand and created a space where they could be their own boss and balance the demands of home.

Chapter Six focuses on the influence of the feminist movement on Houston's female business owners, particularly the arrival of organizations like the National Organization for Women (NOW) and the creation of Houston-specific groups like the River Oaks Business Women's Exchange Club. Several women active in the feminist movement went on to "come out" as lesbians and to open homosexual-friendly establishments. This chapter analyzes the link between feminist and lesbian activism in Houston and describes how lesbians carved out space within the business community to earn a living and provide employment for other openly homosexual women. I conclude with observations on the 1977 conference, the progress women have made in entrepreneurship since the 1970s, and the possibilities for further research.

Myrtle Choate, the other women who ran City Café, and the thousands of others like them who owned and operated small businesses in postwar Houston assisted in the creation of the mythological city that stood as the "golden buckle" of the Sunbelt. Their successes and failures demonstrate the myriad of ways in which gender, entrepreneurship, class, race, and ethnicity could intersect and affect both individuals and communities. Most of the women succeeded at navigating the barriers in place and transforming the stereotypes about their sex into an asset, particularly in food preparation and beauty. The growing postwar food and nightlife industry, as the following chapter shows, provided a fertile space for women to build a business in the Bayou City.

CHAPTER 2: HAMBURGER STANDS, FAJITAS, AND BAR STOOLS: PROVIDING FOOD, DRINKS, AND NIGHTLIFE IN HOUSTON

Writing an overview of Houston in 1951, journalist George Fuermann seemed extremely intrigued by Madeline Pollard, the only restaurant owner detailed in his description of the city, penning that she “has become a dollar-plated success by Texercising the human ego with a scholarly attention that is at the same time wrapped in a lusty indifference.” The restaurateur proved extraordinarily successful at attracting members of the “Almost Blue [Blooded] Set” who packed the house from six p.m. to midnight every day except Monday, when the restaurant closed. Fuermann attributed much of Pollard’s accomplishment to a pluckiness she demonstrated as a woman who had supported herself since the age of fourteen and as a divorcee attempting to raise two children in New York City in the 1930s during the height of the Great Depression. She began working for Arthur Murray in 1933, teaching dance across the nation in several major cities before making her final move to Houston. While dancing proved lucrative, Pollard wished to be her own boss and to end her career as a dance teacher. With another Arthur Murray teacher, Tony Mazza, Pollard opened Mad-Tony’s restaurant in Houston in 1946. Shortly after, Pollard withdrew from the business and opened her own restaurant a few blocks away.¹

Pollard wisely courted investors, largely from her pool of previous customers at Mad-Tony’s, which folded shortly after she left. The stockholders made a solid decision; within a year they received their \$35,000 investment back and began collecting dividends. Again, Fuermann asserted that the achievement owed much to Pollard herself, who, “unlike many ambitious women, is brightly practical, single-tracked, and successful.” Ignoring the backhanded nature of that compliment, it was true that Pollard attracted “the deb-set children and

¹ George Fuermann, *Houston: Land of the Big Rich* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1951), 65-67.

she and her restaurant are an unrelenting magnet for most of the otherwise collared Houstonians.” Madeline’s became enormously profitable during a particularly active time for Houston’s socialites and other “Proper Houstonians.” She capitalized on an era of frenzied growth within the Bayou City and positioned her restaurant as a place to see and be seen.²

Few women entrepreneurs moved in the same social space as Madeline Pollard, but for those other “brightly practical” ambitious women who sought to support themselves in the postwar economy, to care for their families, or to supplement another income, the service industry, exemplified by food production and beauty services, offered potential for profitable enterprises. Unlike Madeline’s, most of these businesses were small, some originating or continuing to operate out of kitchens and garages and others renting spaces all around the city. Most of the businesses did not survive long; few exist in the city directories five years following their founding, demonstrating the difficulties facing small-business owners, particularly women.³ These closings might indicate a business failure or merely a desire to abandon self-employment in favor of domestic pursuits or a career working for someone else. The fact that the service industry saw such an enormous period of growth, though, indicates that women saw opportunity in spite of the risks.

The demographics of the owners cut across class and racial lines; the service industry in Houston appealed to women of all types and in almost all stages of life. Bars and restaurants formed part of what one African American beautician referred to in a 1969 *Ebony* magazine article as “the backbone of Negro business in this country—the beauty shop, barber

² Ibid. It is unclear when Madeline’s closed.

³ *Polk’s Greater Houston City Directory, 1946* (Dallas: R. L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1946) and *Polk’s Greater Houston City Directory, 1951* (Dallas: R. L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1951).

shop, bar, and barbeque joint.”⁴ Nightclubs and bars offered businessmen and women an opportunity to work a flexible job with little capital that enjoyed high-demand from customers. Together with beauty shops, barber shops, and restaurants, they formed part of the cornerstone of the African American community. Of the four “Bs” of the African American community, women owned businesses in two and almost exclusively controlled a third, the beauty industry (further explored in Chapter 3). While segregation in Houston limited African American women’s earning potential, it created a demand for services within the community. Custom and laws prevented African Americans from mixing with whites in nightclubs, bars, and restaurants. While they were not forbidden from buying at many places that served food, in white-owned establishments, they faced the indignity of going to the back to make their purchases. In their own community, conversely, African Americans could freely go to businesses and also support their neighbors. Furthermore, entrepreneurship offered both African American men and women a strong position to advocate for the advancement of their community, either through philanthropy or activities in civil rights, with less a threat of economic intimidation by whites. Business ownership allowed women autonomy to carry out their activism and support their community. African American women took advantage of the need to create thriving businesses to serve their friends and neighbors.

A similar, although noticeably different, pattern also developed in another community that faced restrictions and limitations from the white power structure: Mexican Americans. Mexican American women opened multiple businesses in Houston, although they tended to cluster more in the restaurant industry, as discussed below, with a few exceptions. When need and opportunity arose, Mexican American women, usually with the support and labor of

⁴ “The Natural Look—Is It Here to Stay?” *Ebony*, June 1969, 13.

family members, became entrepreneurs, as exemplified by Yolanda Navarro, owner of Villa Arcos, and Ninfa Laurenzo, owner of Ninfa's.

As they did across the nation, women of all ethnicities contributed heavily to the increasing number of restaurants started in the postwar period. Women owned or co-owned approximately two thousand, or slightly more than half, of the restaurants and other food production businesses started in Houston from 1945 to 1960, and this number does not consider restaurants founded prior to 1945 that continued into the second half of the century.⁵ The types of eateries female entrepreneurs opened after the war reflect both the trends of the postwar period nationwide and local tastes.

More than any other post-war industry, creating meals, serving drinks, and presenting femininity through beauty treatments occupied a feminine sphere. Cafes, lounges, and beauty shops stand at the intersection of postwar ideas on women's place and space. Cooking and entertaining read as suitably female, as they had throughout previous decades, and were, therefore, "safe" occupations for women to pursue self-employment. Additionally, depending upon a woman's level of ambition, the service industry required little overhead and could provide flexibility in caring for children or other dependents that was attractive for women. That did not mean, though, that restaurants and bars were oases of equality for entrepreneurially minded women in an otherwise male-dominated world. A study of cafeterias, lunchrooms, drive-ins, lounges, and nightclubs demonstrates the tension between the reality of women's overwhelming numbers in the service economy and the patriarchy that continued to privilege men even within these three highly feminine industries.

⁵The vast majority of the restaurants, like all restaurants, did not survive for long. Data compiled from *The Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977.

“There’s Nothing Finer to American Tastes than a Restaurant Meal”

The historiography on the evolution of restaurant and eating-out culture during the twentieth century is thin. While there has been tremendous work on food pathways and culture, particularly regional culture, restaurants themselves tend to receive less attention, particularly from historians.⁶ Prior to World War II, except for the upper-class, eating a non-home-cooked meal for pleasure rarely happened. For the elite, the number of restaurants and coffee houses remained low throughout the early nineteenth century. Before the 1820s and 1830s, those in need of a meal outside of the home turned to taverns and boardinghouses. The first “restaurant” in America is a matter of debate among historians; many argue that brothers John and Peter Delmonico opened the first in New York City in 1831. While the number of restaurants grew, particularly after 1850, most Americans continued to consume food produced within their own kitchen. Eating at a restaurant slowly became part of a middle-class lifestyle at the turn of the twentieth century, as Andrew P. Haley asserts in his history of the connections between restaurants and the rise of the middle-class from 1880 to 1920. By 1920, 8 percent of Americans ate at restaurants regularly, a number that continued to grow during the following decades.⁷ As Richard Pilsbury chronicled in his overview of the “restaurant revolution” in the post-World War II period, eating outside of the home for fun or experience is “a twentieth century phenomenon.”⁸

⁶ Brian Lohof, “Hamburger Stand: Industrialization and the American Fast-Food Phenomenon,” *Journal of American Culture* 2 (1979): 519-33. Other examples of recent work on restaurants include Angela Jill Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie: The Evolution of Urban Food Culture in the Jim Crow South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015) and Andrew P. Haley, *Turning the Tables: Restaurants and the Rise of the American Middle Class, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

⁷ Haley, *Turning the Tables*, 6.

⁸ Richard Pilsbury, *From Boarding House to Bistro: The American Restaurant Then and Now* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 13.

One of the defining locations for the postwar period's restaurant revolution, the drive-in, originated in Dallas in 1921. J. G. Kirby opened the first drive-in, the Pig Stand, to sell barbecued pork sandwiches. The idea caught on; A & W Root Beer opened its first drive-in shortly after in 1923 in Lodi, California. Eating inside of the car proved a novelty and, in the case of the Pig Stand, a convenience for drivers along the Dallas-Fort Worth highway. Entrepreneurs often set up drive-ins in the 1920s on popular commuting routes and in or near residential areas, demonstrating a shift from providing a necessity to the working and middle-class during working hours to offering a pleasurable experience for consumers that had less to do with fueling the body. Pilsbury also notes that there is a practicality to the decision to provide outdoor-service; in a pre-air conditioning era, restaurants and cafes could become painfully hot in states like Texas.⁹

What is clear from the existing surveys of American restaurants is that the eating habits of families changed after World War II, prompting a corresponding "restaurant revolution." Americans experienced a sea-change in the daily patterns of life prompted by the overall increase in disposable income. Families moved to suburban areas and sought recreation and pleasurable experiences together, including treating themselves to a night out or a dessert at a local cafe. They bought more cars and traveled more than previous generations, needing food along the way. While most American households had a stay-at-home wife, the number of women working outside of the home continued to rise, fueling a corresponding need for convenient and quick food options. While the story of the "restaurant revolution" is also the story of the rise of massive chains and franchises, like McDonald's, the changing nature of American life in the postwar years also helped contribute to the

⁹ Ibid., 75.

restaurant industry as a whole, including independently owned restaurants.¹⁰ In fact, large chains were still relatively unimportant during the 1950s. Individual units and small chains did as well as the larger industry giants during this period.¹¹ The concept of eating out, particularly the advertising for large and growing restaurant giants, brought the attention of consumers to all eateries .

By 1955, restaurants made up the nation's fourth largest industry, and Americans spent almost \$75 billion for food and beverages. Of that, the restaurant industry received more than 17 billion, and it is unclear if this classification included all food production. Roughly 550,000 restaurant operators served more than 750 million meals per day. The American Restaurant Association celebrated these numbers with a national restaurant month in September 1955 with the slogan: "There's Nothing Finer to American Tastes than a Restaurant Meal."¹² Profits reflect the increase in restaurant patronage; by 1967, the restaurant industry earned more than \$414 billions.¹³

In the South, a similar pattern developed. At the turn of the twentieth century, the number of eating establishments grew in the South. Most of those businesses were owned by non-elite whites, particularly immigrants, and African Americans. These "lower-end" establishments specialized in quick and cheap food for the cities' growing populations of workers.¹⁴ Moreover, the increasing number of establishments catering to the working class

¹⁰ For more see: John Love, *McDonald's: Behind the Arches* (New York: Bantam Books, 1986) and Stan Luxemburg, *Roadside Empires: How the Chains Franchised America* (New York: Viking, 1985).

¹¹ Pillsbury, *From Boarding House to Bistro*, 102.

¹² "Houston Eateries to Observe National Restaurant Month," *Houston Chronicle*, September 30, 1956.

¹³ Pillsbury, *From Boarding House to Bistro*, 102.

¹⁴ Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie*, 50-52.

enabled African Americans to dine out, operate eating establishments, and, in general, consume food in a manner equal to whites, as Angela Jill Cooley demonstrates in her work on race and southern dining culture. Restaurants in urban centers, like Houston, remained strictly segregated into the postwar period. After World War II, the trajectory of southern eating habits melded with those of the rest of the nation. The Sunbelt economy and increased consumption gave most southern whites more access to American consumer culture, and southern restaurants boomed in number.¹⁵

Nationwide, women played an important role in the production and sale of food and meals, as they had for centuries. American women had been producing food in taverns and boardinghouses, as Wendy Gamber has shown, since the colonial period and had owned and operated restaurants since the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁶ A phrase often heard about women in the postwar period was that they were convinced “to return to the kitchen.” Sometimes the idea is that they were forced to return to the home after time spent working in war industries, but the general sentiment revolves around the idea of the kitchen and women’s productive capabilities in terms of feeding their families. The media of the time, focusing on a white middle-class audience, certainly emphasizes food production as a woman’s primary activity and her primary way of expressing creativity and talent. Magazines and articles overflowed with recipes and tips for new ways of cooking and advice on overwhelming guests with a fancy cake. The focus on a white middle-class housewife has, as Joanne Meyerowitz has observed, rendered racial minorities and the working class invisible. The “stranglehold of the white middle-class domestic imperative,” as Sherrie Inness refers to the postwar culture,

¹⁵ Ibid., 10-13.

¹⁶ Wendy Gamber, *The Boardinghouse in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Haley, *Turning the Tables*, 150.

allows a glimpse into the relationship, or, at least, the expected relationship, between women and food.¹⁷ Preparing food and meals was a woman's job when it was not done in a gourmet kitchen (or outside on a grill). It was not only a duty; in the cooking literature, creating meals was an act of love and a way of inserting influence over the family. On the other hand, for women, cooking very well could be a pathway to good notoriety and expanding one's position in society, as Jessie De Both described in her 1951 work *It's Easy to Be a Good Cook*: "When your husband begins to notice what he's eating, mark it well. When he undertakes to tell his friends how you prepare food (who in turn will spread your reputation), you've arrived."¹⁸

An entrepreneurially minded woman could take that reputation and turn it into profit. While the cooking literature rarely encouraged women to leave their personal kitchens for ones in their own restaurant, preparation of food for sale in a restaurant or out of a home business, for post-World War II society, remained within the safety of domestic ideology. Historian Debra Michals has chronicled how political, social, and economic changes spurred and, in many cases, supported women-owned businesses immediately following World War II. Federal agencies like the Commerce Department encouraged women to begin working for themselves. In many instances, this stimulus was a larger part of reconversion efforts designed to provide female war workers with an occupation after the war. These agencies published brochures, booklets, and books providing advice on marketing and operating a business, with titles like *How to Start a Small Store* and *Should I Start My Own*

¹⁷ Sherrie Inness, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 143.

¹⁸ Jessie De Both, *It's Easy to Be a Good Cook* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1951), 111-12.

*Businesses?*¹⁹ Most of the promotional materials encouraged women to pursue production and distribution of domestic goods, particularly food. The women's small business clinics organized across the nation, including in Texas, and held their meetings in auditoriums and exposition centers filled with home-baked goods and other handicrafts. They also marketed books and booklets on topics like "Salad Dressings, Mayonnaise and Related Products" and advice materials on goods that could be sold out of the home as well as a shop.²⁰ While it was preferable for women to remain at home and raise their families for the molders of postwar society, if a woman wished to expand her culinary creativity outside of the home, the leap was not as large as it was into other occupations. Particularly in the late 1940s, as the existence and promotion of the small business clinics illustrate, the federal government and promoters of "normality" advocated for women to return to *a* kitchen, but they also advocated for that kitchen to hold potential for monetary gain and self-fulfillment. As a result of the promotional materials, workshops, and the general environment of growth in the restaurant industry, the number of female-headed restaurants and food-production businesses around the country grew during the "restaurant revolution."

For Houston in the postwar period, the "restaurant revolution" contributed to an overall growth in the number of businesses geared toward food production. From 1945 to 1965, the overwhelming number of business licenses filed for restaurants and kindred businesses in Houston were for independent operations.²¹ The city teemed with independent restaurants and small local chains and cafes operated by families and single owners. Indeed,

¹⁹ Debra Michals, "Beyond Pin Money: The Rise of Women's Small Business Ownership, 1945-1980" (PhD diss., University of New York, 2002), 36.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 74-75.

²¹ Data compiled from *The Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977.

in the 1954 Houston city directory, all but two of the restaurants, coffee shops, cafes, and other eateries of the over twelve hundred total restaurants were independently owned or city-wide chains.²² Although the chain model entered Houston by the middle of the century, it had yet to take hold, and local entrepreneurs reigned supreme.

Cafes and cafeterias were the most numerous of the restaurants founded by women from 1945 through 1960. Approximately 150 to 200 self-identified “cafes” and “cafeterias” opened from 1945 to 1950 alone. These small operations often served what, in the northeast, fell under the classification of “diner” food, including coffee, burgers, sandwiches, and fries, with southern additions like chicken-fried steak. In general, the distinction between “cafes” and “cafeterias” came down to variety and service: cafeterias tended to carry a wider variety of meats and sides while cafes had menus leaning more toward sandwiches, burgers, and a small selection of meat, usually fried. Cafeterias like Bissonnet Cafeteria, owned by Syd and Olga Culver, advertised their “famous roast prime beef” and “delicious salads” while nearby cafes featured hamburgers.²³ They also varied in service; cafeterias were created in the late nineteenth century as a way of cutting down on labor costs and making food available cheaply and quickly to crowds through self-service. Customers moved through a line and chose their food rather than sitting at a table and ordering through waiters and waitresses. Cafes, on the other hand, usually still employed waitstaff, as the high number of “want” ads from the Houston papers of the postwar era illustrate.²⁴ While only a few of the menus from the cafes and cafeterias in Houston have survived into the twenty-first century, one notable

²² The two chains were Luby’s Cafeteria and A & W. *Polk’s Greater Houston City Directory, 1954* (Dallas: R. L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1954).

²³ *Southwestern Citizen*, (Houston, TX), September 19, 1946.

²⁴ Pillsbury, *From Boarding House to Bistro*, 46.

café and one cafeteria did survive to 2016 and can provide a lens into what was served at these kinds of eateries in the Houston of the 1950s.

No one is certain or appears to be able to agree on when City Café at 513 College Avenue opened. The current restaurant owners, who are several proprietors removed from the original owner, claim that the eatery opened its doors in 1952. There is, however, record of a City Café opening in South Houston in 1946 under the ownership of Myrtle Choate.²⁵ Regular customers, some of whom have been coming to the café since the mid-1950s, agree that, while each new owner has added items (including Greek food, recently), the core menu has remained the same. This includes traditional chicken-fried steak, burgers, and hearty breakfasts of eggs, pancakes, sausages, bacon, and never-ending mugs of coffee. When the *Houston Press* ran a short profile of the café in 2012, it claimed that “Inside City Café, it’s like time itself has paused for a cigarette break and a cup of black coffee . . . patrons take their chicken-fried steak and eggs in the morning with a red pack of Marlboro 100s, lined up in a row as they catch up with each other in the familiar rhythms that only regulars in small-town cafes possess.”²⁶

Multiple women owned and operated City Café in its first few decade of existence, establishing a foundation for success. Myrtle Choate filed the first business license for City Café on August 17, 1946. Ten years later, Ramona Sonderfan filed a business license for City Café at the same location, indicating a turnover in ownership. Sonderfan married Arthur Hockenberry a few months after going into business at City Café and in a marriage announcement confirmed that the newlyweds would continue working in the restaurant for

²⁵ “City Café: South Houston’s Charmingly Old School Diner,” *Houston Press*, (Houston, TX), January 17, 2012, and *Daily Court Review*, (Houston, TX), August 17, 1946.

²⁶ “City Café: South Houston’s Charmingly Old School Diner.”

the foreseeable future.²⁷ The restaurant then changed hands at least two more times before the 1970s but maintained its client base with the eggs, burgers, and coffee for which patrons gathered.

While it is unclear exactly how much of City Café's menu has remained the same as it was when Myrtle Choate filed her business license in 1946, the selection has probably stayed consistent in order to please patrons. This is a similar story at the long-running Cleburne Cafeteria. The Cleburne Cafeteria opened its doors in 1941 on Cleburne Street and Fannin. Anabelle Collins and Martha Cavanaugh operated the eatery through World War II and into the early 1950s. They built a solid customer base and then sold their enterprise to Nick and Pat Mickelis in 1952. Nick Mickelis immigrated to the United States from Greece in 1948. His brother operated a barbecue restaurant in Houston, and Mickelis learned how to cook there and saved money for his own eatery. Shortly after arriving in Houston, he met his wife-to-be. Originally, they wished to turn Cleburne Cafeteria into a barbecue restaurant, but, as the history page of their website recalls, "the faithful Cleburne clientele would not hear of it." Working as partners, the Mickelises continued to operate the restaurant as a cafeteria and maintained, as much as possible, the same experience for patrons as did Cavanaugh and Collins. In 1969, the Mickelis family decided to move the restaurant to the suburbs, following their customers and fleeing a rising crime rate. Pat Mickelis wrote 350 letters to their regular customers informing them of the move, and "That was it! No ads, no billboards. All 350 of them showed up," she recollects.²⁸ They continued to serve what

²⁷ *Oil City Derrick*, (Oil City, Pennsylvania), August 22, 1956, accessed on June 15, 2016, <https://www.newspapers.com/newspage/27150372/>.

²⁸ "Our History," Cleburne Cafeteria, accessed July 9, 2016, <http://cleburnecafeteria.com/history/>.

cultural geographer Richard Pillsbury terms “wholesome, traditional body food.”²⁹ Cleburne Cafeteria prided itself on trays groaning under the weight of chicken and dumplings, baked ham, fried shrimp and a plethora of side dishes. As the official restaurant’s history describes, many of the cooks in the restaurant remained on for decades, contributing to a consistency in food production.³⁰

Alongside cafes and cafeterias, restaurants specifically specializing in traditional southern food proliferated in Houston. In at least one case, that potential attracted people from outside of Texas. Vira Fredericks wanted to open a restaurant in the 1950s after spending fifteen years working for an automobile rental company in Springfield, Missouri. Her sister had opened a restaurant in Kansas in 1925, serving as inspiration and a role model. Fredericks also claimed to have always wanted to live in Texas, for unspecified reasons, so in 1951 she left Missouri and bought a red brick colonial home in Houston to turn into a restaurant, the Green Parrot Inn, modeled on her sister’s business of the same name in Kansas. Fredericks specialized in fried chicken dinners served family style with mashed potatoes, gravy, beans, pickles, rolls, and honey butter. She gained the attention of many Houstonians, including the *Houston Chronicle*, with her chiffon pies. Indeed, the fondness for pie demonstrated by Houston’s women was a “delight” to Fredericks, who stated that,

²⁹ Pillsbury, *From Boarding House to Bistro*, 66.

³⁰ “Our History,” Cleburne Cafeteria. Jo-Carolyn Goode, “Cleburne Cafeteria Celebrates 75th Anniversary,” *Houston Style Magazine*, accessed July 9, 2016, <http://stylemagazine.com/news/2016/mar/02/cleburne-cafeteria-celebrates-75th-anniversary/>. Nick Mickelis died in 1989; Pat Mickelis is still alive, as of April 2016. Everyday running of the restaurant is maintained by their son, George. For its seventy-fifth anniversary, which they date from the opening in 1941, even though it was under different proprietors, Cleburne Cafeteria planned to serve their food with 1941 prices, advertising fried chicken for thirty-nine cents and berry cobbler for eight cents. Unfortunately, the restaurant burned in April 2016, a month before the planned celebration. The Mickelis family, as of July 2016, plans to rebuild. Fauzeya Rahman, “After fire, owner of Cleburne Cafeteria vows to rebuild 75-year Houston institution,” *Houston Chronicle*, (Houston, TX), July 20, 2016.

“Why, back home when you go to the trouble to bake luscious desserts for dinner parties, the women usually pass them up. But here women ask for pie as often as the men.” This echoes the sentiments of a major cookbook author of the 1950s, who opined that “Truly a beautiful pie is a beacon to light a man’s way homeward.”³¹ Crafting a delicious dessert for customers was the mark of a good restaurateur, according to Betty Rose Cravens, a *Houston Chronicle* writer and fan of Fredericks. Fredericks graciously included the recipe for her Strawberry Chiffon Pie in a 1952 *Houston Chronicle* profile with advice on frying chicken, cooking green beans, and a recipe for Almond Delight, a confection containing vanilla wafers, almonds, and beaten egg whites.³²

Fredericks included the fact that her green beans came from a can. Canned and convenience food were common in the 1950s and usage indicated that restaurateurs were aware of all new food developments. Modern food experts consider canned foods to be subpar; indeed, historian Glenna Matthews contends that “the nadir of American cookery came in the fifties. This was the heyday of prepared foods and the cream-of-mushroom-soup school of cuisine.”³³ As Sherrie Inness observes in her work on gender and culinary culture, though, a reliance on canned food did not mark an inferior dish in the postwar era. In fact, the food writers of the 1950s contended that canned foods expanded the range of “a cook’s repertoire, rather than narrowing it.” Moreover, using canned foods became associated with modernity and progress. Cooks and restaurant owners in urban and suburban areas could serve anything from a can or a frozen package at any time of the year, showcasing their

³¹ Inness, *Dinner Roles*, 146.

³² Betty Rose Cravens, “Restaurateur of Six Months Has Many Food Tips to Share,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), January 20, 1952.

³³ Glenna Matthews, *“Just a Housewife”: The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 211.

creativity and ingenuity. They could also utilize a whole prepackaged frozen meal, as Virginia Pinkerton, owner of Houston's Gusher Café advertised in the *Southwestern Citizen*. This was not an admission that Pinkerton did not prepare food on demand. Instead she was signaling that she was a "smart modern woman."³⁴ Many recipes in the postwar period advertised meals made only or mostly from cans or prepackaged ingredients with perhaps some additional seasonings or ingredients. Like Fredericks' description of using canned green beans, to which she added seasonings and bacon, articles in magazines like *Good Housekeeping* raved over recipes that, for example, combined instant soup, evaporated milk, and water for a new "soup" or took evaporated milk, American cheese, and a dash of salt and called it "cheese sauce."³⁵ In the 1950s, canned foods provided an entrance into imaginative cooking and, for a cook like Fredericks, provided both convenience and a signal that her restaurant would employ the most progressive and up-to-date technologies. Fredericks makes no apologies for her canned beans, Pinkerton does not make excuses for her frozen meals, nor would any of their contemporary customers have asked for an explanation for why her meals did not come completely from scratch.

Another prolific type of eating site in the postwar period, probably the most linked in historical memory to the era, is the drive-in (often spelled "drive inn" during the 1940s). The drive-in arose, as its name suggests, from the proliferation of vehicles beginning in the 1920s and accelerating in the 1950s. At mid-century, the drive-in became an important part of popular culture, particularly the new teen culture. It appealed to teenagers who wanted cheap food and a place to "see and be seen" and to families doing their weekend and evening

³⁴*Southwestern Citizen*, (Houston, TX), November 3, 1949.

³⁵ Inness, *Dinner Roles*, 159-162.

shopping.³⁶ Houston's female entrepreneurs opened numerous drive-ins during the period, at least 200 by 1955 and more than 250 by 1960.³⁷ In 1954, according to the city directory, women owned at least 20 percent of the ninety-two self-described drive-in restaurants in Houston.³⁸ Most of the drive-ins in Houston opened in the mid-1950s, but a few women had founded their eateries earlier and enjoyed some longevity, including Bar D Drive In, opened in 1950 by Mrs. Ray M. Wadsworth, Becker Street Drive In, opened by Mae Sodario in 1949, and Nagle Drive In, opened in 1948 by Dosie Malbrue and Lucinda Hargrove.³⁹

For women like Charlotte Walters, founder of Charlotte's Drive Inn in 1947, the decision to open a drive-in involved choosing a name for the restaurant. Restaurant proprietors in Houston, like their counterparts across the nation, often named their restaurant after themselves, implying intimacy and warmth.⁴⁰ In particular, women owners named their eateries after themselves in much larger number than women who owned other businesses, possibly due to the desire to make cafes and restaurants more connected to an idea, real or imagined, that a specific, talented woman was welcoming patrons into her space. For the period of 1946 to 1960, of the roughly 250 drive-ins founded by women, approximately 100, or 40 percent, named their establishments after themselves, either using their first name or

³⁶“Drive-In Culture,” University of Michigan, accessed August 20, 2016, <http://www.umich.edu/~drivein/restaurant.html>.

³⁷Obviously they were not all open at the same time. This number also counts women who bought out other women's drive ins as two separate businesses. Data compiled from *The Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977.

³⁸This amounted to eighteen out of ninety-two drive-in restaurants. A further thirty had unclear ownership, so the twenty percent number is likely lower than reality. *Polk's Greater Houston City Directory, 1954* (Dallas: R. L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1954).

³⁹ Data compiled from *The Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977.

⁴⁰See Cooley, *To Live and Dine in Dixie* for more on how eating is a specifically intimate act linked to ideas on gender, race, and class.

their last name. Most of the women who used their name chose their first name to stamp their restaurants; from January to June 1948 alone six women opened Margie's, Kathryn's, Lucille's, Hester's, Myrtle's, and Ann's Drive Ins. Another 20 women of the 250 proprietors named their drive-ins after the location of the establishment (Quitman's Drive In at 1502 Quitman, Fulton Drive In at 4316 Fulton, etcetera).⁴¹

In other restaurants, the statistics are similar as in drive-ins. Roughly four hundred of the over fifteen hundred restaurants (not including drive ins) started by women from mid-1946 to 1960 contained either the first or last name of the woman beginning the establishment, roughly 27 percent of all of the restaurants. Another seventy named their restaurants after the street. Other trends include naming the restaurant after an unclear initial or abbreviation (Dorothy Bonner's V & H Café, Letitia Boykin's J & M Grill, etc.) or using the name of a husband who was not listed on the business license (Ruth Moore's eatery was called Eddie's Café and Zella Harris founded Harry's Barbecue).

In terms of men's involvement in restaurants, there were measurable differences in the longevity of restaurants owned solely by women and those that involved male partners. The food industry is notorious for short lifespans for properties owned by men and women alike, but in the postwar period, restaurants that involved a husband or adult male children were much more likely to remain open for a longer period of time than those solely operated by a woman or women partners. The list of eateries involving a husband-and-wife team that existed throughout the entirety of the postwar period include notables like Cream Burger, Cleburne Cafeteria, The Barbecue Inn, Molina Cantina, and This Is It.⁴² Of the fifteen

⁴¹ Data compiled from *The Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977.

⁴² Ibid..

hundred eateries founded solely by women listed as filing business licenses from mid-1946 to 1960, none survived after 1965. Of the restaurants that lasted for a long period, men were present as owners.⁴³ While the women owners of restaurants that closed in Houston have not left a record stating why they came to end, part of the explanation for the discrepancy could be the fact that restaurants that involved an entire family unit required investment in both time and resources from the couple and any children. The records of long-running family enterprises, like Ninfa's and Cleburne Cafeteria, support this assumption. If one half of the couple could not continue in his or her position, the partner or adult children could take over the operation; a business operated by and invested in only by one woman would not likely remain in operation past the proprietor's retirement or death. Furthermore, eateries operated by either one woman or two women in partnership appear to be more limited in size and scale, due to the limited access to capital. These are relatively modest operations; for restaurateurs operating in a time in which access to credit was curtailed for women, options to expand or weather difficulties with loans proved limited. Men enjoyed greater access to resources that could keep an operation afloat longer; most women venturing out on their own did not have those kinds of resources, and the longevity of their businesses reflects that discrepancy.

Barbecue and Beyond: Opportunities for African American Women

For African Americans traveling from place to place, the *Negro Motorist Green Book* proved extremely helpful. Published by Victor Hugo Green, a Harlem postal worker and activist, beginning in 1936, the book helped African Americans navigate unfamiliar places "embarrassment-free" by listing businesses friendly to African American patronage. The

⁴³ Ibid.

first year of publication, Green only listed businesses in New York City, but, following the success of the first edition and demand for more, the 1937 edition expanded to include the entire nation. Due to the difficulties of tracking all places owned by African Americans or owned by whites willing to serve African Americans, the listings were incomplete, particularly for the South.⁴⁴ Even so, the *Green Book*, as it was usually called, provides a small snapshot of places in major cities that African Americans could call their own.

One establishment that repeatedly appeared in the *Green Book* for Houston was the Ajapo Hotel and Restaurant. It is unclear when the Ajapo Hotel and Restaurant opened; it first appeared in the *Green Book* in 1953. For most Houston listings, the title of the proprietorship and the address are all that appear. The Ajapo, though, took out a half-page advertisement, complete with a photograph of the exterior, in addition to a separate advertisement for the dining room. Located in the Third Ward at 2412 Dowling Street, the Ajapo Hotel billed itself as “The Finest Hotel in the South for Tourists” with an attached dining room featuring “Southern Fried Chicken, Hospitality and Excellent Food.” The entry lists Mrs. R. Ajapo as the manager of the hotel and dining room.⁴⁵ Married to physician William R. Ajapo, Irene Ajapo managed both the Ajapo and Irene’s Real Estate Company.⁴⁶ It is unclear what Irene Ajapo did prior to the 1950s, although it is likely that she, like her husband, was from New York City. As one of only two hotels to house African American

⁴⁴ “Collection Data,” *The Green Book*, The New York Public Library Digital Collections, accessed January 1, 2017, <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/the-green-book#/?tab=about&scroll=6>.

⁴⁵ Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, The New York Public Library, "The Negro Travelers' Green Book: 1953" New York Public Library Digital Collections, accessed March 5, 2017, <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/2bc86d90-92d0-0132-e771-58d385a7b928>.

⁴⁶ *Polk’s Greater Houston City Directory, 1953* (Dallas: R. L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1953).

visitors in Houston and provide convenient food, the Ajapo provided an essential service to the African American community and prospered.

In March 1955, William R. Ajapo died, and Irene continued as the sole proprietor of the Ajapo Hotel.⁴⁷ As of March 1955, Irene was an eligible widow. Through her real estate company and the hotel, she had become, according to *Jet* magazine, very wealthy.⁴⁸ During one of her frequent trips to New York City, she caught the eye of Brooklynite Henry (Harry) Corley, who was a darling of the African American society column. In October 1955, *Jet*'s gossip column observed that Harry Corley "recently hosted a party for wealthy Irene Ajapo of Texas and let it drop that she might be the second Mrs. Corley."⁴⁹ Between that entry and 1957, Irene did become the second Mrs. Corley, and she and Harry returned to Houston to run the hotel and restaurant full-time, although they frequently returned to New York. *Jet* continued to chronicle their jet-setting lifestyle, describing in December 1957 how they returned from a tri-monthly trip to Mexico and their assistant manager greeted them with: "A smoker set his bed on fire, another guest gave me a bad check and chambermaid Nellie Mae quit." Henry quipped in reply, "What else amusing happened?"⁵⁰ *Jet* noticed Irene's week in New York City shopping, theater-going and staying with friends and a Martha's Vineyard excursion in 1962, commented on the Corleys' hosting abilities in 1964, and reported in 1967

⁴⁷ "Texas Deaths, 1890-1976," database with images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:K3ZV-Y2P> : 5 December 2014), Will Robertson Ajapo, 27 Mar 1955; citing certificate number 13170, State Registrar Office, Austin; FHL microfilm 2,114, 386.

⁴⁸ It's unclear why Henry Corley was so popular among the *Jet* society column authors. Little else can be found on his profession or life prior to his 1954 divorce from a highly respected Chicago principal, Ernestine Oldham, and his subsequent wooing of a Bermudan heiress, whom he abandoned for Irene Ajapo. "Stag Line," *Jet*, 7 No. 4 (December 5, 1954): 40; "Party Fare," *Jet*, 8 No. 22 (October 6, 1955): 43.

⁴⁹ "Party Fare," *Jet*, 43.

⁵⁰ "Travelogue," *Jet* 13 No. 8 (December 26, 1957): 28.

when the Corleys decided to sell the Ajapo and move to the Bronx.⁵¹ Prior to 1983, the Corleys retired to San Antonio, where *Jet* continued to follow their life, including an eight-day trip to a camp for the blind, following Henry's loss of sight.⁵² Henry died in 1988, and Irene died in 1991.⁵³ It is unclear how long the Ajapo remained open following the sale in 1967.

Part of the Ajapo's appeal was the fact that it provided lodging when every other hotel in Houston remained off-limits to African Americans. The Ajapo Hotel also provided a dining room for both guests and Houstonians, advertising their "Creole cooks" serving "excellent food."⁵⁴ At the time of their opening, the Ajapo's dining room competed against many African American owned restaurants. On Dowling Street alone, one of the central avenues for the Third Ward, in the 1954 Houston City Directory, the Ajapo Dining Room was listed alongside thirty-seven other restaurants, including fourteen cafes, four cafeterias, and five barbecue restaurants. Of the thirty-seven, fifteen were definitely owned or co-owned by women: Ann's Dining Room, Blanton's Place, Busy Bee Hamburger Stand, Ethel's Snack Bar, Eureka Grill, Gladys's Place, Green's Bar B Q, Hogrobrooks, Jack and Joyce Café, Mitchell's Grill, Page's Sandwich Shop, Rosa's French Kitchen, Silver Bowl Grill, Tennon's Bar-B-Q, and the Welcome Inn Café. Almost all operated within a few city blocks from one another, in the 2000, 3000, or 4000 blocks of Dowling, demonstrating both a

⁵¹ "Travelogue," *Jet* 21 No. 26 (April 19, 1962): 41; "Travelogue," *Jet* 26 No. 21 (August 27, 1964):40; "Travelogue," *Jet* 31 No. 17 (February 2, 1967): 40.

⁵² "Cocktail ChitChat" *Jet* 65 No. 3 (September 26, 1983): 32.

⁵³ "Irene Corley," Find A Grave, November 9, 2012, accessed November 5, 2016, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgibin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GSln=Corley&GSfn=Irene&GSbyrel=all&GSdy=1991&GSdyrel=in&GSob=n&GRid=100421184&df=all&>.

⁵⁴ "The Negro Travelers' Green Book: 1953," New York Public Library Digital Collections.

demand for ready-made food in the Third Ward and opportunity for African American women to open eating establishments within their segregated community.⁵⁵

Indeed, food businesses proved popular for many African American men and women. Food work held the same appeal for racial minorities that it did for white women. Opening a restaurant or café did not require any specialized training, like a drugstore, beauty parlor, or barber shop did. They could be opened without much capital, which was a problem for all women and African American men. For African American women, opening a restaurant was not too great of a leap from a task most already did on a daily basis: producing and preparing food. The main difference between African American men and women in food service appears to be niches. Nationwide, in 1930, women tended to congregate in grocery stores, catering, restaurants, and lunch counters while men owned more fish and poultry markets, butcher shops, and smoke houses.⁵⁶ As with white-owned restaurants, many African American women took on partners or went into business with their husbands. This pattern contributed to the possibility of the business existing longer than most restaurants, which had an extremely high probability of closing in the first few years.

One of the restaurants on Dowling belonged to Theodore and Euneida Hogrobrooks. The Hogrobrooks ran their diner, Hogrobrooks Fine Dining, across from the popular Eldorado Ballroom, from 1939 to 1965. The restaurant had been started by Theodore's mother, Inez Hogrobrooks. Euneida, a native of Colorado, met Theodore at Prairie View College (Prairie View A&M University today), and they married in Houston on June 13, 1937. Following the opening of the eatery, Theodore handled the finances of the restaurant

⁵⁵ *Polk's Greater Houston City Directory, 1954* (Dallas: R. L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1954).

⁵⁶ Poe, "Food, Culture, and Entrepreneurship," 54.

and Euneida and Inez handled the day-to-day operations. As their children grew up, they helped by washing glasses, waitressing, and doing some of the cooking while their grandmother and parents reinforced the imperative that they must pursue an education. Hogrobrooks Fine Foods provided enough profits for all four of the Hogrobrooks children to go to college.⁵⁷

The location of the establishment helped it gain and maintain popularity. After performing at the Eldorado, celebrities like Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, and other music luminaries ate at Hogrobrooks.⁵⁸ Through their restaurant and work in the community, the family befriended several prominent Houstonians, including R. O'Hara Lanier, the president of Texas Southern University, and Morris Bogdanow, a white attorney who had been arrested in 1950 at a watermelon party at the Negro Elks' Lodge for "mingling with Negroes" and suspicion of belonging to the Communist party.⁵⁹ Euneida's friendship with the Laniers and the Bogdanows inadvertently placed her in the middle of Houston's Red Scare in 1954. C.W. Rice, the publisher of *The Negro Labor News*, blamed Dr. Lanier for the protests and unrest of students at TSU, arguing that the African American students could be seen as communists. Rice repeatedly attacked Lanier, claiming he had communist ties.⁶⁰ In March 1954, Rice published a doctored photograph of Lanier and his wife "wining and dining" with Morris Bogdanow, asking, "Was it in the \$65,000 mansion that the state furnishes the President of

⁵⁷ Enid Gayl Hogrobrooks, email message to author, November 8, 2016.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Don E. Carleton, *Red Scare!: Right-Wing Hysteria, Fifties Fanaticism and Their Legacy in Texas* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1985), 61.

⁶⁰ Katherine Bynum, "Weeding Out the Undesirables: The Red Scare in Texas Higher Education, 1936-1958," (MA thesis, University of North Texas, 2014), 82.

TSU?” Euneida Hogrobrooks swiftly moved into action, writing to the *Houston Informer*, “the picture was not taken at ‘the \$65,000 mansion that the state furnishes for the President of TSU’! It was taken at the humbler abode of Theodore and Euneida Hogrobrooks. . . .” She provided the *Informer* with the un-doctored photograph taken at the Hogrobrooks twelve-year wedding anniversary in 1949.⁶¹

Their position as independent business owners allowed them to take a stand on civil rights. The Hogrobrooks raised their children to fight for civil rights and used their restaurant as a site for organization and to fund the civil rights movement. They used their earnings to bail out protesters, including their daughter, Holly, arrested at demonstrations during the sit-in movement, which began in Houston in 1960. Holly Hogrobrooks helped organize one of the first sit-ins challenging segregation at Weingarten’s department store on March 4, 1960 and was jailed again in 1961 for seeking service at a café in Houston’s Union Station. Her sister remembered that “Holly was fearless, opinionated and strong because our parents taught us to stand up to injustice.”⁶² The Hogrobrooks position within the community encouraged their children to actively pursue higher education and help lead the fight against desegregation in Houston.

