A New Beginning

A New Beginning

The judicial system in America is flawed and often times inaccurate, resulting in the discrediting of someone's reputation and the removal of their freedom. In Texas history, we have known this to be particularly relevant to the African American community due to the history of racism and segregation in the South. Barbara Jordan demanded change when she reached incredible heights and made Texas history as she became the first African American woman to be elected to the State Senate and further down the road in her political career, the first African American woman from the south to become a representative in the United States House of Representatives. Jordan pushed for justice during the civil rights era and left a legacy behind her. Her accomplishments were so graceful they seemed effortless, as she faced adversity due to the color of her skin. "The character, certainty, and command at the core of Barbara Jordan, the powerful woman whose voice could move men and women to tears, insight, inspiration, or action, came from that blackness and from her acceptance of it. She took pride in her own inner power." (Rogers, 5). With the acceptance of who she was, she was able to realize the amount of strength and power that ran through her DNA. She chose to silence the stereotypes of the world telling her she couldn't because she didn't look like the current politicians in office. Yes, she not only silenced the

world's negativity, but also won the world over using nothing but optimism, intelligence, and hard work. "Barbara Jordan took part in dozens of legislative skirmishes and initiatives that established her credentials as one of the Senate's key players." (Rogers, 151). Jordan knew she could not just be average in this environment and she took her rightful place, knowing she had to bypass the standards of her colleagues if she wanted to be great, and bypass them she did. Barbara Jordan paved the way for ambitious African American politicians to come behind her and Dallas District Attorney Craig Watkins has successfully followed in her footsteps fighting for justice and equality for all people. Craig Watkins is doing wonderful things in Dallas County by spending considerable time and resources exonerating the wrongfully accused, giving the innocent their freedom back.

America has a federalist system of justice which means the national government is not supreme, states have special reserved rights. Among these rights is the states' right to legislate and amend the parameters to the extent of a defendants voice in court. Elected in 2006 as the District Attorney of Dallas County, Craig Watkins is not only the first African American in the state of Texas elected to this position, but also contrastingly, a Democrat elected in a Republican city and state. Although the odds were never in his favor, Watkins persevered

through countless obstacles and hardships intentionally put in his path to discourage and deter him. Watkins strong mindedly dismisses his nay-sayers, "I encounter resistance every day, it is part of my job. It doesn't make any difference. Let them be on the wrong side of history." (Watkins, 2007). Wisely he is not caught up in the politicking, and maintains focus on the task on which he was elected to perform.

The Innocence Project is a national nonprofit organization officially established in 2003. This organization works relentlessly to obtain exoneration for the wrongfully accused across the United States. Craig Watkins not only joined this initiative, but took it to the next level in Dallas County. Watkins has recently urgently pushed for the state legislature to fight against wrongful convictions and increase the number of freed innocent citizens. By the Racial Justice Act, Watkins seeks to provide the opportunity for defendants to appeal their convictions if they believe their verdict could have been slanted on the basis of race and ethnicity. When explaining his reasoning for this bold initiative, Watkins stated "The issue we're bringing to light is to make sure that everything is fair…if you deserve a death sentence, then you will get it. If you didn't then you shouldn't be on death row." Watkins is referring to the alarming number of African Americans on death row in Texas. Although African Americans only make

up 11% of the Texas population, 40% of death row inmates are African American. The alarming statics don't stop there, as 28 out of 33 people that have been exonerated from crimes are African American. This means of the 40% of African Americans on death row, approximately 85% of the African Americans put on death row were innocent. Lastly, African American defendants are proven more likely to obtain the death sentence than white defendants.

Due to these alarming statistics and the harsh reality of our justice system, Watkins has dedicated his career finding numerous ways to free the innocent and wrongfully convicted. Through enhanced DNA testing, Watkins has been able to separate the accused from the scene of the crime, exonerating the presumed criminals. It also allows for enhanced DNA testing that may have not been provided in the original trial. Watkins has also allowed for extensive review post jurisdiction uncovering the illegally held evidence in remission from the Defense Attorneys, hindering the verdict of the case. Legislatively, Watkins has been urgently pushing for the filling of Bill SB 263 that will create an Innocence Project Committee in Texas. This committee will provide the opportunity for more defendants to introduce evidence after their trial to prove the sentencing was based on race or ethnicity discrimination. This bill gives the truly innocent a second chance they shouldn't have to fight for, yet the chance necessary for their

survival. Watkins continues to fighting for justice, equality and fairness that are too often missing in modern court systems. With Watkins initiative, 33 people in Dallas County alone have been proven innocent and regained their lives back.

Watkins is not only saving lives, he is giving the muted innocent a voice and providing hope for a better world. He is a truly inspirational hero in my community and the impeccable difference he has made in our world has inspired me in my career goals. No longer do I just want to be successful, but I want to save lives and inspire my community just like Mr. Watkins has so eloquently provided a perfect example of. "A Nation is a choice. It chooses itself at fateful forks in the road by turning left or right, by giving up something or taking something-and in the giving up and the taking, in the deciding and not deciding, the nation *becomes.*" (Bennet, 61) Craig Watkins decided not to ignore the injustice for his own political gain, but instead he nobly chose to put his career at risk by upsetting the corrupt flow of the legal system and fighting for justice for those deserving of it. Watkins has freed men that have been inequitably held in prison since Watkins was just a teenager himself. The path was one of righteousness that ultimately led to the answering of many families prayers. Through his beliefs on uprightness, Watkins was able to allow himself to be used as a much needed vessel quenching the long lived thirst of a justice seeking

community. He has brought a sense of hope back to Dallas County and in doing so, exuberated the good in our community.

Craig Watkins and the advancements he has made representing the African American community has a resemblance to Barbara Jordan's endeavors and milestones. The feeling of inspiration of initiative is present in both cases. Success is also apparent in both instances. Texas has benefited from everything these individuals have accomplished and have brought strength, pride and justice to the African American community. Perhaps the reason they were able to be so instrumental and successful in their work is owed to their leadership style. Identical in nature, both Jordan and Watkins have gracefully led by example in their doings. Both individuals have had to overcome extreme opposition and through these trials have silenced their naysayers with discipline hard work and relentless effort to achieve positive results.

The most refreshing, motivating fact about these two heroes is the idea that they both came from extremely humble beginnings. Their families did not fit the stereotypical status quo for producing successful future leaders, but they persevered against the strong statistics implying they would not be able to make it. Jordan and Watkins share the sense of hunger for success, justice and equality

that they outworked everyone around them. They understood the value of hard work and discipline, recognizing it was necessary to get them to where they needed to go. Their actions have provided an example to youth everywhere, especially in the great state of Texas, of how to achieve any goal you have set for yourself. You do not have to possess an excessive amount of money or resources to be able to call yourself successful. After researching and studying these individuals, they have taught me all you need is a dream, the will to work, and the belief in yourself that you are great and will achieve great heights. Their trials and tribulations have not been in vein as thousands of Texans are reaping the benefit of their hard work as justice is more common than it has been in the last century. Progress and advancement in the right direction is what our generation is looking for and I know I will play a part in this change. Looking at those who have come before me motivates me even more to take on the world with courage in hope that one day I can be in the same category as these two heroes and I will provide inspiration for the future Texans that come behind me.

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The Life of Barbara Yarbrough

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3 March 2015

The Life of Barbara Yarbrough

Brad Henry, an American politician, once said, "A good teacher can inspire hope, ignite the imagination, and instill a love of learning." Good teachers alter students' lives by presenting them with the necessary skills so that they may prosper and thrive in the competitive environment of a school and the even more competitive environment of life. Great teachers, however, do all of the above and also impart a love of lifelong learning upon their students. Great teachers engage the minds of their students by challenging them to arrive at the answer on their own. By granting students the opportunity to channel their own brilliance, a great teacher allows students to tap into their individual strengths which helps them to overcome their weaknesses. In the city of Midland, Texas, one such person who fulfills the necessary criteria of a "great teacher" is Barbara Yarbrough. As an influential African American member of the community, Yarbrough has spent fifty-one years touching and changing the lives of thousands of Midland students by teaching them the value of education and by actively supporting their desire to learn.

