

Introduction

East Texas Black History and the East Texas Historical Association

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THE CONCEPTION FOR *BLACKS IN EAST TEXAS HISTORY: Selections from the East Texas Historical Journal* began in September 2006, at the annual meeting of the East Texas Historical Association. There we discussed the feasibility of publishing a book of articles about blacks in East Texas that had been previously published in the *East Texas Historical Journal* (*ETHJ*). We realized that a significant number of articles had been written by historians of considerable stature in the field of Afro-Texas history and that the published articles would constitute an interesting and well-received anthology.

Subsequently, we examined issues of the *East Texas Historical Journal*. From its beginning through 2007, the *East Texas Historical Journal* published forty-five articles that had a focus on African Americans in Texas, and we considered this a substantial number. As a result of that process, we realized that both the quality and the quantity of articles in the *East Texas Historical Journal* concerning blacks in Texas history were little short of amazing. The East Texas Historical Association had a long, continuing, and vibrant interest in the history of peoples of color as well as other vital aspects of the historical experience in East Texas.

The East Texas Historical Association began in 1962 when, as noted in Archie McDonald's introduction to *The East Texas Historical Journal, General Index*, edited by Donald W. Whisenhunt (1983), "four men breathed life into a new historical association." They were Charles K. Chamberlain, Ralph W. Steen, F. I. Tucker, and F. Lee Lawrence. Others helped, but the aforementioned four "gave much more than anyone else because of their love for history in general, and Texas and Eastern Texas history in particular" (iii). The association's purpose included facilitating

research, collecting and preserving historical records and data, and publishing historical scholarship. As a result, that same year (1962) the first issue of the journal was published, with Charles Chamberlain as editor. Chamberlain, a professor of history at Stephen F. Austin State University, continued to edit the journal for nine years. In 1971 Chamberlain stepped down, and the Board of Directors allowed “me [McDonald] to become editor on a provisional basis, and since no one has said anything to the contrary since, I suppose it has worked out” (iii). Following a year at Murray State University, McDonald had arrived at Stephen F. Austin State University in 1964 with a master’s degree from Rice University. He received his Ph.D. in U.S. Southern history from Louisiana State University in 1965.

It is probably no surprise, but an interesting circumstance nonetheless, that the same year Archie McDonald agreed to edit the journal (1971), the first article in the *East Texas Historical Journal* focusing on African American history in Texas was published: Fred Robbins’s “The Origin and Development of the African Slave Trade in Galveston, Texas, and Surrounding Areas from 1816 to 1836.” Four articles on black Texas history followed: two in 1972, one in 1973, and one in 1975. Then, in an exciting and critical moment for a small regional historical journal in the South, the *East Texas Historical Journal* in the spring of 1976 published a Special Issue on Black History, with articles by James A. Burran (“Violence in an ‘Arsenal of Democracy’: The Beaumont Race Riot, 1943”), Rebecca W. Palm (“Protestant Churches and Slavery in Matagorda County”), James M. Smallwood (“Black Texans during Reconstruction: First Freedom”), and Gerald Gaither (“Blacks and the Southern Farmers’ Alliance Movement”). The following year, 1977, the journal published its tenth article on black Texas history: “Child or Beast? White Texas’ View of Blacks, 1900–1910,” by Bruce A. Glasrud.

Since the publication of that article by Glasrud, thirty-five additional scholarly articles on black Texas history have been published by the journal under McDonald’s editorship. The overall total of forty-five articles (see the appendix) on such a significant topic is important, and doubly so in the South, where some journals refused to accept, publish, or encourage the study of black history. The total is also significant since the *East Texas Historical Journal* publishes only two issues per year. One need only compare the number of articles published in

other state and regional journals to understand the significance of this achievement. To our knowledge, few historical journals published as many articles on black history as did the *East Texas Historical Journal*; one would have to turn to *Phylon* or the *Journal of Negro History* to find more articles on this topic. In Texas, especially since the Texas State Historical Association's publication of Alwyn Barr and Robert A. Calvert's edited volume, *Black Leaders: Texans for Their Times* (1981), the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* has played a major role in disseminating minority history as well.

The forty-five articles published from 1971 to 2007 in the *East Texas Historical Journal* cover a variety of topics and are evenly balanced. For example, twenty-two of the articles focus on the nineteenth century, twenty-two on the twentieth century, and one, Alwyn Barr's "Advancing from History's Hollow to History's Mountain: Sources on African American History in Texas," covers both centuries. Nine articles are about slavery, six cover Reconstruction, and six discuss the civil rights era. Eleven of the articles focus on black women, six analyze white/black violence, four look at education, and six deal with religion. Other topics include the Southern Farmers' Alliance, buffalo soldiers, black Texas politicians, the first Ph.D. earned by a black Texan, the NAACP, Dallas municipal policy, the Greenville sign ("the blackest land, the whitest people"), one of the Tuskegee airmen, and World War II hero Doris "Dorie" Miller. In other words, varied aspects of black East Texas history have been covered exceedingly well by these articles. For the purposes of this book, twelve of the articles have been assembled into a collection that is representative, readable, and significant.