While eateries in general offered African Americans opportunity for business ownership, the white power structure in Houston accepted that African Americans dominated the number of barbeque restaurants. According to a Houston food historian, all of the barbecue restaurants in Houston prior to World War II were owned by African Americans

⁶¹“Rice Caught Again in Fraud,” *Houston Informer* (Houston, TX), March 23, 1954, 8.

⁶² Lenzi Causey, “Houston’s civil rights architect passes away,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), February 3, 2016.

and most of those after World War II remained under African American ownership. At all the locations, white Houstonians ordered at the back door in a reversal of the experience that African Americans endured at white-owned establishments.⁶³ This matched a long-lasting tradition in the South. The first barbecuers were African slaves who combined their methods of roasting meat with methods picked up in the West Indies. Specifically, this included the knowledge that creating barbecue takes hours over indirect heat. Following slavery, a disproportionate number of African Americans were barbecue cooks.⁶⁴ Texas barbecue represented a convergence of southern barbecue with the traditions of the southwest. Anglo Americans brought a barbecue tradition along with their African American slaves, who, as in the rest of the South, dominated barbecue production both before and after the Civil War. At the beginning of the twentieth century, barbecue producers went more commercial, selling smoked meats and plates in meat markets and a few restaurants and adding sides. Following World War II, more barbecue restaurants began to open separately from meat markets, which had only sold single-portions and sides as an extra to their main endeavor. Most barbecue eateries in the South remained independently operated into the latter half of the twentieth century.⁶⁵ While barbecue pits gained a reputation as masculine spaces, in practice, women operated pits and grills and owned and co-owned barbecue eateries.

One of the longest-lasting restaurants in Houston, Shepherd Drive Barbecue, named Pizzitola's today, originated in the 1930s at the intersection of Long and Shepherd Drive. Started by John and Leila Davis in the 1930s, Shepherd Drive Barbecue opened in a newer

⁶³ J.C. Reid, "A founding family of barbecue" *Houston Chronicle*, (Houston, TX), December 26, 2014.

⁶⁴ John Edge, *Southern Belly: The Ultimate Food Lover's Companion to the South* (Athens, GA: Hill Street Press, 2002), 23-24.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 116-17.

“mixed” neighborhood in the West End that was not as segregated as older parts of the city. Shepherd Drive Barbecue operated next to an Italian-American-owned food market and small businesses owned by people of multiple races and ethnicities flourished in the area. In the 1950s, the city bulldozed the neighborhood for Interstate 10, and the Davis couple moved further south on Shepherd Drive. John Davis moved the barbecue pit brick-by-brick to the new location to completely preserve the quality of the barbecue. The restaurant proved even more successful in its new location. It became one of the most respected barbecue restaurants in Houston. According to their daughter, Leila Davis operated the pits and made the barbecue while her husband, John, chopped the meat and operated the cash register.⁶⁶ The current promotional materials for the restaurant, which the Davis’ children have leased to Jerry Pizzitola, emphasizes that “it all began in the Roosevelt era with Texas barbecue legend John Davis and his wife Leila. His legacy continues. . . .”⁶⁷ Leila, per statements from her daughter, operated the pits, but it is her husband who is the “barbecue legend” according to restaurant promotional materials, local histories, and cookbooks.⁶⁸ Culture and society deemed pits and grills to be masculine spaces, and despite their presence as pit operators and barbecue owners, women largely disappear from the historical record of barbecue restaurants.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷“Our Story,” Pizzitola’s Barbecue, accessed November 6, 2016, <http://pizzitolas.com/ourstory.html>.

⁶⁸ Robb Walsh, *Legends of Texas Barbecue Cookbook* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2016), 194.

⁶⁹ For more, see H. Molina, “The Construction of South Texas Masculinity: Masculine Space and the Barbeque Grill,” *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 21 (2014): 233-48.

Tex-Mex and “Ninfaritas”: The Mexican American Experience

Some of the most renowned leaders in Houston’s Mexican American community owned restaurants, like Felix and Janie Tijerina. The Tijerinas exemplify the kind of opportunities and limits on Mexican Americans within Houston and the relationship between race and entrepreneurship. The Tijerinas, friends of Felix and Angie Morales, owned and operated Felix’s Mexican Restaurant. The couple had married in 1933 in Houston, two years before Felix’s first entrepreneurial endeavor, The Mexican Inn, went bankrupt. The couple mutually decided that opening another restaurant would be a good idea, and Janie provided the funds after, defying an agreement she had made with her husband, she gambled on a horse and won.⁷⁰ Due to the previous bankruptcy, Janie put the restaurant under her name and personally ordered the furniture, food, and beverages. Felix’s opened on Westheimer in 1937 with ninety cents in the cash register and a staff made up of family members.⁷¹ The restaurant proved extremely successful, catering to the tastes of the Anglo population. As a food critic in the *Houston Press* stated in 2000, the Tijerina style of cooking “was not about bringing authentic Mexican flavors to Texas; it was about putting Anglos at ease with things Mexican.”⁷²

In fact, the same could be said for the Tijerinas civic outreach. Felix served as both vice president and president of the Houston chapter of the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and was president of the national organization for four terms, from 1956 to 1960. He emphasized assimilation into Anglo culture, concluding, during his leadership of

⁷⁰“Restaurateur Janie Tijerina dies at age 88.” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), March 4, 1997.

⁷¹ Chrystal Pit, “Deal with Us: The Business of Mexican Culture in Post-World War II Houston” (PhD dissertation, The University of Arizona, 2011), 187.

⁷² Robb Walsh, “Combination Plates,” *Houston Press* (Houston, TX), August 31, 2000.

LULAC, that a lack of English skills prevented success for Mexican American children. This led to the sponsorship of the Little Schools of the 400, a preschool instruction program that introduced the children to 400 basic English words. Under Tijerina's leadership, LULAC pursued what historian Brian D. Behnken has termed a "whiteness strategy" that argued against discrimination toward Mexican Americans, because they were white. This meant that LULAC should not cooperate or join forces with organizations like the NAACP with Tijerina arguing, "Let the Negro fight his own battles."⁷³ As part of a larger goal to put "Anglos at ease with things Mexican," the Tijerinas upheld racial segregation in their restaurants until forced to integrate with the Civil Rights Act in 1964. In fact, the Tijerinas authored a specific policy for employees to follow if African Americans attempted to eat in one of their restaurants, including calling the police should an African American become "demonstrative."⁷⁴ The Tijerinas did not wish to harm their business, which, by that point, included seven restaurants, or their position in Anglo society. Janie, certainly, had hostility toward African American customers, considering them to be extremely demanding and requiring too much attention from staff. She dismissed African American customers as "the only dissatisfied people that she had."⁷⁵

Janie's role in the running of the Tijerina enterprises was instrumental. When Felix was called into the Army during World War II, she ran the restaurant in his stead while simultaneously operating her own curio shop in downtown Houston. While Janie still helped in the restaurant when Felix returned, the curio shop gave her a sense of independence and

⁷³ Brian D. Behnken, *Fighting Their Own Battles: Mexican Americans, African Americans, and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Texas* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 62.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Pit, "Deal with Us," 206.

allowed her to nurture her love of traveling to Mexico to pick up supplies and new stock. She ran four different stores until 1965, when Felix died from heart disease, and she took up his mantle and ran the restaurant empire.⁷⁶ While Felix provided the direction and was definitely the primary partner in the growing company, Janie assisted as needed, providing a lot of the labor in the early years, and took over completely in the 1960s, demonstrating the family-owned nature of the business. Recognizing that the Felix name was associated with her husband, despite her extensive work behind the scenes since its inception, she did nothing to alter the business. She did, however, work incredibly hard to keep the restaurants going, sleeping four hours each night, picking up food supplies, supervising food quality at all the restaurants, and even covering for wait staff. Despite that hard work, business began to wane in the 1970s as the culinary tastes of Houstonians evolved and demanded a more “authentic” flavor.⁷⁷ Prior to Janie’s death in 1997, all the locations closed except the flagship on Westheimer, which remained open until 2008.⁷⁸

In 2008, when the Tijerinas’ final restaurant closed its doors, another Mexican restaurant, El Patio, took the most-loved recipes and began serving them to “save” them, even recruiting chefs from Felix’s kitchen. Like Felix’s, El Patio had established itself as a beloved Houston institution. It was founded by Fred and Lena Villasana in 1962. Lena filed the paperwork, and the two ran the restaurant as partners until the 1970s, when Fred’s brother, Richard, took over operations.⁷⁹ The original restaurant opened in Rice Village and had, at one point, ten locations. The popularity stemmed from their “authentic” Tex-Mex

⁷⁶ Ibid., 190.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 210-212.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 216.

⁷⁹ “Meet Our Family,” El Patio, accessed on October 1, 2016, <http://elpatio.com/2013/meet-the-team/>.

food, which was more flavorful than Felix's but more postwar Anglo pleasing than the restaurants that followed, striking a balance between what was beginning to be deemed "bland" and what was more adventurous and "exotic" for white Houstonians. In the mid-1960s, the Villasanas moved from the original location to Westheimer. There the restaurant earned its reputation as a place to go for a high energy "good time." It became famous for Club Villa Sana or, as it is better known, Club No Minors, due to the tendency of drunken revelers to steal "Villa Sana" from the sign, leaving only "No Minors" on the door. Club No Minors featured margaritas colored blue because the Villasanas thought it was different and "pretty."⁸⁰ The Villasanas created an institution around fun, blue margaritas, and revelry that has endured into the twenty-first century.

As the tastes of Houstonians began to change and evolve, they increased their interest in ethnically diverse food. Multiple books published in the late 1960s and early 1970s called Tex-Mex, like that served at Felix's, a "purely American regional cuisine" that offered dishes without the commonly used ingredients of Mexico or that existed mainly to please American palates. That interest, combined with the growth of the Mexican American community by more than 200 percent between 1950 and 1970, allowed even more opportunity for women who wanted to turn their culinary talents into an enterprise.⁸¹ The most famous of those women in Houston, due to their business' longevity, were Velia Arcos Rodriguez Duran, founder of Villa Arcos, and Ninfa Laurenzo, founder of Ninfa's. Both began their enterprises because of a need to support their families and both opened their restaurants within a few years of one another in the 1970s on Navigation Boulevard. Moreover, both

⁸⁰Syd Kearney, "El Patio turns 50," *Houston Chronicle*, (Houston, TX), May 1, 2014.

⁸¹ Tatcho Mendiola, "A Demographic Profile of Texas and Selected Cities: Some Recent Trends, 1950-1970" (Austin: University of Texas Center for Human Resources, 1974).

turned the businesses into family operations and fervently believed in giving back to their communities through activism and philanthropy.

Velia Duran's daughter, Yolanda Black Navarro, remarked that her mother's story was little different from other Mexican American women. "If you look at the history of Latina restaurateurs . . . they did it because of the need to survive. It's what they needed to do if they lost their husbands. . . ." ⁸² Velia Duran raised her six children as a single mother in the Second Ward of Houston with the salary she made working in multiple restaurants and bakeries. She had attempted to open a restaurant on South Main that failed and returned to her work in other restaurants. In 1977, with the encouragement of her adult children and a thousand dollars, she opened Villa Arcos, serving ten varieties of tacos and combination plates through a take-out window. In the beginning, Velia alone handled all the cooking while a woman only remembered as Dona Maria made the tortillas. Word quickly spread about the amazing tacos, and the restaurant, which had been mainly patronized by passing truck drivers, thrived. Gradually the eatery added seating and a small patio. After Duran died in 1990, the restaurant passed to her daughters. Yolanda Black Navarro, who had assisted her mother since the beginning on weekends and holidays, took over full-time in 1997. ⁸³

Villa Arcos also became a site for political and social activism. City councilmembers, county commissioners, and mayors all frequented the restaurant, and Navarro herself unsuccessfully ran for public office twice. Members of the community came

⁸² Mikaela Garza Selley, "House Special: Mexican Food & Houston," *Houston History* 9 (2011): 32-33.

⁸³ Yolanda Black Navarro, interview by Mikaela Selley, November 15, 2010, Oral Histories from the Houston History Project, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

to Villa Arcos to talk and catch up with the owners, who became centers of knowledge for political candidates and served as facilitators for fundraising and campaigning.⁸⁴ The Villa Arcos family also became involved in social activism. Navarro worked on the Metro Board and Parks Board for the city, and the Hispanic Advisory Council, fighting for the community in the Second Ward. She also founded the Association for the Advancement of Mexican Americans and earned the Mayor's Lifetime Achievement Award prior to her death in 2015. Villa Arcos continues to serve customers at its original Navigation Boulevard location as of 2016.⁸⁵

While Villa Arcos is a Houston tradition known very well to locals, when most other people familiar with Houston think of Mexican food, they think of Ninfa's. The story of Ninfa's Restaurants and the founder, Ninfa Laurenzo, combines all of the elements seen in most cases of Mexican American women who opened businesses, including her neighbor and acquaintance, Velia Duran. Ninfa's was not Laurenzo's first entrepreneurial endeavor; she had entered the business world with her husband, Tommy, in the 1940s. After his death in 1969, she turned to her talent for cooking to support her family. Fortunately, she opened her restaurant, which emphasized flavor and "authenticity" in a way that Felix's and similar Tex-Mex restaurants did not, at a time when white Houstonian palates were ready to experiment with ethnic food. Ninfa, the person and the restaurant, was a success, and the enterprise became a solidly family affair; her children became involved in running the company early on, like those in the Morales and Tijerina families. Moreover, Ninfa Laurenzo gave back to the community through philanthropic endeavors, mirroring the efforts of Maria Reyna, Angie

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵ "Yolanda Black Navarro Obituary," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), November 12, 2015.

Morales, and Janie Tijerina. Ninfa Lorenzo couched her work within a specific narrative: she went out on her own because she had to support her children. The Ninfa's story, then, is about a clearly constructed identity and narrative designed to appeal to a white power structure that continued to control Houston into the 1970s.

Ninfa Rodriguez Lorenzo, daughter of Esteban Rodriguez and Maura Chapa Rodriguez, was born in Harlingen, Texas on May 11, 1924. Her father, a political refugee, arrived in South Texas in 1911 and opened the first ice plant in the Rio Grande Valley as well as a hotel. He became a plumbing contractor and owned a small ranch. Ninfa Lorenzo had six brothers and five sisters, including a twin, Pilar.⁸⁶ She graduated from Henrietta High School in Kingsville and Durham Business School in Harlingen in the 1940s. While visiting her newly married twin Pilar in Providence, Rhode Island, in 1945, she met Domenic Thomas Lorenzo (Tommy), a Massachusetts Institute of Technology graduate of Italian descent.⁸⁷ The two married and, in 1947, had their first child, Roland. The following year, the family moved to Houston, after flipping a coin to choose between the Bayou City and Los Angeles.

In 1948, the Laurencos opened Rio Grande Food Products Company in a rented building in eastern Houston. Combining Ninfa and Tommy's heritages, the company supplied tortillas and pizza dough to restaurants. By the 1960s, the company was a success. In 1969, Tommy died from a cerebral hemorrhage, and Ninfa struggled to keep the company open.⁸⁸ In 1973, she converted the front of the factory into a ten-table restaurant, Ninfa's,

⁸⁶ Pit, "Deal with Us," 222-23.

⁸⁷ Dai Huynh, "Restaurateur Mama Ninfa dies," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), June 18, 2001.

⁸⁸ "Ninfa Lorenzo," *Texas Women's Hall of Fame*, 2001, <http://www.twu.edu/twhf/tw-laurenzo.asp>.

serving high quality Mexican food. Unable to secure a loan from a bank, due to the factory's debts, Lorenzo mortgaged her home and borrowed money from a friend in Mexico to start the eatery.⁸⁹ The restaurant quickly attracted attention for its flavorful green sauce, "Ninfaritas," and tacos al carbon, introduced as "fajitas." She provided good service, greeting patrons warmly and earning the nickname "Mama Ninfa." The restaurant quickly became popular and, in 1976, Lorenzo opened a second restaurant on Westheimer. By 1980, Lorenzo owned six Ninfa's frequented by movie stars and politicians.⁹⁰ Eventually, Ninfa's expanded to about fifty-five locations in multiple cities.⁹¹ Beginning in 1987, she and her children, who assisted in the management of the company, expanded from Mexican restaurants with Bambolino's Italian Drive-Thru and Joey Jack's Seafood, neither as popular as Ninfa's.⁹² Overexpansion took its toll, and the Lorenzo family had over \$2.8 million in debt by 1996, when the family company declared bankruptcy, and in 1998, the restaurants moved out of Lorenzo ownership. In the agreements reached during the change of ownership, Ninfa Lorenzo received a monthly stipend from the new owners, Serranos Café and Cantina, in exchange for serving as the restaurant's public persona. She retired shortly thereafter.⁹³

In addition to her business work, Ninfa Lorenzo participated in multiple civic and political endeavors. She actively worked in Houston's Mexican American community,

⁸⁹ Pit, "Deal with Us." 227.

⁹⁰ Wayne King, "Houston sings praises of restaurateur who cooks with love," *The New York Times* (New York, NY), July 24, 1982.

⁹¹ Bill Shadewald, "'Mama Ninfa' the mother of all entrepreneurs," *Houston Business Journal* (Houston, TX), June 24, 2001.

⁹² "Ninfa Lorenzo," *Texas Women's Hall of Fame*.

⁹³ Pit, "Deal with Us," 259.

supporting efforts to increase educational quality, health, voter participation and employment opportunities. One of Ninfa's regular customers, George H. W. Bush, encouraged her participation in the Republican Party, and, in 1988, she gave a speech seconding Bush's nomination as president at the Republican National Convention. A devout Roman Catholic, Lorenzo received the honor, in 1984, of acting as one of Pope John Paul II's goodwill ambassadors during a visit to Puerto Rico.⁹⁴ Lorenzo received numerous awards and recognitions for her business success and her volunteer work. In 1979, the National Hispanic Chamber of Commerce named her Business Woman of the Year and the Texas Restaurant Association honored her as Woman Restaurateur of the Year.⁹⁵ She also received the Arthritis Foundation's Humanitarian Award and the Roundtable for Women in Foodservice's Pacesetter Award.⁹⁶ She served on many boards and charity organizations. In 1982, Theater Under the Stars, a Houston production company, created a musical about her life, and, in 1988, she was inducted into the Texas Women's Hall of Fame.⁹⁷ She died of bone cancer at her home in Houston on June 17, 2001.

Advertising at Ninfa's, both in the beginning and in 2016, revolves around the story and image of Mama Ninfa. Her rags to riches narrative is evident on every menu and public relations piece.⁹⁸ This was a very well-crafted image, though. As Crystal Pit discusses in her analysis of Ninfa Lorenzo's career, Lorenzo carefully controlled the narrative of her story to maximize on her success and appeal to white Houstonians in a similar manner to the way

⁹⁴ Huynh, "Restaurateur Mama Ninfa dies."

⁹⁵ "Ninfa Lorenzo," *Texas Women's Hall of Fame*.

⁹⁶ Huynh, "Restaurateur Mama Ninfa dies."

⁹⁷ Pit, "Deal with Us," 265.

⁹⁸ Pit, "Deal with Us," 252; Ninfa's on Navigation, accessed February 12, 2016, ninfas.com.

Felix and Angie Tijerina used bland flavors and adherence to segregation to put whites at ease. The story varied little over the twenty-eight years of her career: Ninfa was a grieving widow who reinvented herself and rose from sorrow and money woes by using traditional recipes from the “heart of Mexico.”⁹⁹ Controlling the story and placing herself as an entrepreneur by necessity and not by choice added sympathy and an extra layer of respectability. The legacy of Ninfa’s on Mexican restaurants can be seen in every menu featuring fajitas, and the Original Ninfa’s on Navigation continues to stand as a Houston institution.

Entertaining the Bayou City: Nightlife in Postwar Houston

While restaurants, cafes, and cafeterias fed the population of Houston, clubs and lounges provided a place to meet with others over a drink. As Houston grew, the demand for places to relax after work or with friends in a social setting expanded as well. Throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, entrepreneurs responded to this need with an ever growing assortment of places. These establishments consisted of everything from local small clubs to the many lounges in the new and glittering Shamrock Hotel, built in 1949 by wildcatter Glenn McCarthy for the socially prominent of Houston.¹⁰⁰ The appeal of owning a business emphasizing nightlife was two-fold for Houston’s entrepreneurs. First, bars, clubs, and lounges had an advantage over restaurants that might serve beer and wine in terms of getting a business started. Proprietors who emphasized alcohol service had lower overhead costs than those who owned eateries, and they also required less in terms of labor costs. Aside

⁹⁹Ibid., 227-229.

¹⁰⁰ For more on the Shamrock Hotel, see the University of Houston’s fantastic collection of materials. Shamrock Hotel Collection, Digital Library, The University of Houston, accessed July 23, 2016, <http://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/sham>.

from the usual costs of renting or buying a space and furnishing it, obtaining a liquor license, and stocking the bar, nightlife businesses could operate at low costs, making good profits by charging more for their products than the proprietor paid. Second, Houston's movers and shakers, a population that expanded as the city's economy grew, needed places to network, and those lower on society's rungs followed their lead. Private clubs had been popular among upper-class male white-collar workers prior to mid-century, but these establishments had been exclusionary in their practices and usually did not allow women. The same was true of working-class bars, which, while sometimes owned and operated by women, did not promote a culture that included women as paying customers. Very few private clubs existed in Houston, and the executives of the city needed places they could take both their wives and the wives of those whom they wined and dined. As going to bars, lounges, and clubs became more acceptable for a wider variety of people, moving out of male working-class culture, entrepreneurs took advantage of the trend to either re-invent their existing eatery as a "lounge" or open something new.¹⁰¹

Women have been running taverns in the United States since the colonial period, and that trend continued into the 1950s. Women entrepreneurs opened a staggering number of clubs and lounges in Houston during the middle of the twentieth century. From 1946 to 1960, women opened over six hundred self-identified bars, lounges, and clubs. Kay's Lounge, a Houston fixture, was one example. Although the bar in the twenty-first century is beloved and considered "the kind of place you can stay awhile" the history of Kay's is

¹⁰¹ For more on the role of pubs, taverns, and bars in male working-class culture, see Christine Sismondo, *America Walks into a Bar: A Spirited History of Taverns and Saloons, Speakeasies, and Grog Shops* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

unclear.¹⁰² Instead, historians can trace the evolution of Kay's and the changing demand of local Houstonians through name changes. It has operated at 2324 Bissonnet since the late 1930s, but there is no evidence on the original "Kay" or when the establishment changed hands. In 2016, the official name was Kay's Lounge, but it has also been Kay's Barbecue, Kay's Grill, Kay's Club and Grill, in the late 1940s, and simply Kay's in the 1950s.

Throughout its existence, Kay's has served a combination of different food and alcoholic beverages, emphasizing different services depending upon the owners and the time. There is evidence that upon its opening in 1939 and into the early 1940s, Kay's operated as a barbecue restaurant, named Kay's Barbecue and, shortly after, as Kay's Grill.¹⁰³ In 1947, the owners subtly shifted the name and advertised that the "newly remodeled" and "air-conditioned" Kay's Club and Grill specialized in "steaks, Mexican food, French fried shrimp, and salads of all kinds." While Kay's did have a license to serve beer and wine, that fact does not appear in the promotional features, but by adding "Club" to the name, the customer could expect alcohol.¹⁰⁴ Once the establishment changed hands, though, in the 1950s, the new owners, Catherine Heenan Jones and Willene Wilburn Lloyd, dropped "Club and Grill" from the name, deemphasizing the food service aspect of Kay's and demonstrating its new status as primarily a bar. By 1960, when a new owner, Lela Frances Cleere, took over, 2324 Bissonnet had made the transition to Kay's Lounge, and it became the bar of choice for

¹⁰² Brooke Viggiano, "10 of the oldest bars in Houston," Thrillist, June 29, 2015, accessed July 23, 2016, <https://www.thrillist.com/drink/houston/the-oldest-bars-in-houston>.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ *Southwestern Citizen*, (Houston, TX), August 22, 1947; *Southwestern Citizen*, (Houston, TX), November 7, 1947.

students at Rice.¹⁰⁵ The transition of Kay's from primarily an eatery that only incidentally served alcohol to a bar that also prepared food reflects the changing scenery of Houston's nightlife.

As the postwar period progressed, clubs and lounges began to specialize and cater to specific audiences. In the 1950s, Ann Kherkher saw a need in Houston for a night club for Mexican Americans and opened the Pan American Night Club (originally the Taxco Lounge and later the Pan-America Ballroom).¹⁰⁶ Born in Iraq in 1915, Kherkher immigrated to the United States through Mexico, where she spent a substantial portion of her childhood. During her time in Mexico, she developed a love for Spanish music, and she envisioned a place where bands could play, people could dance, and families could host weddings and quinceaneras. An enterprise like that did not exist in Houston, and Kherkher possessed enough "savvy business sense and hard work" to produce a successful night club and reception hall.¹⁰⁷

By the early 1960s, the Pan American was the only venue for Tejano music in Houston. Kherkher invited artists from both the United States and Mexico and cultivated local talent, including Gus Garza, who served as the master of ceremonies at the Pan American for several years prior to becoming the first bilingual radio disk jockey in Houston in 1968. He referred to the Pan American as "The House that Tejano music built" and the venue remained popular from its creation in the 1950s throughout the 1970s. Local radio stations heavily advertised the upcoming musical performances, drawing in large crowds. People filled the 2500-seat capacity hall most nights out of the week and Mexican American

¹⁰⁵ "Houston's Oldest Bar," *Housterian*, accessed July 23, 2016, <http://housterian.org/houstons-oldest-bar-leons-lounge/>.

¹⁰⁶ Lindsay Scovil Dove, "Where the Action Was: Houston's 20th-Century Music Venues," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), December 18, 2014.

¹⁰⁷ "Ann Kherkher," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), April 19, 2012.

teenagers came for a special Sunday matinee to dance.¹⁰⁸ The Pan American operated as more than an entertainment venue; it was a place for the Mexican American community to socialize. As a former patron, Juan Torres explained, “We were from different parts of town . . . the ones from Magnolia stuck together and the ones from Northside stuck together,” but they all came together at the Pan American.¹⁰⁹ Angeline Morales, co-owner of Morales Funeral Home and KLVV radio station, attributed the success of the Pan American Club to Kherkher. “Ann is about the hardest working woman you ever saw,” Morales noted. “She’s behind the bar and she would just as soon take the broom.”¹¹⁰ Kherkher operated the Pan American until its closing.

Kay’s and the Taxco Lounge/Pan-American Club were exceptions in terms of advertising heavily in newspapers and other forms of media. While the lounges and clubs of Houston thrived during the mid-century, for the most part, only those establishments that emphasized their food selection over drinks or were associated with the upper-echelons of Houston society earned notice from the media for openings or promotional materials. Instead, working-class clubs and lounges only entered into the notice of the press for salacious and notorious happenings. This leads to women entrepreneurs in the nightclubs and bars of Houston coming across as either tough proprietors, ready to defend and grow their enterprises, through crime, if necessary, or as victims of violence. Marvin Zindler covered the crime beat for the *Houston Press* and provided the city with a view of the

¹⁰⁸ Dove, “Where the Action Was.”

¹⁰⁹ Natalie Garza, “Desde Conjunto to Chingo Bling: Mexican American Music and Musicians in Houston,” *Houston History* 11 (2013): 5.

¹¹⁰ Angelina Morales Oral History, Houston Public Library Digital Archives, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, accessed January 2, 2017, http://digital.houstonlibrary.net/oral-history/felix-morales_OH246-2.php.

moments when nightlife and violence collided. Houston had a high crime rate in the 1950s and was considered by some to be “the murder capital of the nation.” In particular, Zindler waited at lounges and bars in the hopes that something would happen. As his photos demonstrate, he was often rewarded.¹¹¹ For example, Helen Patricia Bowman opened her self-named Pat’s Lounge on North Shepherd Drive in June 1952.¹¹² Bowman’s enterprise proved popular although, unfortunately, attractive to a hotheaded crowd. She received a phone call at one point predicting a shootout in her establishment, which Zindler documented. The next year, she bought a gun to defend herself and her bar and had to use it to scare away a burglar, bringing Zindler and his camera back to North Shepherd Drive for more shots of the intrepid proprietor, who was framed in Zindler’s depictions as a stereotypical feisty barmaid, reflecting ideas about the kind of woman who owned and operated a bar or nightclub.¹¹³

In addition to Bowman’s story, women appeared in newspaper stories set in bars or nightclubs as victims of violence. Unlike what Bowman prepared for, though, violence usually did not come from an outside source and rarely resulted from their status as a bar owner, despite the manner in which newspaper writers hyped the dangerous nature of Houston’s bar scene. For the most part, women who owned nightlife establishments faced the probability of physical danger from the most common source of violence for all women: domestic abuse. In two separate cases within a year of each other, women bar owners

¹¹¹Steven Thomson, “Investigative photos: Marvin Zindler explores the gritty, murderous underbelly of 1950s Houston,” Culture Map Houston, April 6, 2011, accessed July 31, 2016, <http://houston.culturemap.com/news/entertainment/04-06-11-investigative-photos-marvin-zindler-explores-the-gritty-underbelly-of-1950s-houston/#slide=0>.

¹¹² Data compiled from *The Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977

¹¹³ Thomson, “Investigative photos.”

appeared in the news due to their murders at the hands of male partners. In April 1954, Charlie Wright, the co-owner of the Wonder Bar, shot his wife, Grace, the other co-owner, to death inside the bar during operating hours. According to Charlie Wright, the couple had been having trouble for some time. He alleged that he was defending himself from his wife who “came up” with a .45 pistol. Police did not find the pistol at the scene, and two women customers, who witnessed the shooting, asserted that the two had been arguing over money prior to the shooting.¹¹⁴ Independent owners could face the same fate as Grace Wright. A year later, in 1955, Velesta Alta Toerck, the owner of the Recreation Bar, which opened in 1950, died as part of a murder-suicide at the hands of a boyfriend, Phillip B. Allen. The motives behind the murder were unclear.¹¹⁵

Patricia Bowman, as chronicled by Zindler, attempted to protect her enterprise from notoriety, violence, and burglary. Other women entrepreneurs in the nightlife industry became criminals or on the wrong side of the law. Raids for under-age drinking became a cause for concern for all bar and nightclub owners in Houston as the city increased the activities of its vice squad in the mid-1950s.¹¹⁶ Diana Slawson, the owner of the Chuckwagon in Houston, found herself charged with selling beer to minors after Deputy Frank Wingo, making a routine sweep of the nightlife of Houston, asserted that on August 28, 1954, “inside, whooping it up, were some 50 or 60 persons.” He said most of them appeared to be juveniles and more than half of them were drinking beer.” Slawson argued that the boys, four of whom were detained and turned over to probation officers, had shown draft cards

¹¹⁴“Bar Operator Kills Wife in Tavern Tiff,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), April 18, 1954.

¹¹⁵ “Violent Weekend Claims 14 Lives,” *The Cuero Record* (Cuero, TX), June 6, 1955.

¹¹⁶ For discrepancies based on sexuality (bars for gays and lesbians), see Chapter 6.

bearing an over-21 age. Police could not find the draft cards.¹¹⁷ It is unclear what happened to Slawson following the raid, but no record of that specific Chuckwagon exists after 1954, demonstrating the potential damage of raids to taverns and bars.

The increase in raids and in enforcement of vice laws came after a time of notoriously low enforcement standards. In fact, the vice division by 1950 was corrupt from top to bottom. This situation came to light and provoked reform in the entire vice division due to one woman tavern owner.¹¹⁸ In 1950, police officer C. C. Devine accepted a bribe from Clarice Gears, owner of a “dine, dance and drinking place” called Sargent’s Drive-In. Gears borrowed one hundred dollars from her African American cook, Pearlie Mae Preston, and arranged to give it to the officer. Preston had no idea what Gears intended to do with the money but watched Gears to see what happened. On the arranged day, Gears met the officer in a booth in the establishment over coffee, folded the bill into her hand, and slipped it to Devine as Preston watched from the counter. This was apparently not the first time that Gears provided funds to vice officers in exchange for special favors. At some point after this exchange and for unclear reasons, Gears made public her history of bribing vice officers. Devine was charged with bribery and sentenced to five years in prison. On appeal in 1951, Gears and Preston both testified for the prosecution. While both Gears’ and Preston’s stories matched, the judge overruled the lower court, and Devine was released.¹¹⁹

This incident was part of a larger interaction between Gears and the Houston Police Department that went all the way to the Night Chief of Police. The Night Chief, M. M.

¹¹⁷ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 29, 1954.

¹¹⁸ See Mitchel P. Roth and Tom Kennedy, *Houston Blue: The Story of the Houston Police Department* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2012).

¹¹⁹ *State of Texas v. C.C. Devine*, 1951 Tex. App. FindACase, accessed August 11, 2016, http://tx.findacase.com/research/wfrmDocViewer.aspx/xq/fac.19511219_0041189.TX.htm/qx.

Simpson, was charged along with Devine for accepting money from Gears to operate her club after hours and sell beer both after hours and by the drink, which was prohibited at the time by the state. While Simpson was arrested and indicted on three counts of bribery, the charges were dismissed. He was fired from the police department and not reinstated.¹²⁰

Gears appeared as a witness in all of Simpson's court appearances. It is unclear what happened to Gears or her dance hall, but Preston took her skills and opened her own bar, The Kingfish Tavern, three years later in the Fifth Ward.¹²¹

Bars like Preston's formed an important aspect of the African American business community. Julius' Drive In was one of the most prominent examples. Julius and Lulu B. White owned and operated Julius' Drive In at 1210 Lockwood in the Third Ward. The Whites had married in 1928; Julius was already a businessman, nightclub owner, and a prominent figure in Houston's African American community. He used his wealth to support the Negro Chamber of Commerce and the Odd Fellows Temple, and he financed multiple lawsuits against segregation and the white Democratic primary. Both Lulu and Julius were ambitious community activists. Their business, which, while started and primarily run by Julius but also existed under Lulu's name, helped support Lulu B. White's activities with the NAACP, where she became the first female executive secretary and both a state and regional official prior to her untimely death in 1957. The Whites' entrepreneurial endeavors meant that they did not have to fear retribution for their political activities from white supervisors or landlords while publicly supporting civil rights activism through their money and time.¹²²

¹²⁰ Simpson v. City of Houston, 1953 Tex. App. Court Listener, accessed August 11, 2016, <https://www.courtlistener.com/opinion/1656433/simpson-v-city-of-houston/>.

¹²¹ Data compiled from *The Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977.

¹²² Pitre, *In Struggle against Jim Crow*.

Less well-known African American women operated and co-owned taverns throughout the postwar period. African American women opened more than sixty bars between 1950 and 1955 in the Greater Third, Fourth, and Fifth wards.¹²³ As with bars and nightclubs owned by whites, African American women named their establishments after a wide array of topics. Most practically chose to label their new business after the location, like Elmora Jelks' Club Waco on Waco Street in the Fifth Ward, or after their own name, like Ethel N. Burrell's bar, Burrell's, in the Fifth Ward. Others used the name of their business to evoke exotic locales, like Bernice Pierson's Third Ward Trocadero Bar, Elnora Lewis' Club Savoy, and Bessie Mae Fuller's Monte Carlo Nite Club. Names like Lina Ellis' Jump By Bar and Gladys Jefferson's Rendezvous Tavern point to the importance of bars and clubs in the African American community. They provided a communal place for African Americans to relax and to converse. Nightlife proprietorship, like owning a restaurant, provided an opportunity for money and autonomy combined with little formal training, flexibility, and low capital to the entrepreneurial minded women who owned establishments.

Those entrepreneurs had systematic barriers in their path; African American women faced additional surveillance that their white counterparts did not. On the morning of Sunday August 21, 1952, Houstonians unfolded their newspapers to the headline "19 Teenagers Nabbed in Raid On Negro Tavern: White Girls Involved; Woman Held." The tavern near the Fifth Ward, Texas Playhouse, was owned by forty-seven-year-old African American Florence Wilkerson, who police charged with selling beer to minors and not having a health card. According to Captain J. D. Walters of the Harris County sheriff's office, there had been complaints for over a week about white teenagers going to the tavern. The raid was

¹²³ Data compiled from *The Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977.

based off those anonymous tips. Journalists on site after the raid reported that “tearful juveniles told newsmen that they were ashamed of being in the Negro establishment and after a lecture by Capt. Walters, they were released to their parents. A 17-year-old girl, weeping openly, said she only went to the tavern because she had heard that a good jazz band played there.” A state liquor agent assured the public that he would take steps to permanently close the tavern.¹²⁴ It does not appear in the city directory for 1954, the next available year, and Florence Wilkerson, living at the same address identified by the *Chronicle*, has no occupation listed.¹²⁵

The raid on the Texas Playhouse and the sensationalized way it was reported demonstrate multiple elements of life in segregated Houston. According to the *Houston Chronicle*, white teenagers, particularly white teenage girls, had been enticed by jazz and liquor to go to a “Negro Tavern,” transgressing strict racial boundaries. Purchasing alcohol as a minor and the laws broken in that regard are not the main point of the article; the teens felt “ashamed” because of where they were, not what they were doing. The sheriff’s office became involved specifically due to “white juveniles” going to the tavern. More important to the southern racial order, white girls were transgressing into a black space, adding a heightened tension to the situation. Postwar Houston had strict racial lines that needed to be upheld, and the article assured nervous white Houstonians that both local and state law enforcement would observe and protect those lines. The article also reinforces two essential

¹²⁴ “19 Teenagers Nabbed In Raid On Negro Tavern: White Girls Involved; Woman Held,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), 8/21/1952.

¹²⁵ *Polk’s Greater Houston City Directory, 1954* (Dallas: R. L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1954), 1918. Moreover, no additional information on Florence Wilkerson could be obtained through census or city records, aside from her address from the 1954 Directory. It’s possible that she’s the same Florence Wilkinson that opened “Florence’s Place” in the Fifth Ward in 1949, since the city directory and city records often spelled Wilkerson and Wilkinson interchangeably (the 1954 Directory has the names cross-indexed), but that cannot be confirmed.

elements in Houston's African American community: the importance of bars and taverns as a source of income and the role of African American women as entrepreneurs. Together with beauty shops, barber shops, and restaurants, they formed part of the cornerstone of the African American community.

Conclusion

The service industry had provided a place for women interested in owning their own businesses long before World War II. Cooking and serving occupied a space that the prevailing culture had long coded as "feminine." At mid-century, the expanding consumer economy provided an increasing demand for meals outside of the home, entertainment destinations, and beauty services. Entrepreneurially minded women took their "feminine" skills in serving, in the many senses of the word, into the business world.

Additionally, the food and beverage industry offered women an opportunity to open a business with little capital or start-up expenses. For minority women, who faced double discrimination in obtaining loans and credit, this was one of the only avenues available for self-employment. There also existed a cultural expectation that women, of all ethnicities, were naturally gifted at preparing meals and drinks, so opening a business focused on those actions did not require evidence of competence for the customer in the way that a woman in other industries might have to provide her qualifications before obtaining clients. Although service-oriented businesses, particularly restaurants, closed at a high rate, as they did across the nation, the high-demand for food and drinks insured an entrance into the field, if not longevity. The service industry as a whole operated as a largely feminine entity, in terms of the sheer number of owners, operators, workers, and customers at odds with a larger, masculine, and patriarchal business world.

Even within the beauty industry, a stalwart for women's participation in business and an option for women who did not want to turn to restaurants or clubs for entrepreneurship, tensions between women's inclusion as owners and the sexism of the time, which valued male labor over female, existed. Moreover, the beauty industry, like food and beverages, existed in a segregated city. Minority women utilized their skills in the beauty industry in much the same way as they did within restaurants: as a source of income, autonomy from white Houstonians, and as a tool for activism and bettering their communities.

CHAPTER 3: “DASHING, LITHE YOUNG BODIES”: BEAUTY, CONSUMPTION, AND POSTWAR IDEAS OF FEMININITY

Grace Donnelly opened her shop, The Grace System, in the 1940s at 3825 Fannin in Midtown, a few blocks southwest of downtown Houston. The salon provided facials, massages, and medicinal baths for Houstonians and eventually employed multiple beauticians and technicians. Donnelly, married to John P. Donnelly, a chemist employed by Houston Sanitation, had worked in the early 1930s as an operator in Anton’s Beauty Salon after the couple had moved to Houston from Oklahoma City in search of better opportunity.¹ After working as an operator for several years, Donnelly struck out on her own, gradually building her salon throughout World War II. The shop gained a strong following after the war. Throughout the postwar years, Donnelly heavily advertised in the *Houston Chronicle*, *Bellaire Citizen*, and *Southwestern Citizen*. All of her advertisements played upon the beauty fears and social anxieties of postwar women. One 1951 promotional piece told the story of a husband and wife:

Recently a husband almost dragged his wife to our salon. . . . She was in sad shape, terribly overweight, ill-looking, her face showed years of neglect. Beside her, the husband stood slim, alert. I said to her, “What do you have besides your husband?” The question jolted her. . . . I am going to save this woman’s marriage if it wears out my group of masseuses!²

Donnelly signed the wife up for Swedish massages and facials, designed to help the woman “reduce,” the common euphemism for weight loss in postwar newspapers and magazines, and improve her complexion. She praised the husband for being “proud of his marriage” and attempting to “save it,” opining, “How wonderful it is to have such a

¹ *Houston Greater City Directory, 1930* (Dallas: Morrison & Fourmy, 1930).

