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# Border Physician: The Life Of Lawrence A. Nixon, 1883-1966

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BORDER PHYSICIAN:  
THE LIFE OF LAWRENCE A. NIXON, 1883-1966

By

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Department of History

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## DEDICATION PAGE

To my mother Norma Torres and my grandmother Emilia Burgos (1917-2003):  
Thank you for teaching me to be proud of my African roots and Puerto Rican heritage.

In honor of the 100 million Ancestors who perished during the  
African Holocaust between 1441 and 1888.  
The largest forced migration the world has ever known.  
Stolen from West Africa as an act of war, against their will,  
and brought in chains to foreign and distant lands.  
Debased, Defiled, and Detested; compelled to engage in homicides, suicides, and infanticides.  
The world may have forgotten this crime against Humanity, but I cannot.

To Dr. Lawrence Aaron Nixon:  
Thank you for living a dignified life of activism.

Para mi mama Norma Torres y mi abuelita Emilia Burgos (1917-2003):  
Gracias por enseñarme a ser orgulloso de mis raíces Africanas y mis patrimonio Puertorriqueño.

En honor al 100 millones de Antepasados que pereció durante  
el Holocausto Africano (1441 a 1888).  
La mas grande migración forzada que el mundo haya conocido.  
Robados de Oeste África de un acto de guerra, contra su voluntad,  
y llevado en cadenas a tierras extrañas y lejanas.  
Degradado, Detestaba y forzado a participar en homicidios, suicidios, y infanticidios.  
El mundo puede haber olvidado este crimen contra la humanidad, pero yo no puedo.

Para Dr. Lawrence Aaron Nixon:  
Gracias por viviendo una vida digna de activismo.

BORDER PHYSICIAN:  
THE LIFE OF LAWRENCE A. NIXON, 1883-1966

By

WILL GUZMÁN, B.S., M.S., Ph.D.

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

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of the Requirements

for the Degree of

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Cordero, Jesús Colón, Felipe Luciano (one of the original *Last Poets*), Miguel Algarín (*Nuyorican Poets Café*), “La Negra” Luberza Oppenheimer, Dr. Samuel Betances, “Titi” Ruth Fernández, Dr. Y. Alfredo Antonio Ben-Jochannan, Pedro “El Maestro” Albizu Campos, Pablo “Yoruba” Guzmán, Ramón Emeterio Betances, Rosa Clemente, Dr. Mariluz Franco Ortiz, Rafael Cancel Miranda, Rafael Cepeda Atilas, Rafael Cortijo, Ismael “Maelo” Rivera, José “Cheo” Feliciano, Wilfredo Benítez, José Campeche, and Roberto Clemente Walker.

Historically, Afro-Borinqueños have been relegated to the margins of Puerto Rican society or made invisible altogether with an underrepresentation in politics, finance, medicine, higher education, and the judicial branch; and an overrepresentation in religion and spirituality; arts and culture; sports and entertainment; and the prison system. Gone are the days when Black Puerto Ricans could be accused of being jovial, non-threatening, mask-wearing buffoons who slavishly engage in *blanqueamiento* in an effort to “mejora la raza” under the guise of the exploitative economic institution of slavery (1517-1873), Spanish political colonialism (1493-1898), and U.S. cultural imperialism (1898-present). My entering academia is a small attempt to continue to defy this negative narrative.

Lastly, Ms. Morgan A. Pritchett—an African Queen in training whose curiosity is matched by her courage—has taught me the virtue of being patient. I was asked, and ultimately decided, to remain a presence in your life...clearly one of the best decisions I have made. Norma Torres and Emilia Burgos, my mother and grandmother, have been a foundational force. By their accounts I was not suppose to be in this particular physical plane; I’m glad they cooked the books, consulted the gods, and decided otherwise. My sister Selines Guzmán has been a continuous champion of my career. These four family members have played a uniquely different, but central role at various phases of my life. They, as well as the other comrades mentioned here, have shown me humanity’s ability to love unconditionally by giving me emotional, intellectual, and financial support. Whatever I aspire to or accomplish is due, in some way, to their influences.

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation centers on the life of Dr. Lawrence Aaron Nixon, an African American physician and civil rights activist who lived in El Paso, Texas from 1910 until his death in 1966. Born in Marshall, Texas in 1883, Lawrence Nixon graduated from Wiley College in 1902 and Meharry Medical College in 1906. He then established a medical office in Cameron, Texas in 1907, but due to the racial climate and violence of central Texas he moved west to El Paso in hopes of a better life.

Although several historians have mentioned Dr. Nixon in their works, they have tended to limit their analysis to his victories in two important Supreme Court cases, *Nixon v. Herndon* (1927) and *Nixon v. Condon* (1932), which successfully challenged Texas's all-white Democratic primary. Despite these legal successes, Texas continued to deny Blacks from voting in the Democratic party primary. However, Nixon's challenges would establish the legal precedence that ultimately would dismantle all-white primaries throughout the entire south in the famous *Smith v. Allwright* Supreme Court decision in 1944. Nixon's courage, independence from the white economy, and the backing of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) allowed him to contest the 1923 Texas Terrell Law which barred African Americans from participating in a Democratic primary election.

This study is a fuller and more contextualized reading of Nixon's life which corrects a few mistakes, factual and interpretive, which are in the historiography about Nixon such as his specific profession, date of birth, and the inception of the NAACP's El Paso branch. By combining archival research, oral interviews, and secondary sources this dissertation biography reveals the many facets of Nixon's life not previously written about, including his futile effort to save Henry Lowry from being lynched in 1921, his failed attempt to get an all-Black pool built

by the city of El Paso in the whites-only Washington Park, his unsuccessful endeavor to start an all-Black hospital in El Paso, his temporary involvement in *Nixon v. McCann* (1934), and his brief participation in the short-lived Southern Conference for Human Welfare—a liberal southern multiracial organization which existed in the South from 1938 to 1948.