Yarbrough relates especially well to students from low-income families because of her own poverty-stricken background. Barbara Yarbrough was born in Franklin, Louisiana on the 29th of August, 1935, when segregation in the United States still existed. She lost her mother at the young age of eight and had to help raise her two younger brothers with very little help from her father. It was because of the support of her grandfather, who became her primary caretaker

when she was six years old, and the support of her aunt that she was able to develop into an educated individual. Her aunt inspired her to attend Texas Southern University in Houston. “Without my aunt I would have probably ended up becoming a seamstress or a cook just like my mother had once been” (Yarbrough). Her grandfather helped her recognize the value of using hands-on experiences as important learning techniques. He was also the person who taught her to think for herself, but that was not all he taught her: “My grandfather was definitely my biggest influence. He was the person who taught me my love for people” (Yarbrough). Yarbrough also incorporated the skills she learned from her grandfather into the classroom to teach her children; in order to teach fractions to her young math students, she bought planks of wood and cut them into various pieces in order to reinforce the concept of fractions into the minds of the students.

Her love of people is what led her into the field of teaching. Yarbrough was also a firm believer in letting her students learn for themselves so that the students’ experiences are implanted into their minds. On one such occasion, one of Yarbrough’s young students interrupted a reading lesson to ask the last name of Queen Elizabeth I. Instead of telling her student that the Queen’s last name was Tudor, Yarbrough checked out many books from the Midland Library regarding Queen Elizabeth and asked her students to read through them and find the answer. Using methods similar to these, Yarbrough satisfied both the curiosity of the students and her responsibilities as a reading teacher (Yarbrough). Her affinity for teaching the subjects of reading and spelling caused her to develop “shortcuts” for spelling. She would break down words and find synonyms for the partitioned syllables so that they would be easy to remember. An example of this was the phrase “donkey-donkey-eye-country” which helped her young students remember the spelling of “ass-ass-i-nation”.

Throughout her teaching career, she taught students at many grade levels. She has taught students of all races although to her, they are "just people" (Yarbrough). In 1977 at South Elementary she was the only African-American teacher. She recalls sitting behind her desk on the first day of school. Apparently the name "Yarbrough" did not sound "black" to the students, so they were completely surprised to learn that the woman sitting behind the desk was their teacher. Although she had high expectations for behavior and effort from the students, she eventually earned their love and respect. In fact, by the end of the year, they referred to her as their favorite teacher. She also served as a track, softball, basketball, and tennis coach, so she began to develop relationships with the students outside, as well as inside, the classroom.

Barbara Yarbrough, throughout her many years of teaching, developed a love for all of her students and says, "I consider them to be a part of my family and would do anything for them" (Yarbrough). Through the years Yarbrough has become more than just a teacher to some of her students: during an interview she stated that, "I always let my students call me at any time in case they needed my help with anything" (Yarbrough). Her love for her students compels her to attend their various performances, recitals, and sporting events. "Even after they had left my class, they always told me to come to all of their performances and games," she said, "In a way they will never stop being my kids" (Yarbrough).

Yarbrough believes that learning is a continuous process that does not stop when you become an adult, and she explains that "I have learned more from all of my students than my students could ever hope to learn from me" (Yarbrough). For example, she explains that she learned that no two students are the same. Each individual student comes from a different home and a different background. So no two students can be treated exactly the same way by teachers.

She elaborated by saying that she has learned to treat each child differently based on his or her aptitude, prior knowledge, and ability and willingness to learn.

While today Yarbrough is a revered member of the Midland community who is loved by all, fifty-five years ago this statement was simply not accurate. In the 1960's, discrimination and racism against African-Americans, along with many other minorities, was widespread. Barbara Yarbrough came to Midland in 1960 during the height of segregation, and she endured many malicious comments regarding her race, often made by her superiors. She remarked, "Whenever they said something rude to me, I would never say anything rude back". Because of this approach she never said anything that she would ever regret, a strategy she attributes to her aunt's teachings (Yarbrough). Her career as an educator started at the all-black Carver Junior-Senior High School. She taught there for thirteen years before integration between black and white schools occurred. The school closed in 1968 and Yarbrough began teaching at South Elementary School where her reputation as a marvelous schoolteacher grew. She taught a variety of subjects in many different schools in Midland, but she says that South was always her favorite. Yarbrough's love for children extends beyond teaching them the love of learning; students at South Elementary are required to wear uniforms, and because many of them are from low-income homes, their families cannot always afford to buy their children uniforms. Yarbrough helps these families by helping with the costs of these uniforms, and she also provided students with clothes such as coats as well as shoes for those who could not afford them.

> She also collects coats and shoes for students who can not afford them. South Elementary School principal, J.R. Silva said as parent liaison for the campus,

> Yarbrough can relate to anybody in the community. "She's a pillar of the community". Yarbrough keeps uniform clothes with her for the kids. Silva noted [that] it's because of Yarbrough that South was able to collect 200 coats for students last winter and 150 pairs of shoes last spring. (Campbell)

Yarbrough has spent fifty-one years teaching and nurturing Midland students, and she finally "retired" in 1995. However, she continues to serve as a parent liaison at South Elementary School to this day. As a parent liaison, she uses many of the same skills and strategies that she applied while she was in the classroom. Her personal philosophies have always been to not dwell on the negative and to try to see the best in people, and she often shares this viewpoint with both students and their parents. It is obvious that Yarbrough loves what she does and is going to continue to do it as long as she possibly can. The students who she first influenced are now grandparents, and they trust their grandchildren to the same wonderful person who made such as positive impact on their lives. Yarbrough's many years of teaching experience as well as her unique personality cause the immense adoration felt towards her by her students, and because of her success as an educator she was recently honored when the newest school in the Midland Independent School District was named after her. Barbara Yarbrough has been and continues to be an influential force in the community of Midland. Her unparalleled achievements in education and the community have touched and changed the lives of thousands of people, young and old, in Midland, Texas.

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“Two Centuries Strong”

The tens of thousands of university students who stroll through the legendary 40 Acres every day probably don't know it. And the average Texan attending church on Sunday morning most likely doesn't know it either. One single man's actions over a century and a half ago had an impact that can still be found in the everyday lives of the nearly 2 million people currently inhabiting the greater Austin area. Jacob Fontaine, although not a commonly known name, was arguably one of the most interesting and multi-talented Texans of the 19th century. His involvement in and long lasting impact on African American churches, politics, and other business enterprises, makes him one of the most influential people in the early days of Austin's African American community.

While it may just seem like some excerpt from a history book, many lifetimes away and not easily understood by most people, at the time Jacob Fontaine was brought into the world, slavery was still a reality in the United States. Born into slavery in 1808 in Arkansas, Jacob had multiple owners, but his best known owner (and subsequently where he received his last name) was Reverend Edward Fontaine, who moved to Austin, Texas in 1839 ("Fontaine Jacob"). Ironically enough, Jacob Fontaine would later begin his career in ministry because of his owner's involvement in various churches throughout Austin. Around 1860, Jacob began to serve as Edward's sexton, where he began preaching in the afternoon "to blacks in the basement" ("Fontaine Jacob"). At the time, although slavery was still legal, it was "standard for blacks to organize segregated services" as long as they abided by the rule that at least one white person was in the presence ("Historic church founder"). With the supervision of Rev. Edward Fontaine, Jacob was able to begin working as a minister, which would later become one of his most influential works throughout his lifetime. To add to the irony, Jacob became officially

ordained as a minister in Travis County on June 19, 1865, the same day that "Union General Gordon Granger read the Emancipation Proclamation" which would ultimately free African Americans in Texas from slavery ("Historic church founder"). Juneteenth is extremely relevant to Texas, particularly African American Texas culture and history, as it marked the day of freedom from slavery in the state, and this day also became the precursor to a long, impactful career for Fontaine. Free from his slave owner, Fontaine was able to truly begin his career, splitting off from the white churches and organizing the St. John Regular Missionary Baptist Association, "an association for black Baptist pastors", in 1867 ("Historic church founder"). His leadership qualities and abilities to coordinate such an organization were extremely vital in the establishment of many of the early black churches. Fontaine later went on to establish various churches in the Austin area, including "Mount Zion in 1873, Good Hope Baptist Church in 1874, Sweet Home Missionary Baptist Church in 1877, New Hope Baptist Church in 1877, and St. Stephen's Missionary Baptist Church in 1887" ("Historic church founder").