² *Southwestern Citizen* (Houston, TX), February 4, 1951.

husband!” Similar advertisements from The Grace System in 1950 reminded women that their complexion was important to a first impression, and women with poor skin would become “socially embarrassed.”³ Women with “bumps and bulges” could come to The Grace System, spend \$24, lock themselves in a steam cabinet for twelve sessions, and be one of the “dashing, lithe young bodies” who were ready to look their best. After all, those “bumps and bulges become literally road-blocks on the highway to social acceptance.”⁴

While Donnelly proved to be the most prolific beauty and self-improvement advertiser in the Houston-area newspapers of the postwar period, she was far from alone. More than two hundred beauty salons opened in Houston from 1945 to 1960.⁵ They were part of a larger explosion happening within the beauty industry after World War II that saw the acceptance of small beauty salons and shops by professional organizations alongside both an increased emphasis on beauty maintenance and a larger number of women able to make weekly hair appointments, attend to the condition of their nails, and obtain facials. Beauty salons and shops fit into the broader narrative of postwar consumption and gender roles. The beauty salon, both in the postwar period and today, stands at the intersection of discourses on gender, the body, sexuality, class, race, commodification, and consumption. The salon, which usually catered to specific clients of certain races, classes, and backgrounds, provided a homogenizing effect and a layer of conformity. They catered to an idea about how “normal” American women should look.

³ *Bellaire Citizen* (Bellaire, TX), September 21, 1950.

⁴ That would be roughly \$236 in 2015 dollars. *Bellaire Citizen* (Bellaire, TX), September 28, 1950.

⁵ Data compiled from *The Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977.

They were typically female spaces with men rarely appearing as technicians and even less frequently as customers. The only exception to the gender imbalance is seen in salons of the post-World War II period that featured male stylists as “experts” or celebrated guests. Ethnicity and class were reinforced within the salon, with segregation, location, and prices determining the clientele and the availability of services.⁶ It was the workshop for the femininity ideals of the Cold War woman.

Prior to World War II, the beauty industry thrived. As historian Kathy Peiss has chronicled, the cosmetics industry did not offer lucrative returns, but that economic sector, along with sewing and millinery, provided one of the few opportunities for women to exercise their entrepreneurial skills.⁷ By the turn of the twentieth century, women in both the working class and middle class entered the beauty industry as beauty technicians, salon proprietors, and founders of cosmetic industries. These companies usually began in the women’s own kitchens. Women, particularly before the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, patented their own formulas for shampoos, lotions, and moisturizers. Most women sold to their own neighbors and kept production small, but, as Peiss chronicles, a few became nationally known businesswomen with large production capabilities, including Madame C.J. Walker, Florence Nightingale Graham (known to most as Elizabeth Arden), and Helena Rubinstein.⁸ Beauty shops mushroomed in the 1910s and 1920s. In 1920, 5,000 beauty salons existed in the United States; by

⁶ Paula Black, *The Beauty Industry: Gender, Culture, Pleasure* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 10-11.

⁷ Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

⁸ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998), 62-70.

1930, there were 40,000 shops.⁹

Beauty salons proved attractive businesses for women throughout the twentieth century for mainly for two reasons. First, operating a beauty shop required little capital, particularly for the many women operating out of their kitchens. They needed a sink, comb, scissors, hair color, and curling irons. If successful, they could then buy better equipment and possibly open a business outside of their home. Second, hairdressing and other beauty techniques allowed women to attend to other duties, particularly childcare. Women could care for their children in between clients and keep an eye on them while shampooing and styling. Furthermore, during the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, the beauty industry attempted to professionalize through beauty courses and formalized training, adding a layer of attractiveness to women who viewed the beauty industry as non-respectable and associated with loose morals. Interested women (and small groups of men) could take correspondence courses or physically attend one of the beauty schools that opened all across the country. Women established and ran most of the newly opened business schools and participated in the professionalization of the trade by joining formal trade organizations, like the National Hairdressers and Cosmetologists Association, established in 1921.

During the 1920s and 1930s, however, despite the overwhelming majority of women owners and operators in the beauty industry, men began to dominate professional organizations, like the NHCA, attempting to delegitimize small shops and, specifically, shops operated out of kitchens. In a process similar to the efforts of male chefs to professionalize at the expense of female “cooks,” male operators were, according to those

⁹ Julie Ann Willett, *Permanent Waves: The Making of the American Beauty Shop* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 30.

running the NHCA, more likely to be experts than their female counterparts, whom they painted as lacking formal training and relying on innate feminine, and therefore lesser, skills to style hair. It was not until after World War II that male-dominated professional organizations accepted small salons as legitimate.¹⁰

Following World War II, the postwar period witnessed a “return to normality.” Historians have explored the effects of the postwar ethos on gender roles and other aspects. English professor Anna G. Creadick has explored what Americans of the postwar period meant by “normality” in her monograph analyzing the creation of “Norm” and “Norma,” models produced by American sexologists and other scientists, supposedly based on an average of the “normal” American in his or her early twenties. As Creadick argues, postwar health textbooks were rife with instruction about bodily normality, aimed particularly at female readers. The goal was to provide “scientifically sound information” about the functioning of the human body and “how it may be improved” in “fitness and efficiency.”¹¹ In these textbooks, diagrams and figures emphasized that hair, skin, and weights that did not match with the books were “abnormal.” When such bodies could not be had by diet or exercise, they could be bought: by 1950, 85 percent of women over fifteen wore bras, girdles, or both, and corsets had become a \$500,000 annual business.¹² In these textbooks, normality became conflated with beauty; the “average” and “healthy” woman possessed flawless skin and smooth, perfectly coiffed hair.¹³

¹⁰ Black, *The Beauty Industry*, 28.

¹¹ Eleanor Metheny, *Body Dynamics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1952), 134, v, 182 as cited in Anna G. Creadick, *Perfectly Average: The Pursuit of Normality in Postwar America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010).

¹²Creadick, *Perfectly Average*, 37.

Thus, to be a “natural” woman, America’s women needed intervention. That intervention could consist of increased purchase of cosmetics, as Peiss has chronicled, and beauty aides like curlers, irons, and constrictive garments. Natural femininity, however, by the standards of the prescriptive texts of the postwar years, did not gift itself to all women equally; some women needed help to be “natural.” Advertisers for cosmetics, beauty salons, and other beauty industries sold their products to women under the guise of bringing out inner beauty or enhancing natural femininity. This led to the creation of foundations and lipsticks that did not rub off on collars. Working on oneself, however, did not always yield the expected results. When the proper skin tone or hairstyle could not be found at home, women could turn to the professionals.

This process did not stop at upper- and middle-class women. The “normality” of beauty proved an ever-increasing draw for working-class women.¹⁴ When *Militant*, a small socialist journal, claimed that the cosmetics industry sold women pointless products, women responded with annoyance. “I’m no sucker for beauty-aid ads,” reader Helen Baker wrote, “but economic pressure—I have to earn my living—forces me to buy and use the darned stuff.” The emphasis on youth, flawless skin, perfect hair, and slim forms pushed many women to see beauty intervention as a necessity, not a luxury. In order to get and keep a job, American women needed to look the part. The readers of *Militant* also took umbrage with the idea that improving one’s physical appearance automatically became a waste of time. “I wish to improve and enjoy my physical

¹³ This mirrors what was happening among progressives and followers of eugenics in the beginning of the twentieth-century, but the promoters of “normality” in the postwar period argue that “normality” can be obtained; it is not inborn. Creadick, *Perfectly Average*.

¹⁴ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 256.

appearance and at the same time improve and develop all the other sides of my personality,” wrote one reader. “And I think all women have a right to both these things.”¹⁵ Trips to the hair salon, expenditures on moisturizer, and investing in a girdle, then, became some women’s cross to bear and other’s treasured “right.” While society demanded feminine beauty as a necessity, a mark of “normality,” beauty also offered escape. Martin Revson, a Revlon executive, observed that “most women lead lives of dullness, of quiet desperation,” and beauty offered a “wonderful escape” into fantasy.¹⁶

Whether for reasons of fantasy or necessity, women across classes increased their usage of beauty salons and shops in the postwar period. In the beauty industry, two major areas profited from the postwar emphasis on “normal” and “natural” beauty and the time, effort, and money involved in obtaining and sustaining prescribed femininity. Hair salons profited greatly from the combined emphasis on stylized femininity and changes in fashion that required complicated preparations. Similarly, small shops catering to women’s concerns about their skin and weight increased in number throughout the postwar period.

As what was “normal” began to converge with what was “fashionable,” women found it extremely time-consuming to style their hair at home. During World War II, magazines and beauty industry journals promoted efficient hairstyles designed to be both attractive and easy for women workers. Efficiency and patriotism went hand-in-hand, although the emphasis on femininity never completely disappeared.¹⁷ That changed with

¹⁵ Joseph Hansen and Evelyn Reed, *Cosmetics, Fashion, and the Exploitation of Women* (New York: Pathfinder, 1986), 39, 50-53, 75.

¹⁶ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 248.

¹⁷ For more see Melissa A. McEuen, *Making War, Making Women: Femininity and Duty on the American Home Front, 1941-1945* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

the postwar years. The elaborate hairstyles of the postwar era required constant attention and frequent consultations with a hairstylist. In 1948, a survey revealed that 35.7 percent of women had their hair attended to in beauty shops. By 1953, that number stood at 52 percent.¹⁸ As Julie Ann Willett chronicles in her history of beauty shops, hairstyles like “the poodle” gained popularity, because they seemed to flatter both young and old alike. The poodle, popularized by Hollywood actresses like Ann Sothorn and Peggy Garner, required the hair to be permed into tight curls. First Lady Mamie Eisenhower favored a version of the poodle cut with bangs.¹⁹ Poodle haircuts required a haircut every two weeks, permanent waves for women lacking natural curls, and 125 curlers per appointment.²⁰ Later in the 1950s and early 1950s, bouffants and beehives, nicknamed “B-52s” for the resemblance to the nose of the B-52 Stratofortress bomber, gained popularity, and hairstylists labored to tease their clients’ hair skyward, giving their clients’ hair as much volume as possible. Hair dye, which became safer and easier to use after World War II, also entered a new period of popularity, but few women trusted themselves with the process at home. Most women could not obtain the styles of the postwar period at home on their own. These fashion movements required making the beauty salon a weekly routine.²¹

The increasing number of women attending beauty shops and the rising amount of

¹⁸ “Memo From the Editorial Staff—The Breck Survey,” *The American Hairdresser*, June 1953, 33.

¹⁹ Victoria Sherrow, *Encyclopedia of Hair: A Cultural History* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), 192-94, 206-8.

²⁰ Willett, *Permanent Waves*, 142-43.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 144.

time required for hairstyles led to a sharp spike in the number of beauty salons in the United States. The number of reported shops increased from 40,000 in 1938 to 135,000 in 1953, and these statistics probably do not account for the many businesses run out of private homes.²² The elevated numbers reflect the fact that increased attendance at beauty salons was not only for the well-to-do; more working-and middle-class women were likely to attend their favorite beauty shop on a weekly basis. These shops typically were owner-operated or only had a few technicians in addition to the owner, providing a consistent experience for clients as the hair technician became familiar with both their style and personal life. The beauty shop became an important ritual for American women and the place itself a center for companionship, gossip, and community, similar to the place that barber shops held with men. This remained true even if the beauty salon had a male technician.²³ As one Houston beauty school noted in 1950, beauticians increasingly served as listeners to their clients, “for in these castles of cold cream and curl papers milady loves to unburden her heart . . . that intimate chatter which certainly must go no further than the scented stalls of the beauty factories.”²⁴ While having her hair teased into a bouffant, a customer could discuss her life and personal problems mostly secure in the knowledge that these confessions would not leave the walls of the beauty shop.

For most beauty technicians, according to the standard beauty textbooks and guides of the time, the primary goal was to own a shop. To become an owner-operator, most women went through several steps. First, most beauty salon operators in the

²² “Memo From the Editorial Staff,” *The American Hairdresser*.

²³ Willett, *Permanent Waves*, 145.

²⁴ Lydia Houston, “Beauty Culture Offers Good Careers to Graduates with Good Hands and Ears,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), June 4, 1950.

postwar era obtained training either at a designated beauty school or through a vocational program in a high school. For women interested in cosmetology in Houston, there were multiple options. In 1949, Houston boasted four beauty schools for white students and one, Franklin School, for African Americans. Women owned and operated two of the beauty schools.²⁵ Josephine Hodge operated a beauty school named after herself at 3400 Travis Street. Born in 1892 in Laredo, Texas to a French father and a Mexican mother, Hodge opened her beauty school between 1930 and 1940. She advertised heavily in newspapers like *The Victoria Advocate*. The school shut down prior to Hodge's death from stomach cancer in 1953.²⁶ Unfortunately, there are few other records of Hodge's school.

More can be determined from the advertisements and documents left from the second woman-owned school. Lydia Houston owned the self-named Lydia Houston Academy of Beauty Culture. Houston, a widow, moved to the city she coincidentally shared a name with at some point between 1935 and 1940, when the census marks her as lodging in the upscale Rice Hotel.²⁷ Born in Illinois, Houston opened her school in the late 1930s and grew to serve numerous students throughout the postwar years.²⁸ Houston's school recruited women to fill a shortage of beauty operators that existed throughout the nation. As more women attended and graduated from college, they chose

²⁵ *Houston Greater City Directory, 1949* (Dallas: Morrison & Fourmy, 1949).

²⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Population* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), Ancestry.com, accessed July 9, 2016.; *The Victoria Advocate*, January 12, 1940; Texas, Death Certificates, 1903-1982, Ancestry.com, accessed July 9, 2016.

²⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Population* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), Ancestry.com, accessed July 9, 2016.

²⁸ No data could be found on when the school closed.

jobs in white-collar fields. For women who did not attend college, beauty school became one of several options for work outside of the home in the postwar period. The number of beauticians in the first few years after World War II grew slowly as demand increased through the last half of the 1940s, making the beauty industry a segment of the economy with ample room to recruit. As Lydia Houston explained in a 1950 advertisement, “The employment picture for Miss 1950 contemplating a career with brush, comb and mudpack is good.”

Houston’s school offered a six-month program that emphasized a well-rounded student. Rather than focusing only on hair, as many schools of the pre-World War II period did, Houston’s students learned facials and manicures as well. This was part of a national pattern; most beauty schools shifted from offering two tracks, hair styling only or hair styling plus skin and nail care, to a complete education in beauty services, like massage, hair removal, and weight loss. As more customers demanded a wider variety of services, beauty schools prepared their students to provide “milady” with a complete array of beauty skills. The school also offered classes in management and business to prepare students for the possibility of opening their own shops.²⁹

Houston authored her own textbook in the early 1950s, and it offers a window into the curriculum and, in particular, in continued emphasis on professionalism within the beauty industry. Houston’s school had strict rules and regulations. On the first page of the textbook, there are fourteen rules ranging from the school’s hours to equipment use to sanitation. Students were notified that “unnecessary conversation positively will not be permitted as it distracts from the entire class” and “we **positively reserve** the right at

²⁹ Houston, “Beauty Culture Offers Good Careers.”

all times to **expel students** who gossip or cause discord through the school [emphasis original to text].”³⁰ While Houston promoted the idea that beauticians would become the confidantes of their future clients and must have an adequate ability at small talk and chatter, the school balked at the transformation of that skill into “gossip.” In the years prior to World War II, the NHCA had classified small shops as having many problems, and always on the list was a tendency toward “gossip” and overfamiliarity with clients that marked a lack of professionalism.³¹ Houston advised her students to address patrons by their name, “rather than ‘Honey,’ ‘Dearie,’ etc.” and to be careful to avoid discussing personal problems, showing exhaustion, or appearing to relax too much in between clients. Her school aimed to produce professionals fueled by “charm, confidence and personality.”³²

Students who had ambitions to start their own salons gained experience in successful methods as catalogued by Houston. She claimed to have watched the beauty industry in Houston expand and offered advice and tips for future proprietors in their start-up endeavors. This section of the text included a comprehensive list of things to consider when going into business, from capital to ethics. Houston advised readers to budget enough capital for emergencies, but she notes the difficulty that female owners would face obtaining loans from the bank. Instead, she cautions future proprietors to save up money while working in other shops and only depend upon banks for checking

³⁰ Lydia Houston, *Standard Textbook of Cosmetology* (Houston: Milady Publishing Corporation, 1963), frontispiece.

³¹ Black, *The Beauty Industry*, 28.

³² Houston, *Standard Textbook of Cosmetology*, 2.

accounts.³³

Location, after capital, proved extremely important for opening a beauty salon. Houston cautioned her students to choose “a rapidly developing neighborhood where a fair number of women pass the store during the working day.” In the city of Houston, finding a “rapidly developing neighborhood” proved fairly easy. Shopping centers with space for retail leases sprang up all over Houston’s blossoming neighborhoods and burgeoning suburbs. For example, interested proprietors could review property in the growing suburb of Pasadena where Dorothy Nagory opened Band Box Beauty Salon in the new Allendale Shopping Center in 1956.³⁴ Lydia Houston provided advice for readers on how to read and sign a lease in this exciting climate of fast business growth and the building boom to avoid misunderstandings as well as how to furnish and decorate the salon prior to opening to the public.³⁵ She also reviewed bookkeeping and recordkeeping necessities, financial concerns, insurance, and maintaining inventory.³⁶

Houston’s primary concern focused on marketing. While Houston encouraged advertising in radio, newspapers, and even television to reach as many people as possible, she argued that “a pleased patron is the best form of advertising” and that word of mouth would garner future patronage. Thus, the majority of Houston’s chapters on beauty salon management involved how to have a pleasing personality, good hygiene, and high-quality salesmanship. She provided a drawing and description for students on how to have good grooming habits from the tops of their heads down to their shoes. Over the drawing, she

³³ Ibid., 446.

³⁴ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 16, 1956.

³⁵ Houston, *Standard Textbook of Cosmetology*, 446.

³⁶ Ibid., 447-50.

advised students “to keep your appearance at its best, give daily attention to all the important details which make for a clean, neat and charming personality.” Personality, therefore, became conflated with “clean and lustrous hair,” “fresh, flawless complexion,” “sparkling eyes,” and a lack of runs and wrinkles in stockings.³⁷ This failure to distinguish between inner and outer appearance reflects the nationwide trend of merging “normality” with “beauty.” In order to be “pleasant” a postwar woman needed to fit gendered rules of attractiveness.

A congenial personality did not escape Houston’s notice. She delineated the best traits of a beauty salon manager as attentiveness, enthusiasm, initiative, courtesy, cooperativeness, self-control, and tact. Houston expanded on the last point, “tact,” to explain that “the tactful beautician allows the patron to feel that she is making her own decision, while guiding her in making the proper choice of beauty service or product.”³⁸ Most beauty salons had agreements with cosmetic companies to only use their supplies and services or at least to stock their products in exchange for a cut of the sales. For example, Jeane’s Beauty Salon on Rice Street advertised that they used Ultrasol Scalp Treatment, a dandruff shampoo and cream.³⁹ These partnerships allowed beauty salon owners to use and stock products for less than the wholesale price, and there was strong incentive to sell to customers. Houston, though, cautioned her students from seeming to force products on customers. She advised that the tactful and successful business owners would offer appropriate advice in as kind of a way as possible. So Jeane Geiser, the

³⁷ Ibid., 5.

³⁸ Ibid., 448.

³⁹ *Southwestern Citizen*, (Houston, TX), November 7, 1947.

owner of Jeane's Beauty Salon and a former Houston student, would not, if she remembered her former teacher's training, bluntly deliver the news that a client had dandruff and the Ultrasol Scalp Treatment would help prevent flakes.⁴⁰ She would tell the patron a line like the one found in Houston's textbook, "You know, an oil treatment would do your hair a world of good, for it's rather dry" before continuing with the service originally booked. This method is subtle and, if all went well, "nine times out of ten the next time she [the client] come to the salon she will make an appointment for an oil treatment."⁴¹ This perceptive business strategy played on the insecurities of Houstonian women about their bodies and hair.

Houston's advice on advertising in the media is reflected in the hundreds of postings in the city's newspapers. Of all businesses owned by women in the postwar period, beauty salons advertised the most throughout the year. Most, from the salons catering to the fashionable set of Houston to those geared towards women searching for beauty on a budget, focused on the services they provided and the products they carried. Margaret Jones and Alene Grawvunder ran a beauty salon out of the fashionable Rice Hotel. Their advertisements focused exclusively on the product brand they utilized, the Harper Method.⁴² The Harper Method, named for its founder, Martha Matilda Harper, was the first franchise system of independently owned salons in the US. Each person who used the Harper Method obtained training, group insurance, advertising funds, and products, all while owning their own salon.⁴³ The salon in the Rice Hotel advertised

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Houston, *Standard Textbook of Cosmetology*, 450.

⁴² *Houston Chronicle*, (Houston, TX), September 17, 1950.

purely on the reputation of the products they sold. Other salons boasted of their good deals. The Dollar Wave Shop, owned by “Mrs. Bigelow,” advertised in the *Houston Chronicle* multiple times throughout the early 1950s boasting of one dollar shampoos and sets. For patrons who wanted or found themselves persuaded to try more, Mrs. Bigelow offered \$4.50 cold waves and a wide array of oil treatments. Within the advertisements for the Dollar Shop, though, the perspective client did not find a mention of how much more attractive they would find themselves after service. The ads of the Dollar Wave Shop focused on clients obtaining a bargain: “I must clear these stocks out before inventory time so here’s your chance to save money.”⁴⁴

This was in stark contrast to many other advertisement for beauty services in the Houston papers of the late 1940s and 1950s. In addition to services provided, advertisements in Houston followed national trends in encouraging women to feel like they needed the services and products in a beauty salon in order to be properly attractive and “normal.” The Rice Hotel’s beauty salon assured Houstonian women that “You’ll look years younger . . . your friends will admire and envy your added attractiveness.”⁴⁵ The University Beauty Shop proved even more blunt: “Gentlemen Prefer a Well-Groomed You,” they trumpeted. “Blonde or brunette, you’re his type if you’re sweet the neat way.”⁴⁶ Another ad from University Beauty Shop the same month asked, “Won’t you let us help you achieve added charm by using our beauty service?”⁴⁷ Personality,

⁴³Jane R. Plitt, “Martha Matilda Harper,” accessed February 2, 2016, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/theymadeamerica/whomade/harper_hi.html.

⁴⁴ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), October 22, 1950.

⁴⁵ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 17, 1950.

⁴⁶ *Southwestern Citizen* (Houston, TX), July 25, 1947.

defined by the desire to be charming and sweet, came from attractiveness and “perfect grooming.” Fitting in with society necessitated permanents, oil treatments, and other services found within the beauty salon.

Hair proved the primary focus of beauty salons, but, as Lydia Houston emphasized in her textbook, other necessities faced Houstonian women in their quest for “normal” beauty. Several hair salons combined services. Jeane Geiser’s salon utilized facials and manicures to augment shampoos and coiffures.⁴⁸ Ada Stark’s beauty salon boasted of a staff of four people who specialized in facials, steam baths, manicures, and hair styling (and a free pound of Folger’s coffee to “steady your nerves” while “Ada solves your beauty worries”).⁴⁹ Likewise, when announcing the opening of her new River Oaks Beauty Salon in the booming and exclusive River Oaks neighborhood, Leora Davis led with the fact that she offered body massages before listing her hair services.⁵⁰

Other salons focused exclusively on “fixing” problems for women to help them be “normal.” Patricia Fowler promised that her hair removal salon would provide “embarrassing hair permanently removed” using electrolysis.⁵¹ “Embarrassment” proved key in bringing in patrons to hair removal salons. Velma Shults owned a hair removal center using the “Thermiquetron Method” for removing “embarrassing facial hair.”

⁴⁷ *Southwestern Citizen* (Houston, TX), July 18, 1947.

⁴⁸ *Southwestern Citizen* (Houston, TX), August 22, 1947.

⁴⁹ Interestingly, Stark’s salon is the only beauty salon advertised in the 1950s Houston papers that prominently features a photo of an African American employee, Lorraine Vincent, as a specialist. The only hint at inequality is the lack of a title; all of the other technicians are Mrs. and Miss, while Vincent just has her name and specialty. *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 26, 1954.

⁵⁰ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), February 19, 1950.

⁵¹ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), February 3, 1957.

Shults' owned fifteen salons in 1954 with only one of those operating in Houston. Despite her lack of physical presence, Shults' Houston advertisements assured prospective clients that she had personally trained the technicians on staff and "hundreds of sensitive, suffering women have come to Mrs. Shults—and found freedom from Nature's ugly disfigurement."⁵² One year later, Shults simplified her terminology to the "Shults Method," named after herself, and continued to open clinics across the United States and Mexico. She moved her home to Houston and as late as 1964, she was training technicians in her Houston clinic, the largest of approximately forty, and sending them out to manage clinics under her name to remove unwanted facial hair.⁵³

Still other Houston beauty service providers focused on weight. Grace Donnelly, described above, used Houstonian women's concerns about their figures to build a business based on "reducing." While most of Donnelly's advertisements emphasized attractiveness, she too conflated beauty with personality, asserting in one 1950 posting that "you will enjoy your figure and your clothes, your friends will enjoy you too if you will call or visit the Grace System."⁵⁴ Clearly unwanted bumps and bulges would affect a Houstonian woman's ability to make and keep friends. Similarly, Mrs. James M. Erdman built a lucrative business on training women to use facial exercises to slim jawlines, prevent neck sagging, and firm up muscles in the face and neck. The *Houston Chronicle* devoted an entire article to Erdman's story in 1952. According to the article, Erdman learned facial exercises from a Belgian woman she met in the 1920s while working as a

⁵² *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), April 18, 1954.

⁵³ *Palacios Beacon* (Palacios, TX.), March 5, 1964.

⁵⁴ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), February 12, 1950.

beauty consultant for a cosmetics company. In 1949, she began instructing facial exercises privately in New York and continued her practice after her husband's job required a move to Houston in 1951. The author of the *Chronicle* noted that Erdman proved a walking example of the exercises' effects: "She [Erdman] has a dainty figure with easy, upright posture, a smooth-contoured face and neck. Only the soft, becoming tinge of gray hair in her poodle cut hints that she is 52 years old." The article did not detail how much Erdman's facial exercise lessons cost, noting only that there were twelve lessons in a complete series.⁵⁵ Houstonian women interested in turning back the clock on their face and neck could call for a price.

In an era in which women owned the majority of salons, the beauty industry thrived in Houston. It would be a mistake, though, to assume that the beauty industry was a space of equality and unlimited opportunity for all women entrepreneurs. This is very clear in how the media covered announcements, news, and openings. While the opening of a woman-headed salon might merit an advertisement in the paper, particularly if it were opening in a new shopping center or development, the addition of a female technician rarely did. If the salon added a male technician, though, salons and the media often felt the need to mark the occasion. As in the years before World War II, the public continued to regard men as "experts" and "artists" with hair, assuming levels of greater training and talent than those of women. Andrea and Helen's Salon of Beauty, housed in the Houston Club Building, announced "with great pride" the addition of Carl Drago to their enterprise. Andrea and Helen feature a photo of Drago prominently in the advertisement, above photographs of themselves and, in a thumbnail one-quarter of the

⁵⁵ Elinor Williams, "Houston Woman Creates Face Exercises," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), March 23, 1952.

size of Drago's picture, the rest of their all-female staff. Mollie, Louise, Betty, Elva, Boyd, and Elizabeth are not accorded last names; nor are the owners, Andrea and Helen.⁵⁶ Similarly, Rene Louise, owner of a self-named beauty salon, announced the addition of "Mr. Sal" an "outstanding stylist" to her staff but did not publicize the addition of new women who worked as technicians.⁵⁷

In addition to facing men as competition for employment, women in the beauty industry faced a market in which men owned and co-owned several of Houston's most prestigious beauty salons, particularly those that heavily advertised in the media. In 1958, a group of about seventeen Houston salons organized the Houston Hair Design Council "dedicated to high ethical standards to bring to Houston women [hair] styles." The members, "drawn from our city's most skilled and conscientious hair stylists," skewed heavily toward men. Eight of the members were men who owned their own beauty salons, four co-owned salons with their wives, and four of the members were female sole proprietors.⁵⁸ The Council specialized in advertising, promoting, and demonstrating new hairstyles to the public in "invitation only affairs" every three months and offering the styles exclusively in member shops.⁵⁹ In an industry built upon the fashion needs of women and dominated by female proprietors, the expertise and perceived professionalism of men continued to hold sway and influence.

⁵⁶ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), February 17, 1950.

⁵⁷ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), July 29, 1956.

⁵⁸ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), October 4, 1958.

⁵⁹ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 2, 1958.

“A Monopoly on Beautifying the Living”: African American Women and the Beauty Industry

The beauty industry had provided African American entrepreneurs with opportunity since the nineteenth century. At the turn of the century, most African American hairdressers worked out of their homes and had to rely on white consumer dollars to make ends meet, traveling to the homes of white women to style their hair. By the early twentieth century, African American women began to open more businesses that served other African American women while white women opened more beauty shops as well. In 1920, the US census found 12,660 African American women working as hairdressers, most in their own small shops or home-based businesses.⁶⁰

Furthermore, the beauty industry, as it developed during the twentieth century, became rigidly segregated across the nation. St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, in their study of Chicago’s African American community, concluded that, “If colored undertakers have virtual monopoly in burying the Negro dead, the colored barber and beautician have even more exclusive monopoly in beautifying the living.”⁶¹ This separation that began in the early years of the beauty industry allowed hairdressing to exist as a way avoid white oppression and, as beauty historian Julie A. Willett concludes, “countless numbers of domestic workers chose hairdressing as a means to escape white kitchens, white households, and white control.”⁶² The sharp divide between white and African American beauty salons allowed for autonomy and self-definition so that from

⁶⁰ Willett, *Permanent Waves*, 18.

⁶¹ St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 460.

⁶² Willett, *Permanent Waves*, 19.

the beginning of the African American beauty industry to the present, black-owned shops have served as important community spaces and social institutions.

African American beauty salons grew in number throughout the first half of the twentieth century and entered “golden years” during the postwar period, like their counterparts in the white beauty industry. Visits to beauty salons became part of a ritual for African American women and the beauty industry experienced unprecedented growth. As noted earlier, by 1953, there were 135,000 beauty shops in the nation, compared to only 40,000 in 1938.⁶³ The increase in women coming to beauty salons crossed racial and class lines. African American women increasingly became part of an urban population and, albeit much more slowly and in lower numbers than their white counterparts, gained more numbers in industrial positions and in the white-collar world, where their numbers increased eightfold. Incomes, similarly, increased. In 1950, African Americans earned 41 percent of what whites made in 1939; that increased to 60 percent in 1950.⁶⁴ African American women, as a whole, had more income to take to the beauty shop.

In addition to the beauty services they provided, beauty shops served as “asylums for black women ravaged by the effects of segregation and served as incubators of black women’s leadership and platforms from which to agitate for social and political change.”⁶⁵ At their core, beauty shops provided a space for women, particularly domestic workers, to come and share their stories of white oppression with a sympathetic group.

⁶³ Ibid., 42.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 49.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 37.

They could share advice, tips, and help each other cope with the often dehumanizing aspects of Jim Crow. As both Julie Willet and Tiffany M. Gill have noted in their histories of the socio-political makeup of the beauty industry, the autonomy and independence of the beauty shop owner allowed beauticians to become community leaders and activists. For Myles Horton, the organizer of the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee, which brought both whites and African Americans together to fight for civil rights, beauty salon operators were respected businesswomen and “they were usually better educated than other people, and most of all they were independent. They were independent of white control.”⁶⁶ Horton used beauty shops all over the South to distribute literature on civil rights and integration. Civil rights activists, like Anne Moody, also utilized beauty shops as a place to lift spirits during the long battle against Jim Crow. Moody, after a sit-in at a lunch counter, went to a beauty shop where the operator, recognizing that Moody had been part of the sit-in, immediately washed and styled her hair and even washed her stockings, giving Moody time to recover from her encounter.⁶⁷

Texas accounted for a large percentage of the beauty shops in the United States. In 1952, there were 2,200 African American-owned beauty salons in Texas out of 8,000 in the entire United States.⁶⁸ For African Americans in Houston who wanted to work in the beauty industry, J. H. Jemison’s beauty school, the largest of its kind in the South,

⁶⁶ Ibid..

⁶⁷ For more on Anne Moody, see Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968).

⁶⁸ “Data on the Beauty Industry in Texas,” Box 30, Folder 8, Franklin Beauty School Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

was at the center of training for African Americans in the city, and it attracted young women, and a handful of men, from across the state and Louisiana. Nobia Franklin, Jemison's mother-in-law and the founder of the school, began working in 1915 as a beautician out of her home in San Antonio, using horse and buggy to travel to style hair and teach new techniques. The following year, she moved to Fort Worth for two years, opened a beauty salon, and then moved to Houston and expanded her business to emphasize, in addition to the salon, training. While keeping her business in Houston open, Franklin moved to Chicago in 1922 and opened a second business. Her daughter, Abbie, had married J. H. Jemison, and Franklin placed the two in charge of most of her business prior to her death. The Jemisons decided to move the entire business to Houston in the 1930s and re-opened under the new rules and regulations governing beauty schools in Texas in 1935. Nobia Franklin died in Chicago in 1934⁶⁹

Abbie and J. H. Jemison operated the school as full partners throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Abbie controlled much of the operational side of the school, including teaching and supervising teachers, and her husband primarily concentrated on growing and promoting the business as well as serving as the main liaison between the beauty school, the African American community in Houston, and the professional associations in which the school participated. He also helped found the Houston Negro Chamber of Commerce and is credited with being one of the people instrumental in desegregating Houston's public golf courses after a lawsuit against the city, gaining him a prominent

⁶⁹ "50 Year Anniversary Program," Box 30, Folder 23, Franklin Beauty School Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library. For a complete analysis of the Franklin Beauty School, see Julia Kirk Blackwelder, *Styling Jim Crow: African American Beauty Training during Segregation* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2003).

position among the African American elites of the city.⁷⁰ Abbie served as president until 1949 when the school incorporated. J. H. Jemison became president, and Abbie stepped down to vice president. Part of this had to do with the birth of two more small children; Abbie Jemison chose to shift her attention from the business and to the home. The other possible reason for the change in roles was to make it more reflective of the reality of the school by 1950: J. H. Jemison was more associated as the primary owner and operator of the school by the community and in the advertisements and promotional materials than Nobia Franklin's daughter. The school remains in operation into 2016 under J. H. and Abbie Jemison's son and daughter-in-law. By 1980, more than 25,000 students had passed through the Franklin Beauty School.⁷¹

The Jemisons taught students the main beauty techniques they would need after leaving the school. Graduates of the Franklin Beauty School often went on to open their own establishments; promotional materials for the school proclaimed that a wide majority of the students turned to entrepreneurship.⁷² Throughout the postwar period, the school hosted events that emphasized the talents and success of their graduates. In 1955, the school sponsored a Spring Hair Style Show for "fashionable cosmeticians" that promoted the innovative expertise of graduates like Lila Lee Smith, Gracie Mae Davis, and Lydia Franks, all owners of their own beauty salons, which they had named after themselves. These graduates served as examples to Franklin's students and for young women in the

⁷⁰ "75th Anniversary," Box 35, Folder 7, Franklin Beauty School Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

⁷¹ Franklin Beauty School Reunion, Box 30, Folder 24, Franklin Beauty School Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

⁷² *Ibid.*

African American community who might consider cosmetology as a future career.⁷³

Those who came to the shows and promotional events or visited Franklin Beauty School's attached salon saw demonstrations of how Franklin's graduates utilized the specific skills required for African American beauty needs. This meant everything from cutting, shaping, putting in permanents, straightening, and relaxing to working with wigs, manicures, and dyes, as the advertisements from Franklin's graduation programs and events emphasize.

The postwar era promoted a standard of beauty for African American women that, at its core, reinforced notions of the superiority of the white aesthetic. The natural texture and look of African American women's hair had to be, as novelist Bebe Moore Campbell wrote, "burned into submission."⁷⁴ African American media at the national level produced an increase in advertisements, articles, and advice columns on beauty in magazines and newspapers. Most articles presented African American female beauty as an "issue" that needed correcting, in a similar pattern to the "normality" being promoted in white-focused media. The beauty ideals in African American advertisements and columns continued to favor lighter complexions and hairstyles that mimicked white hair: pressed and straight with little sign of natural curls.⁷⁵ If African American women wanted to uphold that ideal, which was also implicitly linked to what a "respectable" African American woman looked like, then she would have to spend hours in beauty

⁷³ "The Fashionable Cosmeticians Presents a Spring Hair Style Show," Box 30, Folder 24, Franklin Beauty School Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

⁷⁴ Willett, *Permanent Waves*, 176.

⁷⁵ Susannah Walker, *Style and Status: Selling Beauty to African American Women, 1920-1975* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 117.

salons. This remained true until the advent of more natural hairstyles and the embracement of afros as part of the cultural, political, and social statements of the late 1960s and 1970s.

In the early 1960s, Sarah Moore Joubert, owner of Joubert's Beauty Bar and a graduate of Franklin Beauty School, advertised that she was "Specializing in all Phases of Beauty Service-All Type Permanents, Hair Straighteners and Relaxers." Likewise, Ernestine Slater specialized in all "phases of beauty work." Vivian Orr's Beauty and Hair Weave Salon offered other services but emphasized specializing in weaves and wigs, which were becoming more popular by the beginning of the 1960s as the dominance of straightening as an African American beauty service came under attack.⁷⁶

For the vast majority of the two decades following the end of World War II, straightening proved the most common service provided for African American women, so much so that "most African American women, regardless of class or region, did not question hair straightening itself" until the late 1960s. Straightening involved using either a press, in most cases, or chemical relaxers. Both were time and labor-intensive, and chemical relaxers proved unreliable and dangerous until the mid-1960s. In the case of the press, beauticians used a softening shampoo and light oil, brushed and dried the hair, and pressed or curled the hair using heated metal rods into the style the customer had chosen.⁷⁷ While novelists like Bebe Moore Campbell and activists like Assata Shakur recorded negative memories about straightening, other women embraced the

⁷⁶ "50 Year Anniversary Program," Box 30, Folder 23, Franklin Beauty School Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

⁷⁷ Walker, *Style and Status*, 124-28.

process or, at least, regarded it with nostalgia. bell hooks recalled that “In those days, this process of straightening black women’s hair with a hot comb was not connected in my mind with the effort to look white, to live out standards of beauty set by white supremacy. It was connected solely with rites of initiation into womanhood.”

Straightening, and the frequency of care it required, insured “an exclusive moment when black women might meet . . . in the beauty parlor to talk with one another or listen to the talk.”⁷⁸

Indeed, the beauty salon primarily served as a gathering place for women in the African American community. For the owners, the beauty industry provided autonomy, income, and, for many, a sense of activism. In Houston, African American beauty shop owners often came together to lobby for better conditions and fair treatment within the broader, white-dominated field. Texas, like the rest of the Jim Crow South, appointed only white commissioners to the State Board of Hairdressers and even state exams were segregated by race with white administrators giving exams on separate days. In 1939, J.H. Jemison, wrote a letter to Faye Stewart, president of the Texas State Board of Hairdressers and Cosmetologists on behalf of the City-Wide Beautician's Association in Houston asking that "some favorable consideration . . . be given to the idea of a Colored Inspector."⁷⁹ Stewart argued that the request would be too expensive. The board remained segregated until 1952, although Jemison and other members of the City-Wide Beautician’s Association, which was one of the largest organizations of its kind in the

⁷⁸ Ibid., 130.

⁷⁹ Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 72.

state, used the board to maintain their professional status. Members of the Association contacted the board if anyone violated state rules and laws or operated without a license. The board would cooperate with African Americans in Houston in that regard but refused to accommodate the request for more equity in representation in the professional and governing associations.⁸⁰ The City-Wide Beautician's Association organized for measures like the installment of the first African American inspector, Vadie Troy, who was appointed in 1953 following a long campaign and a resolution signed by over a hundred Houston women who owned and operated beauty salons.

While the beauty industry in Houston could foster a sense of community, it also served the owner's main need: income. The beauty industry provided those African American women with the training and skills a path to economic success. Jewel Brown, a jazz singer who worked with musicians as notable as Louis Armstrong, found that cosmetology could serve as a fall-back when other avenues to economic stability became blocked. Brown began singing in church when she was six years old in 1943. She grew up in the Third Ward, and her parents were, as Brown remembers, incredibly hard-working and giving. They allowed her to sing in clubs in Galveston as a teenager and as a regular at the Club Ebony, saving enough to purchase a new home for her parents. During the 1950s, she moved and sang at Jack Ruby's Sovereign Club in Dallas and in 1961 received an offer to join Louis Armstrong's band. She recorded multiple records with Armstrong and appeared with him on television.⁸¹ Once her mother became ill in the 1960s, Brown returned to Houston and, with her brother, Alphonse, opened Sir

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁸¹ Andrew Dansby, "Houston Singer Jewel Brown Revives Her career at Age 77," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), March 25, 2015.

Brown's Hair Palace on Dowling in the Third Ward. Transitioning out of music was unpleasant for Brown, who noted that "when you can't support yourself very well it destroys something inside of you." The business steadily grew, however, and "became a source of delight and pleasure." She did not use her previous career as a promotional tool for the salon, but word moved throughout the community, and people came to have their hair done by Jewel Brown, the jazz singer. The shop helped her feel more like herself after what she believed was the loss of her singing career and the loss of her mother. She returned to music in the 1980s and released a new record in 2015.⁸²

"How Come They Don't Know ME"? Anna Dupree, Race, Entrepreneurship, and Philanthropy

Jewel Brown, because of her jazz career, is one of the only African American women who owned a beauty shop in Houston for which more is known than simply a name and address. While there is little information on most African American women who owned businesses, the historical record has remembered another notable woman who used her entrepreneurship and hard work to give back to the community: Anna Dupree. Dupree turned her years as a hairstylist for white women in River Oaks and as the proprietor of her own shop serving African American women into her dream of opening a home for "Aged Negroes," something that the city desperately needed, in 1952. Her story, from intensive poverty in Panola County, Texas to becoming a thrifty entrepreneur and philanthropist, combines many elements familiar to other African American female business owners. She became a hairstylist due to low start-up costs to support herself and her husband. Together, the couple made a collective impact on their community. Along the way, Anna Dupree controlled the narrative of her story,

⁸² Ibid.

emphasizing the thrift of herself and her husband and their community efforts, often downplaying her own business acumen and monetary gains in favor of the narrative of her husband's financial success. This created the public persona of Anna Dupree: a middle-class community worker who was respectable enough to work with reform-minded white Houstonians. Even into her final years of life, Dupree molded the narrative of her life and her philanthropy to meet her needs, agreeing to an interview that emphasized how much she had invested in the African American community and how little she had gained in return. In referring to the students who had benefitted from her donations to Texas State University, she remarked, "Do you know how that hurts. Not one from TSU has come to see me. Now how come they don't know ME, Anna Dupree?"⁸³ The interview helped her gain a spot in the overcrowded nursing home she had founded, where she died three years later in 1977. It also helped raise money for the home. Dupree geared every interview she ever gave and every promotional material she authorized for the home toward maximizing possible benefits for the nursing home. The construction of her biography, which she actively participated in writing, editing, and publicizing, reflects that intention.