The interpretation and analysis of Nixon's life is also intended to contribute to the growing literature on Blacks in the Borderlands, the participation of the African American professional class in 'racial uplift' during the pre-Civil Rights Movement, and the history of Blacks in the United States West and Southwest.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AWDP	All-White Democratic Primary
CLSSC-UTEP	Charles Leland Sonnichsen Special Collections, Univ. of Texas—El Paso
EPCHS	El Paso County Historical Society, El Paso, TX
EPPL	El Paso Public Library, El Paso, TX
FDNHT	Frederick Douglass Negro Hospital for Tuberculosis
HCHS	Harrison County Historical Society, Marshall, TX
IOH-UTEP	Institute of Oral History at University of Texas—El Paso
LANP	Lawrence Aaron Nixon Papers at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library in Austin, TX
LAWFP	Lawrence A. Walker Family Papers, Graham, NC
LBJL	Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, TX
LOCMD	Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Washington, D.C.
MPL	Marshall Public Library, Marshall, TX
MSRCHU	Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NARA-DC	U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.
N/MFP	Nixon/McIver Family Papers, Albuquerque, NM
SCHW	Southern Conference for Human Welfare
TAWDP	Texas All-White Democratic Primary

## INTRODUCTION – NIXON, A BORDER PHYSICIAN

“Until lions have their own historians, tales of the hunt shall always glorify the hunter”  
-Igbo Proverb<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Lawrence Aaron Nixon stood with many other courageous Black Texan leaders including Lula B. White of Houston, Juanita J. Craft of Dallas, Claude W. Black, Jr. of San Antonio, and Warneta and Volma Overton of Austin.<sup>2</sup> All of these noted Texan civil rights leaders were instrumental in advancing race relations at the local level and ensuring that the United States lived up to the principals in its Constitution. This study will center on the life of Lawrence Nixon. Although lay historian Conrey Bryson’s *Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon and the White Primary* is a good primer, a more in-depth analysis is needed to place Nixon’s activities within the larger context of Borderlands history, African Americans in the West, and the engagement of the Black professional class in ‘racial uplift’ during the pre-civil rights movement.<sup>3</sup> What follows in this introduction is a historiography that will explore the above-mentioned themes to

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<sup>1</sup> John C. McCall, *Dancing Histories: Heuristic Ethnography with the Ohafia Igbo* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 51.

<sup>2</sup> James L. Hicks, “This Man Mason” *Amsterdam News*, 30 April 1960, 1; and Gilbert R. Mason and James P. Smith, *Beaches, Blood, and Ballots: A Black Doctor’s Civil Rights Struggle* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), ix. On Lula B. White, see Merline Pitre, *In Struggle against Jim Crow: Lulu B. White and the NAACP, 1900-1957* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999). On Juanita Craft, see Juanita J. Craft and Chandler Vaughan, *A Child, The Earth, and A Tree of Many Seasons: The Voice of Juanita Craft, An Oral Biography* (Dallas: Halifax Publishing, 1981); Michael Phillips, *White Metropolis: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion in Dallas, 1841-2001* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006); and Harvey J. Graff, *The Dallas Myth: The Making and Unmaking of an American City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). On Claude W. Black, Jr., see Yvonne M. Armstrong, *Black Trailblazers of San Antonio, Texas: Their Businesses, Communities, Institutions and Organizations* (San Antonio: Inkbiyvonne, 2006). On Warneta and Volma Overton, see Carolyn L. Jones, *Volma—My Journey: One Man’s Impact on the Civil Rights Movement in Austin, Texas* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1998). On the Ragsdale family, see Matthew C. Whitaker, *Race Work: The Rise of Civil Rights in the Urban West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006). For Clara Luper, see Clara Luper, *Behold the Walls* (Oklahoma City: Jim Wire, 1979) and Linda Williams Reese, “Clara Luper and the Civil Rights Movement in Oklahoma City, 1958-1964,” found in Quintard Taylor and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore, eds., *African American Women Confront the West, 1600-2000* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 328-43.

<sup>3</sup> Conrey Bryson, *Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon and the White Primary* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1974).

understand better the monumental influence of Nixon's actions in shaping the history of the Southwest and why his life's story is deserving of a biography.<sup>4</sup>

## **Borderlands**

Writer Américo Paredes defines borderlands as a “historically determined geo-political zone of military, linguistic, and cultural conflict.”<sup>5</sup> Historians Jane M. Rausch and David J. Weber, in their 1994 *Where Cultures Meet*, define frontiers as “places where cultures contend with one another...to produce a dynamic that is unique to time and place,” representing “both place and process, linked inextricably.”<sup>6</sup> Born out of the 1960s and 1970s, borderlands scholars dropped the term Spanish and their intellectual output were thrust upon academia by “Others” who had been traditionally left out of the history books, mainly Native Americans and Chicanas/os. “The Mexican-American side of the story,” noted scholars Julian Samora, Joe Bernal, and Albert Peña in 1979, “has finally been brought to the attention of other Americans.”

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<sup>4</sup> The terms Black, African American, or New World African will be used interchangeably in this study to refer to former African captives who were under the rule of the social, political, and economic structure of the United States government and other European powers in the Americas. Terms such as *Negro* or *Colored* are antiquated, yet they will be retained in titles, names, and quoted passages. When these terms are contextually appropriate, they will be enclosed in quotation marks. This author agrees with Jeffrey Perry in that because many Black activist and intellectuals during Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon's lifetime “struggled to capitalize the *N* in *Negro* as both a statement of pride *and* as a challenge to white supremacy, when the word *Black* is used as its equivalent it is used with a capital *B*. There is no similarly compelling basis for capitalizing the *w* in *white*,” see Jeffrey B. Perry, *A Hubert Harrison Reader* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), xxxi. On capitalizing “Negro,” see Donald L. Grant and Mildred Bricker Grant, “Some Notes on the Capital ‘N’” *Phylon* 36 (Fall 1975): 435-43; Joyce Moore Turner and W. Burghardt Turner, eds., *Richard B. Moore, Caribbean Militant in Harlem: Collected Writings, 1920-1972* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 223-38. Booker T. Washington also embraced this idea, see Louis R. Harlan and Raymond W. Smock, eds., *The Booker T. Washington Papers: 1904-1906* vol. 1, 9, 10, 12, and 13 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972-1984), 1:188, 207; 9:6-7; 10:383, 572, 614-615, 620; 12:10-11; 13:469.

<sup>5</sup> Héctor Calderón and José David Saldívar, eds., *Criticism in the Borderlands: Studies in Chicano Literature, Culture, and Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 5. On Américo Paredes' life, see Ramón Saldívar, *The Borderlands of Culture: Américo Paredes and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); and José R. Lopez Morín, *The Legacy of Américo Paredes* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> David J. Weber and Jane M. Rausch, eds., *Where Cultures Meet: Frontiers in Latin American History* (Wilmington: SR Books, 1994), xiv.