Aside from his many religious contributions, Fontaine also dabbled in other fields, from political advocacy to business. In August of 1876, Fontaine founded the Austin local Gold Dollar newspapers, one of the very "first black newspapers west of the Mississippi" ("Austin Gold Dollar"). It was one of only forty-eight commercial black newspapers in circulation in Texas between 1870 and 1900 ("Austin Gold Dollar"). The paper is no longer in circulation today, and old copies are hard to find, but it's impact can still be found in today's society. At the time, the newspaper spoke for the "needs of freed slaves", including but not limited to: equality in black education and religion, the issue of black illiteracy, poverty, and overall racial justice. This was an extremely important time for the African American population as they were trying to

find their place in the community economically, socially, and beyond, as recently freed slaves. Although the Emancipation Proclamation legally freed the slaves, things were far from perfect for African Americans living at the time, and this newspaper was a sort of outlet and resource for the people. Fontaine worked on the newspaper out of his house at "twenty-fourth and Orange (San Gabriel)" ("Fontaine Jacob"), and although it was later set afire by arsonists, it is still recognized today, as it was designated "an Austin landmark in August 1977" ("Austin Gold Dollar"). The Gold Dollar was "revived shortly in 1979-80 with federal funds" in order to help "renew and preserve" a nearby black neighborhood, Clarksville, also home to one of the churches Fontaine founded in 1877, Sweet Home Missionary Church ("Austin Gold Dollar"). While the Gold Dollar's impact may seem minimal in our 21st century, it was an important part of the impressionable and blossoming post-Juneteenth black community in Austin.

Through his various occupations, Fontaine gained the reputation as a respectable and trustworthy leader. Aside from his work in the churches and on the Gold Dollar, Fontaine lead the African American community in a multitude of other things, evidenced by his name appearing in several different newspaper articles, from the late 19th century to as recent as the 21st century. An 1890 Austin American Statesman newspaper article (actually in part submitted by Fontaine), mentioned him as "the leader of the movement" of the construction of a local dam that they claimed would benefit the entire community (Fontaine, Fontaine). He was respected by his peers as a reputable leader who could help guide them in decisions. In addition, a 1971 Austin American Statesman article recognized the 104th Anniversary of the First Baptist Congregation in Austin, and credited the church as being "begun by Rev. Jacob Fontaine early in the reconstruction era" ("First Baptist Congregation"). Furthermore, the Austin American

Statesman as recent as June 17, 2010, recognized Fontaine in an article titled “Historic church founder to be celebrated this Juneteenth” (“Historic church founder”) which thoroughly recognized Fontaine as an important figure in Texas history and also celebrated his work for the African American community in the post-Juneteenth era.

However, one of the potentially longest lasting effects of Fontaine’s legacy can be found walking through the historic 40 Acres and beyond. The University of Texas at Austin, home to the Longhorns, is an internationally ranked university and is respected throughout the state of Texas as one of the best public institutions for higher education. Before the university was founded in 1883, Texans had to vote on where the primary University of Texas campus would be, and in 1881 and 1882, Fontaine emerged as “Austin’s leading black advocate” for the establishment in Austin (“Historic church founder’). Fontaine “campaigned through speeches at rallies in the state in 1881 urging voters to select Austin, over numerous other Texas towns, as the main campus site” (“Ex-slave campaigns”). He traveled to San Antonio, Seguin, and Marlin to “secure the black vote for his cause” (“Fontaine Jacob”). His heavy involvement and dedication to this movement helped make this legendary university the one that so many know and love, The University of Texas at Austin. A UT journalism professor, Gene Burd, said that he considered Fontaine “a legend because he was important” and he wished “he could be more recognized” and ultimately co-authored a biography of Fontaine along with Fontaine’s grandson, Rev. Israel Jacob Fontaine III, in 1983. The book, titled Jacob Fontaine: From Slavery to the Greatness of the Pulpit, Press, and Public Service, is one of few at-length works that recognizes Fontaine’s accomplishments (“Historic church founder”).

Jacob Fontaine died in 1898, at the age of 90 years old, “buried in an unmarked grave in

Oakwood Cemetery," which was later recognized by a Texas historical marker, the "first given to a black Texan" ("Historic church founder"). While Fontaine has been dead for over 100 years, his legacy is not dead yet. There are a handful of people who still carry out Fontaine's legacy today, including but not limited to, the many people who now work at the churches Fontaine established many years ago. Roy Jones, who leads New Hope Baptist Church, said "It's an honor to be at one of the churches that he established. It's humbling to know that I have to keep that legacy going" ("Historic church founder"). For years, the Jacob Fontaine Religious Museum "operated in Northeast Austin" and featured "artifacts, photographs and documents from his life" ("Historic church founder"). Fontaine is also recognized briefly in an exhibit at the George Washington Carver Museum and Cultural Center located in Austin, Texas.

Today, Fontaine's influence stretches far and wide. From many churches scattered across the greater Austin area, to the beautiful campus home to The University of Texas at Austin, his impact can still be found nearly 2 centuries after he began his work. During a very impressionable time in Texas state history, the recently freed slaves in the Austin area needed a leader. Through his many contributions to African American churches, his guidance and advice for an evolving community through his black newspaper, and his advocacy for projects and establishments that would benefit the entire community, Fontaine filled the shoes of a leader that this community so critically needed.

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Making a Difference: No Sweat for Sweatt

Making a Difference: No Sweat for Sweatt

At a time when opportunities for higher education were limited for African American residents in the state of Texas, Heman Marion Sweatt, was surrounded by college graduates. His father, James Leonard Sweatt, graduated from Prairie View Normal School, "the first state supported college in Texas for African Americans" (History N.P.), making him one of the trailblazers of higher education for African Americans in the state. As a trailblazer, James Sweatt encouraged all of his children to go to college, and they did:

> "John, his oldest son, attended Iowa State College in Ames, where he studied under George Washington Carver. Erma went to Columbia University; Jack, to the University of Michigan; and Wendell, to the University of Nevada" (Barr and Calvert 163).

Sweatt, the fifth of six children, would follow the path of his siblings, but he would also achieve much more. Like his father, Sweatt would secure his education in the state of Texas--not at Prairie View but at Wiley College, the first black college in the state to receive accreditation--and he would make history as a trailblazer for the integration of graduate level programs in Texas.

In 1930, Sweatt began studying at Wiley College. Since Wiley was segregated, Sweatt didn't face much discrimination; however, after being one of the top in his class and graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree, Sweatt entered the real world working as a postal worker. While working for the U.S. Post Office, Sweatt noticed major discrimination that prevented African Americans from advancing. Post offices required any worker wishing to advance as a clerk before they could obtain a promotion, and those same offices made it against policy for a "negro" to be a clerk, meaning they could never get promoted (Burns n.p.).

This injustice infuriated Sweatt who as a boy often attended NAACP meetings in Houston with his father. He, therefore, knew too many stories of injustice, and he realized exactly who to involve to make a difference. Sweatt began conversations with the NAACP and the National Alliance of Postal Employees. Through these organizations, Sweatt received his first taste of law: he worked with Francis Scott Whittaker to prepare documents for a case meant to challenge post offices for racial discrimination and injustice towards blacks. Involvement in this case sharpened Sweatt's interest in law, and he began to raise funds for lawsuits against other racial injustices, including white primary elections—elections in which only white voters could participate. Sweatt's involvement in the post office discrimination case and white primary lawsuits inspired him to go to attend law school. But how would he accomplish this new goal? The year was 1945, and there were no law schools in Texas that welcomed African Americans. Attending school out of state would be extremely expensive, maybe impossible. If he was to fulfill his new mission, Sweatt had to find a way to go to law school in state.

Since 1940, the NAACP had been looking for plaintiffs in a possible case against the University of Texas, and the University of Texas had a law school. Sweatt decided to approach his family about the possibility of joining the NAACP's efforts. After a long night of discussion, uncovering fears and doubts, Sweatt's family recognized how important the case was for African Americans, and how important it was to Sweatt, in particular. With his family's support, Sweatt was ready and willing to take on the threats, attacks, and years of court cases ahead of him. He quickly told NAACP member, Lulu White, that he would join the cause. The NAACP's members were convinced they had a viable case: "The state's refusal to admit Sweatt to the university constituted a denial of his Fourteenth Amendment rights" (Lavergne 149).The Fourteenth Amendment states that no state shall make or enforce a law that restricts the

privileges of citizens of the United States, privileges such as equal education. Therefore, the plan was for Sweatt to apply to the university's law school and, if rejected on the basis of race, serve as the plaintiff in the NAACP's case against the university (Barr and Calvert 163).

Filing a lawsuit would prove expensive, but the NAACP had already raised $7,200 for the suit, and they planned to continue to raise funds. Sweatt signed a contract in a meeting with A. Maceo Smith and Durham, members of the NAACP, stating that his legal fees and travel expenses would be covered by the organization. All that was left was tuition, and A. Maceo Smith secretly committed to making arrangements to cover Sweatt's tuition as well (Barr and Calvert 167). With all plans set, and the contract finalized, it was time for Sweatt to apply to the University of Texas.