Anna Dupree was born in 1891 in Carthage, Texas. She was one of six children born to Lee and Eliza Johnson and grew up in a two-room shack. The great-grandchild of a slave and white plantation owner, Dupree was surrounded by the stories of her family history and an imperative, handed down from her grandmother and mother, to "work hard and save hard" in order to "do something to make things easier for the

⁸³ *Houston Chronicle*, August 18, 1974, clipping, Folder 5, Box 1, Eliza Johnson Home for Aged Negroes Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

children” of her race. Her family moved to Galveston in 1904, and her mother worked as a maid. Dupree began working as a dish washer as a child, standing on a stool to reach the sink. When she was twenty years old, she moved to Houston in search of more opportunities. She continued to work as a maid and apprenticed at Ethel Baird’s Beauty Shop.⁸⁴

During one of her trips to Galveston to visit her family, she met Clarence Dupree, who worked as a bellhop at the Tremont Hotel. They married in 1914 and moved to Houston in 1916. Clarence continued to work in hotels, and Anna worked as a hairdresser. She began to make a name for herself working in shops and on her own, making house calls to white women for special occasions. By 1922, she had created an extensive enough customer base that she embarked exclusively on her own, riding streetcars throughout River Oaks and Montrose to her white customers’ homes. In the 1930s, a white beauty inspector ordered Dupree to stop making house calls and work out of a shop. Infuriated, Dupree, per her own recollection, pointed to a vacant lot and told the inspector, “You see that lot? Anna is going to build her a shop, and it is going to be one of the best in Houston.” The shop opened in 1936 as Anna’s Institution of Health and Beauty with a Turkish bath and professional masseurs.⁸⁵

Living off Clarence’s salary and saving the rest, the two managed to invest in real estate. They opened a theater in 1929 and the Eldorado Ballroom in 1936 in the Third Ward. Dupree remembered that she wanted the club largely because “white women had

⁸⁴Yvette Jones, “Seeds of Compassion,” *Texas Historian*, November 1976, Folder 9, Box 1, Eliza Johnson Home for Aged Negroes Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

⁸⁵Ibid.

a ballroom, a place to dance and sing, why shouldn't she?" The Eldorado became one of the first clubs for African Americans in Houston and a place for African American entertainers to perform. During its peak years in the post-World War II period, the Eldorado headlined Ray Charles, Etta James, and T-Bone Walker. The success of the Eldorado made it a target for white law enforcement and the city government, like other nightclubs and entertainment venues for African Americans across the nation. Dupree later remembered, "Some folks said the Eldorado was a hell-hole, and they tried to get us for tax evasion. The problem was they just couldn't stand to see so much integrity and honor wrapped up in a Negro body." The Eldorado continued to thrive and flourish into the 1970s.⁸⁶

The entrepreneurial efforts of Dupree and her husband turned into philanthropy in the post-World II years. They donated \$11,000 to the first permanent building of what became Texas Southern University, gave to the United Negro College Fund, financed the first Little League baseball team for African American children, and contributed to other civic causes. In 1945, Anna Dupree donated \$20,000 to the Negro Child Center, which then bought land and opened a home for African American orphans. Following an encounter with a destitute elderly man in 1948, Dupree began thinking about a home for "Aged Negroes." Houston had five homes for elderly people, but none admitted African Americans. Elderly African Americans relied upon their relatives and community charity for survival. Dupree set out to raise as much money as possible, holding teas and dances at the Eldorado and appealing to churches, clubs, community leaders, and white

⁸⁶ No record of the tax evasion investigation could be found. *Houston Chronicle*, August 18, 1974, clipping, Folder 5, Box 1, Eliza Johnson Home for Aged Negroes Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

Houstonians. She wrote and printed pamphlets and flyers and lobbied for attention for the home, which she planned to name after her mother. The *Houston Chronicle* and other white institutions contributed to the project, and Dupree herself contributed most of the seed money. The home, on thirty-five acres on Chocolate Bayou Road (now Cullen Boulevard), opened in 1952. Houston mayor Oscar F. Holcombe proclaimed that Sunday “Memorial Day for Our Aged Negro Citizens.”⁸⁷

Dupree chaired the Board of Management for the home, and fundraising for the home continued throughout the 1950s. A gifted fundraiser, Dupree edited and approved promotional materials that framed herself as a “devoted wife” to Clarence, who in the materials distributed in the 1950s appears as the primary organizer of the Eliza Johnson Home and the principal person in their real estate ventures. Anna, in the “Good Samaritan” pamphlet distributed to encourage church members to donate to the home, is a “civic minded” woman who “has worked constantly with her husband.”⁸⁸ In another, similar, pamphlet, Anna is the main actress, but the attention is still not on her; it is on the “lonely, helpless and aged Negroes who have no home of their own.” The author continues to describe how Anna had seen elderly African Americans “living in one room shacks without a chair to sit in and no stove to warm themselves by . . . to her these represented the forgotten, wounded, and half dead people of our community.” Dupree founded the home as a “haven of shelter,” but, as the author of this entreaty for funds reported, “to all these dear old souls, tender, loving and sympathetic care is being

⁸⁷ Jones, “Seeds of Compassion,” *Texas Historian*.

⁸⁸“Good Samaritans” Box 1 Folder 3, Eliza Johnson Home for Aged Negroes Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

provided by the pitifully small employed staff and a few deserving volunteers.” Since this material was also distributed to white churches and organizations, the author noted that “It is to be remembered that most of the inmates of the Home have given the best years of their lives in service to their ‘white folks’ Now that they are too old to work they cannot depend upon Social Security, pensions, or other financial benefits to support themselves. . . . For the most part, they are forsaken.”⁸⁹ Through constant fundraising, Dupree pulled enough money together to create a foundation to run the home.

It is unclear when Dupree stopped working in her beauty shop, although it was probably sometime around the opening of the Eliza Johnson Home. At that point, she and her husband began working in the home, filling in positions as volunteer janitors and cooks. Part of this was because of need; in the first few years, the home truly was understaffed, according to the Board of Managers notes.⁹⁰ Another reason for their labors revolved around the need to draw attention to the call for more funds; if a respectable middle-aged couple was scrubbing floors and cooking soup, this was a cause worthy of donations. Additionally, Dupree had larger dreams for the property. She wanted to add to the existing thirty-five acres for additional homes for unwed mothers, abandoned children, and the mentally and physically handicapped, combining the homes under the title “Welcome Acres.” Forming the Negro Community Council to help raise money for the project, Dupree lobbied for funds through churches, white philanthropic organizations, African American community organizations, and the media throughout the

⁸⁹ “The Eliza Johnson Home for Aged Negroes,” Box 1 Folder 3, Anna Dupree Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

⁹⁰ Board of Management Notes, June 1952, Box 1, Folder 3, Eliza Johnson Home for Aged Negroes Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

1950s.⁹¹ Unfortunately, Clarence Dupree died in 1959, and Anna, according to multiple articles, grieved herself into a protracted illness.⁹²

This narrative is largely based on interviews Dupree did for local publications later in life and promotional materials for the Eliza Johnson Home for Aged Negroes. All of those materials went by Dupree, who recorded notes and corrections in the margins.⁹³ Everything Dupree said was with an eye toward raising attention and money for the home. Considering the attention paid to how Dupree could not gain a room in the home she started and the complaints about the ungratefulness of TSU students, the 1974 interview with the *Houston Chronicle* might seem purely self-serving. The larger point, though, was how many improvements needed to be made at the Eliza Johnson Home and how much the institution could benefit from continued donations and charity, considering the hard work that people like Dupree had put into its original construction. She lamented, “We need a bigger home, and we need it bad. My heart aches me pretty much. I don’t want to die and leave the home undone.” Even as an “anxious” and “old Negro woman” with a “broken dream,” as the *Chronicle* described her, Dupree was leaning on the sympathies of readers, raising attention and funds for the Eliza Johnson Home.⁹⁴ She moved into the home shortly after the article’s publication and died in 1977. The nursing

⁹¹ *Houston Chronicle*, August 18, 1974, clipping, Folder 5, Box 1, Eliza Johnson Home for Aged Negroes Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

⁹² Jones, “Seeds of Compassion,” *Texas Historian*.

⁹³ The Yvonne Jones article was based, often down to exact phrases, on an earlier pamphlet that requested donations to help furnish the home after its completion. Dupree wrote corrections into the pamphlet, including correcting a mistake about when and where she began working as a dishwasher, but those corrections did not get into Jones’ story. Folder 2, Box 1, Eliza Johnson Home for Aged Negroes Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

⁹⁴ *Houston Chronicle*, August 18, 1974, clipping, Folder 5, Box 1, Eliza Johnson Home for Aged Negroes Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

home closed in 1983, following a period of mismanagement.⁹⁵ Her legacy, however, demonstrates how African American women could convert their position as entrepreneurs in the beauty industry into activism within their communities.

Conclusion

Beauty, like food and nightlife, has long occupied a space that the prevailing culture had coded as “feminine.” The postwar era brought new expectations about “normality” and beauty expectations to all classes and races, demanding increased maintenance that required the assistance of a professional. Entrepreneurially minded women could take their skills with hair and beauty from their official training in schools, like Lydia Houston’s or J. H. Jemison’s, into their own shops and salons.

On the other hand, the beauty industry, like every part of the business world, included a strong professionalization movement that privileged male labor and knowledge at the expense of women. This process, which had existed in beauty since the Progressive Era, emphasized men as trained experts and women as mere practitioners. In Houston’s beauty industry, newspaper articles focused their attention in brief write-ups on the addition of male technicians or new shops opened by men. These businesses earned automatic prestige because of the assumption of male expertise. The entire beauty industry revolved, at mid-century, around the desire to be “normal” and “natural,” but that, as it was always emphasized, required expert hands. Cultural norms implied that men were experts and women were not, even with equal training in a sector of the economy for women.

⁹⁵Ken Rashid, “What is Happening to Eliza Johnson Home?” *Houston Forward Times*, March 12, 1983, clipping, Folder 3, Box 1, Eliza Johnson Home for Aged Negroes Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

For African American women, the beauty industry, like restaurants and nightlife, offered autonomy and an alternative to working for a white person. The beauty industry required more formal training than other sectors of the service industry, but like food and beverage businesses, it allowed women to control their own time and labor and to become their own bosses with relatively little capital. Women could become hairdressers in their kitchens, building customer bases that might translate into their own shop.

With a few notable exceptions, like Jewel Brown and Lydia Houston, the legacy of women's entrepreneurship in the beauty sector has largely disappeared or been minimized. Part of the reason why the media excluded women who owned beauty salons had to do with their sheer numbers. They were not a novelty. On the other hand, women who entered other economic sectors, particularly real estate and retail, did receive coverage from Houston's media, although in a manner that simultaneously celebrated their success and objectified and dismissed them. Real estate and retail, expanding due to consumer demand in a manner identical to the service industry, offered opportunities for women who did not want to or did not have the skills to go into food or beauty. Like the beauty industry, women proprietors in real estate and retail faced the tensions inherent in the opportunity and limitations of mid-century society.

CHAPTER 4: “WHAT COMPANY COULD SUCCEED WITH SUCH A FEMININE NAME”: CARVING A SPACE IN REAL ESTATE AND RETAIL IN POSTWAR HOUSTON

Thirty-two-year-old Olive Shipp moved to Houston from Flora, Illinois, in 1950. Described affectionately as “redheaded” and “freckle faced” with a fantastic sense of humor and expansive friendliness by her family, Shipp followed her husband, Travis, to Houston in search of economic opportunity. Shipp quickly realized that possibilities for financial gain existed in the booming real estate market of Houston and its ever-growing suburbs. She first became a real estate agent at a local realtor’s office and then became one of the first female certified master real estate brokers in Texas. She opened her own brokerage firm, Realty Ranch, in 1951. By her early retirement in the 1960s, she owned four offices deliberately staffed only with women, and several of those women went on to open their own real estate businesses, inspired by Shipp’s example. Her family described her in 2014, when she died, as “an early liberated woman of the 1950s” who saw an opportunity to set out as an entrepreneur and help other women in the process.¹

Shipp’s entry into real estate was part of a broader national trend following World War II. Women gained opportunities to go into business for themselves in two related economic sectors: real estate and retail. An increase in disposable incomes after World War II sparked a consumption revolution. Individuals and families, after years of economic depression and wartime regulations could fully participate in a consumer economy. As with nearly every facet of life in the postwar years, gender dictated how the media, advertisements, and businesses marketed and steered this new booming economy. Women proved a valuable market for corporations and small businesses to exploit, and

¹“Olive Shipp Thompson,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), July 20, 2014.

executives were careful to produce advertisements and spending incentives geared toward promoting domesticity and femininity. Consumption patterns of the Cold War era encouraged gender roles divided along strict lines, but it also allowed women to carve out a niche as these sectors of the economy became based around home and family, where women were seen as having control and some level of authority. Women were the primary recipients and intended audience of marketing for new homes, furniture, clothes, and decorations, and for those looking for a business opportunity, these sectors could provide an entrepreneurial prospect.

America in the postwar years had become what historian Lizabeth Cohen has referred to as a “consumers’ republic.” At the time, Americans – or at least those presenting what Americans believed in magazines and newspapers – viewed consumption as a necessity for a good quality of life for everyone. This included the purchase of a one-family home, the center of postwar domesticity, and appliances, furniture, and home goods, like dishes. As Cohen describes, as each family bought and furnished homes, the expanded consumer demand would expand both business and employment opportunities. “Mass consumption in postwar America would not be a personal indulgence, but rather a civic responsibility designed to provide full employment and improved living standards for the rest of the nation.”² Furthermore, what Americans spent their money on shifted. As Elaine Tyler May recounts, “in the five years after World War II, consumer spending increased by 60 percent, but the amount spent on household furnishings and appliances rose 240 percent.” Purchases for food, comparably, rose only 33 percent. Americans

² Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 113.

wanted to buy homes and fill them with the hallmarks of a middle-class lifestyle: furniture, decorations, and labor-saving appliances.³

As consumption spending increased during the postwar years, women's opportunities to open business operations likewise expanded. In Houston, the number of women opening retail and real estate firms increased from approximately 120 in 1946 to 200 in 1950.⁴ The media took notice. In the early 1950s, the pages of the *Houston Chronicle* boasted of women's achievements in entrepreneurship. One reporter in particular, Jeanne Barnes, paid close attention to women's advances and documented individual women's stories. While Barnes, who moved to become an editor at the *Dallas Morning News* in the 1960s, trumpeted the women's success, she and those writing similar articles simultaneously emphasized their femininity, repeatedly referring to their looks and manners.⁵ Although the perceived attractiveness, hairstyle, and general appealing nature of a proprietor could be construed as advertising for beauty salons and similar businesses, this continuous thread also runs throughout the descriptions of women's activities in retail and real estate. Real estate, in particular, experienced a massive uptick in women's participation during the postwar years and garnered attention from the media. The home, coded as feminine, proved a profitable vocation for enterprising women.

³ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 147.

⁴ Data compiled from *The Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977.

⁵ William Pahlman Finding Aid, Archival Collections at Hagley Museum and Library, accessed January 20, 2017, http://findingaids.hagley.org/xtf/view?docId=ead/2388_II.xml&doc.view=content&brand=default&anchor.id=0;query=Barnes#dsc_1.1.

“What She Calls Logic”: Women and Real Estate

Despite the high number of women real estate agents at midcentury, the real estate profession did not prove welcoming during its inception. Real estate brokers across the nation professionalized for the first time in the 1870s and 1880s as they formed local real estate boards in multiple states. In 1908, real estate agents formed the National Association of Real Estate Boards (NAREB) as part of a broader professionalization movement sweeping the United States. Brokers usually focused on both residential and commercial real estate in the early twentieth century with the exception of those operating out of large cities, like New York City and Chicago. While commercial real estate formed a significant part of a real estate agent’s agenda, the majority of most real estate agents’ concerns came from the residential market. Real estate agents had to fashion themselves as experts on the home. As historian Jeffrey M. Hornstein has noted in his history of realtors, “the home was also indelibly marked as a feminine space, and this fact complicated the models available for real estate men to draw upon in their drive to professionalize.”⁶ In other words, since the home read as “female,” men who operated in that economic sector had difficulty identifying as a professional, usually read as “male.” For that reason, many male real estate agents chose to broker as many deals in the commercial market as possible throughout the twentieth century, although residential real estate continued to be the primary source of profits for the majority of real estate enterprises.

⁶ Jeffrey M. Hornstein, *A Nation of Realtors: A Cultural History of the Twentieth-Century American Middle-Class* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 7.

Several women across the nation were involved in real estate in the early twentieth century, but the bulk of local real estate boards ignored their incursion into the profession. At the turn of the century, many real estate boards barred women as members, and they faced great difficulty breaking into commercial real estate. The home, though, had, beginning in the nineteenth century, been marked as a female territory, so “successful women brokers discovered clever ways of insinuating themselves into the professional project, ultimately creating a field that was more open to women than any other business profession.”⁷ For those women who ventured into real estate prior to World War II, the hesitancy of men to fully capitalize on the residential markets for homes and apartments as part of their professionalization efforts left an opening into which women could step.

By World War II, more and more women entered the market as real estate brokers. Most joined professional organizations, including the National Association of Real Estate Boards, which had a separate Women’s Council that thrived during the postwar years. By 1958, a NAREB advertisement in the *Houston Chronicle* boasted thirteen women-owned realty firms out of forty-five sponsors during the *Chronicle’s* annual celebration of real estate.⁸ Using the rhetoric of community, service, domesticity, and femininity, women established a foothold in residential real estate. Kathy Peiss, in an article on women’s ventures, noted that “women capitalized upon their work as information brokers in civic associations and in casual interactions of daily life, turning

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Thirteen were definitely owned and operated by women, fifteen were definitely owned and operated by men, and the remainder had ambiguous ownership. *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), April 12, 1958.

‘gossip’ into commerce.’⁹ As the arbiters of community information, women could bridge the gap between business needs and the requirements of local families. This process began before World War II and accelerated in the Cold War period.

Much of women’s accelerated entrance into the residential real estate market in the postwar period had to do with the extra emphasis on “the home” both in a literal sense (as a house in which women had the majority of responsibility for decorating and upkeep) and as a symbol. The home stood at the center of Cold War rhetoric as a bastion against communism. William J. Levitt, the developer of Levittown, the quintessential postwar suburb, argued that “No man who owns his own house and lot can be a Communist. He has too much to do.”¹⁰ The famous “kitchen debate” between Richard Nixon and Nikita Khrushchev took place in a mock kitchen as the two politicians argued the merits of communism and capitalism. Nixon emphasized the diversity and freedom of choice available to Americans in the housing market while Khrushchev asserted that, under communism, the state guaranteed housing, creating a stable system.¹¹ The American home provided one of the greatest arguments for free enterprise, as Nixon argued, and women real estate agents proved adept at articulating a combination of capitalism and domesticity that appealed to American families.

Nixon did not intend for the increased idolization of home ownership to create more opportunities for women outside of the home, as it did. According to Elaine Tyler

⁹ “‘Vital Industry’ and Women’s Ventures: Conceptualizing Gender in Twentieth Century Business History,” *The Business History Review* 72 (1998): 239.

¹⁰ May, *Homeward Bound*, 1.

¹¹ “The Kitchen Debate,” Teaching American History, accessed January 20, 2017, <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-kitchen-debate/>.

May's study of Cold War domestic containment, Nixon's articulation of the American Dream, reflective of what the American people received in their local, regional, and national newspapers and magazines, aimed to neutralize the "potentially disruptive forces" of women. The family home would be a place where women could be content as housewives and "reinforce aspirations for upward mobility and diffuse the potential for social unrest."¹² The promotion of home ownership came from both the media and the national government, which expanded the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) program and created the Veteran's Administration (VA) program to guarantee federal insurance for loans for white veterans. Between 1945 and 1966, one-fifth of all single-family residences built were financed by the federal government through the GI Bill.¹³ The government also subsidized large suburban developments and provided extra tax benefits for homeowners. Less expensive, mass-produced homes and lower interest rates on mortgages also contributed to the homebuyer's market. As a result, Americans accurately concluded that it was cheaper to own than to rent; by 1946, a majority of white families lived in a home they owned. Over the next fifteen years, 12 million more families bought homes.¹⁴ Nationwide, expenditures on residential construction rose more than 40 percent between 1952 and 1960. One out of every four homes standing in the United States in 1960 went up in the 1950s.¹⁵ The residential real estate market boomed, particularly in Houston, where the pace of growth seemed to be at a frenzied level.

¹² May also explores the exclusionary elements inherent in post-World War II housing policies, which discriminated against minorities and women in favor of white, male veterans. May, *Homeward Bound*, 147.

¹³ Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 141.

¹⁴ May, *Homeward Bound*, 152.

¹⁵ Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*, 122-123.

Capitalizing on the cultural norms about gender and roles in America, women real estate brokers and home builders made residential real estate a welcoming sector for entrepreneurially minded women, selling home, domesticity, and femininity while they simultaneously expanded the career options for American women. About 3,000 Houstonian women became real estate agents, and roughly half worked for themselves.¹⁶ Many of those women worked together to fully develop what they perceived as innate and uniquely feminine talents. In their quest to break into the profession and be successes, they were aided by a very active chapter of the Women's Council of the National Association of Real Estate Boards. The organization met once a month to discuss problems pertaining to the real estate profession generally, like a February 1950 meeting on public housing, and issues for women specifically, as seen at a Women's Council breakfast in 1954.¹⁷ At the panel discussion, local real estate operators considered the advantage women had as tactful salespeople and builders of relationships. They provided advice to the present members on preparing advertising copy and following up with clients and prospective clients. Ladia Harp, owner of a real estate firm, argued that the "art of handling people is one of the finest arts one can possess", and a talent that women outpaced men at developing.¹⁸ In addition to asserting that women realtors should cultivate their innate feminine talents, the Houston Women's Council of Realtors also provided workshops for its members on how to capitalize on their outward femininity. In 1958, the local council sponsored a dinner meeting featuring a fashion

¹⁶ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), December 25, 1950.

¹⁷ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), February 4, 1950.

¹⁸ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), June 13, 1954.

consultant from Battelstein's, a local department store, on how to dress with style and flair that combined professionalism with an "ingenious use of accessories."¹⁹ Appearance of the realtor was important for cultivating trust with clients and persuading both buyers and sellers to take their female realtor seriously.

One very active member of the Houston Women's Council, Anne Stromatt, proved very talented at using "powers of persuasion" on more than prospective buyers. She became a broker in 1949, joining the Kimmons and Rogers brokerage firm. Ironically, Stromatt had been lobbying the Kimmons and Rogers firm for years to try to stop them from violating residential restrictions in her neighborhood. As the *Houston Chronicle* recorded, Kimmons and Rogers felt so impressed by her "persuasive way" that they hired her on as an agent.²⁰ In January 1951, she joined Olive Shipp to open a branch office of Shipp's firm, Realty Ranch. Ten months later, the partnership dissolved, and Stromatt opened her own firm, Anne Stromatt, Realtor, across the street. She ran the business on her own until 1963, when her husband, W. J., retired from Marathon Oil Company and joined his wife's firm. That same year, their son, Dick, became a property manager. Their other son, David, became an agent for the company the following year. Stromatt's hard work and talent caught the attention of the Houston Board of Realtors Credit Union, which elected her director for six years. In April 1970, Anne Stromatt took a step back as the primary operator of the real estate firm in favor of her son when they formed the corporation Stromatt and Associates, Inc. with David as president, W. J. as vice president, and Anne as secretary and treasurer. She knew that David would one day

¹⁹ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 14, 1958.

²⁰ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 16, 1956.

take over the company completely and decided that the official incorporation would be a good time for the transition to happen.²¹ She proved successful in steering her company into prominence and insuring its existence, under David's leadership, into the twenty-first century.

Stromatt made her company, over time, into a family enterprise. In the beginning, however, she hired a maid to take care of her sons while she went, first, to someone else's businesses and, later, her own.²² For most people operating in real estate, combining home and work in the ways other female entrepreneurs, like many beauty technicians, retail operators, and music instructors could was not an option. Bringing children to work cut into the professional persona the women tried to cultivate. Instead, they turned to maids, family members, after-school programs, and other sources for their childcare needs. A few attempted to do both, usually operating out of their home. Margaret Scott Bailey, the president of the Houston chapter of the Women's Council of NAREB in 1950, leased a residential property on San Felipe Road in 1956. She had the house remodeled to serve as both an office and as her home. In this way, Bailey could easily move from home to work and back again throughout the business day while providing a professional office space for clients.²³

Some of Bailey's clients included property developers. The massive growth of Houston provided opportunities for female real estate agents to partner with men (and a handful of women) responsible for buying land and constructing new subdivisions,

²¹ *Bellaire Texan* (Bellaire, TX), June 22, 1977.

²² *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 16, 1956.

²³ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), July 29, 1956.

commercial property, and what quickly became “mini downtowns.”²⁴ Beginning in the mid-1960s, Dottie Freeman Marlin, an independent real estate agent, contracted with Century Properties to develop the multimillion dollar Greenway Plaza commercial complex, which covers the equivalent of sixty downtown city blocks. The owner of Century Properties, Kenneth Schnitzer, wanted to purchase over three hundred homes from different homeowners in order to build the Plaza. He brought Marlin on board to convince all of the homeowners to sell.²⁵ Marlin had entered real estate with the encouragement of her husband, who worked in the commercial real estate sector. She proved talented at residential real estate and, when Schnitzer wanted a woman to take charge of all of the home acquisitions, she met the qualities of “someone who had to have a lot of patience, [and] deal[t] with a lot of different personalities.” Schnitzer decided that this massive home acquisition would best be performed by one person and gave Marlin authority to negotiate all of the deals on her own.

Other people in the Houston real estate world scoffed at Schnitzer’s ambitions, arguing that it would be impossible to convince over three hundred homeowners to sell and, in particular that, “it couldn’t be done by a woman.”²⁶ Marlin, according to her niece, ignored the naysayers. She created an enticing package for the homeowners, offering three dollars per square foot, roughly twice as much as the average market value. To sweeten the deal even more, Schnitzer allowed Marlin to offer the potential seller rent-free occupancy for five years in the new high-rise condos and the option to move

²⁴ Debbie Harwell, interview by Meredith May, Kingwood, TX, March 18, 2016.

²⁵ “A Revolutionary Way to Block Up Real Estate,” *Lawyers Title News*, October 1968, 1-3.

²⁶ Debbie Harwell interview.

their house to a new lot. Roughly 70 percent of homeowners jumped at the deal. The other 30 percent held out. Some were suspicious of the deal, and “others, elated at first, had done a complete turnabout; they suddenly started falling in love with the tree in the back yard.”²⁷ For those people, Marlin worked with Schnitzer to come to compromises. In the case of one couple, Marlin had an arborist brought in to successfully transplant a magnolia tree from their old home to a new property. Even when Schnitzer balked at certain homeowner demands, Marlin successfully persuaded him of the best ways to find a compromise.²⁸ Looking back in 1968 after all of the homeowners had agreed to a deal, Schnitzer, answering a question on the secret of the “impossible acquisition,” said, “We made a generous offer, we were patient, we treated everyone decently, and we put Dottie Marlin in charge.”²⁹ Schnitzer felt so pleased with how Marlin handled the initial Greenway Plaza acquisitions that, in the late 1970s, he asked her to handle selling 370 condos in a new high-rise. In the early 1980s, she began handling all selling and leasing for the Greenway Plaza condos, a position she occupied until the early 2000s.

In addition to selling real estate and partnering with developers, women pursued opportunities in real estate construction, architecture, and engineering. These women are exceptions, but their stories speak to how the broader fields of housing development and building reacted to the incursions made by women. Moreover, the recording of their forays into typically masculine occupations in papers like the *Houston Chronicle* highlights the contrary nature of Houston’s attitude toward female entrepreneurs. These

²⁷ “A Revolutionary Way,” 2.

²⁸ Debbie Harwell interview.

²⁹ “A Revolutionary Way,” 3.

women are simultaneously celebrated for their business success and objectified as women. While Houston certainly maintained its attitude as friendly to all economic progress, whether it be men or women, the local papers wanted to remind people that the successful woman remained feminine and “attractive.”

This attitude is evident in the 1956 article on Anna Merenda, “a concrete contractor and probably the only women in Houston to have such a job.” Merenda opened her contracting business in 1951 and worked with architects and housing developers to build foundations and sidewalks. She had spent time, after World War II, as a hostess for Pioneer Airlines and as a telephone operator before joining a partner in the concrete business in 1950. Merenda told the *Houston Chronicle* that the job appealed to her because she “is outdoors, meets people, and is her own boss.” Immediately after Merenda’s quote on the draw of being one’s own boss, the *Chronicle* author reminds the reader that “in appearance and personality, 5-foot 110-pound Anna is anything but masculine. One would never guess she has even the slightest interest in anything as messy and cumbersome as concrete” and emphasizes that, although her favorite hobby is hunting, she still likes clothes. In repeatedly mentioning that Merenda’s femininity contrasted with her “masculine” occupation, the author shows both the tension Merenda felt as an “invader,” as the headline for the article described her, and how the building industry felt being invaded. Merenda acknowledges the problems facing women by burying it in an otherwise positive piece of advice: “All you have to do in the business world as a woman is know what you’re talking about, and then convince the male client.” Convincing male clients, for Merenda, involved more than the concrete business. Everything from her clothing (“Just because you are doing a man’s job doesn’t mean you

have to act and dress like one”) to her business’ name revolved around putting male clients at ease. Although she named her business after herself, it was her initials: A.C. Construction Company. The “A.C.” stood for Anna Cecilia, and, as the *Chronicle* author opined, “What company could succeed with such a feminine name?”³⁰

One company that did “succeed with such a feminine name” belonged to real estate developer Comora Cone, one of only three female members of the Houston Association of Home Builders in 1955. Cone was born in 1904 near Houston. She married Hugh Cone, a tea salesman, in 1924. After their wedding, she worked as a saleswoman in a clothing store and later turned her attention to making money off her home, renting rooms out of their West Gray Avenue house.³¹ In 1943, she became a licensed realtor. She built her own real estate business over a six-year period focusing on residential real estate; by 1950, she employed six other real estate agents, and, by 1955, her husband. In 1949, Cone recognized that the booming market for home building could provide an opportunity for personal profit. That year, her company built ten homes. The following year, that number tripled. In 1951, she embarked on a \$550,000 building program for fifty homes.³² She built homes in multiple subdivisions in Houston, including Foster Place, Grand Park, MacGregor Park Estates, and Westridge. At mid-decade, she doubled her investment to one million dollars and bought seventy-eight

³⁰Charlotte Millis, “Woman ‘Invades’ Field of Cement Contractors,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 23, 1956.

³¹ U.S. Census Bureau. *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930: Population* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1932) and U.S. Census Bureau. *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Population* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943).

³²“Woman Realtor, Launches \$550,000 Building Program,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), January 21, 1951.

homesites in the Oak Forest residential community in northwest Houston.³³ In two newspaper articles highlighting Cone's plans, the writers allow a glimpse into what made Cone particularly successful as a real estate developer. Cone's Oak Forest homes fit into the prevailing architectural norms of the postwar period. They were contemporary bungalows with three bedrooms, large kitchens, and family rooms to promote family time. The price, from \$13,000 to \$16,000, placed homes in Oak Forest at the low end of the national average. The descriptive short article in the *Houston Chronicle* hints at "unusual features" that Cone asked her architects to incorporate into all of her homes, features that "she said some of the other builders in Oak Forest were skeptical of at first . . . and are now adopting them." The author for the *Chronicle*, unfortunately, does not explore those features in detail.³⁴

A *Milwaukee Sentinel* article provides the answer for Cone's success:

Most homes are designed and put up by men but it's the housewife who has to put up with inconveniences that accompanying poor home layouts. A woman builder in Houston is making the homes she erects more livable by insisting on a nine-point set of specifications that add up to labor savings, conveniences, comfort, and attractiveness.

Cone's "musts" included: separate entrances that split the living room from other rooms, windows that provided furniture placement options, a door to the back yard, a patio, an attractive backyard from all angles, large kitchens, practical storage space, a dinette, and plenty of electrical outlets. These features all emphasized two twin concepts:

³³A real estate company, Oak Forest Realty Company, owned Oak Forest as of 1947. The company built one section of the development and created seventeen other sections to be constructed by other contractors. "History of Oak Forest," Oak Forest Realty, accessed January 20, 2017, <http://www.myoakforest.org/about-us/history/>.

³⁴"Woman Builder Has \$1,000,000 1955 Program," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), November 28, 1954.

convenience for wives, particularly in creating and serving food, and an emphasis on family togetherness. Cone theorized that “in summer more people live in their yards than inside the house,” so the family should have a relaxing space outside to gather. This vision of domesticity proved attractive; Cone argued, “I try to build homes that will sell themselves, and I believe most of my buyers will say they bought my homes—we didn’t sell them.”³⁵ For families looking for the postwar dream of home ownership, modern conveniences, and togetherness, a Comora Cone home went above and beyond with attention to detail and decorations seen to by Cone herself. Her success, then, came from her insight into what worked for families and, specifically, what worked for women. Like other female realtors across the country, Cone capitalized on her position as a woman with expertise on the family in order to make a profitable business.

While Cone provided direction and vision for her projects, it lay with architects to design the American home. In 1950, the *Houston Chronicle* featured Houston’s only independent woman architect: Lavone Dickensheets Andrews. The author, Anne Haynes, began the feature by arguing that Andrews had entered architecture “using what she [Andrews] calls ‘logic.’” Indeed, Andrews, described in the first paragraph as “attractive,” argued that architecture was a “logical field for a woman.” Andrews’s father insisted that she pursue a profession of some kind, having seen, as a newspaper reporter, women without any skills to fall back on when abandoned by husbands. Noting an absence of women in residential architecture, Andrews received an architecture degree from Rice Institution in 1933 and went into private practice in 1938. Throughout the 1940s, she expanded her company. In the postwar years, she capitalized on the building

³⁵ “Lady Builder Insists on 9 Home Features,” *Milwaukee Sentinel* (Milwaukee, WI), July 2, 1955.

boom and utilized the same rhetoric as women real estate brokers, emphasizing that femininity, far from being a liability, was an asset. “What is more logical than for a woman to design a home—the place that women know best?” she asked. “A woman has a feeling for a home that men will never have.”³⁶

Andrews, like many other female entrepreneurs pushing at the limits of gendered norms, attempted to broaden the definition of female space beyond the home. Real estate agents, builders, and architects could convincingly argue that the residential sector occupied feminine ground. Andrews, though, took a stand in other spaces. She entered industrial design during World War II and maintained her position in the postwar era, designing roughly as many office buildings and non-residential spaces as houses. She justified her position in these non-domestic spaces by describing places where women “logically” had greater expertise than men. “Take shops, for instance. Women spend much more time in stores than men do,” she argued. “They know what surroundings make them most comfortable . . . why then, shouldn’t they design these shops to meet the desires of other women?” She made her most convincing case in education and was hired to design the new Dodson Elementary School in 1950.³⁷ Andrews went on to great acclaim within the architecture world. In the 1960s, she restored a medieval castle in Ireland, which earned her membership in The Royal Institute of Architects in Ireland and the Europa Nostra Award for important restoration of a European monument. In addition to her architecture business, which she continued to run in Houston, she and her husband, a former assistant secretary of the U.S. Navy, formed and built a private oil and gas

³⁶*Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), April 30, 1950.

³⁷*Ibid.*

company, where she served as vice president from 1957 to 1992. Andrews remained active in architecture, particularly in lecturing at universities, until her death in 2002.³⁸

In a related field in 1950, the *Houston Chronicle* featured another “attractive” entrepreneuring woman. “Engineering may not be a woman’s field,” the author began, “but if a woman has the yen, talent and the grit she can get to the top . . . at least that’s what . . . Mrs. Sue Goddard has done.” Goddard opened her own engineering consulting firm after working as a civil engineer for a major oil company. Goddard worked as an architect for the FHA during the Depression and transitioned to engineering during World War II. During the postwar years, she passed the registered engineer’s exams, worked in oil, and then took “a fling” as an independent engineer and real estate agent. The *Chronicle*’s choice of “fling” to describe Goddard’s decision to strike out on her own minimizes Goddard’s very careful planning. In anticipation of the difficulty she might face as the female head of an engineering firm, Goddard took out a real estate license, not on a whim, as the author described, but in order to provide a reliable addition to her company. She did not “think engineering [was] exactly the easiest of best career a girl could pick,” providing a contrast to Andrews’ argument that architecture and the booming market in Houston provided “room for more women architects in the field.”³⁹ With Andrews’ and Goddard’s features coming out within mere months of one another, Houston’s media demonstrated the paradoxical approach to women working in the booming building sector. The “attractive” women maintained their femininity and their domesticity (the author of Goddard’s article emphasized her relationship with her

³⁸ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), June 8, 2002.

³⁹ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), April 30, 1950 and *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), June 25, 1950.

daughter and her painting hobby) while embarking into masculine worlds. The dual articles acted as both a description of two women's economic pursuits and, in both cases, as guides for the possibilities for other "logical" women.

“A Wildcat by the Tail”: Retail in Houston’s Boom-Town Economy

Dottie Freeman Marlin, the realtor responsible for the acquisition of the properties that became Greenway Plaza, had retail ambitions in addition to her extraordinarily successful career as a real estate agent. She dreamed of a business that would combine her family's interest in healthy living, vitamins, and nutrition with an opportunity to pull her sisters who lived in the area together into one business. Kenneth Schnitzer had promised Marlin a 6 percent commission in addition to her contracting fee for the Greenway Plaza sales. Once her task came to an end, Marlin took her commission and invested it in a health foods store in the new Galleria. The store was a success; it was a combination of finding a trend at the right time and a fantastic location. She hired her youngest sister, Joy Freeman, to work in the store as a clerk, and her other four sisters helped as needed. The store became a center for the family and provided extra income for all of Marlin's sisters in the Houston area, most of whom also owned businesses of their own. They operated the store until Marlin decided to sell in the early 1980s.⁴⁰

Of Marlin's five sisters, one worked as a real estate agent in Fort Worth and three operated their own businesses in Houston during the postwar years. Her sister Noreen Freeman Baker owned a beauty supply store that specialized in her in-law's hair tonic. She operated it alone after her husband's death in the early 1950s. Another sister, Lil Freeman Barbour, also suffered tragedy. She owned an optical business with her

⁴⁰ Debbie Harwell interview.

husband until his death from food poisoning in 1967. Like Noreen, she ran the business after his death until her own in the 1980s. Irene Freeman Zerjav first owned a record shop with her husband and then, after it closed, she struck out on her own in printing. The Freeman sisters had entrepreneurship in their veins.⁴¹

As historians of the nineteenth century have shown, women have successfully operated retail establishments throughout American history, particularly in the fields of fashion, accessories, and home goods.⁴² With the arrival of the “consumer’s republic,” entrepreneurially minded women could take advantage of additional consumer dollars in even more fields. While clothing and accessories, both design and sale, continued to dominate the lists of women-headed enterprises, Houston’s women branched into other retail endeavors. These businesses directly linked to the home: furniture and antique stores, florist shops, and small home appliances. Since the home was women’s domain, outfitting and decorating the home and filling it with music and art proved a small step for women proprietors who could utilize their roles as experts on domesticity and femininity to sell lamps, bouquets, and the tools to create curtains, pillows, and quilts for the growing number of Houston families.

Moreover, as detailed in Chapter One, Houston had a new class of industrialists who became very wealthy in the postwar oil and oil-product boom years. They, and particularly their wives, needed clothing wardrobes befitting their new social and economic status. Fashion proved particularly lucrative for women in both design and

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Susan Ingalls Lewis, *Unexceptional Women: Female Proprietors in Mid-Nineteenth Century Albany, New York, 1830-1885* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009) and Edith Sparks, *Capital Intentions: Female Proprietors in San Francisco, 1850-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

retail. Design provided women with a creative outlet as well as profits. Moreover, fresh designs created built-in demand. As the 1950s progressed, manufacturers and retailers worried that consumers would shop themselves out; once they filled their wardrobe once, why should they do more than replace worn-out garments? “Basic utility cannot be the foundation of a prosperous apparel industry. We must accelerate obsolescence,” as B. Earl Puckett, CEO of Allied Stores, advised the leaders of fashion design in 1950.⁴³ Fashion design insured that the proprietor of the fashion line could remain in demand by raising and lowering hemlines, changing color emphasis, and altering the cut of skirts, dresses, and blouses each year or season. Women who wished to remain within the parameters of style replaced clothing out of fashion choice and not out of necessity.

Although most historians of fashion document the emergence and dominance of the New York City fashion world within American fashion design history, Houston boasted several designers of its own, who catered to a wide range of tastes and needs, and a myriad of retailers. These designers and saleswomen often took advantage of the local media to advertise. As with real estate, the *Houston Chronicle* demonstrated a paradoxical attitude toward the women designers and retailers they featured. On the one hand, there is no question that the fashion designers and shop owners appear as success stories. On the other hand, the *Chronicle* authors emphasized either the unique circumstances and personality quirks that surrounded the individual woman’s entrance into self-employment or their families and hobbies. In several instances, both aspects feature in the articles on the Houstonian enterprising women. The inner workings of the businesses (including the existence of employees, profits, and general work process)

⁴³Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic*, 293.

disappear under light-hearted anecdotes. The businesses are legitimate, but the articles' tones and location in the "Women's Interest" section of the paper downplay the seriousness with which each woman approached her enterprise.

Jeanne Barnes featured Helen Kelly, a "pioneer" in formal clothing design, in a 1950 *Houston Chronicle* article. As usual for her articles touting women entrepreneurs, Barnes celebrated Kelly's success, charting how Kelly graduated from and taught at the American Academy of Art in Chicago before moving to Houston in 1948. Noting a dearth of formal ware designers and a high demand, Kelly began designing and manufacturing gowns. Most women in Houston, at some point in their life, required a formal gown, usually for their wedding. Barnes notes that Kelly recognized the difference between the "Southern gals' taste for such fluffiness" and her own talent for clean lines and silhouettes but produced gowns designed to compromise the two: quality fabric and beautiful line with a cut that could be worn over petticoats, if desired. Kelly lost her only child during World War II, and Barnes implies that she replaced her son with her work as her "chief interest." She further insinuates that Kelly shifted her maternal instincts to helping younger women, giving them training and experience in fashion and design.⁴⁴ Kelly's work, therefore, was a natural outgrowth of the loss of her child and an acceptable outlet as well as a notable talent and profit-earning businesses.