As historian Patricia Limerick stated, “the inclusion of these new angles of vision added vitality and depth to Western American history,” and to borderlands history as well.<sup>7</sup> The intellectual thrust of “The Borderlands” and the frontier West that Limerick and her cohorts spoke of is “mutually distinct and simultaneously overlapping.” Both Limerick’s and Frederick Jackson Turner’s Western frontier promote and critique “a fairly unique ‘U.S.-Anglo’ construct rooted in westward expansion” such as Manifest Destiny. The Spanish empire viewed northern Mexico “as a buffer where cultural collateral was acceptable to lose, while the U.S. viewed the frontier as the crucible of civilization, democracy, and American character.” Thus, the Borderlands is the site where the Spanish Borderlands and the U.S. Western frontier “collided....and the results over time are ambiguous, complicated.”<sup>8</sup>

This is where Lawrence Nixon’s life experiences clearly fall. Although he is not Mexican or Native American, his life is nevertheless, not only an American one, but more specifically an African American, borderlands, and a Western American story because his is another “new angle of vision,” which adds “vitality and depth” to what it means to be an American. Lawrence Nixon was born in a border county (Harrison County, Texas), educated in border cities (New Orleans, Louisiana; Marshall, Texas; and Memphis, Tennessee), established a medical practice in Central Texas (Cameron, Milam County); and lived for over fifty years in the

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<sup>7</sup> Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: Norton, 1987), 258.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey P. Shepherd, e-mail message to Will Guzmán, October 15, 2008. Shepherd is an Assistant Professor within the History Department at the University of Texas-El Paso. *Anglo* is a term used primarily in distinguishing a white English-speaking person from a person of Hispanic heritage. In this context it is not limited to persons of English descent but can be generally applied to any non-Hispanic white person. Thus in parts of the United States with large Hispanic populations, such as the Southwest in general and El Paso in particular, an American of Polish, Irish, or German heritage might be termed an Anglo just as readily as a person of English descent. However, in parts of the country where the Hispanic population is small, or in areas where ethnic distinctions among European groups remain strong, such as Chicago, New York City, and Boston, the phrase Anglo has little currency as a general term for non-Hispanic whites, see Pratt and Pickett, *The American Heritage Guide to Contemporary Usage and Style*, 32.

Southwestern border city of El Paso, Texas. Geographically, literally, and physically his was obviously a border life.<sup>9</sup>

Nixon's life also represents a borderlands existence metaphorically. For literary critic Blake Allmendinger, the "Frontier line" refers to "the border between 'civilization' and 'savagery,' represented by whites and indigenous peoples, respectively."<sup>10</sup> Allmendinger compares his "frontier line" assertion to scholar Samira Kawash's suggestion that "the color line metaphorizes racial distinction as spatial division" in which the historic "idea of race has a long-standing relation to the idea of geography."<sup>11</sup> Kawash and Allmendinger's analogies can be used for whites and Blacks. Life for Lawrence Nixon symbolized a presence or being on the edge of the metropole: he was a Democrat in an era when most Black men were Republicans; He was highly educated and medically trained in an era when few people attended college; he challenged the status-quo when most avoided conflict because of the potential violent reprisals; he moved to the Southwest in an era when most African Americans moved to the Northeast or North-Midwest.<sup>12</sup> He was a Black man living in a city where Blacks were a distinct minority and

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<sup>9</sup> On Louisiana in general, and New Orleans in particular, being a Borderlands both geographically and culturally, see Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995); Kimberly S. Hanger, *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1769-1803* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997). On Tennessee, see Cynthia Cumfer, *Separate Peoples, One Land: The Minds of Cherokees, Blacks, and Whites on the Tennessee Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 14.

<sup>10</sup> Blake Allmendinger, *Imagining the African American West* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), xii-xiii and n.7 131-32.

<sup>11</sup> Samira Kawash, *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African American Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>12</sup> Touré F. Reed, *Not Alms But Opportunity: The Urban League and The Politics of Racial Uplift, 1910-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 3, 11, 27-8, 30, 45, 37, 61, and 169-70. On educational attainment for example, between 1900 and 1909—the decade Lawrence Nixon earned both his bachelor and medical degrees from private Black institutions—Nixon was one of 1,613 Black college graduates in the nation among a Black population of 8.8 million (1900) to 9.8 million (1910), see "The American Negro In College, 1945-1946," *The Crisis* vol. 53, no. 8 (August 1946): 237; and Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and Its Meanings, 1619 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 156. On the

Mexican and Mexican Americans were in the majority.<sup>13</sup> And finally, he was a Black man living on an international boundary. This speaks to his worldview and sensibilities, clearly a “Borderlands as Metaphor” experience.

By being a Black man in the United States, Lawrence Nixon, to borrow Paredes’ words, was in constant “cultural conflict” for merely being who he was: ‘unapologetically Black,’ which in the minds of some was the antithesis of being an American.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately the Turnerian narrative, as historian George Lipsitz has stated, “does not prepare us to think about the Americans who crossed the Pacific rather than the Atlantic, or about the people who did not come to America...but instead had America come to them with the brutality and sadism of conquest, slavery, and genocide.”<sup>15</sup> This is aptly true for Nixon, whose ancestors, as we shall see in chapter one, were brought to this country by force and in chains. Nixon lived in a highly segregated, racist, and violent society that deemed him an intellectual and biological inferior which resulted in the denial of his humanity, citizenship, and manhood.<sup>16</sup>

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size of the Black population between 1900-1910, see Monroe N. Work, ed., *Negro Year Book and Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro* (Tuskegee: Negro Year Book Publishing Company, 1916), 364.

<sup>13</sup> In February 1916, six years after Nixon’s arrival, El Paso had a city civilian population of 61,902 of which 32,737 (52.8%) were of Mexican descent; 27,359 (44.2%) Anglos; 1,514 (2.5%) Blacks; 243 (.04%) Chinese; 44 Japanese; and 5 Native Americans. If one were to add the additional 7,047 Mexican “refugees,” then the Mexican/Mexican American population of El Paso would be 39,784 or 64% of the total population, see “El Paso’s Population,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 14 February 1916, 4.

<sup>14</sup> The phrase ‘unapologetically Black’ was borrowed from Jeremiah A. Wright, formerly of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, who was a disciple of James H. Cone, one of the major intellectual icons of Black Liberation Theology, see quote in Robert M. Franklin, *Another Day’s Journey: Black Churches Confronting the American Crisis* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 36; and Roy L. Brooks, *Racial Justice in the Age of Obama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 65.