The moment of truth arrived on February 26, 1946 when Heman Marion Sweatt, R.A. Hester, Lulu White, and Dr. B. E. Howell walked across the grounds of the University of Texas to the registrar's office where they met with the university's president, Theophilus S. Painter, regarding Sweatt's request to be enrolled into the college's law school. Painter insisted that nothing was available to support Sweatt's desire to secure a law degree at the University of Texas and suggested working with the African American universities, Prairie View and Texas A&M, to establish a graduate school for blacks. The NAACP refused to compromise, and after a lengthy attempt to negotiate, Sweatt declared, "The state has the money, and the law and the constitution provide for me to have the training. I cannot go out of state for school, and I cannot wait indefinitely until some provision is made" (Barr and Calvert 168). On May 16, 1946, after three months of attempting to secure admittance into the University of Texas, and finally facing a road blocked by the Attorney General's declaration that he would uphold "Texas' wise and long

- continued policy of segregation" (Lindell n.p.), Sweatt and the NAACP filed suit against the University of Texas.

The first court case was short, ending on June 17, 1946. After the trial, the presiding judge, Roy C. Archer, stated that the state's refusal to admit Sweatt to the university was a denial of his Fourteenth Amendment rights. However, the judge still denied Sweatt access and instead told the state that they had to provide a law college for all blacks that was equal in education to a white college. Discontent with this verdict and wanting to make a greater difference, Sweatt and the NAACP placed an appeal. At the time, this appeal appeared to be a small step for Sweatt, but it undoubtedly turned into a large step positively affecting me personally, my family, my community, and eventually my state, country, and the world.

The case was brought to the lower district court and held on May 12-16, 1947, but the case had changed. Now, the plaintiff not only argued that his denied access was wrong but that segregation altogether at the university was immoral as well. Sweatt, by recommendation from the NAACP, began to testify that he believed there could not be equality under segregation and, therefore, would not attend "a Jim Crow School" (Barr 173). This time the plaintiff's case was so strong that through cross examination, Thurgood Marshall was able to extract a confession stating that Texas A&M's basement law school, a school set up by Texas A&M to satisfy the "separate but equal" clause and the Gaines precedent, was only part-time with an inadequate library and was, therefore, nowhere near equal to the law school at the University of Texas. Unfortunately, the suit was once again denied and the NAACP realized that their only hope for winning was to take the suit to the Supreme Court.

Thurgood Marshall continued as Sweatt's attorney, and on April 4, 1950, four years after the initial case, the first arguments before the United States Supreme Court began. This time, the

state changed their approach, hoping to prove that the Fourteenth Amendment allowed separate but equal segregation in education. However, Thurgood Marshall countered with the overall idea that a segregated law school could not be equal. After closing arguments were made and the proceedings ended, all that was left was to wait for the Supreme Court's ruling.

On June 5, 1950, the verdict came. Chief Justice Fred Vinson announced that the court unanimously concluded that Negro law students were not given equal education and, therefore, Sweatt could not receive an equal education in a separate law school (Burns N.P.). Victorious, on September 19, 1950, Sweatt registered at the University of Texas, ending its long history of segregation and creating a sense of hope in the hearts of African American's that one day all schools would be integrated.

Heman Marion Sweatt and the NAACP's victory in the case Sweatt v. Painter led to the spark of several cases regarding educational injustices. The American School System was changing, and the NAACP took advantage of their victory with Sweatt to expedite change. By 1953, five cases from different states were pending before the Supreme Court. Of those five cases, one made it through--the well-known Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, KS. Brown vs. Board is generally recorded in classroom textbooks as the case that overturned the Plessy vs. Ferguson decision of 1896, a ruling that allowed separate but equal education in public schools. However, since Sweatt's case blatantly showed the Supreme Court and all of America that a separate, segregated law school could not be equal, it was Sweatt's case that first began to unravel Plessy vs. Ferguson. Brown was able to hammer the point even more, standing on the strength of Sweatt's case to prove that at any level segregated schools could not be equal. By 1954, the Supreme Court fully overturned Plessy v. Ferguson, forcing segregation in school systems to not only end in Texas, but in all of America. Without Sweatt's endurance through his

four-year case to integrate higher level education, Brown would have failed to take on the entire school system.

Heman Marion Sweatt was taught since boyhood that he could make a difference and that education was his means of doing so. He took that teaching to a new level when he took on the Texas University of Law in 1946 and paved the way for a case against segregation in all schools. Ultimately his efforts made it possible for African Americans such as Sylvester Turner, the current Houston mayor, to receive higher education in Texas. Still when many people think of the integration of the American School System, they think of the 1954 case, Brown v. Board of Education, as the starting point. However, four years before Brown, there was Sweatt--a second generation trailblazer with a passion for legal studies, commitment to equal educational opportunities, and the persistence necessary to make a difference in Texas, in the South, and in America as a whole.

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George McShan: Proving “Every Student Can Succeed”

Public education, when it was first conceived, was revolutionary. It catalyzed change in society, breaking the barriers that once separated those born into privilege and those who were not. As more and more oppressed groups have gained the right to an education, humanity has furthered their potential tenfold and transformed the world. Education, much like travel, opens up the mind to new ideas and allows humans to acquire experience and knowledge. It is, as Mark Twain once said, "fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness." Thus, the enhancement of public education is the mission of the noblest of individuals. George McShan is one man who has travelled through the years on a journey to help others and improve public education to make the world a better place. He has encountered many obstacles like racism, segregation, and unexpected changes to his career, but he has faced them head-on, rising to the top of his field as a lifelong public servant. By becoming the first African-American to serve as President of the Texas Association of School Boards and restoring the name of a former segregation-era school in his community, McShan has honored his cultural roots and reminded everyone that public education is the great equalizer. Moreover, by serving as President of the National School Board Association and President of the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District Board of Trustees, McShan has been able to make lasting impact on the public education of students in his community, his state, and even his nation.

McShan's journey began in August 4, 1947, in Taylor, Texas, when he was born to Otha and Marie Bell McShan. He grew up on a farm in rural Elgin, Texas. Although his parents had not received much schooling, largely due to the segregation of their time, they stressed to McShan that the path to success was education. He received "lots of family support," recalling advice from his late grandfather that reminded him, "If you use that energy you have in the right way, you can achieve right things, but if you use it in the wrong way, it will be your demise"

(McShan). Unfortunately, due to the absence of Civil Rights for black people, McShan encountered hardships that served as speedbumps on his road to achieve success (McShan). He states, "As a student, experiences I had made it clear to me that the playing field was not level. I noticed that my textbooks were second-hand, dog-eared, and scribbled in. When I noticed that one of my texts had the name of a white student who was my age and in my grade, I knew that the education I was getting was not the same" ("Reflections"). Despite the limited and worn resources available to him, McShan applied himself diligently to learn as much as he could.

Although there were challenges, McShan was fortunate to grow up with the encouragement of his parents. Striving for his best throughout high school, he obtained leadership positions, which offered valuable training for his future career as an educational leader. He also was elected class president, captain of his sports teams, and even State Secretary of the organization New Farmers of America, which he described as "Future Farmers of America for black kids" (McShan). His limitations in a segregated society taught him that all people deserved opportunities, regardless of class, race, gender, or any other divider, and this was a message that he would spread throughout his career in public education.

After graduating from Washington High School in 1965, McShan attended Prairie View A&M University, a historically black university, to obtain a Bachelors in Agricultural Science. Just three years later, in 1968, he graduated Cum Laude, and then proceeded to Oklahoma State University for a graduate fellowship. However, before he was able to complete his master's degree, he was reclassified by the U.S. military during the Vietnam War. His life took an unexpected direction when he received an occupational deferment to teach high school science in a low socioeconomic school district (McShan). "I was told by my selective service board that it was more important to the nation for me to teach children of poverty than for me to go into the

military. It was unheard of, but I thought it was good deal," McShan stated (Anderson). The poverty that surrounded his students in Brownsville, Texas, did not stop McShan from attempting to connect with his students and give them the best education that he could, and he found that if he "won their hearts, they would give [him] their minds" (McShan). McShan's emphasis on the significance of empathy in public education is something that he has maintained over the years and a quality that he hopes future generations will preserve in this age of fast-paced digital communication and technology.

Two years teaching at Brownsville High School lead him to a successful application to become an academic head of the vocational school now known as Texas State Technical College in Harlingen, Texas. He taught chemistry there from 1970, and was promoted in 1976 to Assistant Dean of the college and eventually, to Dean in 1982. Besides assisting the college with accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Universities, McShan gained a breadth of knowledge about the benefits of career technical education that he would later bring to school boards across the state. His vision was that "If [Texas] was going to have a highly skilled labor force, [schools] had to have programs in careers that were in demand" (McShan). Thus, he expanded programs in health care training, computer technology, aviation technology, and in various other fields that were on the rise. Satisfied with the progress of these programs, he retired from Texas State Technical College in 2002 to serve his community full-time.