The present volume includes not only the foreword, this introduction, and the aforementioned twelve articles but also an appendix listing the forty-five articles on black Texas history the journal has published, and a list of contributors. This anthology is meant to be a showcase for the quality, quantity, and variety of works published by the East Texas Historical Association over a period of thirty-five years. It also showcases authors who either wrote early introductory expositions of some of their later studies or parts of lengthier works. These are authors who either made a career of researching and writing about black Texas history or who wrote about black Texans while pursuing other avenues of inquiry. Among these contributors are younger authors

who, at the time of their articles' original publication, were just beginning their journey to additional important contributions.

By compiling this anthology/collection, we demonstrate that these studies remain significant. They have not been refuted by recent scholarship, though such work has shown how important these studies were and has filled gaps left by the earlier studies. For example, Elizabeth R. Rabe's article on slave children and James Marten's study of blacks in Civil War Texas address aspects of slave experiences not usually studied, and Stefanie Decker's treatment of black women in the civil rights era examines an important element of the struggle for equality in Texas. It should be added that the civil rights movement in Texas also influenced the state's history and historians. Certainly Alwyn Barr, Bruce A. Glasrud, Merline Pitre, and James M. Smallwood were influenced by this struggle. The *ETHJ* editor's receptivity to black Texas history is in part explained by McDonald's awareness of and sympathy for the regional, state, and local stirrings.

If there is one topic not covered specifically by an article in this anthology, that topic would be racial violence. However, articles by James M. Smallwood, Garna L. Christian, and Bruce A. Glasrud document racial violence during Reconstruction, the late nineteenth century, and the early twentieth century, respectively. Other *ETHJ* articles on the issue of racial violence include the previously mentioned "Violence in an 'Arsenal of Democracy': The Beaumont Race Riot, 1943," by James A. Burran, along with Michael Phillips's "White Violence, Hegemony, and Slave Rebellion in Dallas, Texas, before the Civil War," Kenneth R. Durham Jr.'s "The Longview Race Riot of 1919," and Edward Hake Phillips's "The Sherman Courthouse Riot of 1930.")

Cary D. Wintz's foreword to this anthology is a revision of his East Texas Historical Association presidential address, which he delivered in September 2005. In it the Texas Southern University history professor reviews some of the significant studies of black East Texas history, outlines the major themes of black Texas history, and discusses the authors responsible for analyzing those themes. Naturally, a number of them are included in this anthology. Wintz also mentions the universities, such as Texas Southern University and Texas Tech University, that have been involved in teaching and training students and scholars in black Texas history.¹

The twelve anthologized articles are in chronological historical order. Two articles bookend the volume, and in between are five articles covering the nineteenth century and five on the twentieth century. The articles were selected on the basis of readability, scholarship, balance, and topic. We decided to use no more than one article per author, which affected four scholars: Gail K Beil, Karen Kossie-Chernyshev, Merline Pitre, and James M. Smallwood. However, each of them is represented with a first-rate article in the collection.

Alwyn Barr's previously mentioned article, "Advancing from History's Hollow to History's Mountain: Sources on African American History in Texas," begins the collection. Barr, undoubtedly the dean of scholars of the black experience in Texas, focuses on the types of primary sources that are available to students and scholars of African American history in Texas. Though none of the resources will surprise anyone (hopefully), it is important to remember that these sources must be used with care. For example, the dominant newspapers were published by whites, and the bias is sometimes overwhelmingly negative and stereotyped; still, a careful investigator can derive data from those newspapers. Barr, a former president of the Texas State Historical Association, has published the standard work on blacks in Texas—*Black Texans: A History of African Americans in Texas, 1528–1995*. Readers should also understand, and utilize, resources that have become available over the past decade via easy access to the Internet. One example stands out: the incredible resource of the Slave Narratives, now available digitally, along with relevant photographs, via the Library of Congress Web site. Secondary sources, too, are easier to retrieve; students, scholars, and readers may turn to JSTOR, the online journal archive, or have ready access to inter-library loans via the OCLC's ArticleFirst database.

The final essay in the book, the other bookend, is a co-authored study by James Conrad and Theodore M. Lawe, "Preserving Rosenwald Schools in East Texas: The Sand Flat and Richland School Project." We use it as a bookend because it is current, discussing historic preservation issues and needs in the black community, and at the same time discusses the importance of the Rosenwald schools to the black community earlier in the twentieth century. The essay focuses on rural East Texas and the role that two communities played in preserving Rosenwald

schools in their areas. Multimillionaire Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington worked to upgrade black education in the South, and the result was the Rosenwald schools. Some were established in Texas.