<sup>15</sup> George Lipsitz, “Facing the Music in a Land of a Thousand Dances,” *Sunburst* vol. 9, no. 2 (February 1993), 7.

<sup>16</sup> On Blacks viewed as intellectually and biologically inferior, see Harriet A. Washington, *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 33, 34, 38, 62, 90, and 93.

## **African Americans in the U.S. West**

Reintroducing Nixon's contributions will add to what Quintard Taylor describes *In Search of the Racial Frontier* as "the rich, complex, tradition of black western history." This project is an example of Taylor's request for historians to look at the Black West and the potential it has to tell a different, more informative and comprehensive story of the African American experience. Nixon's life illustrates both the Black West's "regional distinctiveness and its continuity with the legacy of African American history in the rest of the nation." Nixon's life is also an example of the diversity of the Black past and "the existence of multiple African American historical traditions."<sup>17</sup>

In studying Nixon, the city of El Paso and the Black community within it will also be examined. Both a Southern and Western city, El Paso was not a racially inclusive city. Again Taylor gives us the central paradigm in the history of Blacks in the West:

Did the West represent the last best hope for nineteenth and twentieth century African Americans? Was it a racial frontier beyond which lay the potential for an egalitarian society? Or did the region fail to match the unobtainable promise imposed upon it by legions of boosters, to provide both political freedom and economic opportunity? Perhaps Black Americans, in their desire to escape the repression of the East and South, simply exaggerated the possibilities in the region. Did western distinctiveness apply to race? Such questions defy easy, immediate answers.<sup>18</sup>

In many regards the West, including El Paso, was no different than the rest of the nation in its ongoing, yet slanted obsession with the social construct of race. In *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A History of the American West*, Richard White writes that "in coming west, African Americans had...voted with their feet against legal segregation and the south only to

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<sup>17</sup> Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 18-9.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 17.

find themselves subject to de facto segregation in the West.”<sup>19</sup> In the conclusion of Taylor’s *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, he asks, “was the West a racial frontier beyond which lay the potential for an egalitarian society?” In response, Taylor claims that even when allowing for “subregional, cultural, or gender differences and the presence of some Euro-Americans supportive of racial equality,” that many scholars, including those who have studied white western racial attitudes, have to conclude no to the question.<sup>20</sup> Nixon’s life experiences in El Paso will add validity to this assertion, because El Paso engaged in Jim Crow practices as mandated by state laws and social norms.

In *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America*, Douglas Flamming describes racism against African Americans during the first half of the nineteenth-century in the Southwestern city of Los Angeles as manifesting itself in three distinct forms. First, and perhaps the least important of the three, was public insult designed to denigrate Black people. Obviously there are many words in the English lexicon which shows disdain for all ethnic groups, so African Americans were not singled-out. Yet, “what mattered was the real power behind the insult.” In a public arena, as an example, for a Black Pullman Porter to be called “George” or “boy” by a white child or adult was a reminder of the powerlessness of Black men in direct relation to those with institutional power. Many Black Pullman porters and waiters “wincing when they heard “George.” Not responding was grounds for dismissal. Answering meant admitting they had no name of their own, no identity as an individual.” “Boy” and “George” were throwbacks to that ‘peculiar institution’ when African captives were forced to accept the

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<sup>19</sup> Richard White, *“It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own”: A History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 577 and 589.

<sup>20</sup> Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 313.

names given to them by plantation owners.<sup>21</sup> Calling Black men “George” or “Boy” was a subtle, but powerful way for whites to say: “We’re on top and there’s nothing you can do about it.”<sup>22</sup>

The second example of racism that Flamming describes was “structural, or institutional, inequalities,” which was the “one most often targeted by civil rights activists.” What many Black people wanted was real, substantive equal opportunity: socially, politically, legally, and perhaps most importantly economically. The institutional forces which perpetuated racism included “Jim Crow” laws or state-sanctioned racial apartheid, extralegal law enforcement in the form of lynchings, imbalance of arrest and sentencing within the criminal justice system, the one-party South, the curtailing of voter registration and voting through the use of such tactics such as violence, intimidation, poll-taxes, the grandfather clause, and literacy tests. In addition to these institutional manifestations of crass racism is the denial of economic and educational opportunities. Most whites simply did not hire Blacks in meaningful and highly valued positions. Flamming reminds us where African Americans “were employed, they were usually hired last, fired first, and paid less, than their white counterparts—and all this too, was a legal institutional barrier” to African American advancement.<sup>23</sup> Nixon challenges this structural or institutional racism by involving himself in the battle to dismantle the all-white Democratic primary. This was an opportunity for him to assert his citizenship, humanity, and manhood.

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<sup>21</sup> Larry Tye, *Rising from the Rails: Pullman Porters and the Making of the Black Middle Class* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004), 95. National Public Radio (NPR) affiliate WHYY’s “Fresh Air” host Terry Gross interviewed Tye on 30 June 2004 about his book, where he expands further on this phenomenon, see <<http://www.npr.org/templates/player/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=103933268&m=103947>>

<sup>22</sup> Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 11.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

The third example of racism that Flammig mentions is the assumption of Black inferiority.<sup>24</sup> Some whites in the West assumed that African Americans, “as an undifferentiated group, were criminal, violent, dirty, ignorant, lazy, loud, unsanitary, oversexed, carefree, and unambitious.” When Anglos in the West met African Americans “who obviously did not fit the stereotype, they classified those blacks as “exceptional”—the exception that proved the rule—thereby preserving their presumption of black inferiority.” Stereotypes, as Black cultural critic Hazel Carby asserts, are designed to not represent a reality, “but to function as a disguise, or mystification, of objective social relations.”<sup>25</sup> Nixon must have experienced all of the above, but had varying reactions to them that allowed him to survive, thrive, and demand respect. This study will explore this in further detail.

### **Black Professionals and the Pre-Civil Rights Movement**

In her address and seminal essay, “Black Professionals and Race Consciousness: Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, 1890–1950,” Darlene Clark Hine encourages historians to “identify and revisit other foundational moments and deeply to penetrate the layers of our country's past in order to bring into the bright light of history all those whose struggles and resistance made freedom more than a dream.”<sup>26</sup> Clearly Lawrence Nixon’s Supreme Court cases were foundational moments in African American history. This study answers Clark Hine’s call by placing Nixon’s contributions to the civil rights movement in a broader context, and as a key element that paved the way for future actions. Nixon’s story will allow people to understand

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>25</sup> Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 22.