Meanwhile, in 1988, after much encouragement from colleagues and friends, McShan decided to run for the Harlingen Consolidated Independent School District Board of Trustees. McShan describes his campaign as "one that looked like a rainbow, [with] people from the wealthiest part of town to the poorest" helping him get his campaign message out that "Every Student Can Succeed" (McShan). Despite the lack of trust for black people at that time,

McShan's community-minded approach paid off, and he won a position on the school board. He has since served thirty years, and his retirement from the board this year will come with knowledge that he has brought vision, change, energy, knowledge, and a high moral compass to the community and its schoolchildren (McShan). "I can't tell you what's going on in Chicago or other cities, but I can tell you what's going on in Harlingen, Texas. The local school board has the best interests of the community at heart," McShan asserts (Dahlkemper). He plans to continue his advancement of the "strategic vision of the district" even after retirement because he has a "deep, deep interest in it" (Whitehead).

When McShan first joined the school board, he was bothered by the district's tracking system that divided students into three plans, separating them into the gifted and talented, average, and underachievers based on a single aptitude test. Because of his experiences with segregation in Texas public schools, he realized this type of grouping detracted from students' self-esteem and was unacceptable. He believed that "If [a student] wanted to take a class and had a great desire to do it, that was fine" (McShan). Thus, this tracking system was eliminated and replaced with a system that gave students with the motivation to succeed the opportunity to do so without restriction of course choice (Whitehead).

Perhaps McShan's greatest contribution to HCISD is his leadership and guidance that led to the passing of the Texas Ratification Election. This initiative has made a world of difference not only at HCISD but also across the state of Texas as a model of what opportunities public schools can provide for their students (McShan). HCISD Board of Trustees Vice President and former colleague at Texas State Technical College Javier De Leon states of McShan's involvement, "The passing of the Tax Ratification Election was largely due to the leadership and hard work of McShan. The passing of the TRE has allowed our district the opportunity to change

our classrooms, buildings and even construct new schools, allowing the latest and greatest for our students. HCISD is becoming a showcase for all other ISD's throughout the state due to the passing of the TRE" (DeLeon). By generating over ten million dollars a year, the TRE has allowed HCISD to develop a strategical plan for building infrastructure, such as the construction of several new academies such as a fine arts elementary school, an International Baccalaureate Academy, a STEM-focused middle school, a health professions high school, and a media arts and communications academy, to give students of all ages broader choices ("Tax Ratification"). McShan predicts that this wise investment in students through the TRE will "overall increase graduation rates and student achievement so students will become tax payers, not tax users" (McShan). He wants to see students discovering their passions for vocations that will benefit themselves, their families, and society.

McShan has clearly impacted Harlingen in many ways, and through his work in restoring the name of a segregation-era school, he has also helped commemorate the history of African-Americans in Texas. The Booker T. Washington School was the name of the campus that African-Americans in Harlingen were forced to attend until the landmark Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* that started integration; however, over the years, the school had been forgotten. Therefore, when Lonnie Davis, local businessman and an alumnus of the Booker T. Washington School, came up with the idea to place a plaque in the location of the school and restore the segregation-era name, McShan was eager to help, tirelessly advocating for Davis's idea in school board and city council meetings. On May 4, 2013, a ceremony was held to honor the placing of the plaque as a symbol that "we are one community and this river of life affects us all" (Essex).

As he advanced public schools in Harlingen, becoming elected President of the Texas Association of School Boards in 1998 gave McShan the opportunity to improve public education on an even larger level. This huge achievement honored McShan's heritage, as he became the first-ever African American to hold the position. During his presidency at the TASB, he worked closely with the Texas legislature and advocated for all types of schools, whether rich or poor, urban or rural, to address the diversity in Texas and "advance equity and excellence in public education" (McShan). He especially campaigned for more flexibility in local school boards throughout his term. In fact, these desires came into fruition in his own community when HCISD became a district of innovation. This designation allows the district to have local control over hiring teachers in courses that require specialized certifications, start date flexibility, and much more, leveling the playing field with charter schools. Superintendent Dr. Arturo Cavazos states that McShan's involvement in the advancement of the district of innovation plan has allowed the "district to meet the specialized needs of the community's children" (Cavazos).

McShan's career success reached new heights with his election as President of the National Association of School Boards in 2004. This allowed him to work closely with President George W. Bush and other officials to push forward the passing of legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. The IDEA ensured that students with disabilities would have the accommodations they needed within the public education system- whether that be more time on tests, diagnosticians, or specialized plans for education of individuals. McShan's ultimate message was that within public education, "One size does not fit all" (McShan). During his presidency at the NASB, he traveled all around the country and even internationally, stressing the importance of collaborative partnerships, communication, and both an academic and character education to prepare students not only to be good career employees,

but good citizens in the world. Most importantly, McShan's "model of proactive, creative board involvement in developing agreement on the district's core values and mission, building and maintaining the board-superintendent team, and encouraging parent involvement and community engagement" (Eadie) guided school boards everywhere so that they could focus their efforts on student achievement. Moreover, McShan's time at the TASB and NSBA allowed him and other public education officials to "get [legislators] informed and educated about the value of supporting local initiatives to connect to a state and national agenda, so there's not a disconnect" ("Your Voice"). McShan's passion for education has given him the drive to call to action school boards across the state and nation to realize that only quality education will allow the United States and the world to progress. Because the future of democracy is dependent upon how well the children of today are educated, the enhancement of public education can be considered the work of true humanitarians such as George McShan (Mitra).

McShan was able to lead as president of both the TASB and NASB, yet he was also grounded in his local HCISD Board of Trustees and remained connected with the citizens who elected him to represent Harlingen. He feels immensely thankful that he was able to touch so many lives, from students to staff, and give them a chance to reach their hopes and dreams. He states that he desires to help "people to be empowered, and feel like they are valued- whether they're cleaning the floors or the superintendent" (McShan) and wants to "see the dreams of all children become a reality" (Trustee). By helping reinvent and transform the landscape of public education, George McShan has helped shape the future of America to produce a well-educated citizenry that will protect democracy.

McShan's life has had him navigate unique places, from his African American farming community in Elgin, Texas, to the primarily Caucasian Oklahoma State University, to the largely

Hispanic Rio Grande Valley. This smorgasbord of experience has undoubtedly made the very man that his late Grandfather envisioned of him, as he has always followed the right path and harnessed his energy in a positive manner. Indeed, McShan's experiences in such diverse communities have helped him learn that public education is transformational and, in the words of Condoleezza Rice, "erases arbitrary divisions of race and class and culture and unlocks every person's God-given potential." George McShan's heart and judgment is the same for all people and his influence on public education has allowed millions of children to dream big and believe his message that "Every student can succeed."

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Texas Western College Breaks Race Barrier

Texas Western College Breaks Race Barrier

While many colleges in the 1960s had African American players on their basketball teams, no team had ever started five African Americans until Texas Western College (TWC) in the 1966 NCAA National Championship game. This game may have seemed like one small step for African Americans at the time, but it became one giant leap in allowing them to play at all colleges and universities in the United States. Despite their impact, TWC was never properly recognized until fifty years later when, in 2006, Disney made a movie about the team called *Glory Road*. In the midst of the civil rights movement, the 1966 TWC team changed basketball forever by opening the floodgates to let African Americans play college ball.

In 1956, TWC became the first college in the southern half of the United States to integrate its athletic teams (Lattin 81). By the 1966 season, the TWC basketball team had seven black players, four white players, and one Hispanic player. The black players were David Lattin, a 6'6" sophomore from Houston, Texas; Bobby Joe Hill, a 5'10" junior from Detroit, Michigan; Ortsen Artis, a 6'1" senior, and Harry Flournoy, a 6'5" senior, both from Gary, Indiana; and Willie Cager, a 6'5" sophomore, Willie Worsley, a 5'6" sophomore, and Nevil Shed, a 6'8" junior, all three from New York City, New York (Fitzpatrick 17).

TWC's best players were Lattin and Hill, both of whom started in the National Championship game (Fitzgerald 207). Lattin initially went to Tennessee State but transferred to TWC after his first semester because he knew its basketball coach, Don Haskins, had a winning program, played several African Americans, and made sure his players all got a good education out of their scholarship (Lattin 73). Hill was at a junior college in Iowa in 1964 when Coach Haskins and his assistant coach, Moe Iba, first saw him play and thought he was a "hot dog"

(Haskins and Wetzel 129). In a recent interview, however, Coach Iba regarded Hill as the leader of the team and "probably was as good a player as there was in the country" (Iba).