The nineteenth-century experience for African American Texans begins with slavery. The choice of which article on black slavery to use was a difficult one since there were several excellent offerings. We chose Elizabeth R. Rabe's "Slave Children of Texas: A Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis" because she focused on an aspect of Texas slavery not previously studied, and she did so by using primary sources as well as recognizing the secondary literature. Hers is a path-breaking work.

Sometimes it is easy to forget that slavery continued until 1865; James Marten, in "Slaves and Rebels: The Peculiar Institution in Texas, 1861–1865," discusses the status of black slaves during the Civil War and how they adjusted to the changing conditions. His work leads us to the Reconstruction era. The dominant scholar of the black experience during the years of Reconstruction in Texas is James M. Smallwood. He published three articles on that topic in the *East Texas Historical Journal*, any one of which could have been used in this anthology. We selected "Black Texans during Reconstruction: First Freedom" because of its significance in detailing what Reconstruction meant to black Texans and how they responded to their "first freedom." His other articles, one on religion and one on education, deal with topics that are covered in other essays in our anthology, though not during Reconstruction.

The two remaining articles on nineteenth-century topics also reflect choices from an array of significant possibilities. However, we wished to use one of Merline Pitre's articles and decided that "The Evolution of Black Political Participation in Reconstruction Texas" covered a topic of considerable importance, and some of the black politicians she discusses held office beyond Reconstruction. Pitre, one of the first of a new generation of black African American scholars (including Darlene Clark Hine) and an acknowledged specialist in black Texas history, produced a worthy and significant article. The final article on nineteenth-century topics is Garna L. Christian's "The Violent Possibility: The Tenth Cavalry at Texarkana." The Tenth Cavalry was one of two black cavalry units in the West in the years after 1866. For a time they were stationed in Texarkana; Christian explicates the

deep-seated fear with which some whites viewed armed blacks, even though the soldiers were there to protect them. Christian is author of the award-winning *Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas, 1899–1917*.

The five essays that were selected to represent twentieth-century topics describe white attitudes that led to violent treatment of black Texans via riots and lynching; an African American religious community and its endeavors in East Texas; an author, teacher, and man of the Harlem Renaissance; women in the civil rights movement; and the rural-to-urban odyssey of eight black families during the twentieth century. The first of these five articles, “Child or Beast? White Texas’ View of Blacks, 1900–1910,” by Bruce A. Glasrud, notes that white Texans were either paternalists, who viewed blacks as childlike, or racists, who viewed blacks as beastly. As a result of these views, at least one hundred black Texans were lynched, while others faced instances of “whitecapping” (forcible removal) and race riots during the first decade of the twentieth century. Despite such circumstances, as Karen Kossie-Chernyshev argues in “Constructing Good Success: The Church of God in Christ and Social Uplift in East Texas, 1910–1935,” not all black Texans gave up, left the state, or despaired. Members of the Church of God in Christ developed ways to help through efforts at social uplift over the next, albeit difficult, twenty-five years.

The rigid, discriminatory nature of Jim Crow society in twentieth-century Texas had other effects on black Texans. Prominent poet, scholar, and Wiley College professor Melvin Tolson became a radical, as Gail K Beil illustrates in her persuasive article on Tolson, “Melvin B. Tolson: Texas Radical.” Tolson also became acquainted with prominent national literary leaders such as Langston Hughes, wrote the first major scholarly study of the Harlem Renaissance (his master’s thesis), and later moved to Langston University in Oklahoma.

Black Texas women resisted and became radicals as well. Stefanie Decker, in “Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Juanita Craft versus the Dallas Elite,” describes the means by which black women, especially Juanita Craft, became involved in the African American struggle for civil rights in Texas. Black Texans survived many adverse situations in the state, as William H. Wilson relates in “Growing Up Black in East Texas: Some Twentieth-Century Experiences,” which details the experiences of eight

black families in twentieth-century Texas. What became especially noticeable to Wilson was the centrality of three values—family, work, and education (religion was associated with the family)—to their lives, whether in a rural or urban setting. Wilson is a prize-winning historian who published a well-received history, *Hamilton Park: A Planned Black Community in Dallas*.

These twelve articles reflect solid scholarship, vital information, arresting interpretations, and crucial issues of the black experience(s) during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in East Texas. They provide an overview of the history of black Texans, as well as examples of critical writing from authors interested in that experience. The major chronological divisions have been covered, as well as the principal themes and topics of African American history in the eastern portion of the Lone Star state—slavery, freedom, segregation, and the struggle for civil rights.

By showcasing these articles in *Blacks in East Texas History*, we demonstrate the consistent commitment that the *East Texas Historical Journal* has made over the years to publish quality, original scholarship on the lives of black Texans. The articles chosen indicate also that for many years the East Texas Historical Association has been interested in and supportive of the investigation of Afro-Texas life in East Texas.

Note

1. See also Bruce A. Glasrud and James M. Smallwood, "The Texas Tech School of Black History: An Overview," *West Texas Historical Association Year Book* 82 (2006): 102–19.