<sup>26</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, “Black Professionals and Race Consciousness: Origins of the Civil Rights Movement, 1890-1950,” *Journal of American History* vol. 89, no. 4 (March 2003): 1280-81.

“the proto–civil rights movements” which Clark Hine correctly points-out is “fundamental to the reconstruction of the origins of the classic civil rights movement of the late 1950s and 1960s.”<sup>27</sup> Clark Hine asserts that “the formation of parallel organizations...proved to be far more radical, far more capable of nurturing resistance, than anyone could have anticipated in the closing decade of the nineteenth century and opening decades of the twentieth.”<sup>28</sup> While there is no evidence to suggest that Nixon was a member of the National Medical Association, he was part of the Lone Star State Medical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Association History, which was the state-level affiliate of National Medical Association.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, Nixon was part of the Black professional class as a physician and throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s he attempted to establish an all-Black hospital in El Paso, which, had it come to fruition, would have been instrumental in cultivating more future Black doctors and establishing a sense of pride within the African American community in the southwest. Furthermore, Clark Hine tells us that it was during this time period, the first half of the twentieth century, that the Black community “produced a class of professional men and women, who would meet the race’s survival needs, promote its uplift, develop its advancement agenda, and provide a crucial link with the struggles of the mid-twentieth century for first-class citizenship.”<sup>30</sup> Although largely an unknown figure

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 1281.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 1279. Specific parallel organizations that Clark Hine mentions include: the National Medical Association in 1895, the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses in 1908, and the National Bar Association in 1925. For a brief history of each organization see, Nina Mjagkij, ed., *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Associations* (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2001), 389, 468, 408, and 467; and David H. Jackson, Jr., “The Growth of African American Cultural and Social Institutions” in Alton Hornsby, ed., *A Companion to African American History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 312-24.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph Alvin Chatman, *The Lone Star State Medical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Association History* (Lubbock: Chatman, 1959), 36 and 173.

<sup>30</sup> Darlene Clark Hine, “The Corporeal and Ocular Veil: Dr. Matilda A. Evans (1872-1935) and the Complexity of Southern History” *Journal of Southern History* vol. 70, no. 1 (February 2004): 5.



outside of Texas, Nixon belongs in the company of his generation's most notable civil rights activist in the West, Southwest, and beyond.<sup>31</sup>

Historian Edward Beardsley challenges historians to think differently about erroneous perceptions of the Black middle-class in the first half of the twentieth century. "Supposedly, this group was so eager for white acceptance and so fearful of being lumped with the mass of 'shiftless' blacks, that it turned its back on the poor and virtually repudiated its own membership in the race."<sup>32</sup> Beardsley's observations will be explored in the context of Nixon's life activities and his refusal to turn his back on the race. Nixon's life as a crusader for freedom also illustrates historian Carter G. Woodson's assessment of the relationship between the Black professional class and the struggles of African Americans for dignity, respect, and equality.<sup>33</sup> Woodson argued that "in organizing the people...and in stimulating their effort to battle for their rights the Negro physician has contributed more than any other class, with the possible exception of the Negro lawyer, toward enlarging the domain of individual liberty and securing for a despised element a hearing at the bar of public opinion."<sup>34</sup>

Flamming suggests that in order for professional middle-class Blacks to combat "white presumption of Black inferiority," they attempted to become what he coined "Super Citizens" in hopes of dispelling those negative assumptions.<sup>35</sup> As a member of the African American community in El Paso, was Lawrence Nixon a 'Super Citizen'? It appears that way, especially

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Edward H. Beardsley, "William D. Chappelle, Jr., M.D.: A Physician and Churchman in South Carolina," *A.M.E. Church Review*, 117 (April-June 2001), 54; Clark Hine, "The Corporeal and Ocular Veil," 7 n11.

<sup>33</sup> Clark Hine, "The Corporeal and Ocular Veil," 3.

<sup>34</sup> Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro Professional Man and the Community: With Special Emphasis on the Physician and the Lawyer* (New York: Negro University, 1970), 126; and Clark Hine, "The Corporeal and Ocular Veil," 4 n1.

<sup>35</sup> Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*, 12.

when one considers that he was well liked and had few enemies. No one is on record of having a disparaging remark to say about Nixon, although surely he was not perfect. His public posture was one of dignity, composure, and soft-spoken, which lends credence to Flamming's 'Super Citizen' theory. Was this public persona part of his personality or nature? Or was this a tactical strategy to disarm his enemies and protect himself and his family from the stings and blows of white supremacy, domination, and control? For Blacks of the middle class, Flamming writes, "the quest for civil rights was not a "movement" or a set of dramatic movements; it was a way of life." Lawrence Nixon and others of his generation, race, region, and class—despite their outward appearances—"were not soft-spoken in their demands for equal rights or their denunciations of racism, and they were anything but escapists."<sup>36</sup>

Again, Clark Hine makes the poignant point when she says that in creating a nurturing environment, the actions of the Black professional class appeared "to imply acquiescence in segregation," but Black institutions "never silenced internal dissent. Ideological tensions between parallelism and integrationism haunted black discourse throughout the twentieth century." Ironically Black professionals such as Lawrence Nixon "identified the Achilles' heel of white supremacy: Segregation provided Blacks the chance, indeed, the imperative, to develop a range of distinct institutions that they controlled," which allowed them to exploit "that fundamental weakness in the 'separate but equal' system permitted by the U.S. Supreme Court's 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*."<sup>37</sup>

There have been very few books written about Black doctors and their contributions to racial uplift, particular during the era Nixon lived. Books such as Florence Ridlon's *A Black*

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 3 and 9.

<sup>37</sup> Clark Hine, "Black Professionals and Race Consciousness," *Journal of American History*, 1280.