Coach Haskins found out about Artis and Flournoy from Jack Hobbs, a friend who played college basketball with him at Oklahoma A&M (now Oklahoma State University) and became a high school basketball coach in Gary, Indiana (Haskins and Wetzel 136). Artis and Flournoy were Coach Iba's favorite players because they were on his freshman team and were very easy to coach (Iba). Both started in the National Championship game (Fitzpatrick 207).

The three African American players from New York City—Cager, Worsley, and Shed—knew about TWC from Hilton White, a recreation director for the New York Department of Parks who coached amateur sports (Fitzpatrick 105). While White was in the Army, he was stationed at El Paso's Fort Bliss and realized African Americans could play college basketball at TWC (Fitzpatrick 105). Coach Haskins never saw any of the New York players play before they arrived on campus but trusted White's judgment (Haskins and Wetzel 133). However, he was reluctant to recruit Worsley because he was only five foot six, but was glad he did because Worsley was a great athlete and, despite his height, could dunk the ball (Haskins and Wetzel 132-133). Worsley started in the National Championship game (Fitzpatrick 207).

Because Cager had not graduated from high school, he went to El Paso on his own and worked at a service station (Lattin 89). He slept in the back of the station in the summer while he attended high school to get his GED so he could enroll and play basketball at TWC in the fall (Lattin 89). Shed originally played at North Carolina A&T, but the players voted him off the team after he admitted breaking curfew to get a sandwich (Sanchez 29). Shed never knew why they voted him off but suspected the coach convinced them to do it (Sanchez 29). Shed, however, credits the A&T coach for allowing him "to play for one of the greatest coaches in the

country, win a national championship and take part in making a bit of history" (Sanchez 29).

In 1966, even at the most liberal colleges, basketball coaches had strict racial quotas because they thought one white player had to be on the court at all times to lead the African American players (Fitzpatrick 24). "The whispered motto for many of them was: 'Two blacks at home. Three on the road. And four when behind'" (Fitzpatrick 24). Coach Haskins did not go by this rule but instead started his five best players (Haskins and Wetzel 119). To him, "they were just kids in white-and-orange uniforms. Not white guys, not black guys, just Miners" (Haskins and Wetzel 119).

At the beginning of TWC's historic season, they were not ranked high because they never played in the East in front of a lot of media (Haskins and Wetzel 146). The moment when Coach Haskins knew the team "could really, truly play with anyone" was when they beat Iowa, who was ranked number four in the country at that time (Haskins and Wetzel 146). Coach Iba agreed this was the key game when he knew this team was something special because TWC was up 40-19 at half time (Iba). After TWC won, they were in the top ten in the national polls and began to get attention (Haskins and Wetzel 149).

The 1966 NCAA Tournament had only 22 teams compared to 68 now (Sanchez 96). TWC's first round game was against Oklahoma City, which they won 89-74 (Sanchez 96). From that point on, every team they played was a conference champion (Lattin 164). Their next two games were in the Midwest Regionals in Lubbock, Texas, against the University of Cincinnati and the University of Kansas (Sanchez 100). The game against Cincinnati went into overtime and TWC won 78-76 (Sanchez 104). "That victory, more than any other, proved the Miners could play with the best of them" (Sanchez 106).

The next game against Kansas "would go down as one of the greatest games in the history of the NCAA tournament" (Haskins and Wetzel 167). With only a minute to go, TWC was leading by three points and Lattin dunked the ball, which should have been the end of the game (Lattin 179). However, he hung on the rim and was called for a technical and the two points did not count (Lattin 179). Jo Jo White, an All American at Kansas and later famous NBA player, hit a bucket, was fouled, and made the free throw to force overtime (Haskins and Wetzel 168). Then at the end of the first overtime, with the score tied at 71, White made a shot at the buzzer, but his foot was out-of-bounds and the basket did not count (Haskins and Wetzel 168). TWC won in the second overtime 81-80 and made it to the Final Four (Haskins and Wetzel 168).

The Final Four was in College Park, Maryland, and the teams were TWC, the University of Utah, Duke University, and the University of Kentucky (Haskins and Wetzel 172). TWC beat Utah 85-78 and Kentucky beat Duke 83-79 to play in the National Championship (Haskins and Wetzel 177). Although both teams were 27-1, virtually all of the coaches believed the all-white Kentucky team was going to win (Fitzpatrick 203). None of them mentioned it but many thought "an all-black team could not beat a talented, disciplined, well-coached white squad" and "Kentucky was the epitome of all those things" (Fitzpatrick 203).

Even though Coach Haskins prohibited behind-the-back dribbles and passes, he realized the team's ability to dunk intimidated opponents (Lattin 133). He also knew Kentucky had not seen a player as physically intimidating as Lattin and wanted him to dunk on TWC's first possession (Haskins and Wetzel 183). When Lattin got the ball, Kentucky's center ran out of the way and Pat Riley, an All American at Kentucky and former coach of the Los Angeles Lakers, came over to defend him (Lattin 205). Lattin then "dunked it on his head, just slammed it right down on his head" (Haskins and Wetzel 184). TWC led almost the entire game and beat

Kentucky 72-65 (Sanchez 138). Kentucky's legendary coach, Adolph Rupp, blamed the loss on the fact his team "came here to play Duke" (Sanchez, 144). He never complimented the Miners except to say that "that little guard hurt us" but even then he clarified that by saying "everybody has a good little guard" (Sanchez 145). When asked whether he should start recruiting African Americans, he replied, "I don't think Duke and Kentucky had to apologize to anybody for the way we played without 'em...So far we haven't found a boy who meets our scholastic qualifications" (Sanchez 3).

"Oddly enough, the most memorable thing about the actual game was the lack of memorable moments" (Haskins and Wetzel 184). The *El Paso Times* never mentioned that all starters for the Miners were black or the significance of this fact (McKown). Coach Iba believed the reason for this may have been because El Paso embraced the TWC team and had no issue with skin color (Iba). The El Paso article instead focused on the differences in the teams' height by stating that the "Miners had been billed before the game as the taller of the two teams, but actually the Miners were almost an inch shorter as an average than Kentucky, which measured in at 6 foot 3" (McKown). The only historic reference to the game was that the "win for Texas Western brought Texas its first national basketball championship" (McKown). It still is the only national basketball championship for a Texas school.

Most other sports writers tried to ignore the fact that this was the first championship team to start five African Americans (Reigstad). The *New York Time's* article was less than one hundred words and used "racially coded language" to describe the team as "six fancy players from the concrete school yards and high school gyms of the north [and] one Texan" (Reigstad). The *Baltimore Sun* described the team as the "running gunning Texas quintet" even though TWC "ran a methodical, disciplined offense" (Reigstad). Other reporters referred to the TWC players

as “urban hired guns,” “a bunch of crooks,” and “uncontrollable playground thugs” (Fitzpatrick 33). Kentucky’s coach even wrongly claimed the school was put on probation soon after its championship and that one of the players was recruited from prison (Fitzpatrick 33). Also, in 1976, Pulitzer prize-winning writer James Michener wrote in *Sports in America* that the TWC players were “loose-jointed ragamuffins ready for a brawl—hopelessly outclassed” by the all-white Kentucky team (Reigstad). This is a “puzzling characterization” because Kentucky only held the lead once when the score was 1-0 (Reigstad).

Based on these articles, many people believed none of the African American players on TWC “ever went on for another semester, much less graduated” (Fitzpatrick 33). Coach Iba corrected them by stating, “Almost all of them got their degrees and they’ve done something with their lives” (Fitzpatrick 34). Artis graduated and was a detective in Gary, Indiana; Flournoy graduated and worked in management for Orowheat in Los Angeles, California; Worsley graduated and worked as the director of a children’s academy in New York City; Cager graduated and was a high school basketball coach in El Paso; and Shed graduated and worked in the athletic department at the University of Texas in San Antonio (Lattin 233). Lattin was drafted in the first round by the NBA San Francisco Warriors and Hill was a senior buyer with El Paso Natural Gas Company. (Lattin 233).

One thing that still bothers some of the TWC players is that they did not get to appear on *The Ed Sullivan Show* or visit the White House like past NCAA champions (Solomon). Worsley, Cager, and Shed really wanted to be on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, which was filmed in Manhattan, because it would have been a free trip back to New York (Haskins and Wetzel 187-188). In 2006, the players were invited to watch a screening of *Glory Road* at the White House with President George W. Bush (Solomon). “But that wasn’t the same thing as President (Lyndon)

Johnson," Cager said. "I was very disappointed we didn't go to the White House or Ed Sullivan. Johnson was having a lot of problems with segregation and all that kind of stuff" (Solomon).