Less than a week later, the *Chronicle* featured Paulette Gueydon's millinery shop. Gueydon and her husband, Max, moved to Houston from Paris in February 1950. She had worked in Paris as a milliner employing multiple workers for twenty-two years prior

⁴⁴Jeanne Barnes, "Dressing Young Girls Well is Her Ambition," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), March 12, 1950.

to the move to the United States. The workrooms in Paris continued to operate after the Gueydons left, and the hats, more than two hundred, went on sale in Houston in April 1950. Although the article makes Gueydon appear to be a stereotype of an overenthusiastic, overly passionate, French citizen (“Hats are my life!” and multiple other similar exclamations pepper the article), a closer reading shows that Gueydon was quite shrewd when it came to business. She played upon the American fascination with European and other foreign imports, deliberately decorating her new shop in a French style with actual French antiques. In all likelihood, her “expressive, vivacious French” used during her interview also tied into the marketing for the shop: fashionable, chic, compelling, and set apart from the other millinery and accessory shops in Houston.⁴⁵

Six years later, another Parisian took advantage of her nationality to open a dress design and wholesale salon. Claude Helene Neff met her husband, a Kentuckian, at a masquerade party near Paris shortly after World War II. They decided to live in Houston after a 1955 visit. Neff, a graduate of a Parisian design school, owned design shops in Paris, like Gueydon. After subscribing to the *Houston Chronicle* for a year prior to their move, Neff chose the booming Westheimer area for her new shop. In terms of capital, the Neffs had money saved from the design shops, a hotel, a restaurant, and a chain of Laundromats in Paris. The new salon, named “Claude Helene,” also utilized Neff’s connection to a famous Frenchman: General Lafayette. Neff’s full maiden name was Claude Helene Serre de Mongrion de la Lafayette; she was General Lafayette’s great-

⁴⁵ Eleanor Wakefield, “Mme. Gueydon Brings Bits of Paris to Houston,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), April 2, 1950.

great-niece, according to her description in the *Chronicle*.⁴⁶ Neff emphasized both her ancestor and the usage of the *Houston Chronicle* to great success. The newspaper was, in all likelihood, more than happy to publish a story about how their existence helped an American veteran and his wife (a descendant of an American independence hero) return to the United States. In the process, Neff received free advertising. Claiming a unique or interesting element, as Gueydon did with her nationality, and Neff did with her connections, allowed female designers to set themselves apart.

The emphasis of uniqueness and success epitomizes the story of Houston designer Rose Luna. Luna first lost her family, becoming an orphan, and then the ability to walk after a bout of polio shortly after her birth in 1914. Her foster mother encouraged her to sew and create a career to support herself. She began designing and sewing her own clothes, without a pattern, at nine years of age. At age twenty-one, after years of saving money from freelance sewing, art work, and typing, she studied at the Chicago Art Institute and the New York Traphagen School of Fashion, continuing to support herself with fashion. Throughout the late 1930s and 1940s, she worked in Hollywood movie studios, designing and sewing, and owned her own shop in Chicago. She came to Houston in 1950, determined to open a shop specializing in individual designs. “I want to do my best here,” she explained in the *Chronicle*, “to design personality clothes by first studying my subject, her type and interests.” She opened her shop, “Rose of Houston,” in November 1950 and employed a small group of seamstresses. While Luna declared that she had “overcome my handicap,” the *Chronicle* noted that “probably that

⁴⁶ At some point in the sixties, Neff returned to Paris. It is unclear if Claude Helene was a success; nothing more could be found on her or her shop. “Lafayette Relative Who Read of City in Chronicle Will Open Salon,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), October 14, 1956.

handicap will help.”⁴⁷ The *Chronicle* emphasized that Luna’s success in the face of adversity owed much to her inability to walk but, left unsaid, was the sheer uniqueness of a person with such a profound disability formulating an accomplishment. That element of Luna’s life made for both an interesting hook for *Chronicle* readers and a way to get customers curious about Luna’s products. Luna both capitalized on her disability and found an occupation that allowed her to make profits and adjust her environment, hours, and needs in a pre-Americans with Disabilities Act world. Fashion design and production provided a way for someone with a mobility disability that would have prohibited them from work in many other sectors to make a living. While it is unclear if Luna’s story provided inspiration for other Houstonians with disabilities, her business demonstrates the possibilities that entrepreneurship could open for other women.

For many women, success at fashion design proved a combination of hard work and coincidence. Jucy Kolm, a Hungarian immigrant, spent World War II making uniforms for German soldiers in a slave-labor camp. After the war, she traveled to the United States, and, in 1950, decided to move to booming Houston. That summer, she approached Irvin Veedell at his clothing showroom and tailoring shop with a business proposition. Veedell recounted the story to a reporter for the *Houston Press*: “She hasn’t got any money. But she wants space, a machine, and some material. So I take her to the back, gave her a bolt of material, and the next thing I know she is bringing me a ladies’ suit with a man-tailored vest that is the smartest-looking article I’ve seen off of Fifth Avenue.” Described by Veedell as a “genius,” Kolm created her business out of the back

⁴⁷As with Claude Helene Neff, nothing more could be found on Rose Luna’s business or her future in Houston. Jean Baker, “Rose—Though Unable to Walk—Set to Become Top Designer of Exclusive Women’s Apparel” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), October 22, 1950.

of Veedell's store, providing Veedell with rent for the machine and space as well as foot traffic in his shop and, presumably, a cut of the profits. She sold ready-to-wear garments with unique details, colors, and adjustments for the overly warm Houston temperatures.⁴⁸ In less than a year, Kolm outgrew Veedell's back room and set out on her own. A few years later, after her design house became a success, she realized the untapped potential of maternity wear. In 1954, Kolm began designing maternity clothing for everything from regular daywear to galas and parties.⁴⁹ Wearing a Houston original design with unique touches and flares appealed to the women of Houston, and Kolm continued to be a success as an independent fashion designer into the 1960s.⁵⁰

Chronicle writer Jeanne Barnes, in the same year as her article on engineer Sue Goddard and designer Helen Kelly, featured a description of one woman who had, like Kolm, filled a need in the fashion world. Margaret McLendon also recognized a niche market in fashion design and production. In 1949, McLendon, "a restless, youthful brunette," as the *Houston Chronicle* referred to her, sought to combine her interest and talent in sewing with an unusual product that could allow her to corner the market. McLendon decided to go into the burial attire business. She started with two machines in a small shop on Richmond Avenue and attracted attention for the quality and variety of the shrouds. She included "such feminine touches as lace inserts and shirring, as well as beading, embroidery and hand-painting to achieve the effect of a smart-styled gown" that she sold through casket wholesalers. A year later, McLendon purchased a factory with

⁴⁸ Sigman Byrd, "The Liberation of Miss Jucy Kolm," *Houston Press* (Houston, TX), January 10, 1950.

⁴⁹ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 26, 1954.

⁵⁰ *Baytown Sun* (Baytown, TX), June 21, 1971.

twenty-one machines and hired employees to turn out about 250 garments a month. She credited her success to the swirl of emotions surrounding a funeral. “It’s amazing how stingy a man can be about his wife’s clothes when she’s alive,” McLendon remarked, “then turn around and spend more than she ever thought of to bury her in.” As with all of her articles on women entrepreneurs, Barnes did not ignore McLendon’s family life and made sure to include the fact that McLendon had permission from her husband, Joel McLendon for this work. In a tone that reads as fond exasperation, Barnes relates how the husband “just takes it all in his stride,” quoting him as saying “If it wasn’t shrouds, it would be something else.”⁵¹

In addition to design and production, female entrepreneurs embarked on fashion retail endeavors, capitalizing on their expertise in femininity to help women build and expand their wardrobes. In some cases, design and retail worked hand in hand. Blanche Cannon opened a women’s specialty shop in Houston focusing on “fine fashions.” Like Jucy Kolm, Cannon hailed from Hungary, where she graduated from the Royal Academy of Fine Arts. She then moved to New York, graduated from the Traphagen School of Fashion, like Rose Luna, and then moved to Miami Beach, where she opened an apparel shop. Drawn by Houston’s boosterism, Cannon opened her shop in Houston in May 1950, where she specialized in select designers. Additionally, Cannon’s shop allowed for a ready showroom of her own hat designs, which she specifically created to coordinate and complement all of the gowns and suits in the store.⁵² Instead of creating designs and

⁵¹ Barnes never refers to McLendon’s first name; she is “Mrs. Joel McLendon” for the entire article. Jeanne Barnes, “High Fashion Extends Even Unto the Death,” *Houston Chronicle*, (Houston, TX), February 5, 1950.

⁵² “Mrs. Cannon Opens New Apparel Shop,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), May 7, 1950.

then selling them in a small showroom, as many designers did, or selling them to stores, Cannon brought in other designers' products and created her own pieces of millinery art to match the clothing in her shop. This innovative technique insured that Cannon had a wide array of stock in her store from which patrons could choose and allowed her to utilize her designing skills and make a name for herself as an artist in her own right.

For other women, their stores operated only as places for clothing purchase and not as showcases for their own designs. That did not mean that the stores did not bear the stamp of their owner's creativity, ingenuity, and enterprising spirit. Ruby Howard created an aura of haute couture style around her apparel shop on Main Street. Referred to as a "mauve jewel box of a specialty shop" by the *Houston Chronicle*, Howard chose to focus her advertising on the feel of her store; the clothing itself came in secondary. Instead, Howard's promotional material emphasized that her establishment boasted "a contemporary color theme" and "the touch of traditional elegance in antique furniture." A solid two-thirds of Howard's write-up describes the rooms in detail, down to the fitting rooms "done in mauve with dark green faille draperies in match with chair upholstery in each room." In the final two sentences, Howard describes her New York buying trip focused on purchasing her stock of high-fashion clothing. Clearly, the focus for Howard, and presumably the clientele she courted, fixed less on the stock of the store, which promised to be "the cream of top-designer items," and more on the experience of shopping inside her boutique.⁵³ Similarly, when Catherine De Stames opened her corset and lingerie store in the Gulfgate Mall in 1956, her brief advertisement emphasized the

⁵³ "Apparel Shop Opened by Ruby Howard," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), June 4, 1950.

availability of private dressing rooms, air conditioning, and the general enjoyment of the visit.⁵⁴

For enterprising retailers in fashion looking to set themselves apart, the customer's experience in the store mattered almost as much, if not more, than the stock itself. Being inside a "mauve jewel box" weighed greatly in the minds of potential shoppers in Houston, who had many retailers from which to choose. Unique touches could help an establishment stay in business and provided the kind of hook that interested the *Chronicle* authors enough to cover the stores and provide free advertising. If the articles are problematic in not covering the story of the entrepreneur, her business plans, sources of capital, and general operations, through the anecdotes and musings of the various newspaper writers, a picture begins to emerge of how important the experience of shopping was to the upper-class women of Houston in the postwar period. The wives of Houston's oil and gas men, bankers, and other members of the well-off wanted both high-end designer clothing and a personalized customer event.

Isabell Gerhart's clothing store (named after herself) provides the best example of how personal touches and attention to that experience of shopping, rather than only products, could lead to great success. Gerhart, described as "a blue-eyed blonde" with "a 22-inch Scarlett O'Hara waist" by the *Chronicle*, opened her first store in the Avalon Shopping Center in 1946.⁵⁵ Her husband, Norwin, had just finished time as U.S. naval attache to the American ambassador in Chile, and the two returned to Houston, where

⁵⁴ "Window Display at De Stames Corsets and Lingerie," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), October 7, 1956.

⁵⁵ Gerhart boasted that even her eight-year-old daughter could not fit into the gowns that she wore in the 1950s, due to the tiny waistline. Betty Ewing, "Friends, family toast 40 years of Gerhart salons," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), October 19, 1986.

they had grown up and been childhood sweethearts. Norwin supported Isabell's decision to open a small specialty shop, suggesting that she turn her fashion skills into a profitable enterprise, and he worked as a behind-the-scenes business partner. In fact, part of the Gerharts' public image revolved around the idea that Norwin provided the brains of the business, handling all financial decisions, and Isabell did the rest. Isabell Gerhart asserted that, "All I know about finances is my gold credit card." This statement proved far from the truth; Isabell Gerhart may not have handled the books in her business (and this was, in all likelihood, not true and part of the couple's public persona), but she was masterful at courting and keeping customers. The original store became so successful that the Gerharts moved to a larger location in 1950 in the prosperous and growing River Oaks neighborhood.⁵⁶ In 1986, at a gala celebrating forty years in the business, Gerhart recalled, "I had a wildcat by the tail from the very beginning." Her store became even more profitable and highly regarded. She became "Houston's uncontested fashion queen," outfitting the brides of wealthy Houston industrialists and, in the 1980s, country singer Reba McEntire, golfer Nancy Lopez, and, reportedly, Sarah Ferguson, the Duchess of York.⁵⁷

At the River Oaks location, Gerhart proved exceptionally perceptive at catering to customer's desires. Gerhart specialized in high-end clothing. The designer suits and formal gowns retailed for as much as \$1500, or nearly \$15,000 in 2016, adjusting for inflation. The timing of her move and expansion was fortuitous. In 1949, Glenn McCarthy opened the Shamrock Hotel, which became a center of Houston's burgeoning

⁵⁶ Betty Ewing, "Gala to Mark Gerhart Store Opening," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), January 25, 1991.

⁵⁷ Ewing, "Friends, Family Toast 40 years of Gerhart Salons."

social scene. Gerhart recalled that “Houston wasn’t really an evening gown town until the Shamrock opened.” In the weeks before its grand opening, Gerhart made a name for herself ordering designer gowns for the upper-class of Houston to wear to the large event. The women who ordered gowns for the first gala at the Shamrock continued to patronize Isabell Gerhart for future event needs. Gerhart encouraged customers’ appetite for fashion through an aggressive advertising campaign. In addition to the traditional advertisements in newspapers and other media, Gerhart and her husband extensively networked with the people they outfitted at galas, opening events, and philanthropic parties. She acted as a fashion model at these events for her store, arraigning herself in the newest designs. Additionally, Gerhart hired models for “Coffee Break” fashion shows throughout the 1950s and 1960s, timed to take place whenever both the working population and housewives were most likely to be shopping. According to one of the former models, “Ten girls would model three changes while a packed houseful of viewers nibbled on sandwiches and pastries.”⁵⁸ The “Coffee Break” shows brought in both onlookers, who crowded around the plate-glass windows to view the haute-couture, and even more potential customers.

The store itself, outfitted in what came to be Gerhart’s signature pink hue, boasted marble floors, chandeliers, and a “lovely” waterfall shaped staircase that was designed to impress patrons as they entered and also acted as the runway for Gerhart’s fashion models.⁵⁹ It was a “shrine to opulence.” Customers sipped free sherry and champagne while “personal shoppers,” as Gerhart branded her sales associates, brought them upscale

⁵⁸ Betty Ewing, “Isabell Gerhart Ex-Models Help Her Celebrate Business Honor,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), March 27, 1988.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

apparel. When the store closed in 1993 after a disastrous relocation and an economic decline in Houston that drove away the store's base, one customer who had patronized Isabell Gerhart recalled, "Shopping at Isabell's always was a wonderful experience. People there knew you by your first name."⁶⁰ The allure of the Isabell Gerhart experience owed much to its owner who, even as her store's run came to an end, remarked, "Someone around here [the gathering to mourn the loss of the store] was passing around a card that said, 'The party's over.' Well the party's not over for me. I don't know what I'll do yet, but I am going to do something."⁶¹ This last publically recorded remark prior to Gerhart's death in 1996, spoken, according to the reporter, with the same good humor she had exhibited throughout the forty-six year existence of her store, demonstrates the personality that kept Gerhart successful for so long. Like other high-end fashion retailers, Gerhart knew how to entice and cater to her customers, a talent that won her, in 1988, Houston's Business Woman of the Year Award.⁶² The interior of the store, customer service, and the proprietor herself, working as a kind of dual hostess and model, all acted together to articulate a sense of expertise on class, femininity, and fashion. The customers who entered those stores returned the personalized attention with continued patronage and, particularly in Isabell Gerhart's case, long-term success.

Gerhart and her counterparts operated in the postwar years in an advantageous period: Houston had a new and growing class of people in need of high-end fashion, and

⁶⁰ The year 1993 was difficult for Gerhart. She also lost her husband that year after a long illness. "I've lost my husband of 54 years. I lost my sweetheart," she told one reporter. "Now I am losing my business. My world is tumbling in." Greg Hassell, "A Life Dedicated to Fashion—Isabell Gerhart Closing Upscale Clothing Store," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), June 25, 1993.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ewing, "Isabell Gerhart Ex-Models Help Her Celebrate Business Honor."

the field of fashion merchandising proved welcoming to women, who could parlay their supposedly innate femininity and actual skill and business acumen into successful enterprises. General retail, including arts and crafts, furniture, and a multitude of other products, also benefited from Houston's postwar economic surge. Houston's expanding population with, broadly speaking, similarly expanding incomes spent their earnings on a wide array of consumer goods. Like their counterparts across the nation, they spent more on household operations than prior to World War II, an increase of 108 percent in expenditures on appliances and furnishings.⁶³ This clear increase in demand provided opportunity for enterprising women who, like their counterparts in fashion, often combined a creative energy with business acumen to create their proprietorships.

Once a family found a home, they set to work filling it with furnishings. Other families sought to remodel to match new fashions and trends or replace worn-out or hand-me-down pieces. All of these impulses spurred furniture retail. Roughly fifteen women in Houston opened shops between 1946 and 1960 and went into the sale of new furniture, often the kind that mirrored trendy interior designs.⁶⁴ Gertrude Green opened her Rattan Furniture Shop in the late 1940s, reflecting a demand for rattan furniture that had begun in the 1930s. While rattan furniture had existed in America for a long time, the material was almost exclusively used in chairs and tables. In the 1930s and 1940s, manufacturers began producing rattan sofas, couches, desks, beds, bookcases, dressers and more for a population in need of furniture that proved both durable and inexpensive.⁶⁵ Green's shop, founded in 1947, came at the beginning of the end of the

⁶³ May, *Homeward Bound*, 148.

⁶⁴ Data compiled from *The Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977.

explosion in rattan furniture demand across the nation, but the product remained popular, particularly in the hot and humid South. Green advertised in 1950 that “In Houston’s finest homes you find beautiful Rattan furniture.” Her promotional piece featured an entire bedroom suite built from rattan complete with bamboo drapes and Hawaiian patterned fabrics.⁶⁶ The design appealed to Houstonians in search of light and airy furniture for their new homes in the heat of the Gulf’s summers, and the low prices, (\$175 for a rattan bed and mattress) proved enticing to those furnishing many rooms at once. Green’s store continued to advertise heavily throughout the 1950s, as did similar furniture stores, including Rattan Craft Furniture House, owned by Gladys Graham Smith and Grace Dean Hauck.⁶⁷

While Green and others like her sold furniture designed and built elsewhere, in another case, a woman turned her “hobby” for producing creative furniture pieces into a thriving business. Edythe Nicoletti opened a plumbing fixture shop in the 1930s, but during the war, her business slowed due to an inability to properly stock her store. In order to supplement the income from the plumbing supplies, Nicoletti began selling lamps. It had been a diversion during the war for her to collect antique lamps and make new lamp shades. She created lamps from coffee pots, lanterns, glass blocks, and china. Over time it became clear that the lamps were more popular and profitable than plumbing fixtures, and Nicoletti went exclusively into the lamp business in 1946. Her business grew over the next ten years, attracting customers through the unique nature of the lamps

⁶⁵“A Short History of Rattan,” History of Furnishings, June 25, 2015, accessed April 16, 2016, <https://selectfurnishingsme.wordpress.com/2012/06/25/a-short-history-of-rattan/>.

⁶⁶ “Rattan Hawaiian Bed Group,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), January 29, 1950.

⁶⁷ Data compiled from *The Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977.

and Nicoletti's knowledge and charisma. In 1954, she opened a two-story shop on West Alabama.⁶⁸ She owned and operated the business until her death in 1998, and the enterprise passed to her close associate, Janet Cook, who continues to run the store as of 2016.

Interestingly, while the *Houston Chronicle* acknowledges the serious profit-driven motives behind Nicoletti's growth and expansion, her protégé Cook, in an interview in 2011, firmly placed Nicoletti's business in the "hobby" category. She acknowledged the perception of novelty behind Nicoletti's endeavor, stating that "She paved the way, I would say, for a lot of women. Women didn't start their own businesses, it was very hard to go to the bank and get a loan." Then Cook clarifies that the business "was a hobby for her and it has become a hobby for me." Although Cook knew Nicoletti from the moment she began to work in her store in 1969 and would know her motivations and plans very well, this classification does not seem to match the picture that emerges of Nicoletti from her advertisements and other depictions. The term "hobby" downplays the work that went into the store from its opening in 1946 and makes the success appear as incidental to the operation. Nicoletti made conscious decisions to both grow into a massive showroom space and heavily advertise in both the *Houston Chronicle* and a multitude of other media outlets throughout her tenure as owner, which belies the notion that Nicoletti's business started out as and remained a "hobby." In all likelihood, Cook, in her classification of Nicoletti as a hobbyist, was justifying her decision to move the store in 2011 from its 22,000 square foot home on West Alabama to a 2,000 square foot space in Spring, a northern suburb. She explicitly stated that this move was not because of a lack of profits

⁶⁸ "Lamps and Shades are Specialties of this Shop," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 29, 1954.

but because she wanted the shop to be closer to her home, and she had less of an active interest in the business.⁶⁹ By connecting her own plans to the motives of the well-known and respected former owner, she gained legitimacy for her own decisions.

While Green, Nicoletti, and the thirteen other women who went into the furniture business in the postwar period sold new furniture, other women made a career selling antiques. Hattie Mathee and Ruth Williamson Hargrave operated an antique store beginning in 1922, first out of Hargrave's home and later on Main Street. The two women came from well-to-do families and socialized in some of the highest social circles in Houston, and what probably started out of an interest in antique furniture and a whim turned into a successful enterprise. The two began the shop with a buying trip to Europe and utilized furniture Mathee had purchased during a prolonged missionary trip to Panama. Mathee, the primary person behind day-to-day operations, took a three-month course on bookkeeping through Columbia University.⁷⁰ Hargrave and Mathee's store, the Shabby Shoppe, became "the first important antique shop" in Houston, providing furnishings to those in Hargrave and Mathee's social circle, including their neighbor, Edna Henderson Bowles, who was also a businesswoman. She ran her husband's oil business from 1945 to 1965 and heavily patronized the store, encouraging those in her circle and who she encountered through her business to also visit the Shabby Shoppe.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Catherine Dominguez, "Well-known Houston Lamp Store Relocates to Woodlands," *The Woodland Villager* (Woodlands, TX), August 20, 2011.

⁷⁰Lila Gordon, "Authority on Antiques Recalls the Past," *Houston Chronicle*, (Houston, TX), February 19, 1950.

⁷¹"West Eleventh Place," Historic Preservation Manual. City of Houston Planning and Development Department, accessed April 19, 2016. https://www.houstontx.gov/planning/HistoricPres/HistoricPreservationManual/historic_districts/west_eleventh_history.html.

As Mathee fondly recalled, “Our customers were our friends” and not simply because they provided excellent customer service. Mathee and Hargrave turned to their friends and their networks to continue to turn a profit.⁷² The shop remained in demand throughout the 1950s and only closed upon the ill health of the owners in the 1960s. The final liquidation of Shabby Shoppe’s assets came in 1967, a few weeks prior to Mathee’s death.

Ethel Brosius placed her antique shop more firmly in the “hobby” category. Brosius made a name for herself in the 1920s and 1930s as a real estate sales and management expert, working in River Oaks first as a secretary than rising to manage real estate transactions. During World War II, she managed 450 housing units for the military and worked closely with Oveta Culp Hobby, who later became Dwight Eisenhower’s Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. Shortly after the war, she opened an antique shop and lived in an apartment above it. A diabetes diagnosis (which Brosius credited Hobby with recognizing) forced her to cut back on her hectic business schedule. She devoted more time to her store. In 1954, she stated, “Besides running my antique shop, I’ve started a new hobby. I refinish furniture.”⁷³ Unlike Mathee and Hargrave, who probably started their business as a pastime and turned it into a true profit-maker, Brosius continued to see her antique store as a “hobby” nearly ten years after its opening. In fact, there are no documents of Brosius’ store; the only evidence of Brosius’ business activities are her work in River Oaks and for the government during World War II.

⁷²*Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), February 19, 1950.

⁷³ Elmer Bertelsen, “Woman Tells How She Beat Health Menace,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), November 7, 1954.

Maria McPhail's enterprise, the Vogue Sleep Shop, mirrored the trajectory of Mathee and Hargrave. A Russian immigrant, McPhail opened her store in 1938 as a shop specializing in interior design, custom-built furniture, and custom-made draperies and decorations with the support of her husband, who was a medical doctor. While the business began as a creative outlet for McPhail, it quickly grew to become profitable, enough so that, in 1940, she hired Mary Leigh, an interior decorator for residential services. In 1950, McPhail expanded her enterprise to include commercial decorating services for schools, hotels, apartment projects and office buildings and took on another interior designer, Alec Wunsch, an industrial designer from Chicago, to handle commercial accounts. What began as an effort to find creative expression became a thriving business, which catered to the needs of both Houston's homes and businesses.⁷⁴

In both the cases of the Vogue Sleep Shop and the Shabby Shoppe, women began working for the stereotypical reason of making "pin money" or as a hobby. Once they realized that they were efficient businesswomen who could run profitable businesses, though, the trajectory of their work makes a clear transition. In both cases, the shops grew, they advertised heavily, and they hired employees. A dalliance transformed into a serious enterprise, defying the expectations of postwar gender roles for women of their class.

Women did not have to leave their home and go into the workplace, though, to exercise their artistic and innovative talents. For women who wanted to put their own style and creativity to work in their homes, arts and crafts businesses proliferated to cater to their demand. Between 1946 and 1960, women in Houston opened more than thirty

⁷⁴*Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), April 9, 1950; U.S. Census Bureau. *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Population* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1943).

businesses for hobbies and crafts.⁷⁵ In several cases, these women were socialites in search of something productive to do. The Hobby Horse, the business of Evelyn M. Norton and Mary Jane Carvel, came out of that impulse in 1948. Carvel was a “Houston socialite” who lost her husband during World War II. After his death, she never remarried and never had children. Instead, she channeled her energies into the thriving social scene of Houston, making regular appearances at the Shamrock Hotel, which was the number one place to see and be seen in the city, and into her multiple businesses ventures. Her descendants described her as “a very strong, business savvy woman” who was “incredibly smart and bright.” With her brother, Frederick Welling, she built, owned, and operated an apartment complex. Independently, she owned and operated several other commercial buildings and rental properties. She also worked as an interior decorator and, with her friend Norton, opened the hobby store in 1948.⁷⁶ The store opened on Westheimer and sold a wide range of products for hobbyists and for arts and crafts.

Women specifically interested in knitting and needlework could visit Fan Epstein’s The Knit Shop. Epstein opened her knitting shop at 910 Westheimer Road in 1933, a few years after she, her husband, and their son, Robert, moved to Texas from the mid-west. Although the 1940 census records Epstein as an unpaid assistant in the shop and her husband, Percy, as the owner, all of the Knit Shop’s advertisements and the

⁷⁵ Data compiled from *The Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977; *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Population*.

⁷⁶ Despite repeated searches, nothing could be found on Evelyn M. Norton other than the business license the two filed for the business. There is also no closing date for the Hobby Horse. “In Memory of Mary Jane Carvel,” Earthman Hunters Creek Funeral Home, accessed April 20, 2016, <http://obits.dignitymemorial.com/dignity-memorial/obituary.aspx?n=Mary-Carvel&lc=7469&pid=145537037&mid=4384825#>.

listing in the city directory firmly places her as the sole owner and operator of the store, at least by 1945.⁷⁷ In reality, according to Epstein's son, the business came from a moment of desperation during the Depression and a partnership between Fan and her husband. The family struggled greatly during the Depression; Fan Epstein was a talented knitter and began teaching her neighbors handicrafts for a small fee in her home. Her husband noticed the potential for profits and encouraged his wife to expand her repertoire and open a shop. He helped with the initial start-up and managed some of the books while Fan Epstein ran the entire front of the store and taught classes. Eventually the shop expanded to the point that she could hire multiple employees, so that she could concentrate on her love: teaching women how to knit, weave, and sew.⁷⁸

The shop became a success for women wanting to create rugs, clothing, pillows, and decorations for their homes and families. Epstein advertised heavily in the *Houston Chronicle*, changing her advertisements with each week to showcase specials or to highlight the different products she carried seasonally, and, in 1965, she incorporated her company as The Knit Shop-Fan G Epstein Inc.⁷⁹ In 1943, Epstein met Carolyn Liedeker, a descendant of the Westheimer family, prominent in Houston's Jewish community, and a fellow avid knitter. She arranged a blind date between her son and Liedeker when he came home on leave from the military. Soon after, Liedeker became Epstein's daughter-in-law and protégé, serving as president of the company after her retirement.⁸⁰ Similarly,

⁷⁷ *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940: Population.*

⁷⁸ Robert Epstein, telephone interview by Meredith May, April 28, 2016.

⁷⁹ "The Knit Shop-Fan G Epstein INC," Bizapedia, accessed on April 23, 2016, <http://www.bizapedia.com/tx/THE-KNIT-SHOPFAN-G-EPSTEIN-INC.html>.

⁸⁰"Carolyn Epstein," Obituaries, *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 11, 2011.

Lucile Burrow owned a nearby hobby shop during the 1950s that, while providing some competition for The Knit Shop, never cut into profits. The market for hobbies and handicrafts was far from saturated. The Burrow Knit Shoppe, which grew from a small household firm to a large shop that offered materials for knitting, crochet, and other needlework as well as lessons. Like Epstein, Burrow proved profitable enough to hire employees to work as salespeople and as instructors.⁸¹ Arts and crafts provided housewives with creative outlets for their energies and, for women like Epstein and Burrow, an ability to support themselves and others through employment.

In addition to furniture and décor, Houstonians filled their homes with music. Houston boasted eighteen music and record shops in 1959.⁸² Frank and Irene Freeman Zerjav opened a music store, the Jive Hive, in Houston in 1945 after Frank left the military. Two of Irene's sisters already owned businesses in Houston—Baker's Beauty Supply and Barbour's Opticians—and another of her sisters, Dottie Marlin, would go on to real estate fame. Frank had experience in purchasing, Irene had spent time working in sales and advertising, and the two loved music, so their collaboration came together at 2053 West Alabama between a liquor store and a burger shop.⁸³ The couple only had \$150 to begin operations, so they made ends meet the first year by selling Christmas trees in the parking lot. Frank repaired radios in the back while Irene handled sales, ordering, and accounting.⁸⁴ Irene Zerjav specialized in personal customer service, contacting customers when something would come in that she thought they would like and tracking

⁸¹“Knitting Shop Moves to New Building,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), October 13, 1956.

⁸² *Polk's Greater Houston City Directory, 1959* (Dallas: R. L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1959)

⁸³ Debbie Harwell, “Rockin’ and Boppin’,” *Houston History Magazine* 11 (2013), 7

⁸⁴ Interview with Debbie Harwell.

down music that a customer wanted. The Zerjavs were talented at anticipating what would become hits: Irene took great pride in being one of the first in Houston to sell Elvis Presley's records prior to the beginning of his massive success.⁸⁵

In 1952, the Zerjavs had a daughter, Debbie. At the same time, Frank rejoined the Air Force for the Korean War, so Irene ran the store alone. The family lived in an apartment close to the store, and Irene could carry Debbie to and from the store, where she could keep an eye on her in her playpen.⁸⁶ As the store continued to be a success, the Zerjavs considered expanding. In 1957, they moved to 1010 McKinney, in a large space in the bustling downtown center. As their daughter recalls, "My parents enjoyed two very successful years before progress took their building." In 1959, First City National Bank bought and destroyed the entire block to make way for a high-rise.⁸⁷ Instead of reopening elsewhere, the Zerjavs decided to leave the music business completely. The two recognized that the era of the independent record store was beginning to wane as department stores, like Houston's Foley's, began to sell records at a lower price. Frank Zerjav sought stability and a steady paycheck working as a purchaser with an engineering company, spending the rest of his working career buying supplies for refineries.

Irene Zerjav, though, had thoroughly enjoyed being her own boss. In 1960, she opened Copy Cat Printing. She had a little bit of experience with design from her time working in sales for a department store in Fort Worth prior to her marriage and, with a little bit of money, she bought a printing press and rented space in the *Houston Chronicle*

⁸⁵ Harwell, "Rockin' and Boppin'," 9.

⁸⁶ Interview with Debbie Harwell.

⁸⁷ Harwell, "Rockin' and Boppin'," 11.

building. Zerjav provided three-color jobs for booklets, flyers, business cards, and posters. The nature of the job allowed her to continue to take care of her daughter and work at her firm. When NASA arrived in Houston, Zerjav provided many of the printing services for the agency and moved her offices closer to theirs for the sake of convenience. She also provided services for the State Bar of Texas, printing how-to books on probate law. The shop successfully ran from 1960 to 1985.⁸⁸

Retail could also provide women with the opportunity to combine profit and community activism. The story of Maria Reyna and her shop, Reyna's Florist, follows this pattern. She and her husband, Jose, moved to Houston in the late 1920s. The couple worked multiple jobs toward their twin entrepreneurial goals: a mechanic's shop for him and a flower shop for her. Jose worked as a mechanic in multiple garages before saving enough to start his own business, and Maria sold clothes door to door during the Great Depression and operated a fruit stand in the early 1940s. She opened Reyna's Florist in 1947. Over thirty years, she acquired the nickname "la reina de las flores," "queen of the flowers." She provided the arrangements for thousands of events, weddings and funerals, sometimes at her own expense for families and organizations with limited money.⁸⁹ Reyna also served as a leader in Houston's Mexican American civic community. She was a founding member of the Ladies League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and was the first secretary in 1935. She was also a member of the Magnolia Park YWCA, the Hispanic Business and Professional Women's Club, the March of

⁸⁸ Debbie Harwell interview.

⁸⁹ *Handbook of Texas Online*, María-Cristina García, "Reyna, Maria Torres," accessed March 26, 2017, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fre59>.

Dimes, the Houston Junior Forum, and the organizer of many community organizations.⁹⁰ Due to the success of her business, Reyna could give back to the community as a volunteer.

Similarly, Angelina Morales and her husband Felix used their business, Houston's first Mexican American-owned radio station, KLVL, to simultaneously provide a much-needed service to their community and to fund their community activism. The Morales family had been successful entrepreneurs since the 1930s, owning a successful funeral home in the Second Ward catering to Mexican Americans.⁹¹ Angelina (Angie) Morales was born in San Antonio in 1907. She married Felix, who worked for his brother Andrew's funeral home, in 1928. The couple moved to Houston in 1931 and opened the first Hispanic-owned mortuary service in the city and, later, a cemetery. The other funeral homes in Houston refused to serve Mexican Americans and the city would not bury Mexican Americans in cemeteries within the city limits, forcing Mexican Americans to set up voluntary associations for burial services and to bury their dead elsewhere, so the Second Ward welcomed the couple.⁹² To help make ends meet during the Great Depression, Angie became a notary public in 1936 in addition to being the only Mexican female embalmer licensed by the State of Texas.⁹³ She worked as a translator in Houston's court system and helped with immigration cases and various judges and

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Thomas H. Kreneck, *Del Pueblo: A History of Houston's Hispanic Community* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 69.

⁹² Chrystel Pit, "Deal with Us: The Business of Mexican Culture in Post-World War II Houston" (PhD diss., The University of Arizona, 2011), 125-27.

⁹³ Ibid., 129.

officials. Angie charged a negligible fee for her services with the condition that “when you die, don’t you forget, you come over to me because I am an undertaker. . . . We started getting so much business that way, through our community involvement.”⁹⁴

In many cases, the Moraleses did not charge or undercharged for their mortuary services, considering the financial straits of their clients. This was part of their broader community outreach within and beyond the Second Ward. Felix was involved with many civic clubs and organizations, but none of them offered membership to women at the time, so Angie created women’s branches of the Woodmen of the World, the Sociedad Mutualista Obrera Mexicana, and acted as the first president of Houston’s Ladies’ LULAC Council in 1935. Angie Morales used her position in the community as an undertaker and notary public to provide both services for Mexican Americans and to “create the proper political climate for future political force for the community,” as she later stated.⁹⁵

Throughout their time as undertakers, Felix Morales nurtured a desire to begin a radio station, stemming back to an early love of Mexican music and radio. Although Angie was ambivalent at best, Felix convinced her to move forward with a radio station in 1946 by emphasizing that a Spanish-language radio station would improve the public image of Mexican Americans in Houston.⁹⁶ Thus began a nearly four-year process, almost thwarted by a convoluted system of licensing, leasing, and finding an available frequency. At last, in May 1950 on Angie’s birthday, KLVL, La Voz Latina, went on the

⁹⁴ Ibid., 129.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 133.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 135.

air for the first time. They operated out of Pasadena, a community southeast of Houston that had no radio station of its own, and in offices in the Second Ward.⁹⁷ The Morales ran the station for the first few months of the station's life without an experienced manager or program director. The couple divided their time between the funeral home and the station; Angie usually stayed more at the funeral home, and Felix stayed mostly at the station, but they swapped between the two as need arose, forming a successful partnership despite a struggle for money during the 1950s as the station failed to generate a profit.⁹⁸

Over time, the station began to make more money, and, after a period of financial instability, the station began to yield a profit in the early 1960s. As historian Chrystal Pit has noted, "KLVV gradually established its reputation as a caregiver to the Mexican community and a medium that fostered greater contact between Anglos and people of Mexican origin . . . the station's role in fostering community-building and better relations between Anglos and Mexican-origin people in the city therefore cannot be understated."⁹⁹ The station produced programming that went beyond entertainment; it was solidly community oriented. Angie ran a program called "Que Dios se lo pague" ("May God reward you" that urged listeners to help specific cases of poverty or need. In 1954, the station collected money, food, and clothing to help victims of flooding in the Rio Grande Valley. The station earned the title "la madre de los Mexicanos." Felix died in 1988, leaving the station solely to Angie, who continued to run it until her own death and the

⁹⁷ Ibid., 142-143.

⁹⁸ Angelina Morales Oral History, Houston Public Library Digital Archives, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, accessed January 2, 2017, http://digital.houstonlibrary.net/oral-history/felix-morales_OH246-2.php.

⁹⁹ Pit, "Deal with Us," 162.

sale of the station in 1997.¹⁰⁰ Following Felix's death, Angie worked to cultivate his legacy, founding the Morales Memorial Foundation in her husband's memory in 1993 and, as is the case in the historical memory of many businesses co-owned by a husband-and-wife team, focusing the narrative of the Morales family's rise on her husband's ambitions and drive.¹⁰¹ In reality, the two both provided remarkable service to Houston's Mexican American community and served as important civic leaders, as reflected by their many awards and the dedication of buildings at Houston Community College in both of their names.¹⁰²

Conclusion

The experiences of the Freeman sisters—Irene, Noreen, Lil, and Dottie—demonstrate the potential Houston had for entrepreneurially minded women and the way in which owning a business in real estate or retail could benefit a woman at multiple life stages. Noreen and Lil began their enterprising life in partnership with their husbands. Through unfortunate circumstances, they then had to continue on without those partners. The businesses provided an income for them to continue to raise and support their children as they navigated their new status as widows. Irene, on the other hand, spent nearly fifteen years working with her husband at their record store and then used that experience to forge ahead on her own in the printing industry. For Dottie, entrepreneurship led to a successful and rewarding career in both retail and real estate.

¹⁰⁰ *Handbook of Texas Online*, María-Cristina García, "Morales, Felix Hessbrook," accessed March 26, 2017, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fmobk>.

¹⁰¹ "About Us," The Morales Memorial Foundation, accessed March 18, 2016, <http://www.moralesfoundation.com/node/35>.

¹⁰² "Campus Locations," Houston Community College, accessed March 18, 2016, <http://southeast.hccs.edu/about-us/campus-locations/>.

She still lives, as of 2016, in one of the high-rise condos she helped sell in Greenway Plaza.

The Freeman sisters embody all of the possibilities for women to make their own way into retail and real estate. While there were certainly women who were merely dabbling or viewed their business or shop as a hobby, other women, like Fan Epstein, Isabel Gerhart, and Irene Zerjav, entered into and sustained careers in self-employment because they were motivated, hard working, and talented at business. While they were a minority in the female population in Houston, their experiences highlight the barriers and opportunities available to women in the Bayou City in the postwar period. Women were at a disadvantage, in comparison to men, in terms of their access to capital and professional organizations, aside from the Women's Council of Realtors. While several women enjoyed independent wealth from their family ties, most female proprietors relied upon family members, particularly husbands, and friends for help starting up and sustaining their business.

What all successful female entrepreneurs had in common was their immense capacity for hard work. As Irene Freeman Zerjav's daughter, Debbie Harwell, recalls: "All the sisters had that drive. They never questioned that they could do something. They just did it . . . They were feminists before they knew they were feminists, and they were feminists even when they didn't want to claim the word." While the Freeman sisters, Fan Epstein, and others might not have wanted to count themselves as "feminists," their drive to support their families and their belief that women could do and be anything that they wanted to registered with their children.¹⁰³ Judging from Joanne Barnes' articles and the

¹⁰³ Interview with Debbie Harwell; interview with Robert Epstein.

coverage of women's forays into retail and real estate, Houston as a whole acknowledged these exceptional successes, albeit in a backhanded and objectifying manner. Like the realtor Olive Shipp, they were each individually an example of "an early liberated woman of the 50s" within the existing parameters of Houston's culture.

CHAPTER FIVE: FIGHTING AGAINST THE “IMPOVERISHMENT OF IMAGINATION”: ART, EDUCATION, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Born in 1927, Patsy Swayze grew up in Houston. A car struck her as a child, leaving her seriously injured. Her mother enrolled her in dance classes to rebuild her strength, and Swayze quickly developed a love for multiple forms of dance.¹ She trained under Marcella Donovan Perry, who operated a dance studio above a drugstore in Houston Heights.² After studying dance in several cities, Swayze returned to Houston in 1954 to open her own dance studio, Patsy Swayze School of Dancing, for students ages four and up at 910 Wakefield Drive. According to her advertisement, “The large, modern and air controlled studio specializes in ballet, tap dancing and acrobatics. Tumbling, weight lifting, men and women’s exercises and adagio and ballroom dancing are also included.”³ She also founded the Houston Jazz Ballet Company and acted as the director, serving Houston’s dance community through her studio and the ballet company until 1980.