*Physician's Struggle for Civil Rights*, Linda Royster Beito and David T. Beito's *Black Maverick*, Thomas J. Ward's *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South*, Gilbert R. Mason and James Patterson Smith's *Beaches, Blood, and Ballots*, Barbara R. Cotton's *Non Verbal Opera = Not Words but Works*, and Hugh Pearson's *Under the Knife* are some examples of the available literature. These texts provide rich information about the medical and civil rights contributions of various Black physicians, including Theodore R. Howard of Mound Bayou, Mississippi and Chicago, Edward Mazique of Washington D.C., Joseph H. Griffin of Tallahassee, and Gilbert Mason of Biloxi, Mississippi. Of these books, none of the individuals showcased lived in the West or Southwest and all four physicians gained prominence or began their civil rights activism after the 1950s.<sup>38</sup> Nixon is born and comes of age after federal troops are withdrawn from the South in 1877, a period that historian Rayford Logan calls "The Nadir" because of the horrible conditions for most Black people and the deteriorating state of race relations.<sup>39</sup> This study of Nixon will be one of the few biographies of a Black physician in the civil rights struggle during the first half of the twentieth-century, and of a Black doctor in the West or Southwest. Thomas Ward's book, *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South*, is an excellent overview of many Southern doctors scattered throughout the region and their plight during the Jim Crow era;

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<sup>38</sup> Linda Royster Beito and David T. Beito, *Black Maverick: T.R.M. Howard's Fight for Civil Rights and Economic Power* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Florence Ridlon, *A Black Physician's Struggle for Civil Rights: Edward C. Mazique, M.D.* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005); Gilbert R. Mason and James P. Smith, *Beaches, Blood, and Ballots: A Black Doctor's Civil Rights Struggle* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000); Barbara R. Cotton, *Non Verbal Opera=Not Words but Works: The Biography of Joseph Howard Griffin, M.D.* (Tallahassee: B. R. Cotton, 1980); and Hugh Pearson, *Under the Knife: How a Wealthy Negro Surgeon Wielded Power in the Jim Crow South* (New York: Free Press, 2000).

<sup>39</sup> Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877-1901* (New York: Dial Press, 1954), iii, 52, and 79; Kenneth Robert Janken, *Rayford W. Logan and the Dilemma of the African American Intellectual* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 219-221; and August Meier, "The Negro and the Democratic Party, 1875-1915" *Phylon* vol. 17, no. 2 (April-June 1956): 175. Figuratively, the term "nadir" is the lowest point, the time of greatest depression or dejection, see Jean L. McKechnie, ed., *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 1192.

although not a biography of any one particular physician. Nixon's story will cause us to rethink the literature of Black doctors and their communities, activism, and patients.<sup>40</sup>

## **Organization**

The study is organized primarily according to chronology, content, and narrative. The introduction is the historiography—where Nixon's story fits into the larger historical narrative. Chapter One discusses Nixon's birth, early life, introduction to his family lineage, formal education, the infancy of his medical practice, and racial violence in Texas. Chapter Two is on Nixon's move to the border city of El Paso, the city's growth, the origins of the NAACP, the Black community in El Paso, the creation of the El Paso NAACP branch in May 1914, Nixon's initial involvement in NAACP, the existence of Jim Crow in El Paso, and the death of Nixon's first wife, Esther J. Calvin Nixon. Chapter Three will look at Nixon's failed attempts to save Henry Lowry from a brutal lynching in 1921, Nixon's futile attempt to secure an all-Black pool in El Paso's Washington Park, and the courting by the Anglo political establishment of the Black community during the 1923 Juneteenth celebration.<sup>41</sup> Chapter Four will look at Nixon's two legal challenges to the white primary—*Nixon v. Herndon* (1927) and *Nixon v. Condon* (1932). In addition, the NAACP's involvement with the case, the origins of the Terrell Law which spawned the all-white primary, and the Ku Klux Klan's political involvement in Texas and local

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas J. Ward, *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2003); and James Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors: A History of Meharry Medical College* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1983).

<sup>41</sup> Juneteenth is the Emancipation Day for Afro-Texans that began when Union forces arrived June 18, 1865 into the state declaring on June 19, 1865 the institution of slavery illegal, thus enforcing Lincoln's previously ignored January 1, 1863 Emancipation Proclamation. Since then Blacks in Texas have annually observed their Freedom Day and beginning in the 1990s it spread to other parts of the country, becoming an official holiday in a good number of states, see Mitchell A. Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom: Memory and Meaning in African American Emancipation Celebrations, 1808-1915* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 97-146; and Francis E. Abernethy, Carolyn F. Satterwhite, Patrick B. Mullen, and Alan B. Govenar, eds., *Juneteenth Texas: Essays in African American Folklore* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1996), 5.

El Paso politics will also be analyzed. Chapter Five will consist of Nixon's attempt to start an all-Black hospital in El Paso, his involvement in the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, family life including Drusilla Tandy Nixon's (his second wife) civic involvement, Nixon's retirement from medicine, and his untimely death. The Conclusion will place his life in context and explore his legacy and impact.

CHAPTER 1 –  
MARSHALL, TEXAS: “ONE OF THE WORST SECTIONS  
IN ALL THIS ROUND WORLD FOR ANY NEGRO TO LIVE IN”<sup>1</sup>

Lawrence Aaron Nixon grew up in a time in United States history when violence by whites against Blacks was rampant and when resurgent white power, especially in the South, steadily circumscribed the constitutional rights of African Americans. This era, described as “The Nadir” by historian Rayford Logan, was a period of social unrest and political upheaval. “The Nadir” epitomized the dramatic deterioration of race relations after the presidential compromise of 1877. Black people and their interests were placed on the sacrificial alter of political expediency by many whites within the Republican party in exchange for the removal of federal troops from the South, sectional harmony, and the expansion of big business and global imperialism.

**Lawrence A. Nixon’s Family Genealogy**

Lawrence A. Nixon was born during The Nadir on February 9, 1883 to Jennie Valerie Engledow and Charles Blanton Nixon in Marshall, Texas.<sup>2</sup> He was the oldest followed by his two younger sisters and two brothers—Annie Lucillia Nixon, born in March 1885, Alfaretta Sally Nixon (born March 1887), Hallie P. Nixon, and Charles Jeff Nixon (born April 1889), the

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<sup>1</sup> William Pickens made this statement about Marshall, Texas after nearly having been killed twice by whites during his brief one-year stay in the city. Pickens was a former professor at Wiley College and NAACP Field Secretary, see Sheldon Avery, *Up From Washington: William Pickens and the Negro Struggle for Equality, 1900-1954* (Delaware: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 36 and 203-4 n.2-4.