The image of five African Americans playing an all-white team from a southern university represented the racially charged times in the 1960s (Bohn). Even with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, three major college conferences in the 1966 season had no African Americans on any basketball team — Atlantic Coast, SEC, and Southwest (Bohn). The next year, every conference in the South was integrated and, by 1976, over half of the basketball players in the SEC were African Americans (Jones).

Hall of Famer Clyde Drexler, who played for the University of Houston basketball team when they got second place in the NCAA, won a gold medal for the 1992 U.S. Olympic team known as the "Dream Team," and played for the Houston Rockets when they won the NBA Championship in 1995, said that the 1966 National Championship game was one of "the greatest victories and upsets in college sports, both on and off the court" (Drexler, ii). After watching the movie *Glory Road*, Drexler said that he was "humbled by the sacrifices these young African American men made to just play basketball; how their drive, heart, and unstoppable spirit allowed each of them to reach the pinnacle of college basketball—the national title" (Drexler, i). Drexler also said, "After this game, the walls started tumbling down, and thousands of deserving minority students, not just athletes, were admitted to colleges all over America" (Drexler, ii).

In addition, Pat Riley considered the game "the ultimate" in sportsmanship and what he called: "The Emancipation Proclamation of 1966" (Lattin 229). Lattin believes one of the reasons people are still talking about the game is based on Riley's statement that it was "one of the most significant games ever played because it dispelled the absurd illusions that too many people in this country held to be true" (Lattin 229). Although Riley said the game was "one of

his worst nights of his life," he is still proud to be part of something that changed the lives of so many people (Lattin 229).

The 1966 Texas Western College basketball team broke the race barrier by paving the way for African Americans like Drexler to play basketball on the collegiate and professional level. Their victory over Kentucky also changed the stereotype of African American players and proved they did not need white leadership on the floor to win a game. It is unfortunate, however, that it took until 2006, when the movie *Glory Road* came out, for the nation to recognize the team's impact.

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Sweatt v. Painter: A Mailman Who Delivered Integration

One of the most famous stories of triumph against all odds originates from the heart of East Texas. The blockbuster film *The Great Debaters* tells the true story of a professor and debate coach who leads his team to an unlikely win over Harvard University in the National Debate Tournament. But it was one member of the team who would go on to impact racial inequality at the collegiate level far beyond his debate career. It was a classic retelling of David and Goliath, but this time it would be the story of Heman Sweatt and the University of Texas at Austin. Originally from Houston, Sweatt moved to Marshall, Texas to attend and graduate from the historically black Wiley College. After obtaining his undergraduate degree, Sweatt moved back to Houston to work as a mailman until his peers, knowing his potential and intellect, convinced him to apply to law school. Eventually, he set his sights on the University of Texas School of Law. He was rejected. Not because he lacked the qualifications or had a problem with his application, but rather "because he [was] a Negro" (Hoover). Justifiably, he sued. The lawsuit climbed the legal hierarchy, eventually landing in the Supreme Court. While *Brown v Board of Education* would eventually end segregation in all schools, it was *Sweatt v Painter* that desegregated higher education and served as a precursor for a larger ruling. Heman Sweatt may not make it into as many history books, but his impact on desegregation in Texas and the rest of the nation is undeniable.

After all, Sweatt had every qualification to enroll in law school, except for his melanin. The NAACP, anticipating the importance of the case, matched him with the renowned lawyer Thurgood Marshall who knew the potential mass social ramifications of the case. Gary Lavergne, author of *Before Brown*, draws attention to University of Texas president Theophilus Painter's letter to the attorney general, outlining his justifications for Sweatt's rejection as

“[giving] Thurgood Marshall exactly what he had been hoping for and that is that this issue is reduced to naked discrimination” (Boswell). Originally, the first court to hear the case held to the past “separate but equal” precedent and ordered the creation of a separate campus for Sweatt and other African Americans that would afford them the same opportunities and education as UT Austin School of Law. The location for the black-only campus was originally set to be Prairie View, but eventually it was moved to what is now Texas Southern University in Houston (Fleet). Those in opposition to the integration of higher education argued that, as long as the blacks-only institution contained the same material and tangible resources, the two institutions would have the same educational value. This belief ignored the intangible effects of educational development on a student’s success. Those effects include the power a didactic teacher could have in forming a lifelong love of learning, ease of understanding, motivation to continue further in studies, and basic stability that, for some students, could be all they need to spark a flame of success. As Sweatt and Marshall’s argument went, the position, clout, and influence of University of Texas alumni and professors is immeasurable yet creates an impact on the university that a separate, blacks-only university would not have. Justifiably, Sweatt contested this new school, arguing that the new campus could not create the same prestige or educational environment as the all-white UT Austin counterpart (Hoover). As Lavergne noted, “the NAACP had decided to change its strategy, which is the legacy of Sweatt v Painter. Thurgood Marshall decided that separate can never be equal. Heman Sweatt said segregation is wrong, he said in court, I do not believe in segregation” (Hoover). In its concluding decision, the court came to the verdict that established universities possess "qualities which are incapable of objective measurement, but which make for greatness” (Hoover). As Heman Sweatt’s nephew Heman Marion Sweatt II put

it, refusing to accept the subpar grant of the lower courts "took more courage than I think I would have exhibited. He had no idea what he was getting into" (Boswell). Sweatt only knew that he wanted to expand his horizons and get the best education possible.

As the case grew, so did public outcry and backlash against Sweatt and his family. By the time the case reached the Supreme Court, Sweatt had already faced a litany of hate crimes, threats, and harassment instances against him and his family for the simple desire for self-improvement and education. The hatred grew so harsh that Sweatt remarked that he "didn't know if he was going to be lynched" (Boswell). Historical intimidation tactics committed by the Ku Klux Klan in an attempt to suppress black voices during the infancy of Jim Crow were still breathing down the neck of every black activist and protestor (Hicks). Sweatt fought against inequality as others fought equally as hard to preserve that same inequality. Still, he continued onward, crushing seemingly immovable obstacles, all while wondering "if somebody was going to pull a gun out and shoot him on his way home" (Hoover). Sadly, once Sweatt was finally granted admission, the battle for his education did not stop. In law school, he endured harsh racist taunts from peers who disagreed with the court's ruling. Coupled with the bulk of the stress from the court case and the emotional trauma from the taunts, Sweatt faced a multitude of health-related issues. As a manifestation of stress, Sweatt's physical health began to dwindle, resulting in an untimely appendectomy and weeks of missed classes (TSHA 2010). "My uncle had been out of college for a few years and as a postman he didn't have a place to do any writing of significance and I know that had to be a heck of an adjustment. His financial situation was precarious and his wife was unhappy. There were many things that had to be on his mind at the time that didn't help him at all" Sweatt II said. There were multiple casualties of Sweatt's

circumstances. Due to the aggregation of brutal racism, unlucky health issues, and an eventual divorce between Sweatt and his wife following the tumultuous legal battle, he was tragically forced to leave the school that he fought so courageously to attend. However, all was not lost. Scholarships and promises of admission at other institutions began pouring in as a result of his case's national spotlight. Eventually, Sweatt transferred to earned a Master's Degree from Atlanta University in Social Work (Keeton).

Sweatt began a mass ripple effect preceding the landmark case *Brown v Board of Education*, creating Texas Southern University, and eventually the launch of the Heman Sweatt Center on the University of Texas campus. By opening up higher education for integration and denouncing the horrid and unfounded "separate but equal" doctrine, Sweatt allowed the courts another weapon to fight racism. Texas Southern University would have been the campus Sweatt attended had the courts validated the separate but equal clause. However, the campus still received enough funding to spark its growth and prosperity. The University of Texas at Austin has performed multiple public actions in an attempt to reverse their stance on the *Sweatt v Painter* case. One specific and more recent example stands out. To ensure the success of black males on campus through the support of resources, The University of Texas unveiled the Heman Sweatt Center for Black Males in 2019 (Hicks). Dr. Ryan Sutton, director of the University of Texas's Division of Diversity and Community Engagement said, "We still have black males who are undergoing and experiencing certain types of stressors—racial stressors—mindsets and cultures on campus that make them question their presence here. By giving them the support—the holistic support that we do—it makes it that much more possible that they not only graduate, but that they thrive well past graduation." The center was previously named the

African American Male Research Initiative but renamed to help draw attention to the history behind and the reason for the initiative. It's an initiative that, had it existed when Sweatt attended, might have made all the difference.