In addition to her work as a dance instructor, Swayze became an acclaimed choreographer following the success of the first movie she worked on, *Urban Cowboy*, in 1980. In *Urban Cowboy*, set and shot in Houston, Swayze worked with John Travolta on country dances, like the two-step, with which he had limited familiarity. Following that success, she moved her family to southern California, where she worked as a choreographer, most famously on *Hope Floats*, and opened another dance studio. She

¹ Avi Rutschman, “Dirty Dancing and So Much More Taught at Swayze Dance Studio,” *Simi Valley Acorn* (Simi Valley, CA), January 7, 2007.

² Anne Sloan, *Houston Heights* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 96.

³ “Swayze to Open Dance School on 13th,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 29, 1954.

operated the California dance studio until 2007. She died from a stroke in 2013.⁴ The public best remembers Patsy Swayze as the mother of Patrick Swayze, who entered into national consciousness in 1987 in the hit movie *Dirty Dancing*. Patrick Swayze, born in 1952 as one of five children, grew up in his mother's studio where she taught him and his siblings how to dance and encouraged them to participate in musical theater. All five children became dancers and/or actors. After he obtained stardom, Patrick credited his mother with encouraging him and being a role model.⁵

While Patsy Swayze's career trajectory and the fame of her son are unusual, her story in the 1950s, a mother seeking a business option that would allow her to combine childcare and work, is not. In the same issue of the *Houston Chronicle* that featured her advertisement, twelve other woman-owned dance studios announced their opening or re-opening for the school year.⁶ As discussed in previous chapters, small-business ownership allowed women to extend their home life into their work life in a way they could not in other jobs. For women trained in music or dance, operating a studio allowed them to make a career and balance their home life in a way that conformed with post-war gender expectations. In a dance or music studio, mothers could keep an eye on their children or other domestic obligations while teaching or supervising other teachers.

Two additional factors created a demand for more access to art education in the middle of the twentieth century. The growth of the middle class in the post-war period allowed families to afford music and dance lessons, something limited to fewer people in

⁴Devin Kelly, "Patsy Swayze, Mother of Patrick Swayze, Dies at 86," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), September 18, 2013.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Most schools shut down for the summer and reopened in September. *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 29, 1954.

the pre-war years. Obtaining extracurricular lessons in the arts for children, a hallmark of a middle-class lifestyle, came within the grasp of average white middle-class families. Furthermore, experts on children strongly encouraged parents to develop their children's innate creativity and imagination. While many historians have examined the role of conformity in the mid-century, this culture emphasized parents raising "creative children," the opposite of Soviet drones, who would grow up to use their creativity and ingenuity in the Cold War. This focus created a demand for art, music, and dance lessons.⁷ Women stepped in to fill that need across the country.

While the post-war economy allowed many families to afford these new "needs" on one parent's salary, many other families found that in order to raise children in the manner delineated by new child psychologists and experts, they needed more income. After World War II, more mothers worked outside of the home than in the prewar years. While many women, including Patsy Swayze, used maids to take care of their children while they worked, other women turned to daycare services. This trend led to a demand for nurseries and daycare services that entrepreneurially minded women fulfilled in their homes and in separate structures specifically designed for childcare. In the child-centered world of the post-war period, parents expected daycare facilities to be more than simple child-watching. Prior to World War II, services for children divided into day nurseries, which were purely custodial in nature, and nursery schools, which provided early education for pre-school aged children. Day nurseries, a product of the Progressive era, held a stigma, even during the war, of being a place of last resort for working-class and

⁷ For an in-depth study of the link between the Cold War mentality, creative children, and American material culture, see Amy F. Ogata, *Designing the Creative Child: Playthings and Places in Midcentury America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

poverty-stricken families. By contrast, nursery schools served the middle- and upper-class parents who wanted their children to have access to services that developed cognitive functioning and social aptitude. In the post-war era, day nurseries and nursery schools began to merge into a system resembling modern daycare.⁸ The most in-demand day care owners had to combine the latest in pedagogical and developmental research into their services. Like art educators, nursery school and day care operators faced the demands of raising and training future Cold Warriors.

Raising a Creative Child Instead of an “Efficiency Slave”

Traditional narratives of Cold War America depict a world of conformity and suburban sameness. A limitation of political expression and thought, exemplified by the televised trials started by Joseph McCarthy, gives the period an ominous historical memory. Authors and artists of the time, like Arthur Miller, explored the darker side of conformity, and popular depictions of postwar-America in the twenty-first century, particularly in Hollywood, perpetuate the idea of Cold War homogeneity. In terms of childhood, many historical works focus on the economic, social, and cultural impact of the largest extended baby boom in U.S. history, during which, from 1954 to 1964, 4 million children were born every year. Indeed, in 1950, George Hecht, publisher of *Parents’ Magazine*, designated the 1950s as the “Children’s Decade” in an editorial on how “the U.S. is richer in children than ever before.”⁹ Child-rearing in the postwar years

⁸ For more on the history of day care, see Elizabeth Rose, *A Mother’s Job: The History of Day Care, 1890-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

⁹ Nicholas Sammons, *Babes in Tomorrowland: Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 250.

was an issue that touched many aspects of American life. Historians have done excellent work exploring the link between the baby boom and consumption and mass media.¹⁰

Scholars are beginning to examine, however, the role of creativity and imagination in postwar childhood.¹¹ Art historian Amy F. Ogata's work on material culture and creativity in midcentury America argues that "creativity was mythologized and commodified, and that it acquired a primary place in the discourse of postwar exceptionalism."¹² As the Cold War intensified, Americans held their children in contrast to the image of Soviet children. In American depictions of Soviet life, the state produced children in much the same way machines produce products. Soviet children, according to this interpretation, were mindless drones who had been programmed by the Communist state without free will or free thought. A 1955 study by Else Frenkel-Brunswick, an American psychologist of Polish-Austrian descent, warned that "the impoverishment of imagination seems to be analogous to that apparent under totalitarian social and political regimes."¹³ According to Frenkel-Brunswick, the state starved Soviet children, like Nazi Germany's children, of creativity and artistic outlets. The art that children produced in the Soviet Union existed as a form of propaganda. American children, by contrast, were "natural" free-thinking and free-acting individuals.¹⁴ The concept of the ideal American

¹⁰ In particular, Landon Y. Jones, *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1980) and Sammons, *Babes in Tomorrowland* provide excellent examinations of the cultural formation of the baby boom generation.

¹¹ Almost all of the work that has been done on creativity and childhood has focused on middle-class, white children, mostly because they were the primary focus of postwar experts and scholars.

¹² Ogata, *Designing the Creative Child*, x.

¹³ Else Frenkel-Brunswick, "Differential Patterns of Social Outlook and Personality in Family and Children," in Margaret Mead and Martha Wolfenstein, eds., *Childhood in Contemporary Cultures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 383.

¹⁴ Sammons, *Babes in Tomorrowland*, 250.

boy, which John H. Lienhard, professor of mechanical engineering and history at the University of Houston, has dubbed the “savage boy inventor” included traits of wildness, authenticity, curiosity, and virility.¹⁵ These boys, with their bright imaginations, would definitively demonstrate the success of American democratic capitalism and the failure of Soviet communism. Likewise, their female counterparts, who appeared far less in both scholarly analysis and popular representations, would use their roles as wives and mothers to raise and support creative and imaginative children.¹⁶ These white middle-class children would grow to be bulwarks against totalitarianism by being the complete opposite of Soviet homogeneity.

Anthropologist Margaret Mead became one of the greatest spokespersons for the way culture and childcare could lead to totalitarianism. A child granted democracy and freedom would grow, according to Mead, into an adult who could resist psychological persuasion, mindless obedience, and state control.¹⁷ Mead co-authored a paper with a Soviet expatriate that described Soviet childrearing. The Soviet family followed a set plan that placed the needs of individuals and families behind those of the state. The parent produced compliant citizens that the state could use. Thus, the parent shouldered responsibility for obtaining obedience, enforcing certain moral and social ethics, and

¹⁵ John H. Lienhard, *Inventing Modern: Growing Up with X-Rays, Skyscrapers, and Tailfins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 190-203.

¹⁶ While excellent work has been done on white middle-class boys during the postwar years, more attention should be paid in the future to what creativity meant for raising both white middle-class girls and minorities.

¹⁷ Margaret Mead, *Soviet Attitudes toward Authority: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Problems of Soviet Character* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1951).

producing, in a mechanized manner, the ideal Soviet citizen.¹⁸ American parents, according to Mead, should tamp down the desire for obedience from children and act as mediators between culture and children. Children needed to develop in their own ways.

Alongside Mead, other scholars and experts turned their attention to the proper raising of children. Erik Erikson, an associate of Mead, applied Freudian psychoanalysis to childcare. Erikson's work zeroed in on the scientific childcare of the past, which he argued only served to "adjust the human organism from the very start to clocklike punctuality in order to make it a standard appendix of the industrial world."¹⁹ Erikson further argued that "virile individuality" had been the "outstanding characteristic of the American" and that scientific management destroyed that trait in children.

Standardization and mass culture was the enemy; parents should avoid at all costs turning their child into a "consumer idiot" or an "efficiency slave."²⁰ In particular, Erikson devoted the majority of his work on the role of mothers in raising creative children who rejected conformity. Erikson asserted that American motherhood focused too much on repression and oppression as well as encouraging children to "fit in" and "go along" with cultural norms that might or might not be harmful.²¹ He concluded, "Psychiatric enlightenment has begun to debunk the superstition that to manage a machine you must

¹⁸ Margaret Mead and Elena Calas, "Child-Training Ideals in a Postrevolutionary Context: Society Russia," in Margaret Mead and Martha Wolfenstein, eds., *Childhood in Contemporary Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 186.

¹⁹ Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1950), 280.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 281-82.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 252. Erikson's work fits with Freudian psychology as he delves into the psychosexual Oedipus and Electra complexes in children. In particular, he argues that the root of "momism" can be found in both the Puritan repressive sexuality of the colonial period and the frontier experience, where fathers left the homes for long periods of times, forging unnatural relationships between mothers and sons. For the work credited with most thoroughly articulating "momism," see Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1942).

become a machine and that to raise masters of the machine you must mechanize the impulses of childhood.”²² Children could not grow in whatever manner the individual child desired, but natural childcare practice would provide a guide for raising healthy individualistic children.

The theories of Erikson and Mead, among others, provided the basis for a sea change in advice on childcare practice. The theories on their own, however, did not provide a step-by-step practice and needed a proper translator for suburban middle-class parents. Child-care advice, exemplified by Dr. Benjamin Spock, a close friend of Margaret Mead, viewed children as untamed, but not too wild, creatures whom parents should encourage to explore and create on their own. Spock, whose first book sold nearly a million copies every year in the 1950s, was extremely well known, but he was just one of several pediatricians and child psychologists influencing childcare. Spock’s genius lay in his ability to translate the sociological and psychological theories of the time, by experts like Erik Erikson and Mead, into easy-to-follow advice for parents anxious and fearful about damaging their child and stunting his or her development. His writing was easy to read and both calming and encouraging, and he urged parents to trust in themselves as much as they trusted experts. Spock’s popularity reached into popular media; references to him appeared in shows like *I Love Lucy* and almost all magazines and newspapers.

Spock referred to his approach as “child-centered,” which allowed children to develop at their own natural pace, paralleling the theories of Mead and Erikson. The 1950s parent was, according to Spock, to take a hands-off approach, observe behavior,

²² Ibid., 282-83.

and not direct it. While his massive tome covered everything from feeding to toilet training in a manner similar to childcare guides of the past, marking norms in development along the way, Spock encouraged as much natural development as possible. He encouraged parents to push aside the scientific, regimented childrearing methods of the past, which produced an excessive degree of conformity within children. Children would learn without boundaries or established norms. Without an oppressive authority figure (the parent) dictating what he/she could or could not do, children would be more likely to grow up to refuse to bow to other oppressive authority figures (the state).²³

The question became how to properly raise a creative child who could act as a resistant force against totalitarianism and fascism. In addition to encouraging parents to grant children more personal freedom and modify their discipline, experts urged mothers and fathers to provide their children with outlets and lessons to enhance and encourage their cognitive and social development.²⁴ Artwork, viewed by experts as a broad term encompassing everything from songs children made up to spontaneous dances and crayon pictures, offered a glimpse into a child's emerging psyche. Parents were not to expect their children to become artists, dancers, or musicians, but through art, dance, and music, children could expand their imaginations, harness their creativity, and become proper Cold Warriors.

As the postwar period continued, children shifted from being providers of authentic insight to consuming citizens. They and their parents had greater consumptive power than in prior periods. During the fifteen years after the end of World War II, the

²³ Benjamin Spock, *Baby and Child Care*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pocket Books, 1957).

²⁴ Ogata, *Designing the Creative Child*, 5.

gross national product increased more than two and a half times. Americans' average disposable income nearly doubled. Combined with a child-centered society, the spike in income for many Americans led to an unprecedented boom in spending on items and services for children. Throughout the 1950s, each year's toy sales surpassed those of the year before. By the late 1950s, American parents were spending \$1.25 billion per year on toys and other items for play, fifteen times what parents spent on children in 1940.²⁵ Most of these new toys for children were geared toward learning and expanding children's creativity through play.

Although statistics are difficult to find, the number of articles exhorting parents to enroll their children in music or other art lessons indicates a marked increase in the number of children and in demand of arts education. Education in art, music, and dance was a relatively elite practice before World War II, but it became an ordinary expectation of modern childhood in the postwar years. As one middle-class teenager told a reporter for the *New York Times* in 1956, she started taking piano lessons six years previously, "because I lived in the kind of society where children just did."²⁶ Music or dance lessons of some kind became a typical part of the American middle-class lifestyle.

It should be noted that all the representations of the ideal postwar American child, reveling in his or her imagination, depicted a white child. African Americans and ethnic minorities, while involved in dance and music, did not participate in an equal percentage in either enrollment in music and dance classes or in the opening of studios. The South's

²⁵ Elliott West, *Growing Up in Twentieth-Century America: A History and Reference Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996), 197.

²⁶ Dorothy Barclay, "Music and the Well-Tempered Family," *New York Times* (New York, NY), May 8, 1955.

music and dance education remained segregated throughout most of the postwar era; there was neither opportunity nor as great of a demand for those services. Piano and dance teachers existed within the African American and Mexican American communities, but not on the same scale as their white counterparts, largely due to the limited opportunity and restrictions in training prior to, during, and after World War II. For the most part, racial and ethnic minorities turned their entrepreneurial efforts elsewhere.²⁷

As the expectation that children should develop their creativity and imagination through art continued through the postwar period, the demand for teachers in music and dance grew. Women, who had historically gravitated to music and dance education, began to capitalize on the postwar economy and changes in childcare. Across the nation, they began to open studios, both inside their homes and in stand-alone shops, to cater to the growing number of middle-class children. The postwar economy and shifting methods of childrearing created a perfect environment for entrepreneurially minded experts in music and dance to build a business and earn a living.

Music Studios and Music Education: Providing “Spiritual Food”

Edith Gribbin was, by her own admission, a rebellious child. Born in 1914 to well-established, middle-class Houstonians, she pushed against the rules established for her life. Her father, a lawyer and musician, was instrumental in beginning the Houston symphony and her mother, Pauline V. Gribbin, taught piano part-time out of the family’s front parlor, but Edith refused to participate in her mother’s formal instruction. She resented her mother’s students. “I was a mess,” she recalled. “But eventually she got me

²⁷ Ogata, *Designing the Creative Child*.

right.”²⁸ She became an accomplished pianist under her mother’s tutelage, but, in 1929 at age fifteen, she secretly married J. B. Oliveros III, a member of the Coast Guard. Edith and Oliveros had two children before divorcing in 1944. With two children to support, Edith began playing as an accompanist for local dance studios. In 1951, she opened Greenbriar Music Studio and began teaching her own piano students. To supplement her own education, Edith began taking classes with Patricio Gutierrez, an accomplished pianist. In 1955, the two married. They taught together in Edith’s studio until 1965, when Edith’s mother moved in with them. Edith decided to close the separate studio and move her business into her home, so she could act as a live-in nurse for her ailing mother. Her mother died in 1973, and her husband became ill during the same period. For thirty years, Edith took care of both her mother and husband while teaching a full-time load of piano students.²⁹

Edith Gutierrez gained prominence in the Houston music scene later in life. For five years after her husband’s death in 1985, she could not bring herself to enter the home studio where she had worked next to her husband. She eventually began taking on new students, but she also turned to other occupations to supplement her income. While working for the Houston Ballet in the late 1980s, Gutierrez met Yasser Bagersh, an Ethiopian director. The two became good friends, and Bagersh convinced Gutierrez to write the music and lyrics for his new production of *Rumpelstiltskin*. The production was

²⁸ Barbara Karkabi, “Musically Inclined: For Edith Gutierrez and Family, Talent’s Key in the Song of Life,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), April 6, 1998.

²⁹ Pauline Oliveros, “Edith Gutierrez: Emerging Composer,” *IAWM Journal* (1993): 1-2.

a success, and Gutierrez went on, as an octogenarian, to write three more musicals performed for Houston children's theater.³⁰

Edith Gutierrez's story combines multiple elements that many other music teachers could recognize: she turned her experience in music into a successful business that allowed her to first support her children and later her ailing mother and husband. Owning her own studio allowed her flexibility and a steady income in a manner that she could not obtain as an employee. Moreover, women had long historical roots in music education. Elite women took music lessons, usually in their own homes, beginning in colonial America. In the nineteenth century, middle-class women became involved in music education as an extension of the "private sphere" of the home. Society encouraged women, if unmarried, to pursue music, typically taught out of front parlors. Married or unmarried, according to music historian Sondra Wieland Howe, women who needed to contribute financially to their families could teach music privately or publish sheet music and remain socially acceptable.³¹ Beginning in the 1890s, female music teachers could gain additional music opportunities in normal schools and summer institutes. Women, who began the twentieth century "not accepted as 'musicians' by the professionals, nor as 'educators' by the intellectuals," in the words of Frances Elliot Clark, the founder of the National Association for Music Education, gained more national recognition as music educators at conferences and in organizations throughout the first half of the twentieth

³⁰ Karkabi, "Musically Inclined."

³¹ Sondra Wieland Howe, "A Historical View of Woman in Music Education," *Philosophy of Music Education* 17 (2009): 165.

century. By 1950, Clark remarked that female music educators “never had such an opportunity” to contribute to the field as they did at mid-century.³²

At the national level in the postwar period, articles in newspapers and magazines pushed parents to enroll their children in musical education. Jascha Heifetz, a world-renowned violinist, wrote an article in 1953 for the *Saturday Evening Post* in which he argued, “If busy children have time to keep up with Captain Video, Howdy Doody, and Hop-A-Long Cassidy, why haven’t they time to learn to play an instrument?”³³ Heifetz echoed experts and child-development theorists of the time when he argued that music provided “spiritual food to feed their [children’s] personalities” and that “we do not expect them all to become celebrated artists, but they need creative art for self-expression, so as to not be choked up, frustrated, or inhibited; it will provide a medium for self-expression that will galvanize his personality. . . .”³⁴ Like Benjamin Spock and his peers, Heifetz viewed music as a tool through which children could develop their personalities, expand their creativity, and become imaginative, productive citizens.

Music teachers in Houston encouraged parents to develop their children’s musical education as well. The pages of the *Houston Chronicle* expanded each August and September with ads for music teachers, overwhelmingly female, inviting parents to enroll their children in classes. The advertisements consisted of two elements: a typical 1 inch by 1 inch or slightly larger advertisement that listed the important information of the music studio with, in some cases, a drawing and a longer article that described the

³²Ibid., 166.

³³Jascha Heifetz, “How to Teach Your Kids to Like Music” as republished in *High Notes* 4 No. 8 (1953): 3. Houston Music Teachers Association Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

³⁴Ibid.

teacher's education and experience. Mrs. Vincent Pawelek, in 1950, posted two ads in August. The first, on August 13, consisted of four short lines: "Mrs. Vincent Pawelek offers classes in Music for Minors with a new approach to violin or piano."³⁵ The second, on August 27, provided more information, including the fact that the studio had opened "in line with a current trend in musical education" to develop an interest and appreciation in music "so that the desire to play an instrument comes from the child himself rather than from his parents." Pawelek provided assurance to parents that their child would have a nurturing and natural experience with music that differed from the idea of "practice hours as punishment rather than entertainment." The short article also listed Pawelek's educational and professional experience as both a pianist and violinist.³⁶

Music educators, who often found themselves isolated from one another in their respective studios, had come together in Houston to form the Houston Music Teachers Association in 1941. The organization had only a handful of members until the end of the war; they broke 100 members in 1947.³⁷ Throughout the 1950s, the organization published a newsletter, *High Notes*, that provided advice for music educators and updates on the organizations activities. From the beginning, the organization encouraged teachers to accept that their pupils had a slim chance of becoming professional musicians. In an article describing how "love of music alone will not clothe, feed, and shelter a family," Bernard Kirshbaum noted that plenty of opportunities existed for music teachers, but the

³⁵ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 13, 1950.

³⁶ "Mrs. V. Pawelek Opens 'Music for Minors' Studio," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 27, 1950.

³⁷ "About Us," Houston Music Teacher's Association, <http://houstonmusicteachersassociation.com/about/> accessed on September 6, 2015.

field of professional performance had become saturated. He encouraged teachers to steer their pupils toward participating in a “renaissance of the true amateur spirit in music,” preparing them to pursue music only as a hobby and not as a vocation.³⁸ This advice helped direct the pedagogy of Houston-area teachers.

Professional pedigrees dotted all of the short articles describing postwar music studios in Houston. Houstonian educators listed all the summer institutes they had visited in the months their businesses shuttered. In 1950, Mrs. G. L. Fabriquze announced the opening of her music studio, which trained students in both piano and, for advanced students, how to teach music. Additionally, she listed four prominent musicians she studied under, including “Madam Julie Rine King, who was a pupil of Liszt.”³⁹ Other teachers provided their educational experience as a guide for parents on how they planned to teach. Mrs. F. R. Mahr’s advertisement in the *Houston Chronicle* listed her experience in the Houston area as well as her usage of the Teschetlsky principle of teaching, which focused on the development of tone and technique.⁴⁰ Another teacher, Mrs. Joe Richey, described how her class stressed “foundation, technique, rhythm, interpretation, and poise.”⁴¹

³⁸Bernard Kirshbaum, “Keep You On File” *High Notes* 9 No 3 (1957): 3. Box 8 Houston Music Teacher’s Association Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

³⁹ “Mrs. G. L. Fabriquze Reopens Music Studio for Piano,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 10, 1950.

⁴⁰ No information on the Teschetlsky principle of teaching is available, so this might be a way of teaching expounded by one specific and forgotten person, it could be a misspelling, or Mahr possibly made it up to sound impressive. “Marh Piano Studio Registration Set at New Location,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 10, 1950.

⁴¹ “Mrs. Joe Richey Offers Music Classes,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 10, 1950.

By the late 1950s, more Houston music studios began to advertise that they utilized the Orff method of teaching, named for Carl Orff. This approach encourages children to learn music through a gentle and friendly approach that built on “a child’s world of thought and fantasy.” This method focuses on children’s enjoyment and exploration, not on preparing for performance or competition, which are virtually nonexistent under an Orff teacher. Instead, the Orff method encourages children to see music as an extension of play with training becoming more focused and refined as the child ages.⁴² Parents who followed developments in music education or child development could refer to these advertisements to determine which teacher would best work with their children.

Advertising brought students to music studios in Houston, but teachers needed business savvy to turn their enterprises into lasting institutions. In November 1953, Grace White, a Houston piano teacher, wrote an article for *High Notes* with practical advice for the business side of teaching. White advised her readers to first pay attention to their environment. “The artist teacher who is really capable of teaching advanced repertoire must of necessity teach in communities large enough to support him.”⁴³ White told multiple horror stories of students she knew from a music academy in New York who had moved to small towns saturated with educators and could not support themselves. Houston, in this scenario, provided more than enough opportunity for the growing number of studios. The city was growing and more primary schools opened

⁴² Mary Shamrock, “Orff-Shulwerk: An Integrated Method,” *Music Educator’s Journal* 83 (1997): 41-44.

⁴³ Grace White, “The Business Side of Music Teaching” *High Notes* 5 No. 2 (1953): 2. Box 8 Houston Music Teacher’s Association Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

every year to accommodate the baby boom. Several music teachers included in their advertisements their proximity to various school districts, particularly if they were within walking distance. Mrs. F. R. Mahr proudly advertised her location across the street from Pershing Junior High School.⁴⁴ For parents seeking after-school music education, location helped them choose a studio.

In addition to location, White turned her attention to the administration of a successful music school. She believed that a music studio had room for people of all talents. White encouraged music educators who proved talented at bringing in pupils, but found themselves drowning under too many students and too little time, to begin hiring teachers to work under them and expand their business. These business owners could then possibly provide instruction for other instruments outside of their specialty or branch into voice coaching, increasing their clientele and their profit margins. She advised that these expansion-minded people, who could “pick up a new pupil with every trip to the post office,” to either limit their teaching or stop completely and devote themselves to administrative duties. If the business owner were a truly gifted teacher, White advised her to teach advanced classes or specialties.⁴⁵

Class structure varied from instructor to instructor, but Mary Ann Bolster, member of the Houston Music Teacher’s Association, advocated for a general structure for music classes. In an article for *High Notes*, Bolster opined that, in addition to private lessons, students should have a class lesson group with multiple peers. In such a class, teachers could efficiently present material all at once then focus on building skills with

⁴⁴ “Marh Piano Studio Registration Set at New Location,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 10, 1950.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

individual students during private lessons. Bolster asserted that the instructor should decide whether to have co-ed classes but reminded her readers that “we all know that with adolescent boys and girls there is the possible danger of the students becoming more interested in each other than in the lesson.” Furthermore, Bolster strongly advocated for teachers to balance classes according to a combination of age and skill, so that advanced students did not grow bored and beginners did not become discouraged, which would nullify the advantage of teaching a group of students.⁴⁶

Bolster saw the other benefit of teaching multiple students at one time: stimulating creativity. Reviewing the typical methods of drilling notes, she asserted that “in order to keep the student from becoming a mechanical robot and just knowing letter names, let’s devise games” to encourage the students’ imaginations and provide a deeper understanding of the material. With teachers serving as the “moderators,” the children, whom the author viewed as natural problems solvers, would discuss problems and issues in a critical and deep manner. This approach would also build teamwork and social skills that students missed in private lessons. Furthermore, Bolster encouraged instructors to have students to begin creating their own melodies. “Hear [sic] we are giving the student his first taste of original work and establishing a phase of music study which will advance his creativity.” She emphasized teaching students to master improvisation in addition to theory and technique. Bolster viewed improvisation as an excellent outlet for imagination and an antidote to student boredom.⁴⁷ By adding creative elements, Bolster

⁴⁶ Mary Ann Bolster, “Presentation and Use of Materials for Class and Private Piano Combined,” *High Notes* 6 No. 2 (1955): 3. Houston Music Teacher’s Association Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, Houston Public Library.

⁴⁷Ibid.

contrasted the new, more child-centered musical education with the pedagogy of previous decades, which focused on rote memorization and endless drills. Although she never mentions Dr. Benjamin Spock, Margaret Mead, or the Cold War, Bolster was encouraging fellow Houstonian music teachers to stimulate the imaginations of children in a manner that would have pleased the experts.

“She Sure Raised a Lot of Us”: Dance, Discipline, and Expression

Marcella Donovan Perry, like music teacher Edith Gribbin, had a rebellious nature as a child and teen. She was the only child of James G. Donovan, a lawyer who opened his practice in the Houston Heights neighborhood in 1909. Donovan proved instrumental in keeping the Heights alcohol-free before and after Prohibition; he wrote the provision stipulating that the Heights would not sell alcohol “till time runneth not.” Marcella graduated from Heights High School in 1922, went to New York, and worked as a specialty dancer in the Greenwich Village Follies. She was underage; her mother signed her contract after her father refused.⁴⁸ The Greenwich Village Follies became an entry for Marcella into Broadway. She worked alongside people like Martha Graham, who would go on to greater fame as a modern dancer. In New York, she studied under Ted Shawn, Ruth St. Denis, George Chaffee, Jack Manning, Johnny Mattison, and several others who had 1950s garnered fame in modern dance. As he did many Ziegfeld Follies girls, Alfred Cheney Johnston photographed Perry in two semi-nude shots, her body covered only by a strategic fan or draped with a filmy blanket.⁴⁹ These shots then graced advertisements and the covers of magazines.

⁴⁸ Sloan, *Houston Heights*, 96.

Perry returned to Houston at some point in the 1930s and opened her own dance studio in 1935 at 1909 Ashland above a drugstore. In 1954, she moved her studio to a new one-story structure with large windows and a soft pastel interior. Here she taught ballet, acrobatics, and tap to children from the age of three. The same year that she opened her new studio, Donovan brought Jack Dayton, a friend from New York and a former instructor of Vera Ellen and Gene Kelly, to help with classes.⁵⁰ Her father continued to disapprove of her chosen path in life and in the 1950s convinced her to join the board of his newly created bank. Eventually, she ran the bank full-time, closed her dance studio, and became the first female commissioner for the Port of Houston.⁵¹

Marcella Donovan Perry operated a successful dance studio for at least twenty years before turning her attention to banking. Like music teachers, dance instructors could use the expectations about women's place within dance to operate profitable and long-lasting businesses. Dance studios enjoyed the benefits of the growing middle-class economy in the postwar period; parents enrolled their children in dance classes in growing numbers. As with music, parents wanted their children to have creative outlets and forms of expression. Dance had a reputation, stretching back to the early twentieth century, as a way to teach children discipline and perseverance, particularly in ballet, while maintaining the child's individuality and self-expression. Furthermore, many dance studios continued to teach ballroom and other social dances in the postwar period, which, as Arthur Murray's many dance studios advertised, would help children and teens

⁴⁹“Marcella Donovan Perry,” Vintage Photography, <https://sinimonib.wordpress.com/2013/01/20/marcella-donovan-perry-alfred-cheney-johnston/>, accessed September 14, 2015.

⁵⁰ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), Sept 17, 1950.

⁵¹ Sloan, *Houston Heights*, 96.

gain popularity.⁵² For postwar parents, dance education for their children could be both imaginative expression and additional security that their child would fit in with others.

Women have a long history of involvement in dance education. Dance was very important for the upper class and those aspiring to high society during the eighteenth and nineteenth century in the United States. It demonstrated social grace and what was considered at the time to be a well-rounded education for elites. While women served as the primary pupils, in the colonial period, dance masters were exclusively male. During the eighteenth century, many dancing teachers operated in both northern and southern colonies. Joseph E. Marks, a historian of dance, wrote that colonial dancing masters, “like preachers, doctors, lawyers, peddlers and many other trades and professions during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, traveled from town to town, often advertising ahead that they planned to open a dancing school.”⁵³ The nature of working as a dance master thus precluded women from that position prior to the Civil War, although some women, in the early 1800s, opened schools with their husbands.⁵⁴

After the Civil War, more dance schools continued to open across the country. As women continued to gain experience as performance artists in traveling ballet companies and in theaters, they sought to supplement their incomes with teaching. One of the most influential educators of the last quarter of the nineteenth century was Genevieve Stebbins. Stebbins, a well-respected member of the upper middle class, opened two dance schools,

⁵²Almost every Arthur Murray advertisement in the *Houston Chronicle* revolved around the theme of gaining popularity by avoiding embarrassment at dances. One 1956 ad declared that dance was the “shortcut to popularity and good times.” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), July 22, 1956.

⁵³Joseph Marks, *America Learns to Dance* (New York: Exposition Press, 1957), 20-21.

⁵⁴One of the first and most influential ballet schools in America was Paul Hazard’s ballet school in Philadelphia, which he ran with his wife beginning in roughly 1835. Gayle Kassing, *History of Dance: An Interactive Arts Approach* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 2007), 158.

one in Boston and one in New York, based on Francois Delsarte's techniques of dramatic expression. Her work produced two accomplishments: her students and models provided influence for the creators of modern dance, like Ted Shawn and Isadora Duncan, and she effectively argued that dance was an appropriate avenue for respectable women.⁵⁵

While most dance schools operated on the East Coast, the concept spread and by 1900, private dancing academies dotted the country. It was one of the hallmarks of an established city. Houston in the 1890s boasted one dance school, operated by husband and wife Thurston and Jessamine Donnellan. Thurston Donnellan also earned money as a violinist and gained fame for painting several portraits of Sam Houston. His wife taught dance with him, but she declined to continue the school following his death in 1908.

Roughly fifteen women per year claimed to be dance teachers in the city directories of the 1890s, but they were probably operating out of their homes and not out of formal dance studios.⁵⁶ By 1920, Houston had three dancing schools: one owned by a married couple, one owned by a woman, and one that has unclear ownership. Anne S.

Giezendanner, the one female sole proprietor in 1920, ran her dancing school at 707 Hawthorne Street beginning in 1910. Teaching dance allowed her to pursue a life in dance while attending to the needs of her four children. She charged a fee for many of her two hundred to three hundred pupils per year, but because her husband worked as an accountant at a well-established Houston firm and provided the family with a comfortable living, Giezendanner could provide many free lessons and spent a substantial portion of

⁵⁵For more on Stebbins' life, work, and feminism, see Nancy Lee Chalfa Ruyter, "The Intellectual World of Genevieve Stebbins," *Dance Chronicle* 11 No. 3 (1988): 381-97.

⁵⁶*Morrison & Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Houston, 1897-98* (Galveston: Morrison & Fourmy, 1897); *Morrison & Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Houston, 1899-1900* (Galveston: Morrison & Fourmy, 1899); and *Morrison & Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Houston, 1900-01* (Galveston: Morrison & Fourmy, 1900).

her time in charity work. She also operated the first outdoor dance studio in the South, according to the authors of the 1926 *New Encyclopedia of Texas*.⁵⁷

By 1930, women operated five of the fifteen dance studios in Houston; several others were co-owned by women.⁵⁸ One of the five, Hallie Pritchard, opened her dance school in Houston as early as 1923, the year after she graduated from university. She studied in New York under former members of the famed Ballets Russes, an important institution in terms of training and sending out dancers throughout many countries in the 1920s. In 1924, Pritchard opened a studio especially for her own use outside of her home. She began teaching with an emphasis on classical ballet, but she also included modern dance and “physical expression.” One contemporary remarked that Pritchard “enters into the spirit of her work as a dancing teacher and inspires her pupils to seek the highest skill.”⁵⁹ Her studio remained in continuous operation until her retirement in 1982. The studio produced students who went on to make names for themselves in show business, including Broadway star Ann Miller and television star Chandra Wilson. Former students organized a tribute to Pritchard in the 1990s, shortly before her death, during which one pupil remarked that “For a lady who never had children of her own, she sure raised a lot of us.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Ellis A. Davis and Edwin H. Grobe, *The New Encyclopedia of Texas, Volume II* (Dallas: Texas Development Bureau, 1926), 1269.

⁵⁸ Five others, with names like “Studio of the Dance,” have unclear ownership. In all likelihood, the number is higher than five. *Morrison & Fourmy’s Houston City Directory, 1930-31* (Houston: Morrison & Fourmy, 1931).

⁵⁹ Davis and Grobe, *The New Encyclopedia of Texas, Volume II*, 1282.

⁶⁰ “Hallie Pritchard Luncheon Celebration,” YouTube, accessed September 5, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O-W1894mY44>.

Pritchard and one other dance studio proprietor, Pauline Campbell, successfully steered their dancing schools through the Great Depression, World War II, and into the postwar years, when they enjoyed great success.⁶¹ Dance studios owned and operated by women boomed in both Houston and the nation in the postwar years. In 1950, Houston had thirty dance studios. Of those, women were sole proprietors of nineteen. The other eleven represented either chains, like the Fred Astaire Dance Studios, or belonged to married co-owners. By 1959, the total number had jumped to fifty-one dance studios with roughly three-quarters of the studios owned solely by women, seven by only men, two national chains, and the remainder co-owned by both men and women. Almost all of the studios open in the early 1950s remained open ten years later.⁶² Clearly, owning and operating a dance studio could provide a long-term career for the women of Houston who had trained in dance.

Dance studios moved frequently during the postwar era, usually to larger and brighter spaces.⁶³ Studio owners had certain requirements for their spaces: large open areas, walls for mirrors, and a piano or space for one. Owners typically hired someone to accompany their dance classes in the 1940s and 1950s rather than relying upon record players, or they counted the beats out loud without music.⁶⁴ Studio owners preferred highly polished wood floors, and, for schools that taught ballet, which included every dance school in Houston in 1950, a ballet barre along at least one wall. This limited

⁶¹Outside of a handful of advertisements and a record in the census and city directories, nothing else could be found on Pauline Campbell.

⁶² *Morrison & Fourmy's Greater Houston City Directory, 1951* (Houston: Morrison & Fourmy, 1950) and *Polk's Greater Houston City Directory, 1959* (Dallas: R. L. Polk & Co., Publishers, 1959).

⁶³Hallie Pritchard's studio moved at least five times in twenty years.

⁶⁴Earle Wylie, "Wylie has had an interesting life," *Teague Chronicle* (Teague, TX), May 22, 2014.

options for women who wanted to go into dance education to a few spaces that could meet their minimum needs. In all likelihood, the frequent movement of studios around town owed a great deal to the multiple requirements for a proper studio. One major draw for prospective students to a dance studio was the availability of air conditioning. Air conditioning became more widely available in the 1950s, and dance studios proudly advertised its availability. Ann Keene felt that air conditioning was such a draw that it featured in the headline of her advertisement: “Ann Keene Studio Is Air Cooled.”⁶⁵ Indeed, five dance studios in the 1954 advertising season for prospective students emphasized the availability of air-conditioned space.

In addition to describing their space, dance studios sought to draw in students by emphasizing their teachers’ training and qualifications in a manner similar to music teachers. Nearly all of the advertisements for dance studios describe the professional affiliations of the instructors, most often their involvement with the Dance Masters of America or the Dance Educators of America. All of the advertisements listed where instructors studied, with many emphasizing their connections to famous dancers and other people, no matter how tangential. Imelda Pulley mentioned her training with a former member of the Ballet Russe who then worked for MGM Studios in Hollywood.⁶⁶ Elsa Soler boasted of more than twenty years on the European stage and production of her own shows “under the patronage of Lord Gert, then governor of the Island of Malta, with crew members of the USS Mavrant, commanded by Lt. Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.,

⁶⁵*Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 29, 1954.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*

taking part.”⁶⁷ Two years later, Soler continued to comment on her time spent in Europe and her patronage by Lord Gert.⁶⁸ Advertising provided a way for dance instructors to set their studios apart and reinforce legitimacy.

Even retail firms associated with dance could help dance studios advertise. A 1956 full-page advertisement for Village Shoe Store, with locations on Rice Boulevard and Westheimer, features a young ballerina and a dance teacher. To the side, a large headline read “Dance school NOW can make such a difference LATER.” Smaller text adds that an observer could see the difference in the way she is “Confident. Sure. Secure.” The shoe company encouraged parents to enroll their daughters in “dance School where she’ll have such fun and gain a whole new world of grace and charm and young poise that just cannot be learned anywhere else at all!” The emphasis here was clearly on feminine ideals of beauty, using words like “light on her feet,” “gracious with the group,” and “inner stability that is the basis of all poise and the beginning of all beauty.” The advertisement then listed eleven dance schools in Houston for interested parents.⁶⁹

It is unclear if the author possessed familiarity with leading pedagogical texts on dance, but the text in the 1956 advertisement mirrored the views of Frederick Rand Rogers in his writings on the aims of dance education for girls, published in 1950. *Dance: A Basic Educational Technique* was one of the leading textbooks in training

⁶⁷*Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 31, 1952

⁶⁸*Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 29, 1954.

⁶⁹ It is unclear why some schools were included and some were not. The eleven were: Ann Keene Dance Studio, Asbury School of Dancing, Durante School of Dance, Edna Herzog Dance Studio, Eleanor Eason School of Dancing, Emmamae Horn Dance Studio, Hallie R. Pritchard School of Dancing, Weikerth School of Dancing, La Delle Stevens School of Ballet, Preparatory School of Ballet, and Shaap Dance Studios. *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 30, 1956.

dance teachers in the postwar period. Rogers argued that the goal of dance should be to bring girls closer to a “beauty” objective, whereas boys trained in dance should strive toward “strength.” Boys would, if they met all educational goals, grow into “strong and courageous” men, and girls would become “sympathetic, generous, and sacrificial.”⁷⁰ If boys did not meet the goals of education, they could stray into “atheism, betrayal, confusion, destruction, bestiality, death,” and, ultimately, “inequity.” Girls, on the other hand, if led astray, would arrive at “cruelty, torture, damnation, murder, bestiality, death,” and, in the end, “infamy.”⁷¹ Dance education helped lead boys and girls from “iniquity” and “infamy” and to “strength” and “beauty.” Rogers defined “beauty” as indicating “clear complexion, general cleanliness, regularity of feature and figure, grace and poise of body, graciousness of bearing . . . not a pretty face, but a sympathetic soul shining through a healthy body.” Dance teachers who did not recognize the differences between the goals for the two sexes or did not properly encourage one were, in Rogers’ view, “unsafe even as citizens.”⁷² Dance education, to the followers of Rogers, went beyond instruction on movements and techniques; it was a battle for the destiny of children. Although the Soviet Union never appears by name in Rogers’s work, the specter of communism and, its twin fear, atheism, loomed over his chapters.

Dance teachers often spent their summers, when their studios were closed, learning new techniques or working across the country. Ruth Ketti, owner of Garden Oaks School of Dancing, promised in her 1950 advertisement to her prospective new

⁷⁰Frederick Rand Rogers, “Meanings of Education and Dance,” In *Dance: A Basic Educational Technique*, ed. Frederick Rand Rogers (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1950), 12.

⁷¹Ibid., 10-11.