<sup>2</sup> Some sources incorrectly state Lawrence A. Nixon’s birthday as February 7, 1884. In the 1900 census, Lawrence Nixon is described as a seventeen year-old Black male student who was born in February 1883. Also, Nixon indicates his birthday in four different accounts as February 9, 1883, see *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Schedule 1-Population, City of Marshall (2<sup>nd</sup> Ward), Harrison County, Texas, enumerated on 13 June 1900 by J. Garrison, Series T623, Roll 1643, Page 186 Subpage B, Line 83; “El Pasoan Ends Medical Career,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 24 July 1963, 6; Conrey Bryson, “Progress Report: A Letter from Dr. L. A. Nixon to the NAACP, 1952” *Password* vol. 32, no. 4 (Fall 1987): 186; and Registration Card 3153, Draft 1827, Local Board 1, City of El Paso, El Paso County, Texas, 12 September 1918, <www.ancestrylibrary.com> (accessed 9 June 2009).

youngest member of the family.<sup>3</sup> Hallie died at the age of two and Annie Nixon died in March of 1944.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 1.**  
Top row, left to right: Charles Blanton Nixon, Charles Jeff Nixon, and Jennie Valerie (Engledow) Nixon, c.1900-1910.

Bottom row, left to right: Annie Lucillia Nixon, Alfaretta Sally Nixon, and Lawrence Aaron Nixon, c.1900-1910  
(Photos courtesy of Edna Angela (Nixon) McIver).

According to family lore, Lawrence Nixon's paternal grandfather, Charles Neil Nixon, was an African captive who was brought to Georgia directly from the continent. Alfaretta, Lawrence's sister, writes that her grandfather talked of being "from the Bush tribe," which could mean a number of things, including his being Bushongo of the Kuba Kingdom who inhabited the Congo basin region. He may have been a San, Bushmen, or more appropriately a Kwe, Nharon, Hai, !Khu, or !Xo who live across Namibia, Botswana, and South Africa.<sup>5</sup> Although this

<sup>3</sup> Nixon and McIver Family Papers, hereafter cited as N/MFP. Middle names for Alfaretta, Annie, and Charles were obtained from Mrs. Edna McIver, Lawrence A. Nixon's seventy-two year-old daughter. Will Guzmán visited with Mrs. McIver in March 2009 at her home in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

<sup>4</sup> On deaths, see family tree documents within the Lawrence A. Walker Family Papers, hereafter cited as LAWFP. This information was gathered in the 1950s by Alfaretta S. Walker, Lawrence A. Nixon's sister. Family papers are in the possession of Lawrence A. Walker, eighty-nine year-old nephew of Lawrence A. Nixon, who currently lives in Graham, North Carolina. Will Guzmán visited with Mr. Walker at his home in January 2009. On names and birthdates of Lawrence A. Nixon's siblings, see *Twelfth Census of the United States*, City of Marshall (2<sup>nd</sup> Ward), Harrison County, Texas, enumerated on 13 June 1900 by J. Garrison, Schedule 1-Population, Series T623, Roll 1643, Page 186, Subpage B, Line 82-6. Oddly, Jennie Valerie Nixon (born March 1865), Lawrence Nixon's mom, is listed as 'Head of Household' with no mention of Charles B. Nixon, Lawrence Nixon's father. Charles B. Nixon could have been away on his many trips as a Pullman Porter when the census was conducted.

<sup>5</sup> Narrative on the Nixon family written by Alfaretta S. Walker, Lawrence A. Nixon's sister, found within LAWFP. On the Bushongo and the Kuba Kingdom, see Rebecca Leuchak, *Kuba* (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 1997) and Robert B. Edgerton, *The Troubled Heart of Africa: A History of the Congo* (New York: Macmillan, 2002). Kwe, Nharon, Hai, !Khu, and !Xo are several of the terms that various groups in southern Africa call themselves. 'Bushmen' and 'San' are considered racist and sexist by some since they derive from 'bandit' or 'outlaw,' yet at times 'Bushmen' and 'San' are also what the people call themselves, see Robert J. Gordon and Stuart Sholto-Douglas, *The Bushman Myth: The Making of a Namibian Underclass* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 5-7; Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, *The Old Way: A Story of the First People* (New York: Macmillan, 2007), xiii-xv.

occurrence was statistically improbable since more than ninety percent of enslaved Africans taken to the Americas were from the West African coast—Mauritania to Angola.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the senior Nixon simply could have been referring to the fact that he came from the rural ‘country,’ deep forest region, or a forgotten area of the African interior.

Primary documents have been difficult to uncover, yet scholars have estimated that “between 1790 and 1810, about 194,000” African captives entered the United States. Of this figure, “more than 90,000 were newly transported African captives” who came through Charleston, South Carolina and Savannah, Georgia. Approximately “63,000 stayed near the port of entry, 15,000 in South Carolina and 48,000 in Georgia.” Despite the Congressional ban on importing African captives in 1808, “illegal slaving vessels” continued to bring in “perhaps 7,000 more Africans...during the next decade,” of which “Georgia took about 2,000.”<sup>7</sup> Charles N. Nixon gave his age as fifty-four when the 1880 United States Census was taken, making his birth year 1826.<sup>8</sup> From this information we can deduce that he obviously was not within the group of 2,000 Africans that arrived into Georgia between 1808 and 1820, nor the group of 48,000 African captives who arrived prior to 1808. Traders in African captives may have illegally smuggled the elder Nixon into the United States sometime after the 1830s, decades after the official ban of the importation of African captives was imposed by Congress.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Howard Dodson, “The Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Making of the Modern World,” found in Sheila S. Walker, ed., *African Roots/American Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), 119.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Countryman, *Americans: A Collision of Histories* (New York: Macmillan, 1997), 102-3.

<sup>8</sup> *Tenth Census of the United States*, Schedule 1, City of Marshall (2<sup>nd</sup> Ward), Harrison County, Texas, enumerated on 1 June 1880, Series T9, Roll 1309, Page 339 Subpage A, Line 29.

<sup>9</sup> The United States Congress outlawed the importation of African captives in 1787 and the law went into effect 1 January 1808. The political arguments and the bill’s progression through the United States Congress to prohibit the importation of African captives are discussed in Donald L. Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics, 1765-1820* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 324-38. The illegal importation of



Georgia remained a center for smuggling African captives until the eve of the Civil War. Former African captives interviewed by the federal government's Works Progress Administration in the 1930s "remembered the landing of Africans" as late as the 1850s. In 1935, for example, Wallace Quarterman, a Geechee or Gullah speaker, recalled African captives landing near his Darien, Georgia home in 1844. In the late 1850s, a Georgia agricultural society offered a \$25 prize "for the most physically perfect African imported that year," indicating that the illegal importation of African captives was well known, tolerated, and the laws of the federal government were flagrantly and arrogantly violated. The last ship to smuggle African captives into Georgia was the New York-based *Wanderer*, which arrived at Jekyll Island (near Brunswick) on November 28, 1858 with a cargo of 409 "salt backs" or African captives.<sup>10</sup>

As the patriarch of the family, Charles N. Nixon left an important imprint on his grandchildren whom he visited often in Marshall when he lived with his fourth wife, Ann Nixon, in Texarkana on Laurel Street.<sup>11</sup> Half the city of Texarkana is in Bowie County, Texas and the other half is the county seat of Miller County in Arkansas, which is approximately seventy-five miles northeast of Marshall. Laurel Street is on the Arkansas side. Alfaretta describes Charles N. Nixon as being "dark, busy [bushy] hair, prominent nose, and thin lips" who met his death due to heart disease sometime in the 1890s, when he would have been in his mid-to-late sixties or early seventies.<sup>12</sup> While held in bondage, Charles N. Nixon had large families with his first two wives, yet he was sold off by plantation owners each time never to see his families again.