As an undergraduate student at Wiley College, Heman Sweatt was a "great debater," arguing national policies in front of professors who served as his adjudicators and studying those who came before him. Sweatt could not have known that a few short years later, he would be sitting before the United States Supreme Court as the plaintiff in a monumental case that would go on to impact students in the state of Texas and across the country well beyond his lifetime. "I think that my uncle Heman opened the door for a lot of blacks and amazingly some Hispanics to opportunities they didn't realize they had," Sweatt II said. Heman Sweatt laid the groundwork for *Brown v Board of Education*, served as an inspiration to future students thriving in spite of their obstacles, and became the namesake of a sanctuary for black male students on the University of Texas campus. As *Before Brown* author Gary Lavergne put it, "the contribution of Sweatt v Painter to the American Civil Rights Movement is the sheer reality that separate equality is impossible to achieve. There's more to an education than floorspace, volumes, [and] number of bricks" (Boswell).

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Headlining History

French philosopher Gilles Deleuze once proclaimed that “a concept is like a brick, it can be used to build a courthouse of reason or it can be thrown through the window.” Today, America is in the midst of a difficult, national conversation about institutionalized racism. It is an ongoing issue with a troubling timeline that seems to repeat itself in new forms decades apart. From slavery to mass incarceration and segregation to gerrymandering, the only change is in its name. In the ongoing fight for justice, Black press is the brick. For every protester in the street, a black journalist ensured their voice was given a byline in the fight for freedom (McElroy). One of the most influential members of the press was Houston native George Albert McElroy. Originally denied admission to the University of Texas at Austin due to his skin color, McElroy would go on to spend his career amplifying the voices of the Civil Rights Movement in Texas. He began by reporting from the front lines of the battle against segregation and ultimately left behind a legacy that paved the way for Black journalism for decades to come.

McElroy’s story leads with his parents, Hugh and Philomena McElroy, who raised him in Houston, Texas during the late 1920s. Born in Houston’s historic Third Ward, McElroy’s heritage and culture ran deep from an early age, giving him limitless ambition and a drive to tear down the monolithic courthouse of segregation that had kept his loved ones at the margins of society for generations (Sandifer-Walker). From a young age, the press featured as one of his main interests. This prompted him to take a job as a youth column writer for the *The Informer*—the oldest all-Black newspaper in Texas—making as little as $2 a week, but giving him early experience in journalism that was priceless (Viren and Grant). He never forgot the time he spent at *The Informer*, serving in nearly every position from columnist to Editor-in-Chief until his death in 2006 (Fairchild et al). Both inside and outside of the newsroom, McElroy was the editor-in-chief of his own future, which he demonstrated from the time he left high school.

Following the Supreme Court's historic *Sweatt v. Painter* case, McElroy applied to the University of Texas, only to be denied admission. In the rejection letter, UT admissions pointed McElroy instead to Texas State University for Negroes (now Texas Southern University) that offered similar courses, a known tactic of the university to prolong segregation. Given the educational disparities he faced for well over a decade, McElroy took it upon himself to send a response to the admissions office, arguing that though the courses were the same in name, nothing else about the universities was "equal." In addition to the letter, McElroy responded with a lawsuit. Although ultimately unsuccessful, McElroy did not let his dream of pursuing higher education become yet another casualty to racist policy. He earned his bachelor's degree in journalism at TSUN in the 50s. However, McElroy's work for the larger civil rights struggle did not end with his lawsuit. During his time at TSUN, McElroy stood his ground during the campus-wide civil rights protest, being instrumental in the dissemination and collection of information when a city-wide "media blackout" attempted to prevent Black activists from receiving accurate and up-to-date information about their success ("Trailblazing Journalists").

Upon graduating, McElroy applied to the University of Missouri graduate school and was accepted on a Wall Street Journal scholarship to the university's journalism program. Following a stringent and historic two years in graduate school, McElroy made headlines as the first African American in history to earn a Master's degree in journalism from the University of Missouri (Rusley). After years of struggle, McElroy was no longer a student and could finally call himself a professional writer, joining the *Houston Post* as a "colored sports" writer, earning him the distinction of the first Black reporter for the then-largest morning newspaper in Texas (Hollingsworth). However, McElroy's story was just beginning.

McElroy's time at the *Post* was fraught with headlining interviews and impressive awards. He quickly rose from the ranks of a sports writer to a weekly columnist, putting him face-to-face with some of the largest news stories of his era. A small black-and-white printed picture of McElroy's face sat next to his stories on newsworthy subjects from Martin Luther King, Jr. to Fidel Castro and local barbers to Black police officers. McElroy prided himself on giving everyone a voice and allowing even the common person to speak on behalf of a generation (Viren and Grant). Journalism was written into every margin of his life, as McElroy showcased a determination and passion that was unparalleled. Throughout his time at the larger and more notable *Houston Post*, McElroy still found the time to work closely with *The Informer*—the paper that gave him his first job and helped him discover his purpose—more than fifty years after he walked into the newsroom for the first time ("George Albert McElroy"). He never seemed to forget where he came from, later also teaching journalism classes part-time at his alma mater Texas Southern University, at Yates and Phyllis Wheatley High Schools in Houston, and at the University of Houston (Dawkins 36). This drive was a common theme in his personal life and relationships too. Of his five children, three of him followed in his footsteps, taking positions that some still hold today. For instance, his daughter Kathleen was an editor for the *New York Times* and the *Austin-American Statesman.* Many of her pieces continued the fight against racism using the same tools as her father. Serendipitously, she is currently the director of the School of Journalism at the University of Texas at Austin, the very school that once rejected her father. For McElroy, journalism was never about fame or fortune. Instead, he wanted to amplify issues that were often ignored despite the fact that they plagued marginalized communities for decades. In 2000, McElroy reflected on his profession and his struggles against racism during a personal interview, arguing that the Black press "cover issues that the major

dailies don't see or fail to see. We're closer to problems and concerns in our community," citing his and several other Black newspapers as being the first to report on the crack-cocaine epidemic that wrecked the nation in the late 20th-century (Nelson). As a journalist and an activist, McElroy saw incalculable success, winning hundreds of awards and inspiring a generation of journalists to follow. But it would not be the awards he left behind that he would be remembered for, but rather his legacy.

In 2006, while still working for *The Informer,* McElroy received word that he would be given the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Houston Association of Black Journalists. McElroy, who received numerous commendations for his work—including a week named in his honor by Houston Mayor Fred Hofheinz in 1997—graciously accepted the award in person despite being diagnosed with a respiratory illness earlier that year ("George Albert McElroy"). Unfortunately, McElroy gave his final acceptance speech that night, passing away from acute pneumonia not long after receiving the award in October of 2006. He left behind several children that followed in his footsteps, making headlines in their own right, as well as a legacy of excellence and success that propelled the Black press from the work of small local newspapers to the expansive, mainstream newsrooms that documented the fight for civil rights. Writing about her father, Kathleen McElroy commented on how he "instilled in [her] a love of journalism and the value of education" (McElroy). From her father's early days on the campus of Texas Southern University, working to disseminate news in the midst of a city-wide media blackout to his work interviewing small-town barbers with the same reverence as international icons, McElroy amplified voices. To him, a newspaper should be analytical and interrogative, questioning the very structures of the world around it. In a column for *The Post*, he responded to a prospective journalist asking for advice by saying, "The world, the nation, the state, the city are

all multicolored, as in a rainbow and multiracial. A professional journalist simply cannot afford to reside in a racial-isolation ward. He must travel and he must converse and he must observe and he must be curious" (McElroy). It was McElroy's uncompromising belief in the voices of the marginalized that paved the way for future journalists, specifically those of color. He significantly impacted the lives of those around him both directly and indirectly. Writers Hank Kilbanoff and Gene Roberts spoke of the Black press with this reverence, arguing that the "most important standard was the legacy of protest. The earliest newspapers, both Negro and white, were primarily advocates and special pleaders. But long after white papers had turned to coverage of general-interest news, their Negro counterparts remained loud, clear instruments of protest, by turns educative and provocative" (Roberts and Kilbanoff). McElroy broke barriers in his career and racked up a series of firsts, but what he wanted most was to make sure he was not the last.

After centuries of white supremacy, enslavement, and Jim Crow laws erected a courthouse of structural racism written into every aspect of social life, Black activists like George Albert McElroy utilized their talents to slowly but surely radically change their own future. Leaving behind a career of journalistic excellence, McElroy has given a voice to a generation of the disenfranchised. Article by article, brick by brick, George McElroy dismantled structural oppression and built his own legacy. Although McElroy did not have much control over how his story began, he made sure he had the final say in how it ended.

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