⁷²Ibid., 14-15.

students that “many new dancing techniques” would come from her time at the Normal School of the Southern Association of Dance Instructors.⁷³ Similarly, Dorothy Weikerth Graves, owner of multiple branches of her Weikerth School of Dancing, described how both she and the teachers under her employ attended the national normal school for dance educators and the convention of the Texas Association of Teachers of Dancing.⁷⁴ Dance studio owners and educators attempted to stay up to date on dance education and techniques, and they described that work for interested parents in their advertisements.

From such advertisements, parents could see the differences in teaching styles. Most dance educators provided traditional training in ballet, tap, and ballroom dancing. During the postwar period, dance, unlike music, remained grounded in a pedagogy based on rigorous discipline. Teachers continued to use traditional methods in ballet, in particular. Marion Miller, founder and owner of the Houston School of Ballet, utilized the Cecchetti method in her curriculum. The Cecchetti method, in existence since the turn of the century, emphasized attention to line, proportion, and body placement, as applied to an individual student’s anatomical differences and qualities. The goal of the Cecchetti method was for a student to become familiar with ballet theory in the abstract and know how that theory could be represented with their bodies. Ultimately, the student would be dancing to the best of his or her body’s ability and not as a mimic of the instructor. In order to teach the Cecchetti method, a dancer needed to pass a series of examinations leading to acceptance into the Imperial Society of Dancers. This traditional pedagogy

⁷³ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 3, 1950

⁷⁴ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 31, 1952

influenced multiple dance instructors, including all of the dancers trained at the Houston School of Ballet.⁷⁵

As in music, however, more dance instructors began to add variety to their teaching methods and focus more on creativity and play. Practitioners of the Laban Method, invented by Rudolf Laban, used improvisation and play to teach students how to express emotions through bodily movement. Like Cecchetti, Laban wanted to make a dance student aware of his/her body and limitations. Unlike Cecchetti, Laban encouraged students to recognize their personalities and reject the idea of technical perfection in favor of authentic and natural expression.⁷⁶ Vivian King's studio utilized the Laban method in her classes for small children, particularly in her courses on character dancing, which is an expressive form of dance commonly used in musicals.⁷⁷ Similarly, the Imelda Pulley School of the Dance emphasized "personality," encouraging students to express themselves through ballet, tap, and acrobatic dancing.⁷⁸

Other teachers sought to connect dance with other fields and widen the appeal of their studios. In addition to the usual offering of ballet, tap, and acrobatics, several dance studio owners provided instruction in baton twirling, tumbling, native folk dances, and voice. Dorothy Taylor, owner of School of Dance Arts, taught students traditional ballet but also included modern dance, Spanish, and ballroom in the hope that students would

⁷⁵*Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 3, 1950.

⁷⁶Juana de Laban, "Basic Laban Principles and Methods," in *Dance: A Basic Educational Technique*, ed. Frederick Rand Rogers (New York: Macmillan Company, 1950), 197.

⁷⁷*Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 10, 1950.

⁷⁸*Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 29, 1954.

gain an appreciation of good music as well as mastering dance technique.⁷⁹ These methods of dance education encouraged students' creativity and allowed them to express themselves naturally in a manner that echoed broader theories on child development at the time.

Dance teachers in Houston also capitalized on the emphasis in the postwar years on popularity and fitting in. Arthur Murray's chain of dance schools in particular led the way in highlighting the role of popularity in the decision to learn how to dance. Almost all of the ads for the schools promised a "shortcut to popularity and good times . . . you'll be thrilled how much more popular you are."⁸⁰ Houston-specific studios also mentioned fitting in as part of their appeal. The School of Dance Arts, in addition to teaching ballroom dance, also emphasized ballroom etiquette so that students would refrain from embarrassing themselves at organized dances.⁸¹ In her advertisement for her Studio of Dancing, Laura Dorman commented on her emphasis on "social deportment in teenage groups. . . . She also gives teenagers tips on how to be friendly and popular."⁸² For parents worried about raising happy, natural, and well-adjusted children, the promise of training in popularity and personality development greatly appealed.

"Happy Children Learn": Nursery Schools and Day Cares

An advertisement in a January 1957 edition of the *Houston Chronicle* features a frowning blond woman, face furrowed with wrinkles of frustration. "Do you work with

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰*Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), July 22, 1954.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²*Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 29, 1954.

piece [sic] of mind?” the advertisement queries. “Is your child learning to be a natural and happy person, to take part in a planned program? Are they being taught natural, physical and social sciences, and creative arts?” This advertisement, for the Professional Child Care Association, reminded Houston parents of their responsibility to find high-quality day care for their children, care that went beyond simple babysitting and custodial care and provided educational benefits from trained professionals. Providers of that care partnered with parents to produce “natural and happy” children. The advertisement provided a list of their sixteen members who provided services for Houston children, all run by women. The association promised that if parents placed their children in one of the member businesses, their child would receive “loving care plus proper discipline.”⁸³

The idea of day care for working mothers remained an area of contention during the 1950s and 1960s, as it had been since the beginnings of day care services at the turn of the century. As Elizabeth Rose demonstrates in her history of day care in the United States, elite women in major cities created day nurseries for children in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in order to keep children off the streets. Thus, for decades day care had an association with charity; it was a last resort for mothers driven into work by economic need. Those who worked for and ran day nurseries provided basic care, referred to by Rose as “custodial,” for children. These institutions helped immigrant children assimilate and encouraged good habits, but they shied away from providing educational benefits. Indeed, the operators of day nurseries avoided the idea of

⁸³ The sixteen businesses are: All American Preparatory School, A Kiddy’s Fairyland Nursery, Greenway Day Nursery, Heights Nursery, Humpty Dumpty Nursery, Happy House Nursery, Little Tots Day Nursery, Mother Goose Nusery, Mrs. Neal’s Wonderland, Nelson’s Day Nursery, Pickiwickian School, Red Wagon Nursery, Shann Nursery and Kindergarten, Tot Haven Play School, Wee Folks Nursery, and Village Play School. *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), January 20, 1957.

promoting day care for all or pushing for expansion, lest it seem that they were encouraging mothers who could afford to stay home to enter the workforce and “abandon” their children. Under the day nursery movement always existed the assumption that day care could not positively influence children.⁸⁴

By the 1920s, childcare experts began advocating for “nursery schools.” Nursery schools existed on a separate path from day nurseries. “Day care in the nursery schools was not a matter of charity, but of privilege: parents were willing to pay in order to give their children the benefit of nursery school training.”⁸⁵ As Rose argues, both day nurseries and nursery schools operated on the assumption that mothers were too incompetent to raise their own children and needed the assistance of trained professionals. Nursery schools could provide middle-class children with the social skills and independence needed in the world of the future. Unlike day nurseries, time in nursery school could be a positive good for a child. In particular, nursery schools promised to produce children who were “well-adjusted” and possessed the right personality to get along with others.⁸⁶ Still other nursery schools promoted the idea of giving children the freedom to express themselves. In Greenwich Village in New York, Harriet Johnson ran a nursery school that treated children as individuals and encouraged “a readiness to get to work on the material at hand, persistence of interest, the tendency to investigate and experiment in constructive ways.”⁸⁷ Nursery schools, with their emphasis

⁸⁴ Elizabeth Rose, *A Mother's Job: The History of Day Care, 1890-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 5.

⁸⁵Ibid., 113.

⁸⁶Ibid., 120.

⁸⁷Harriet Johnson, *Children in the Nursery School* (New York: John Day Company, 1928), 45-49.

on trained professionals in education, helped with some of the stigma attached to day care services, and World War II introduced more families to day care services through government-run programs for the children of war workers.

On the eve of World War II, Houston had no nursery schools identified in the city directory, and two day nurseries, one at Green Caroline Community Center and the other Jack & Jill Nursery.⁸⁸ The location of a day nursery at Green Caroline Community Center reflected the nature of day nurseries as resources for people in temporary need, not as a permanent solution to a mother's wage-earning. During the war, the number of day nurseries and nursery schools grew. In addition to the Green Caroline Center and government-run day care services, Houston added two more day nurseries: Babyland Nursery and the Industrial Day Home. African American children could enroll at Fifth Ward Nursery School, Oaks Kindergarten & Nursery, or Leola Smith. White children could attend multiple parochial schools or Harper Nursery School.⁸⁹ For the most part, women in Houston appear to have relied on government-run day care services for their children during the war or on informal arrangements with family and neighbors. A distinct dearth of nursery schools and day nurseries existed in Houston in the years immediately preceding and during the war.

Nationwide, after the war, government-run day cares closed their doors. As the 1940s came to an end, many people still linked day care to the emergency of war, family troubles, and social stigma. The national media and most childcare experts advocated mothers remaining at home with their children. Creating stable homes with well-adjusted

⁸⁸ *Morrison & Fourmy's Houston City Directory, 1940-41* (Houston: Morrison & Fourmy, 1941).

⁸⁹ *Morrison & Fourmy's Houston City Directory, 1941-42* (Houston: Morrison & Fourmy, 1942).

children was a mother's primary job in a Cold War world. Dr. Benjamin Spock's childcare book assumed that the mother is at home at all times; he lists working mothers as a "special problem."⁹⁰ During the postwar period, though, more women began working for wages. In 1950, wives earned wages in 21.6 percent of all families, by 1960, that number climbed to 30.5 percent.⁹¹ Changes in consumption, particularly the new needs for children to have as many advantages as possible, encouraged women to enter the workforce. While the ideal was to have mother at home, in reality, keeping up with the Joneses was expensive, and two incomes could help a family in the postwar materialism race. Attitudes toward day care, as Elizabeth Rose asserts, "reflected the ambivalence that many Americans felt about how to define a mother's job."⁹²

Around the nation, the two paths of day care services, day nurseries and nursery schools, began to converge. Day nurseries increasingly hired trained professionals and used nursery school pedagogy, marking a loss in the distinction between nursery schools and day nurseries.⁹³ Indeed, no distinction appears to have existed between custodial and educational day care centers among the sixty-five firms that opened in Houston in the twenty years between the end of World War II and 1965.⁹⁴ Owners appeared to have used the two terms interchangeably, along with play school, day school, and kindergarten (for children younger than five years old, the usual age for beginning kindergarten.)

⁹⁰ Spock, *Baby and Child Care*.

⁹¹Rose, *A Mother's Job*, 83.

⁹²Ibid., 207.

⁹³Ibid., 216.

⁹⁴Probably more than sixty-five, not all issues are accounted for. Data compiled from the *Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977.

Clearly the increased need for day care facilities created a demand that women could fill. Women operated nearly all of the day care services in Houston during the 1950s and 1960s. In some cases, the demand for their services was so high that they opened at multiple locations. Maryjon Miller owned and operated Peter Pan Nursery & Kindergarten. Two separate locations opened in May 1958, one at 5000 Calhoun and another at 3008 Cullen.⁹⁵ Operating a childcare center provided women with income options that had lucrative potential, considering the increasing demand for childcare services, and skated the line between public and private. In postwar Houston, women operated daycare services out of their homes, but more women began to move their operations fully into the public sphere, gaining legitimacy as providers of pedagogical services as well as traditional child-minding needs. As with music and dance studios, operating a day care services had the added benefit of providing a way for female business owners to take care of their own children while earning an income. Moreover, as the businesses began to organize, the owners viewed themselves as professionals, as the formation of the Professional Child Care Association of Harris County in the 1950s reflects. The women who owned day care services did not view themselves as babysitters; they provided trained expertise in pre-school and infant care and pedagogy.

Usually, the day care centers advertised themselves as “schools,” demonstrating the accent placed on education. Felicia Ann Emmert’s enterprise, Country Playhouse, emphasized the small classes and individual supervision from qualified and experienced teachers at the kindergarten and preschool level in a 1950 advertisement.⁹⁶ A few days

⁹⁵ Data compiled from *The Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977.

⁹⁶ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 6, 1950.

later, Mrs. T. L. Barnhouse wrote that her Little Tots' Day School provided "training, companionship and down-to-earth first-hand experiences for 'the forgotten under-sixes.'" On the same page of advertisements, Ganelle Cox's Montrose Nursery School boasted of "excellent food, rest periods" and "trained personnel."⁹⁷ Similarly, Village Playschool advertised the two teacher's qualifications: Jean Dodson had training in home economics and nutrition in addition to nine years in the Houston public schools, and Ruth Helwig had similar experience as an educator in public schools.⁹⁸ Children at the schools had the option of attending half or full days and received hot meals at lunch, a structure similar to primary school.

The nursery schools of the postwar period fully embraced the pedagogical ideas among experts about naturalism and creativity. The aforementioned advertisement from the Professional Child Care Association of Harris County listed the production of a "natural" person as the first priority for child care.⁹⁹ As with advice to parents, pedagogical theories on nursery school aged children encouraged teachers to take a "child-centered" approach to teaching. The emphasis at day care centers in the postwar period was on creating well-adjusted children who were properly prepared for elementary school. The shift toward terms like "play school" reflects that idea. As Montrose Nursery School's slogan proclaimed: "Happy Children Learn."¹⁰⁰ Less than a month after Montrose Nursery School ran their "happy children" ad, Mother Goose Kindergarten announced its grand opening for children between the ages of two and a

⁹⁷ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 27, 1950.

⁹⁸ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 29, 1951.

⁹⁹ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), January 20, 1957.

¹⁰⁰ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 27, 1950.

half and five years old. The owner of Mother Goose, Nydia Dallas, promised to help the children “explore the wonders of Fairyland in story folklore and music appreciation.” Dallas strongly believed that a good policy for preschool aged children was to “learn while you play,” and the school emphasized artistic endeavors and creative outlets for children: finger painting, dance, music, and theater.¹⁰¹ In order to be competitive, nursery school owners tapped into the prevailing postwar ideas about natural, child-centered care and providing proper creative outlets for children to learn and grow. The growing Houston market for child care services meant that schools and care facilities had to reflect the broader Cold War fight to produce solidly American children.

Conclusion

Cold War culture embraced a strange paradox in terms of child-raising advice. On one hand, childcare reflected broader cultural norms, which focused heavily on conformity and normality. In order for a child to be a success, he or she needed to be “popular” or at least fit in with the other children. On the other hand, parents wanted their child to express his or her creativity and individuality as much as possible. “Natural” childcare provided the path to a healthy and well-adjusted child. Art and proper pedagogical techniques, used in the burgeoning preschool and playschool market, could help parents raise happy, healthy children in an extremely anxious age. Few white middle-class Houstonian parents wanted their children, particularly boys, to become artists, dancers, or musicians. Creativity existed as a tool to use, not a profession to seek. Through creative pursuits, a child’s imagination could develop, and he could take that into a successful career in business and, in the hopes of the state, into the colossal clash

¹⁰¹ *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), September 10, 1950.

between communism and capitalism. The demarcation lines were clear, as Ferdinand Rand Rodgers said: dance and other arts encouraged men to be imaginative and strong. Art, if done properly, taught men to be good Americans and good Cold Warriors.

For women, an education in art could lead to other possibilities. While advertisements and articles on child-raising emphasized the creativity that a woman would need as a housewife, music and dance could provide a career for women. Operating an independent studio, either inside or outside the home, could allow a woman to combine her “duties” as a wife and mother with an income. Similarly, operating a playschool or day care acted as an extension of the home and a woman’s proper place. The postwar childcare balancing act between creativity and conformity allowed women to create thriving businesses.

CHAPTER SIX: “BETTY FRIEDAN DID NOT CHANGE MY LIFE”: AT THE INTERSECTION OF FEMINISM, LESBIAN ACTIVISM, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN HOUSTON

In 1972, Kathryn Van Dement Heilhecker was an oil company secretary and engaged to a man with three children from a previous marriage, inheriting a “ready-made family,” and excited to begin the next stage in her life. Unexpectedly, her father died. Heilhecker had to decide whether to continue her father’s automotive repair business, which he had started in 1954, or sell it. Luckily, Heilhecker found herself surrounded by encouragement. Joe, her fiancé, his family, and her family supported her decision to continue the business. The employees of the shop agreed to stay on under her and help her learn the ropes. Customers continued to bring in their cars.¹

Houston area bankers were not as supportive. They were unwilling to make the loans Heilhecker needed to keep the business operating in the first few months of transition, asserting that “a woman was not capable of managing a successful automotive repair business.” Her frustrations synced with those articulated by a growing feminist movement, which had arrived in Houston in the form of organizations and support groups that included both heterosexual and lesbian members. Heilhecker begged, borrowed, scrimped, and joined the local chapter of the National Organization of Women (NOW), where she found other women who had similar stories and, like the other members of her support system, championed her cause. Four years after her initial dealings with sexist bankers, Heilhecker could cheerfully declare to NOW’s Houston area newspaper that she had “proven them [the bankers] wrong.”²

¹ Houston’s chapter of NOW had both a newspaper, *Breakthrough*, and a newsletter, *Broadside*. “The Risk Takers,” *Houston Breakthrough* (Houston, TX), September 1977.

This chapter explores the impact of feminism on Houston and the growth of feminist and lesbian businesses. Self-identified feminists were very active in Houston during the 1970s, and the city boasted one of the largest and most active chapters of the National Organization of Women (NOW) in the country. Women who did not necessarily identify as feminists benefited from both the movement and an organizational spirit sweeping the country to form support groups and networks in their professional lives. For women who did participate in the movement, as with other parts of the country, many translated their desire to escape patriarchal oppression within the male-dominated workforce into business endeavors. In some cases, such as feminist bookstores and credit unions, feminist businesses acted as a natural outgrowth of the movement. This chapter asserts that business ownership proved invaluable to the Houston feminist and gay communities. Conversely, the feminist movement provided an outlet, acknowledged or not, for even those who did not actively participate, to reflect on the meaning and goals of their entrepreneurship. This chapter explores businesses owned by both heterosexual and lesbian women in Houston. These businesses included a growing number of openly gay bars in the wake of the New York City Stonewall Riot and the nationwide gay rights movement. Many of the lesbians involved in constructing new, open businesses in the 1960s and 1970s participated in Houston's feminist movement. This section argues that businesses owned by women, including lesbians, were essential to the impressive gains by women and the LGBTQ community in Houston during the latter quarter of the twentieth century.

The historiography on feminism and the South is rather lean. Certainly, excellent works on second-wave feminism exist. One of the earliest, Sara Evans's *Personal Politics*:

² Heilhecker and her husband retired to Colorado, but the business remains open as of January 2015. "The Risk Takers," *Houston Breakthrough*.

The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left, explores how activity within the Civil Rights Movement and politics on college campuses led many women to become aware of their own oppression and gave them the tools to organize. Evans' attention to the South begins and ends with the Civil Rights Movement, although her exploration of how young southern white women joined the Civil Rights Movement is illuminating. Similarly, Alice Echols's *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* describes the growth and conflicts among various branches of second wave feminists, focusing on those who identified as radical feminists. Her work examines five cities, and while one, Gainesville, Florida, is southern, she gives little acknowledgment of the differences between regions. Other extremely important works on second-wave feminism have made similar omissions.³

Recently, historians have made an effort to correct the northeastern bias in the earlier works on second-wave feminism. Anne Enke's *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* focuses on studying the relationship between feminism and space by studying women's efforts to take over or create space in Detroit, Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Chicago.⁴ Stephanie Gilmore similarly broke from a northeastern perspective by studying the activities of chapters of NOW in Memphis, Tennessee; Columbus, Ohio; and San Francisco, California.⁵ Enke's and Gilmore's case studies of ground-level feminism and

³ Sara M. Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979); Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989). Also see Sara M. Evans, *Tidal Wave: How Women Changed America at Century's End* (New York: Free Press, 2003); Cynthia Harrison, *On Account of Sex: The Politics of Women's Issues, 1945-1968* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Penguin, 2000).

⁴ Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space and Feminist Activism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

organization are extraordinarily valuable and do superb work of combatting both geographic distortion and a tendency to focus on “stars” like Gloria Steinem and Shulamith Firestone, but neither work ventures further south than Memphis.

In general, studies of women in the post-World War II South have revolved around civil rights and race relations.⁶ General histories of the South in the latter half of the twentieth century often skip from the upheavals of the Civil Rights Movement to the conservative backlash and the changing political landscape, often ignoring women’s history as a whole. Evans’ sections on southern white women shows how a growing sense of feminism grew out of the Civil Rights Movement and its involvement with organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, but she does not thoroughly follow the thread forward in time.⁷ Katarina Keane’s 2009 dissertation, “Second-Wave Feminism in the American South, 1965-1980,” helped fill in a large gap. Keane explores feminist activities across the South, exploring both the similarities and differences between feminism in the South and other parts of the nation. She convincingly argues that “Southern women of widely varying backgrounds engaged in feminist activism, but only rarely in organizations that crossed lines of race and class . . . the women’s movement in the South may thus be characterized as multiple movements that overlapped at times, if only in limited ways, and

⁵ Stephanie Gilmore, *Groundswell: Grassroot Feminist Activism in Postwar America* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

⁶ Charles M. Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Rebecca Sharpless, *Cooking in Other Women’s Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

⁷ Evans, *Personal Politics*.

moved along parallel tracks at others.”⁸ While Keane does a cursory job of analyzing feminist businesses, providing two illuminating case studies of fairly prominent southern female-owned businesses, this analysis is a small part of a much larger story that includes political organization, labor activism, calls for reproductive rights, and the lesbian movement across the South.

Keane’s version of the origins of feminism fits into the standard narrative shared by many historians of feminism across the nation. Women’s feminism has multiple origins. While some historians, notably Dorothy Sue Cobble and Cynthia Harrison, have identified labor unions and professional women’s organizations, respectively, as places of feminist outgrowth, still others agree with Sara Evans’ contention that the language and organizational structure necessary for women’s activism came from the New Left and the Civil Rights Movement.⁹ For liberal feminists, who focused on working within the system to achieve equality for women, the language and organization of the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left provided a positive example as well as a source of frustration. In 1966, Betty Friedan, Aileen Hernandez, and Pauli Murray helped begin (NOW). They and twenty-five other women were in Washington, D. C. for the Third National Conference of State Commissions on the Status of Women. The twenty-eight women expressed their frustrations at the continued discrimination against women in the workplace, despite the passage of Title VII and the creation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). NOW

⁸ Katarina Keane, “Second-Wave Feminism in the American South, 1965-1980” (PhD diss., University of Maryland at College Park, 2009).

⁹ Evans, *Personal Politics*.

would be a “NAACP for women,” allowing members to organize and lobby for full equality.¹⁰

The women of NOW and kindred organizations tackled inequality within the structure of American culture. They advocated as a civil rights lobbying group and found a great deal of support among professional women. These women agreed with Friedan’s 1963 book, *The Feminine Mystique*, which criticized education, psychoanalysis, and the media for infantilizing women and confining them to a “comfortable concentration camp.”¹¹ NOW’s membership had no intention of challenging the mainstream. As Sara Evans notes, however, “older structures and identities no longer sufficed . . . a new movement would have to transform the privacy and subjectivity of personal life itself into a political issue.”¹² For some women, it was not enough to operate within the system; the system itself needed to be questioned and, according to some, destroyed.

Radical feminists differed from liberal feminists, like those in NOW, due to their strategies. Radical feminism found the root of women’s oppression in the patriarchal family and wanted to “fundamentally restructure public and private life.”¹³ Multiple theoretical works came out by 1970 voicing the radical feminist ideology, including Shulamith Firestone’s *The Dialectic of Sex*, Kate Millett’s *Sexual Politics*, and Robin Morgan’s *Sisterhood is Powerful*. Putting theory into practice, radical feminists protested the Miss America Pageant in 1968, where they burned feminine products like false eyelashes and

¹⁰ Miriam Schneir, *Feminism in Our Time: The Essential Writings, World War II to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 95.

¹¹ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1964), 294.

¹² Evans, *Personal Politics*, 21

¹³ Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 11.

mops (though not bras, as often reported). Less symbolically, they organized consciousness raising groups, which brought women together to discuss individual problems and identify the root causes of women's oppression. Across the country, radical feminists formed rape crisis centers and demanded attention to women's problems.

The Feminist Movement and the Organization Women in Houston

The mainstream of the nationwide feminist movement came to Houston in the 1970s. In March 1970, ten Houston area feminists organized a chapter of NOW at the invitation of Sally and Barton Hacker. Sally Hacker was a clinical instructor in psychiatry at Baylor University College of Medicine. A self-described "radical feminist anarchist," Hacker focused her work on technological change and gender discrimination.¹⁴ The Houston chapter's stated purpose, identical to the national statement, was to "take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society . . . exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men." Their focus for this task would be on "public service, employment, education and family life, and it includes freedom from discrimination because of marital status or motherhood."¹⁵ Officers included Sally Hacker as president, Cathy House as vice president, Barton Hacker as secretary, and Barbara Settle as treasurer.

Within its first year, the organization grew in both membership and influence. They took credit for multiple achievements for Houston women, including getting sex discrimination included in the hearings of the EEOC in Houston in the summer of 1970,

¹⁴ "Biography," Papers of Sally Hacker, 1951-1991: A Finding Aid, Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, February 2009, accessed January 10, 2015, <http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~sch00610>.

¹⁵ "National Organization for Women, Houston Area Chapter, By-Laws," Box 1, Folder 1, Houston Area NOW and Other Feminist Activities Collection, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

pressuring the *Houston Post* to drop separate male and female help wanted ads, and introducing an ordinance for the city that would “prohibit discrimination in employment, public accommodation, and housing on the basis of sex, race, creed, color, national origin, or place of birth.” The ordinance on equality passed the city council four years later, in 1975. In August 1970, NOW held a rally celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of women’s suffrage at the Federal Building with over 350 participants. The group followed that success with an organizing conference for the Texas Abortion Coalition (TAC). TAC members picketed and spoke to the Harris County Commissioners Court at the end of 1970, protesting the Court’s position against abortion reform in the state.¹⁶

NOW’s members in Houston continued to grow in number. Their activities and activism caught the attention of the national board. In 1974, Houston hosted NOW’s national conference. This event followed on the heels of Poppy Northcutt, Houston NOW member and one of the first female engineers working with NASA, becoming Mayor Fred Hofheinz’s first appointee as Houston Women’s Advocate. Hofheinz, viewed as extremely progressive, signed off on a list of demands from NOW, including the position of women’s advocate, equal opportunity for women in the police and fire department, and investigations into child care availability to working women. Northcutt helped make sure women’s issues stayed important to the city council and mayor’s office.¹⁷ In 1976, Houston’s women showed enough interest that Janice Blue and Gabrielle Cosgriff, members of Houston’s NOW Media Reform Task Force, began publishing a newspaper dedicated to bringing positive stories

¹⁶ Box 1, Folder 8, Houston Area NOW and Other Feminist Activities Collection, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

¹⁷ Frances Miriam “Poppy” Northcutt, interviewed by Jane Ely, April 3, 2008. Digital. University of Houston Library. Accessed January 10, 2015, <http://digital.houstonlibrary.org/oral-history/frances-northcutt.php>.

about women to the media. Named *Breakthrough* in honor of the book *La Brecha* by Mercedes Valdivieso Callahan, a feminist Chilean author, the newspaper lasted until 1981 and produced and delivered roughly 30,000 copies daily.¹⁸ Clearly, by the mid-1970s, Houston seemed fairly receptive to the liberal feminist message.

For women who either wanted to focus on business without joining NOW or other feminist organizations or wanted to participate in both professional organizations and feminist groups, Houston provided few outlets until the late 1970s and early 1980s. The River Oaks Business Women's Exchange Club (ROBWEC) became the first organization to serve business-minded women. In 1976, Marilyn Elam moved to Houston to become a legal clerk. Men dominated most business organizations at the time. On February 12, Elam met with less than ten women for breakfast at a Travel Lodge. Until July of that year, they continued to meet informally, gaining members from diverse business backgrounds including the arts, law, real estate, insurance, and accounting. On July 2, the group formally organized and moved their meetings to the River Oaks Country Club.¹⁹ By the end of 1976, the club had about thirty members. The organization focused on "referrals, investment tips . . . knowing where to go for information." Beyond that, members felt that the organization was also "about loyalty, camaraderie, commitment, sharing. Things of the spirit not easily described, but easily felt and remembered and cherished."²⁰

¹⁸ Janice Blue, "Revelations," *Houston Breakthrough* (Houston, TX), Dec/Jan 1981. Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries, accessed January 20, 2015, <http://digital.lib.uh.edu/collection/feminist/item/1226/show/1201>.

¹⁹ Box 1, Folder 1, River Oaks Business Women's Exchange Club Records, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

One of the unique features of the organization was an aversion to competition. ROBWEC limited membership to one person in each field (i.e., one photographer, one real estate agent, etcetera). The club members hoped that this restriction would enable the women to trust one another and build a community. Member Vicci Keitner, a part-owner of a marketing firm, opined that “women never used to trust each other . . . you often found a basic mistrust of other women in sororities and things like that.” The lack of competition within fields, in theory, eliminated that problem.²¹

The club also preferred that women who identified as entrepreneurs own a business in the traditional, masculine definition of the word: a brick-and-mortar store or a service based organization with distinct lines between home and work. The vice president, Gretchen Stephens, a certified underwriter in personal and business insurance, made that distinction clear when she said that the organizations needed “more women entrepreneurs” but “not people who make crafts in their garage.”²² By 1978, the organization boasted of members owning businesses in office supplies, women’s apparel, catering, photography, floral design, art galleries, and ranching.

In its first few years, despite the ban on competition within fields, the membership varied little in marital status, child-bearing status, or age. The group skewed white, middle-class, and college educated. Stephens was a political science major from Boston and a divorcee with two children. Keitner held a fine arts degree from Southern Methodist University, and Jeanne Atherton, the president of the organization in 1976, earned a master’s degree from the University of Chicago in architecture. After pursuing a career in architecture,

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

marrying, and raising two children, she divorced and became a banker. In addition to the organization's demographic homogeneity and further adding to the exclusivity, membership fees in 1976 were \$120 a year and an additional \$5 for each breakfast meeting.²³ If a member missed two consecutive meetings or could not attend the required six meetings a year, her membership automatically terminated.²⁴

Frustrated by the ban on competition and other restrictions, women formed splinter groups in the following years. In a 1979 article, caustically titled "Good Old Girl's Network: Women's Breakfast Clubs Latest Whim," Barbara Karkabi profiled four breakfast clubs, including ROBWEC. Sudy Blumenthal formed the River Oaks Women's Breakfast Club in 1977. This organization met once a week, every Thursday. Blumenthal argued that businesswomen had "too much to get accomplished" to only meet once a month. Similarly, the Galleria Professional Women's Club spun off from ROBWEC to cater to women in neighborhoods in the Westheimer area. ROBWEC, Blumenthal's group, and the Galleria Professional Women's Club all restricted their membership in some way. In 1978, Nabila Cronfel, an independent art consultant, founded the Second Tuesday club without restrictions on memberships. A year after its founding, the organization had twenty-five members. All four organizations invited speakers to each meeting and most published newsletters.²⁵

In addition to the breakfast meeting clubs, organizations aimed at helping business and professional women in Houston continued to appear throughout the mid and late 1970s. These groups included multiple chapters of the American Business Women's Association

²³To place that in perspective, according to the Bureau of Labor Studies, that is the equivalent of nearly \$500 in 2014.

²⁴ Box 1, Folder 1, River Oaks Business Women's Exchange Club Records, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

²⁵ Ibid.

(ABWA). A Kansas City businessman, Hilary Bufton, Jr., founded ABWA in 1949 with three unidentified businesswomen. “It was my feeling all women were seeking and deserved equal business opportunities,” he remembered later in life. “They had gained tremendous business knowledge during World War II, through necessity, and I felt a new organization for all businesswomen was needed.”²⁶ The organization grew, and, by 1980, Houston had multiple chapters, including ones devoted to the downtown area, the neighborhood around Westheimer, and Cypress. Kay Allen, a field representative for the national ABWA office, thought that the Houston chapters could make a larger impact if they worked together. Allen sponsored “community meetings” in the late 1970s to urge the chapters to collaborate. She hoped that the different chapters could come together to share ideas and business information. The meetings proved extremely popular, but the multiple chapters had no interest in dissolving and forming one large Houston-area chapter.²⁷

In 1981, Rosie Walker, owner of the *Houston Working Woman’s Journal* and an ABWA member, organized a meeting in March 1981 to discuss creating an umbrella organization for Houston’s female business and professional organizations. She opened the meeting to non-ABWA organizations; more than twenty groups attended the March meeting. In September, the Federation of Houston Professional Women (FHPW) officially came in to being.²⁸ The organization would “help professional women serve as a resource to each other and to the community by providing educational, networking, and support group activities to its members, focus on empowering individuals to achieve their goals by addressing general

²⁶ “Our History,” American Business Women’s Association, Texas A & M University, accessed on November 10, 2015, <http://abwa.tamu.edu/node/8>

²⁷ “The Federation of Houston Professional Women,” *The Observer* (Houston, TX), March 10, 1993, 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

concerns of women in civic, community, personal, and professional pursuits, and unite individuals of our member organizations to promote a place of influence and power." Together, the various groups involved in the federation would attempt to educate women about the political process to foster activism that would create a more favorable environment for businesswomen in Houston.²⁹

Feminism and Entrepreneurship in Houston

All of this organizing proves just how interested Houston area businesswomen were in not only attending to their own success but fostering the success of others. Most importantly, this commitment to mutual aid involved sharing information and advice. When approached by *Houston Breakthrough*, the newspaper for the Houston chapter of NOW, several female entrepreneurs, all members, at the time, of NOW, wrote on the pros and cons of their endeavors and their success in order to encourage fledgling or aspiring proprietors. The article included nineteen female business owners. While no record describes how the newspaper collected responses, in the resulting article, the periodical's authors clearly asked for information on what spurred the women to begin their enterprises, what barriers appeared, and how they felt about the process. While a few of the women mentioned a close brush with failure or their fear of closing, more of them pondered the problems of success.³⁰

The owner of The Bookstore, Mary Ross Rhyne, penned the first entry in the piece: a two part tongue-in-cheek list on the "Risks of Starting Your Own Business." Rhyne had written extensively for NOW in the past and acted as editor for *The Broadside*, the official NOW newsletter, for multiple years. In the first part of this particular article, "If You Fail,"

²⁹ Box 1, Folder 7, Federation of Houston Professional Women Records, Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

³⁰"The Risk Takers," *Houston Breakthrough*.

Rhyne noted the ever-present risk of lost money, damaged credit, potential fall-out with business partners, and general regret. The second part, “If You Succeed,” provides an honest analysis of the difficulties for women who managed to get a business off the ground:

- C. Your parents/in-laws may say:
 - a. ‘Her poor husband.’
 - b. ‘Those poor children.’
- D. Your old friends may feel threatened and defensive, or jealous
- E. If you make a lot of money
 - a. Your husband/lover may resent it.
 - b. You’ll have to deal with more financial decisions.
- F. If you don’t make a lot of money
 - a. Your husband/ lover may resent it.
 - b. You’ll have to worry about staying in the black
 - c. You’ll feel overworked and underpaid.
- G. You’ll find out that people will say:
 - a. ‘Her poor husband/lover.’
 - b. ‘Those poor children.’
 - c. ‘All she needs is a good *!@K.’
 - d. ‘She did it by sleeping with the customers/suppliers/media people.’
 - e. ‘She’s probably a lesbian.’³¹

Karey Bresenham, owner of Great Expectations Quilts, echoed Rhyne in her contribution to the article. She asserted that, “Being afraid of success is incomprehensible to me,” but she noted the pitfalls of being a “successful” woman, particularly the damage to relationships and the stress of the double day.³² She devoted herself to both quilting and her business, deciding to forego having children with her husband, Maurice. She contracted polio at age six, and she credited her professional success to the determination she developed as a result of the disease. She served as mayor of a suburb of Houston, Piney Point, in the early 1970s, opened Great Expectations in 1974, and in the late 1970s developed Quilts, Inc., which coordinates large quilt shows, including Houston’s International Quilt Festival, and

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

wholesaling events. Through it all, she had the support of her husband, who, in 2014, said, “Her life is a total book of accomplishment. She’s always doing something and more often than not, she’s doing things for other people.”³³ Despite a happy marriage and a thriving business, Bresenham argued that, “There’s another risk nobody talks about: isolation. The more successful you are, the fewer people there are with whom you can share experience and insecurities.”³⁴

Mary Ellen Allen and Bobbie W. Street concurred with Bresenham’s description of the problems of success. Allen opened a cheese shop in Houston in 1975. Like Bresenham, she bemoaned the toll a successful business took on relationships. Allen’s shop broke even within the first year, which she rejoiced in, but, echoing Bresenham, she asserted that, “It’s hard for me to understand how anyone with family responsibilities could devote enough time to establishing a new business. . . . My private life certainly has not developed since the shop opened.”³⁵ Street’s experience as a mother and business owner speaks to that problem. Street ran a weekly shopper newspaper, *The Market Place*, beginning in 1969. Street remarked that she was fortunate to not face any instances, that she could recall, of sexism, but her main problem was explaining to her sons, who were seven, eleven, and seventeen when she began the paper, why she needed to work long hours. In retrospect, she felt the experience had been extremely beneficial for her sons, who learned self-sufficiency and a level of responsibility that, in her opinion, they would not have gained if she had stayed at home.³⁶

³³ Betsy Denson, “Reagan Hall of Fame inductee shares love for ‘Red Coats,’” *The Leader* December 8, 2014, accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.theleadernews.com/index.php/reagan-hall-fame-inductee-shares-love-red-coats/>.

³⁴ “The Risktakers,” *Houston Breakthrough*.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Other women described the persistent struggles they faced with men with whom they interacted and their individual coping mechanisms. Ruth Barrett, co-owner of an advertising agency, remarked that, “when a client calls to ‘suggest’ that I bring the male half of Barrett Associates to a meeting . . . or when a Chairman of the Board insists on calling me ‘Honey,’ I wonder why I continue to do it.” For Barrett, solace came in the form of a “nice fat check in the bank” and the ability to purchase all the “toys” her male peers described, like boats and expensive jewelry.³⁷ Mitsouko A. Burton, owner of an interior design business with a degree in architecture, adopted a “take it or leave it” style with male clients and peers. She laughed off male salesmen who come to the office and preferred to direct their conversation to her male assistant, even when Burton was in the room. She used her sense of humor to let the sexist assumptions and remarks go. “Recently,” she wrote, “a gentleman came in to my office and asked for Mr. Burton. I said, ‘He doesn’t come into the office very often—but can I help you?’”³⁸

Women who did not deal with overt sexism still faced problems unique to female entrepreneurs, particularly crises of confidence. Mary Ellen Whitworth, owner of M.E.’s Gallery, opened her gallery in 1975. Prior to that, she had spent years acting as a wholesaler for small collectable items, but she did not consider herself as an entrepreneur or self-employed. Similar to ROBWEC’s derision of people who made crafts in their “garage,” Whitworth only began to see herself as the proprietor of a legitimate business when she began her brick-and-mortar operation. She described her major struggles as a fear of staying financially solvent and a lack of confidence in her abilities. In terms of money, Whitworth

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

managed to obtain two loans for her business but continued to turn to part-time jobs and private investors to remain afloat. “Realistically,” she reflected, “I know that even in times of plenty I have difficulty accepting myself as financially independent.”³⁹

Whitworth’s lack of confidence in her ability to be “financially independent” also crossed over to her inability to see herself as equipped to run an art gallery. While she had a graduate degree, it was in neither business nor art and, psychologically, this fact acted as a barrier to her success. When faced with solving a problem, Whitworth could not trust herself in the early days of her operation to rely on her intuition. Gradually, that changed. She happily noted that, “the transition has not been easy, but it has been very rewarding.”⁴⁰ Similarly, Elouise Hetherly, owner of Ouisie’s Table, a restaurant and shop, highlighted intuition as crucial to her success. “I have my intuitive feelings permission and encouragement to be and proceeded to act on them . . . that quality is exactly what I believe makes for a good cook, and it is what I look for when interviewing one.” Like Whitworth, Hetherly’s trust in her own abilities developed over time and only arrived when she made the decision to open her own business. “It never occurred to me that it might fail,” she remembered. “This has always surprised me, because I was never one with much self-confidence or high self-esteem.”⁴¹

Other women noted that when a woman possessed the confidence that Whitworth found lacking in herself and Hetherly rejoiced in, she could face problems. Street asserted

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ At some point in time between the writing of the article and 1980, Whitworth enrolled in a graduate program in environmental engineering at the University of Houston and has spent the rest of her career in environmental science. Ibid.

⁴¹ Hetherly, now Elouise Jones, ran her business for fifteen years, chose to close for six, then reopened. The restaurant is still open, as of 2015, and she blogs for the *Houston Chronicle*. Ibid.

that “A woman in business for herself has to be able to take care of herself, but most men are frightened of such self-assurance. They expect demure dependence . . . and are turned off by a self-sufficient woman.”⁴² Elyse Peavy and Joy Goodman, co-owners of The House of Coffee Beans, concurred that husbands sometimes had difficulty accepting an entrepreneurial wife. “Neither of us had any previous business experience or much money,” they recalled, “and we didn’t receive much support from our families, except our children, who thought the project sounded like fun.”⁴³ Likewise, Ruth Barrett remembered how she spent the early 1960s “carried away in an avalanche of babies. And whenever I showed signs of digging out, someone inevitably reminded me that ‘the children need you at home.’”

After her years as a housewife, Barrett became a partner in Barrett Associates, a Houston advertising agency. She directly credited the feminist movement for giving her the confidence to march into business for herself, though she lamented that “unfortunately, Betty Friedan did NOT change my life,” because it came out so early in her childbearing years. Barrett rejoiced in the “fun and prestige of paying my own way,” but she did not want that personal fulfillment to stop at her own life. She wrote: “I believe that the sooner women (lots of women) stop feeling guilty about earning money (lots of money) the sooner we’ll be able to BUY all the things we say we believe in . . . we could change the world if women only had enough money. . . .”⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ The House of Coffee Beans, as of 2015, remains open at the same location but under different owners. Shortly after their opening in 1973, they became one of the first Houston businesses to roast coffee beans on site. Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Feminists across Houston answered Barrett's call. The problem of women's access to money came under increasing attention in the early 1970s. In 1973, after Gloria Steinem addressed a crowd in Dallas, local activists approached her to ask what they could do to support the feminist movement. She answered, "Start a credit union." By 1976, eighteen feminist credit unions existed across the country.⁴⁵ The first feminist credit union, as historian Anne Enke has documented, arose out of the women's self-help and health movement in Detroit. In Detroit, the Feminist Women's Health Center opened in 1973 as a safe space for women to get access to contraceptives, exams, treatments and testing for sexually transmitted diseases, and abortions. Within the same building, the Feminist Federal Credit Union opened. The women who started the credit union "saw feminist economic self-help as the first step toward anything else."⁴⁶ Most banks required male signatures for loans. This rule became inextricably tied to women's health care, because women who needed money for abortions or divorce faced barriers to their economic autonomy. Thus, until 1976, the Feminist Women's Health Center and the Feminist Federal Credit Union of Detroit shared space and collaborated in practices.⁴⁷

Opening a credit union proved difficult for the trailblazers in Detroit. The two founders, Valerie Angers and Joanne Parrent, had to convince the Federal Credit Union Charter Agency why "feminism constituted a legitimate common bond that could be the basis of credit union membership." In order to legitimate that claim, they restricted membership to established feminist organizations like NOW, the League of Women Voters,

⁴⁵ Candice Reed, "Society and Credit Unions Have Come a Long Way, Baby," *Credit Union Times Magazine*, December 12, 2012, http://www.cutimes.com/2012/12/12/society-and-credit-unions-have-come-a-long-way-bab#disqus_thread.

⁴⁶ Enke, *Finding the Movement*, 202.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

or the Women's Liberation Coalition of Michigan. Once the Detroit credit union established that as the requirement, the Federal Credit Union Agency wrote that structure into the requirements for all future feminist credit unions, including the Houston Feminist Credit Union. This rule reinforced the idea that a feminist must be someone who belongs to a feminist organization and frustrated many activists, who felt that it limited the goal of helping all women regardless of affiliation with organized groups. Nevertheless, the clear definition of membership allowed the Detroit Feminist Federal Credit Union (FFCU) to obtain their federal charter in August 1973 with over \$22,000 in federally insured loans. Not long after, the credit union boasted assets approaching a million dollars and prompted the founding of similar organizations in Los Angeles, Seattle, Denver, Pittsburgh, New York, and, of course, Houston.⁴⁸

The Houston Area Feminist Federal Credit Union (HAFFCU) opened on October 10, 1975. Relying on seventy-three members of affiliating organizations, at opening night, HAFCU had \$18,000 in deposits. By their first board of directors meeting, HAFCU had 296 members; 21 percent of the members of HAFCU were members of Houston NOW.⁴⁹ In practice, HAFFCU helped women obtain loans for start-up costs related to business enterprises. In 1975, Barbara T. Grizzle made a decision "to become independent." She secured a loan from HAFFCU and built a greenhouse, selling plants at flea markets on weekends in order to build up an inventory. She called her new business "The Little

⁴⁸ Enke, *Finding the Movement*, 203-4.

⁴⁹ Report of the Board of Directors of the First Annual Meeting of HAFCU, March 11, 1976. Box 2, Folder 43, Laura Oren Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

Thicket.” She credited HAFFCU for enabling her to figure out a way to make a living out of something for which she had a great love.⁵⁰

The growth and success of feminist credit unions, in part, prompted Congress to pass the Equal Credit Opportunity Act in 1974. The Act was implemented and enforced in a series of phases over two years. This act allowed women to obtain loans in their own name. Banks and credit unions opened their lending lines to women in increasing numbers. Unfortunately for women-run credit unions, this change meant that women could now obtain loans from other sources than feminist credit unions. The HAFFCU closed its doors in 1980. In one of their final newsletters, the organization cited “a very high delinquency rate, lack of share growth, and burn-out” from volunteers.⁵¹

The idea of providing safe space unique to women extended beyond health centers and credit unions. Specifically feminist businesses opened across the country in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The most prominent examples of radical feminist businesses included communes selling fruits, baked and canned goods, and crafts, women’s health organizations, feminist bookstores, and coffee shops. Anne Enke argues the founders of most feminist-identified businesses had “a desire to build and foster community through provision of a new community space.” According to Enke, few of the feminist business owners thought of themselves as businesspeople; their businesses were benefiting women and, they hoped, changing the very nature of the marketplace. For feminist bookstore owner Mary Taylor, proprietor of Bookstore on Bissonet, an open community was at the heart of her

⁵⁰ The Risk Takers,” *Houston Breakthrough*.

⁵¹ Newsletter, 1977, Box 2, Folder 43, Laura Oren Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.

entrepreneurial efforts. She opened her bookstore in the early 1970s. Taylor had abandoned a dissertation “back in the days when the University of Texas didn’t put married women on the PhD candidate job list” to open her bookstore. She hosted book signings by feminist authors and became extremely involved the local and national feminist art movement. She used her bookstore to provide a place for women artists to display their projects, advertise feminist events, and to fundraise for feminist art projects. In the late 1970s, she closed her bookstore to pursue a career in museum administration and revitalizing Houston’s alternative arts spaces and galleries. She was instrumental in bringing the feminist exhibition *The Dinner Party* to Houston and continued to champion feminist art and feminist community in Houston into the twenty-first century.⁵²

The Intersection of Feminism, Lesbian Activism, and Entrepreneurship in Houston

Marion Coleman, owner of House of Coleman, a printing agency, echoed that sense of community. She credited the success of her business to her female friends who helped her begin the enterprise, brought her customers, and helped keep up her spirits. In the first year of her agency, it was not certain the business would survive. When Coleman contacted ad agencies, they questioned whether a women “could not only run a printing business but actually be a printer.” She had very few customers and almost closed her doors within the first six months until suddenly the campaign for a Senate candidate, George H. W. Bush, asked Coleman to handle printing flyers and signs.⁵³ Coleman, a lifelong Republican, delightedly took on the task. She supported Bush’s views on government interference in

⁵² “Dedicated Donor: Mary Ross Taylor,” *Women in the Arts*, Winter/Spring 2014, 7.

⁵³ “The Risk Takers,” *Houston Breakthrough*.

businesses, arguing in the 1990s that, people who owned a small business needed to vote Republican.⁵⁴ After word spread that Bush used Coleman's shop, business increased.

At night on weekends in 1975, after her male printer went home, Coleman opened her shop to Alison McKinney, Pokey Anderson, and Linda Lovell, the founders of Houston's first lesbian-feminist periodical, *Pointblank Times*. The newsletter consisted of ten to twelve pages of news analysis, poetry, stories, and notices for upcoming events. The founders worked to reduce the isolation and invisibility of Houston's lesbian community, and they printed their work out of the House of Coleman for the cost of paper and with the full support of Coleman. Although Coleman later came out of the closet and opened one of the city's most popular lesbian bars in 1980, in the 1970s, she felt she could not. Anderson remembers, "Her printer was a Christian man and straight as a board. Marion was afraid he would find out that she was a lesbian—even though she was his boss!"⁵⁵

Known as the homosexual playground of the South, Houston boasted multiple gay bars and clubs by the 1960s that formed the backbone of what constituted a gay community.⁵⁶ Very few Houston lesbians and gay men organized in any discernible way in the 1950s and 1960s. Ray Hill, a Houston gay man, recalled how many local homosexuals "saw other people in the community almost as enemies . . . We didn't like ourselves. We didn't like one another." This statement was true in the lesbian community. One bar owner remarked that, "We were a lost people who needed to come together."⁵⁷ In the pre-Stonewall

⁵⁴ Stuart Eskenazi, "Rogue Elephant: Log Cabin Republicans Want to be Part of the GOP, Which Wants No Part of Them," *Houston Press* (Houston, TX), September 3, 1998.

⁵⁵ James T. Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 174.

⁵⁶ For more on the rise of the gay rights movement, see Bruce Remington, "Twelve Fighting Years: Homosexuals in Houston, 1969-1981" (MA thesis, University of Houston, 1983).

period, what coming together existed in Houston happened in bars and clubs. While in the North, unscrupulous Mafia bosses controlled many gay bars and clubs, in Houston in the 1950s and 1960s, straight women owned most venues that catered to homosexuals. In his cultural study, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones: Queering Space in the Stonewall South*, sociologist James T. Sears chronicled multiple straight-owned businesses in Houston. One of the first and most frequented was Effie's Pink Elephant, opened in 1946, which catered to older gay men. Others followed throughout the 1940s and 1950s: Verlon Muma's Surf Lounge, open on South Main in 1956, the Round Table on Westheimer, operated by a woman only remembered as Dorothy, and Rocky's, a working class club on West Dallas. In 1949, Hazel L. Johnson opened the Desert Room. The straight entrepreneurs kept an eye out both for their own interests and those of their grateful patrons. Sears describes how people fondly remembered the Desert Room's "famed Sunday afternoon tea dances . . . guarded by Hazel with a watchful eye for the police and an agile thumb set to flicker the lights."⁵⁸

Police raids proved a constant threat for bar owners who catered to gays and lesbians in Houston, as in other parts of the country. Houston had a very active vice squad. Some gay bars and clubs would not let women inside if they did not wear dresses or wore distinctively male pants. At the time, women's pants zipped in the back and men's zipped in the front, allowing for a quick determination of whether a person was wearing the clothes of the opposite sex, which constituted a crime in Houston. In 1966, twenty-five lesbians were arrested in one night during a raid at a lesbian-owned club due to their clothes. At the same club, the Roaring Sixties, in 1968, the vice squad, led by a Sergeant McMenney conducted

⁵⁷ Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 53.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

another raid. Lining all of the women dressed in men's clothing against a wall, they began questioning them. The owner of the Roaring Sixties, Rita Wanstrom, remembered how, "One woman was asked her occupation and said 'I'm a weenie peeler.' That just broke everyone up . . . It turned out she worked in a meat factory . . . So they put all the butches in the paddy wagon."⁵⁹

Wanstrom opened the Roaring Sixties on June 23, 1967. The bar, boasting red walls and crimson drapes, mostly had a lesbian clientele. Wanstrom ran the bar with her partner, Ricci Cortez, who performed and stripped alongside Peaches, a gay man who choreographed the drag queens. She spent most of her life fighting her desire for other women, leaving four failed marriages in her past. She moved to Houston from Bell County, Texas, in 1957 following the devastating death of her parents in a car accident.⁶⁰ The Roaring Sixties was one of the first lesbian-owned bars in Houston. It also came to form the center of resistance against vice raids. "I don't think the other bar owners could see what was happening," Wanstrom recalled, "I saw the need for someone to speak out on behalf of this community." Working with Ray Hill, the manager of a private after-hours club, and David Patterson, a young man who had just arrived from Kansas, Wanstrom formed the Promethean Society. In 1968, the mayor of Houston, Louie Welch, frequented the Red Room, a bar that operated as straight before a certain time and had "queer hours" later. After discussion with the mayor's people, Hill met with the mayor's assistant, Larry McKaskle, in a maid's closet in City Hall under cover of darkness. McKaskle promised that his people would look into the lesbian bar raids. Wanstrom hired attorney Percy Foreman and raised funds through hosting benefits and

⁵⁹ Ibid., 54.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 50.

drag shows.⁶¹ When Wanstrom and the other women, including the “weenie peeler,” appeared in court, the judge dismissed the cases due to the failure of the officers to appear. The head of the vice squad, who vowed to refile charges and carry on the raids, was quietly transferred to another division. “They never bothered us again!” Wanstrom triumphantly recalled.⁶²

By the beginning of the 1970s, lesbian-owned businesses, ranging from bars to construction businesses, were booming. Wanstrom operated a construction company that allowed her lesbian friends and acquaintances to work in jobs they loved openly and with no harassment. By 1973, her construction company was doing so well “that she hired one person whose only job was to clean up around the saw.”⁶³ At gay bars, vice raids persisted, fueled by gruesome headlines about the murders of twenty-seven young men in Pasadena, near Houston. This crime only added to the slow demise of the Roaring Sixties. Business had been roaring until Wanstrom and Cortez broke up in July of 1973. Wanstrom recalled how “It affected the business. People were used to seeing us as a team, an institution. It shattered ideals between couples.” The Roaring Sixties closed in 1974.⁶⁴

Wanstrom’s friend, Marion Pantzer, had recently opened Just Marion and Lynn’s, at roughly the same time as the demise of the Roaring Sixties. Her bar quickly became the center of the lesbian community, filling the void Wanstrom’s business left. Pantzer kept dogs

⁶¹ Years later, Wanstrom stated that she thought Foreman was so willing to work with her because he’d had a good friend in school who was gay and was murdered on a night the two were supposed to be together. Wanstrom believed he had a guilt complex about that and always wanted to help the gay community. Carl Davis, “Steps in Time With Rita Wanstrom and Phil Davis,” *This Week in Texas*, January 23-29, 1987, 54.

⁶² Sears, *Rebels, Rubyfruit, and Rhinestones*, 54-55.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 171.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

near the front door, trained to bark when police arrived to harass bar patrons, in spite of a ban on raids promised by new mayor Fred Hoffheinz. Pantzer and Wanstrom shared status as “fairy godmothers” of Montrose, the center of Houston’s gay community. They raised money for those who fell on hard times and looked out for their friends and acquaintances. Sears speculates that the social services performed by people like Wanstrom and Pantzer, including funeral services and marriage ceremonies, explains why the expression of sexuality within Houston’s gay community remained confined to the bars and clubs until the arrival of the lesbian-feminist movement in the mid-1970s.⁶⁵

In his work, Sears chronicles the shift from “bar lesbian” to “lesbian-feminist” in Houston, personified by Pokey Anderson. By the early 1970s, the earlier activism led by people like Wanstrom had faded. Lesbians continued to open bars and clubs throughout Houston, including Just Marion and Lynn’s and Poppa Bears, a second bar opened by Wanstrom in Old Market Square, but the Houston lesbian community remained social, not political.⁶⁶ Feminism helped change that. Anderson identified herself as both a feminist and a lesbian. She attended the first National Women’s Political Caucus in 1973, held at Houston’s Rice Hotel. Energized by her experience at the meeting, Anderson began seeking out organizations for homosexuals. She was disappointed to find that what did exist, especially Integrity/Houston, a “Fellowship for homophiles,” mostly consisted of men. She resented how, “Men’s history is institutionalized and has lots of capital letters. Women’s history tends to be small letters . . . little groups that get together and read books and play softball.”⁶⁷ She

⁶⁵ Tragically, one of the funeral’s Wanstrom organized was Pantzer’s. In 1986, Pantzer was murdered in a botched burglary of her bar. She was sixty seven years old. So many people attended her funeral, including the mayor at the time, Kathy Whitmire, that the attendees walked from the church to the cemetery to avoid traffic congestion. *Ibid.*, 173.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

moved from back and forth between the gay movement for a time, became annoyed with sexism, then turn back to the women's movement, where she felt alienated by heterosexism. What Houston really needed, in her opinion, was a lesbian-focused movement.

She and Harla Kaplan, the leader of the Sexuality and Lesbianism Task Force for Houston's NOW chapter, began recruiting people for a lesbian-centered organization out of already established centers, like the Roaring Sixties. Most women of Wanstrom and Pantzer's generation recoiled from Anderson and Kaplan's activism. Anderson remembers one older lesbian couple who told her, "Pokey, you come out. And when it's safe, you let us know." Despite the older generation's misgivings, about fifty women met for the first meeting of the task force to Anderson and Kalan's delight.⁶⁸ Simultaneously, Anderson and others worked to bring the lesbian community out of the shadows, founding *Pointblank Times* and contributing to a growing sense of activism. In 1976, three hundred marchers walked down Main Street for Houston's first gay pride march. Both feminist and gay bookstores passed out materials supporting the gay movement.⁶⁹

The National Women's Conference in 1977 demonstrated the vitality and visibility of the lesbian community in Houston. Lesbians and their supporters from outside of Houston could not have failed to see the half-page ads appearing in Houston's newspapers paid for by the Pro-Family Rally, a vehemently anti-homosexuality organization. The advertisements showed a girl holding a bouquet of flowers against her white dress. "Mommy, when I grow up, can I be a lesbian?," the little girl asked. The message, one of condemnation, could not

⁶⁷ Ibid., 168.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 170.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 224.

be missed. Nevertheless, a massive number of lesbian feminists attended the conference. Hundreds of lesbian delegates held balloons stating “We Are Everywhere” and listened in stunned silence as Betty Friedan changed her stance on lesbianism and supported a pro-sexual preference resolution that passed as part of a plan of progressive resolutions. Not everyone in the crowd approved, most predictably those delegates chosen purely to disrupt the conference, including men from southern states. “As the all-white, partly male Mississippi delegation stood and turned its back to the podium, lesbians in the hall departed for a brief candlelight ceremony.”⁷⁰ From a shunned minority to acknowledgment from the founder of NOW, lesbians at the conference celebrated their success with a somber and moving reflection on how far they had come. At Houston, lesbians had won a major victory within the mainstream feminist movement.

From the beginning to the end of the 1970s, the landscape for women business owners in Houston had dramatically changed as a direct result of the feminist movement, whether female entrepreneurs directly identified as feminists or merely benefitted from the changing environment. Houston women had the opportunity to join local feminist organizations, like Houston’s chapter of NOW, or business-focused groups, like the River Oaks Business Women’s Exchange Club. Houston boasted one of the largest and most active chapters of NOW in the country and the largest women’s political caucus in the nation, gaining attention not only for hosting the International Women’s Conference but also the national annual conference for NOW and the annual organizational meeting for the national Women’s Political Caucus. The opportunity for Houstonian women to obtain loans dramatically increased, first with the founding of the Houston Area Feminist Federal Credit

⁷⁰ Ibid., 283.

Union and, later, with the implementation of the Equal Credit Opportunity Act. The first women's advocate appointed by the mayor for the city of Houston, Poppy Northcutt, remarked on the "huge changes made over that period" in Houston, listing the fact that women became local television anchors for the first time, gained legal, credit, and employment rights as well as positions in politics.⁷¹ The number of female-owned businesses spiked across the nation as women continued to make headway. For lesbian business owners, the increased attention and agitation for rights led to a new period of open business advertisement and practices. Women like Marion Coleman came out of the closet and founded openly-lesbian businesses. Women like Rita Wanstrom stepped further out of the shadows and enjoyed new opportunities. Indeed, women business owners across Houston entered a new period of opportunity and potential.

⁷¹ Frances Miriam "Poppy" Northcutt, interviewed by Jane Ely, April 3, 2008. Digital. University of Houston Library. Accessed January 10, 2015, <http://digital.houstonlibrary.org/oral-history/frances-northcutt.php>.

CONCLUSION: “HOUSTON LEADS THE WAY”: WOMEN’S
ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY HOUSTON AND
BEYOND

In 2014, the *Houston Chronicle* proudly proclaimed that in number of female-owned businesses “Houston leads the way.” The city was the fourth most friendly for successful women small-business owners in the nation. In Texas, women-headed businesses increased 98 percent from 1997 to 2014, a rate of growth beaten only by Georgia. Although the newspaper asserted that Houston’s strong economy provided a welcoming environment for women entrepreneurs, several of the women business owners interviewed for the story attributed the growth and flourishing of female-headed businesses in Houston to a network of women proprietors that stretched back into the postwar period. The women interviewed knew they stood on the shoulders of other women who had struck out on their own in the past and laid a foundation for the future by forming professional organizations like the Houston Women’s Business Forum and the River Oaks Business Women’s Exchange Club, sharing information, and providing a model for aspiring women entrepreneurs. The growth of woman-headed enterprises at the end of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first is a testament to what the women of Cold War Houston sustained and built.¹

Despite their importance, these women do not often appear in the usual business history of Houston. Women’s establishment of businesses, however, provides a lens into women’s broader experience during the postwar years, particularly in areas of spectacular economic growth. No place better exemplifies this than Houston, the “belt buckle of the

¹ Crystal Simmons, “Houston Leads the Way in Top Female-Owned Businesses,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 5, 2014.

Sunbelt.” Women entrepreneurs sought out opportunities that allowed them the flexibility to earn incomes while still performing their roles as wives and mothers. They found, in proprietorship, autonomy over their decisions and work life. Houston women in the postwar period had opportunities for business ownership, used perceptions of their gender to their advantage, and capitalized on successes and ideas about women’s “place” to find their own place in the food and beauty industry. The service industry as a whole offered increasing possibilities for postwar women, and as Houston continued to reap the benefits of its booming oil-based economy, women’s enterprises provided necessary products and services. Moreover, women’s increased buying power in the Cold War era and their connection to home and family gave them greater authority in the retail and real estate economic sectors. Their societally sanctioned expertise in childcare and in the arts also granted them the ability and authority to open related businesses. As the 1960s and 1970s progressed, the feminist movement and the growth of professional organizations allowed women greater opportunities. The pattern of Houston’s postwar women making spaces in service, retail, real estate, and the arts crossed racial, ethnic, and class lines, although the effects of segregation and discrimination based on color cannot be minimized or ignored. What united all women business owners in Houston, across various intersectional points, was a desire to earn a profit, determine their own working conditions, and balance their prescribed domestic role with a place in the market economy. Women could carve out a space for economic determination in a world that continued to emphasize their subordinate and secondary position.

In the 1970s, more and more women began to own their own businesses. In August 1977, *U.S. News & World Report* stated that the number of female-owned

businesses doubled between 1972 and 1976, and in 1976, more women attended Small Business Administration sponsored training programs on obtaining loans in the first eight months than in the entirety of 1975. The National Association of Women Business Owners, founded in 1976, quickly expanded beyond Washington, D.C., and workshops overflowed with attendees. The New York Association of Women Business Owners hosted a meeting on starting a business in 1976, expected 250 participants, signed up 500, and had to turn away 750. *U.S. News & World Report* examined the reasons that so many women ventured into entrepreneurship. Changing social attitudes, antidiscrimination laws, an increase in the size of the service industry, and higher education rates for women all played roles in the increase in women's business participation in the 1970s. Moreover, the women who began businesses prior to those changes recognized the other reasons: ambition, profit, and a desire to have a flexible schedule that allowed for a blend of work and home. Despite continued barriers generated from decades ingrained attitudes and discrimination, acknowledged by both *U.S. News & World Report* and the women proprietors they interviewed, the upsurge in women's business interest caused predictions that "dramatic changes seem certain" regarding women's increased business activities.²

As the 1970s progressed, those predictions proved correct. For women in both Houston and across the nation, the 1977 National Conference on the Observance International Women's Year provided an additional spotlight on the needs and potential of women entrepreneurs. The city of Houston welcomed the delegates and visitors with

² "Starting a Business: Women Show It's Not Just a Man's World," *U.S. News and World Report*, August 29, 1977, 54-55.

the acknowledgment that “women workers have been essential to the successful operation of Houston’s City Government. . . .What is more, their contribution increases as their opportunities broaden.”³ Expanding opportunities for women formed the core of the conference’s goals.

The National Women’s Conference resulted from two years of planning, beginning with President Gerald Ford’s executive order creating the National Commission on the Observance of International Women’s Year. The following year, Congress authorized funding for the conference and included an appropriations bill for \$5 million dollars. From there, the National IWY Commission selected Houston to serve as the site of the conference. The commission toured multiple sites and cities prior to choosing Houston on October 14, 1976. They cited four factors that put Houston ahead of the other cities: extensive lobbying for the meeting from the Greater Houston Convention and Visitors Council, the unique position within the city government of an official women’s advocate, excellent facilities at both the Sheraton Houston and the Hyatt Regency Hotel, and “the strong and wide volunteer support” offered by local groups. The organizations that provided their assistance, time, and labor included the local chapter of NOW and local businesswomen’s organizations, like the Federation of Professional Women and the River Oaks Business Women’s Exchange Club.⁴ In other words, Houston proved enticing because of a combination of its boosterism and its projected image as pro-women’s advocacy and equality. The Houston organizations that

³ Program for the National Conference on the Observance of International Women’s Year, Box 4, Folder 15, Houston Area NOW and Other Feminist Activities Collection, Courtesy of Special Collections & Archives, University of Houston Libraries.

⁴ Letter from Hilary Whittaker to Jim Smither, Box 6, Folder 16, Nikki Van Hightower Papers, Courtesy of Special Collections & Archives, University of Houston Libraries.

promoted and advocated for women's businesses, either as part of their main mission or their general efforts to aid women's success, were at the heart of arranging for the commission's decision.

The conference put women's business efforts as part of the main points and recommendations of the agenda. The delegates agreed on a plan of action over five plenary sessions spread throughout the conference. One of the action plan planks included multiple recommendations for U.S. President Jimmy Carter. The delegates began by asking the president for an executive order establishing national policy on:

- The full integration of women entrepreneurs in government-wide business-related and procurement activities, including a directive to all government agencies to assess the impact of these activities on women business owners.
- The development of outreach and action programs to bring about the full integration of women entrepreneurs into business-related government activities and procurement.
- The development of evaluation and monitoring programs to assess progress periodically and to develop new programs.

The delegates also advised the president to add women to the programs covered by the Office of Minority Business Enterprise and the Small Business Administration and to direct the Department of Labor to confirm that compliance officers monitor contracts to assure that women-owned businesses are equitable treated. They noted that the Small Business Administration excluded women from eligibility in the 1953 act that was designed to assist disadvantaged business owners and only received 4.6 percent of the loans provided by the SBA.⁵ The SBA, in turn, recognized their responsibilities toward women by offering a workshop on "Opportunities for Women as Business Owners"

⁵ "Business," Program for the National Conference on the Observance of International Women's Year, Box 4, Folder 15, Houston Area NOW and Other Feminist Activities Collection, Courtesy of Special Collections & Archives, University of Houston Libraries.

during the conference. The workshop, held at multiple times to reach as many potential business owners as possible, described the assistance SBA would provide, services contributing to successful ventures, and materials on management, loans, and government procurement opportunities and was open to the public.⁶ The conference, as a whole, proved successful for both Houston, as the host city, and also for women looking for acknowledgement of their concerns as business owners.

Following the conference, women's enterprises continued to mushroom in number through the beginning of the twenty-first century. For women weathering the recession of the 1970s, business ownership provided a way of coping with the economic climate. Moreover, the opportunities available to women substantially increased throughout the 1970s and 1980s as legislation began to roll back legal barriers to success, and the feminist movement continued to articulate a message of equality and independence. As historian Debra Michals has argued, the 1970s was arguably "the single more important decade in the history of women's business ownership" due to the economic situation pressuring women into the marketplace and the new consciousness of equality and self-determination that intersected with the needs of both feminists and non-feminists. Women began to receive a message that the only limitation they had on their dream of business-ownership was the scale of their imagination.⁷

In Houston, Doña Toña was one of the women influenced by the developments in the 1970s and 1980s. In the late 1980s, Doña Toña, a thirty-six-year-old Mexican

⁶ Program for the National Conference on the Observance of International Women's Year, Houston Area NOW and Other Feminist Activities Collection.

⁷ Debra Michals, "Beyond Pin Money: The Rise of Women's Small Business Ownership, 1945-1980," (PhD diss., University of New York, 2002), 255-56.

immigrant with a fourth-grade education, used the equity on her home to secure a bank loan and open a restaurant in eastern Houston.⁸ She had been a janitor at Exxon for a few years and gained a reputation as a talented cook by selling her sweet bread and tacos to fellow employees, including those in managerial positions. One of the white men in charge of that branch of Exxon discovered her food and continued to place orders for tamales and chicken mole for business events. He encouraged Doña Toña to open her own restaurant, asserting that she was now in a country where she could do anything, despite her lack of education, which she felt held her back from economic advancement and limited her possibilities. Nevertheless, she decided to take a risk and become her own boss. The restaurant, according to Doña Toña, became a success; in 2011, she earned \$30,000 in income. While this might not seem like a “success” when compared to higher-earning firms, Doña Toña’s measurements of success reflect the desires of many of the women entrepreneurs who preceded her: longevity, stability, flexibility, and autonomy.⁹ She might have worked twelve-hour days and earned seven dollars an hour, but Doña Toña felt that she had control over her financial destiny.

Doña Toña is one of many women, particularly minority women, who have carved out space in the business world in ever-increasing numbers since the 1970s. By 2016, women controlled 38 percent of all businesses, up from an estimated 5 percent in 1972. In the United States in 2016, 11.3 million women-owned businesses existed, employing nearly nine million people and generating over \$1.6 trillion in revenues. From

⁸ “Doña Toña” is a pseudonym used by the sociologist who recorded her story, and there is no way of ascertaining who she is or what the name of her restaurant is. Zulema Valdez, *The New Entrepreneurs: How Race, Class, and Gender Shape American Enterprise* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 1-3.

⁹ Ibid.

2007 to 2016, the number of women-owned businesses increased by 45 percent, compared to just a 9 percent increase among all businesses, meaning that women's businesses have grown five times faster than the national average. Women of color have been at the vanguard of the increase; their numbers have more than doubled since 2007, increasing by 126 percent. Nearly eight out of every ten new woman-owned firms begun since 2007 have been started by a woman of color. Doña Toña's restaurant is one of 1.9 million Latina-owned businesses, and as of 2016, Latina-owned businesses have increased more than any minority-owned enterprise.¹⁰

In her 2011 study of entrepreneurship in Houston, Zulema Valdez persuasively argued that one of the main traits that all Houstonian entrepreneurs shared, across racial, class, and gender lines, was a view of themselves as “rugged individualists.”¹¹ This coincides with the message to many potential business owners, like the sentiment the executive at Exxon relayed to Doña Toña, that the United States is a country in which people can do anything, and with the ideas of the feminist movement of the 1970s that women could achieve success and independence through business ownership. The problem with this positive outlook on business ownership and the “American Dream” is the way it downplays the impact of structural inequality. Business ownership has always existed as an opportunity for women, both white women and women of color, but that opportunity lives in the highly unequal American social structure, particularly for women of color, who face the double oppression of their sex and their race or ethnicity.¹² The

¹⁰ American Express OPEN, *The State of Women-Owned Businesses Report, 2016*, accessed January 16, 2017, http://www.womenable.com/content/userfiles/2016_State_of_Women-Owned_Businesses_Executive_Report.pdf.

¹¹ Valdez, *The New Entrepreneurs*, 8.

¹² *Ibid.*

barriers of race and gender existed during the postwar period and continue to exist, albeit in altered forms, in the twenty-first century. Studies since the 1980s have shown that successful women are consistently less likely to be identified as leaders in business, even when those women-owned businesses succeed at a rate equal to similar male-owned enterprises. Women of color have a general lack of confidence in their entrepreneurial talents that measurably diminishes performance and makes them think, in the words of one African American entrepreneur, that they “can’t do some things” and lack the “right stuff” for business success.¹³ Latina women in 2016 made less in revenue than their male counterparts, despite their phenomenal growth, according to the Houston Hispanic Chamber, due to unfamiliarity with the resources available to small-business owners.¹⁴ While the kind of legal discrimination that women in postwar Houston faced faded during the last decades of the twentieth century, both covert and overt stumbling blocks remained for entrepreneurial women in the 2000s and 2010s.

A dearth of role models was one of the covert barriers many women faced as they entered the business works in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Recovering the lives and work of women entrepreneurs can provide models for those who want to embark on their own business path. Historians like Susan Ingalls Lewis have cogently articulated that women proprietors from the colonial period through the early twentieth century are “unexceptional.”¹⁵ The women business owners in post-

¹³ Mary Godwyn and Donna Stoddard, *Minority Women Entrepreneurs: How Outsider Status Can Lead to Better Business Practices* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 22-23.

¹⁴ Ileana Najarro, “Series Aims to Fill Information Gap for Latino Business Owners: Series Offers Connections with Experts and Information on Capital,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), August 26, 2016.

¹⁵ Susan Ingalls Lewis, *Unexceptional Women: Female Proprietors in Mid-Nineteenth Century Albany, New York, 1830-1885* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009).

World War II Houston, likewise, were not exceptional. As this work shows, they were everywhere in Houston's business world. Despite that fact, they were also relatively invisible, especially in the historical record of businesses that continue to exist into the twenty-first century. A survey of restaurants in Houston emphasizes that reality. While many of Houston's restaurants operated under either women's sole proprietorship or as husband-and-wife teams, those that remained in existence into the twenty-first century emphasize the entrepreneurial skills of men to the detriment of the women who committed their time, energy, and talent to creating long-lasting enterprises. As noted at the beginning of this work, according to the business license filed, City Café began as a restaurant solely owned by a woman. Soon after, it moved into the hands of another woman and, later, her husband.¹⁶ Interestingly, a representative for the owners of City Café, as of 2016, claimed that no woman had ever had anything to do with the ownership of the restaurant dating back as far as the 1950s.¹⁷ Certainly, in the most recent decades, men from the small Houston Greek community have owned and operated the cafe, but all signs point to women's active participation in the first decades of existence. This erasure of women's proprietorship is evident in other places as well, particularly in eateries that were husband-and-wife teams.

For example, in 1948, Joe Pizzitola and his "pretty wife," as the Houston Chronicle referred to her, Mary Jane, began the Regal Sandwich Company. They sold sandwiches on the porch of their apartment and, a year later, began delivering sandwiches from their new house's garage. Mary Jane made all of the sandwiches while Joe delivered

¹⁶ Data compiled from *The Daily Court Review* (Houston, TX), 1946-1977.

¹⁷ Telephone conversation. City Café. June 17, 2016.

all of them. She single-handedly created every sandwich the company made for three years. By 1957, the couple expanded the company to include fifteen delivery trucks and over a hundred employees. By the twenty-first century, though, the historical memory of Regal Sandwich Company erased Mary Jane Pizzitola. It is unclear if or when the couple divorced; in a 2016 article Jerry Pizzitola, their son, who also went into the restaurant business, mentions that he visited his father on holidays, which, in all likelihood, means that at some point after 1957 the Pizzitolas divorced, and Joe retained the company.¹⁸ Pizzitola also recalled that “my dad and stepmother (Joe and Jean Pizzitola) owned . . . Regal Sandwich Company for 52 years.” That is the last time in his description of the company that he mentions his stepmother. Despite acknowledging her co-ownership in the beginning, he attributes all the success of the company, including sales topping \$1 million per year, to his father.¹⁹ Mary Jane Pizzitola, the woman who made every single sandwich in the first few years of existence, and Jean Pizzitola, the official co-owner, disappear from the historical record.

Even restaurants that acknowledge the importance of female co-owners neglect their histories in the official remembrances. Nell Skrehot co-owned and co-founded the Barbecue Inn in 1946 with her husband, Louis Skrehot. On their website, the restaurant’s operators acknowledge that Nell Skrehot helped found the restaurant, but, in the next few sentences, emphasize that Louis created the menu and their sons took over and expanded the restaurant beginning in the early 1960s. The sons “successfully incorporated

¹⁸Amy McCarthy, “How Jerry Pizzitola Went From Backyard Grilling Enthusiast to Lifelong Pitmaster,” *Houston Eater*, June 14, 2015, accessed July 9, 2016, <http://houston.eater.com/2016/6/14/11929746/pizzitolas-houston-lifers>.

¹⁹Syd Kearney, “Pitmasters Gather for the Love of Barbecue,” *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), April 2, 2014,

everything their father taught them” and it is their partnership “that is responsible for making the Barbecue Inn the thriving business it is today.” Nell Skrehot, the only name on the business license filed with the city of Houston for the restaurant, the mother of the men who expanded it, and, presumably, one of the people who helped get the restaurant off the ground, is limited to recognition in the first sentence establishing her as a co-founder.²⁰

Similarly, Cleburne Cafeteria’s “Our History” page asserts that Nick and Pat Mickelis were partners who worked “side-by-side.” The presence that dominates the story of the restaurant, however, is Nick Mickelis. The reader receives a complete biography of Nick Mickelis, including the story of his early life in Greece, his talent for art, and how he entered the restaurant business. Pat Mickelis, on the other hand, is a secondary character in the official narrative.²¹ In twenty-first century newspaper and magazine articles covering the restaurant, Pat Mickelis is overshadowed by her husband’s legacy and the current proprietorship of her son, George. In retrospectives of the restaurant written shortly after a devastating fire, reporters frame the eatery as solely Nick Micklelis’ “American dream,” not as the dream of a young couple working in tandem, despite the “loving wife and partner” being present through every major move and transformation with a “watchful eye.” This could be due to Nick’s death in 1989; the destruction of the restaurant by fire is emphasized as particularly upsetting because it is the loss of Nick Mickelis’s legacy, not as the loss of Nick *and* Pat Mickelis’s hard

²⁰ “A Family Tradition,” The Barbecue Inn, accessed July 19, 2016, <http://www.thebarbecueinn.com/history.html>.

²¹ “Our History,” Cleburne Cafeteria, accessed July 9, 2016, <http://cleburnecafeteria.com/history/>.

work.²² On the other hand, articles prior to the fire consistently minimized Pat Mickelis's role in the restaurant; a few completely ignore her participation in the purchase, start-up, and running of the restaurant, making her husband the sole proprietor.²³ Like the women who ran City Café in its first decade, Nell Skrehot, and Mary Jane Pizzitola, the dreams and efforts of the men in Pat Mickelis' life dwarfed her own entrepreneurial efforts and success in the retelling of the cafeteria's history.

Bringing the entrepreneurial women of postwar Houston into focus, highlighting their contributions to Houston's economy, and correcting their erasure from their own business history provide a foundation for the ever-growing number of women embarking on their own business journeys in the twenty-first century. Continuously labelling women's business ownership as a novelty to be rediscovered every few years creates an "othering" that marks their enterprises and successes as different and less than those of men, despite their higher growth rates in the past decade and their proven ability to weather recessions at a higher rate than other firms. At 38 percent of all businesses in the United States, and growing in Houston at a rate higher than the national average, women-owned businesses in 2017 are commanding an increasing share of the economy and are opening more opportunities to women at a time of economic uncertainty. Women-owned businesses increased employment by 18 percent since the Great Recession; in contrast, all business employment has declined by 1 percent.²⁴ Not only are women-owned

²² Rahman, "After fire, Owner of Cleburne Cafeteria Vows to Rebuild 75-year Houston institution."

²³ Goode, "Cleburne Cafeteria Celebrates 75th Anniversary"; Peter Lucas, "Sights Unscene: Cleburne Cafeteria," *Glasstire: Texas Visual Art*, August 28, 2014, accessed July 9, 2016, <http://glasstire.com/2014/08/28/sights-unscene-cleburne-cafeteria/>.

²⁴ American Express OPEN, *The State of Women-Owned Businesses Report, 2016*.

enterprises providing opportunity for the women who own them, they are offering increasing numbers of positions for workers.

In terms of the study of women entrepreneurs, historians need to do more work. While a microhistory of Houston is illustrative, a comparative study with similarly situated Sunbelt cities, like Dallas or Atlanta, would help fill out the picture of women's business history. Similarly, comparisons to other large cities, including Chicago and Los Angeles, would help place Houston in perspective. Additionally, while sociologists, business scholars, and government agencies have done extensive studies over the past thirty years on women entrepreneurs, and business historians have made solid headway on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, more analysis is needed on women's economic position from the Great Depression to 1980. Specifically, more qualitative research should exist on small and micro-businesses that do not meet the standard of "success," as delineated by multiple metrics in business, but fulfilled a need or provided economic survival in periods of economic upheaval.²⁵ This is particularly relevant, because while no business is completely "recession-proof," women-owned businesses grew and proved successful through both the recession in the 1970s and the Great Recession of 2008.

In 2016, Houston entered the second year of the worst oil downturn in decades and flirted with recession on a similar scale to the 1980s oil slump, which had a job loss for one in seven workers throughout the city.²⁶ During the earlier crisis, the city as a

²⁵ Lewis, *Unexceptional Women*, 8-9.

²⁶ Rhiannon Meyers, "Houston Economy: 'It's Bad, but It's Not Awful,'" *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, TX), January 2, 2016.

whole realized that it needed to adapt and shift with economic winds. City leaders continued to develop the medical and technical industries, even as oil regained its prominent place. By 2016, the city could describe the oil crisis' impact on the citizens as "bad, but it's not awful." Houston diversified its economy enough to remain optimistic in the face of a body blow to a major industrial sector, and part of that came from learning from the past.²⁷ Entrepreneurship, in the 1980s crisis, provided hope and an income for many of Houston's citizens. During the 1980s recession, Houston enjoyed substantive growth in self-employment as people set up small shops and stores, re-imagining itself, after decades as an oil city, as a place for entrepreneurs in small business and the growing medical and technical industries. Throughout the economic downturn in the 1980s, though, Houston maintained its image as "a place where people come to make money," even if that meant that every person had to fend for him or herself.²⁸ That kind of "rugged individualism," which so many of Houston's entrepreneurs self-identify with, has been at the heart of the city's relationship with business ownership for decades.²⁹ An aggressive attitude toward business growth is part of the heart and soul of Houston and its citizens.

Entrepreneurship as a route to navigate through economic turmoil is a story well known in the history of women's business endeavors. The citizens of Houston in the twenty-first century can learn from those who have been down this path. From the women who made their own way in retail shops on Fannin and beauty salons in the Third

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ James Fallows. "A Permanent Boomtown" *The Atlantic* (July 1985): 16-28.

²⁹ Valdez, *The New Entrepreneurs*, 8.

Ward in the years following World War II to women like Doña Toña in the early twenty-first century, entrepreneurship has provided a path to economic reward and independence in the face of otherwise limiting circumstances. Building a business in the Bayou City in the postwar era allowed women to push at boundaries and expand their opportunities, as they continue to do today.

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VITA

Meredith Lee May was born in Lufkin, Texas. She is the daughter of Cecil Eugene and Sandra Rene Price May. A 2006 graduate of Huntington High School, she received a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in history from Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, in 2009, graduating summa cum laude. In August 2010, she enrolled in graduate study at Texas Christian University. While working on her Master of Arts degree in history, she held a graduate assistantship in 2010-2012 and tutored at the John Justin Athletic Center.

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She is a member of the Southern Association of Women Historians, Phi Alpha Theta, the Texas State Historical Association, the Texas Oral History Association, the Southern Historical Association, and the East Texas Historical Association. For the 2016-2017 year, she served on the Graduate Council for the Southern Historical Association.

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ABSTRACT

BUILDING A BUSINESS IN THE BAYOU CITY: HOUSTON AND WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP, 1945-1977

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The history of women in post-World War II America often focuses on conformity and a retrenchment of gender roles. Recent histories have complicated the portrait of women in postwar America, noting their participation in labor and civil rights. In order to add to the understanding of the opportunities and limits on women in the latter-half of the twentieth-century, this dissertation analyzes female business owners in Houston from 1945 to 1977. I contend that business ownership allowed post-World War II American women another option to the traditional choices of working in a low-paying pink-collar job or attending solely to domestic responsibilities. I also highlight the overlapping limitations placed on women from differing racial, social, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. I argue that due to early efforts at self-help and organization spearheaded by business owners, by the time the mainstream feminist movement reached Houston in the late 1960s, Houstonian women proved among the most active and most organized in the nation. For that reason, organizers chose Houston as the site for the National Women's Conference in 1977. Thus, a study of Houston's female business population has broader implications for the history of the women's rights movement.