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Africans into the United States would continue over the next five decades, see Erik Calonijs, *The Wanderer: The Last American Slave Ship and the Conspiracy that Set its Sails* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> Calonijs, *The Wanderer*, 110; and Donald L. Grant, *The Way it was in The South: The Black Experience in Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 29.

<sup>11</sup> Information on the first two wives of Charles N. Nixon does not exist.

<sup>12</sup> Narrative on the Nixon family written by Alfaretta S. Walker, Lawrence A. Nixon's sister, found within LAWFP.

This was a traumatic and unfortunately frequent occurrence among African captives in the Americas, particularly in the United States South. Logic would seem to have dictated that it was in the best interest for plantation owners to *not* split-up Black families by selling off valued loved ones so as to secure loyalty, maintain cohesion, and create a sense of normalcy and stability. Yet, the fact is most plantation owners wanted to “maximize labor productivity and slave-trading profits” and in order for this to happen most efficiently African captives and their families were “sold, moved, and relocated...in reaction to economic pressures,” not emotional sensibilities, moral righteousness, or an ethical worldview based on reciprocity, respect, or dignity.<sup>13</sup>

Charles N. Nixon’s third wife, the Virginian Marguerite Macfarland was an African captive who was “said to be a Lee,” according to family records, meaning she was owned by the infamous Robert E. Lee, general of the Confederate Army.<sup>14</sup> Many Black families, particularly in Virginia, took the surname Lee after General Richard Henry Lee, the American Revolutionary war hero and an ancestor of Robert E. Lee.<sup>15</sup> Family documents indicate that Marguerite Macfarland boasted of a Lee connection, but she obviously did not adopt the Lee name upon freedom. Macfarland is described as having been “short of stature, white skin, long brown hair and blue eyes” and bearing three children with Charles N. Nixon: Adeline, Caroline, and Charlie.<sup>16</sup> In the 1880 census, Adeline is listed as an eighteen year-old ‘mulatto,’ Caroline as a

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<sup>13</sup> Wilma A. Dunaway, *The African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-16 and 52-9.

<sup>14</sup> Narrative on the Nixon family written by Alfaretta S. Walker, Lawrence A. Nixon’s sister, found within LAWFP. Between 1857 and 1862, Robert E. Lee owned over 200 hundred African captives, freeing nearly all on 29 December 1862, see Michael Fellman, *The Making of Robert E. Lee* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 54-75.

<sup>15</sup> Charles L. Blockson and Ron Fry, *Black Genealogy* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1997), 108.

<sup>16</sup> Quote taken from Alfaretta S. Walker’s summary of the Nixon family history found within the LAWFP.

fourteen year-old ‘mulatto,’ and Charlie Nixon (also known as Charles B. Nixon, Lawrence A. Nixon’s dad) as a twenty-two year-old ‘mulatto.’<sup>17</sup>

Charles Neil Nixon had an additional five children with his fourth wife, Ann Nixon. She is described as a thirty-two year-old mulatto who is “keeping house.” Their children’s names and ages were: Andrew (thirteen), Sarah (ten), Savannah (seven), Edward (four), and Lawrence (eight months).<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, Charles Neil Nixon and his parents, are said to have been born in Virginia according to this 1880 census, which would contradict Alfaretta S. Walker’s account in her family history. There are many reasons for this including the census enumerator could have been mistaken in documenting the information. Also, it may be that the elder Nixon did not find out of his African roots until years later, or was ashamed of his direct African lineage and felt the enumerator would not believe him. Perhaps, although unlikely, that Nixon could have fabricated the story for the amusement of his grandchildren which they unwittingly passed on to future generations as fact. Unlikely because although many ‘New World’ Africans were proud of their African lineage, there were some others who were either ambivalent or outright hostile to the notion of an African origin.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Tenth Census of the United States*, Schedule 1, City of Marshall (2<sup>nd</sup> Ward), Harrison County, Texas, enumerated on 1 June 1880 by P. Maulding, Series T9, Roll 1309, Page 339 Subpage A, Line 29-38. The term ‘mulatto’ was first used as an official category in the 1850 United States census and continued until 1930, see Dominique Arel and David I. Kertzer, *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity, and Language in National Census* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 51-2; Kevin R. Johnson, ed., *Mixed Race America and the Law: A Reader* (New York: NYU Press, 2003). Today ‘mulatto’ is rarely used in public or in popular culture, instead Bi-racial or Multi-racial is the preferred phrase among many, although there are notable exceptions including current NAACP president Benjamin T. Jealous who despite having a Black mother and a white father considers himself Black, “without qualification,” see Deborah Solomon, “Race Matters: Questions for Benjamin Todd Jealous,” *New York Times*, 2 August 2009, MM-11.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Faye Z. Belgrave and Kevin W. Allison, *African American Psychology: From Africa to America* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2005), 213-20.

Although dead at the time of the 1880 United States census, Marguerite Macfarland's European features were pronounced enough for the enumerator to classify her three children with Charles N. Nixon as "mulatto."<sup>20</sup> Marguerite Nixon died of a heart attack in 1873, eight years after the end of the Civil War and the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution.<sup>21</sup> Their son Charlie or Charles B. Nixon would go on to have five children of his own, including Lawrence A. Nixon.<sup>22</sup>

In the year of Lawrence Nixon's birth, the United States Supreme Court handed-down two major decisions that would impact African Americans. On January 22, 1883 the court ruled in *United States v. Harris* that local and state governments, and not the federal government, had the right to punish individuals for violent crimes such as assault and murder. Too, this ruling declared the enforcement of the Equal Protection Clause—found within the Fourteenth Amendment of the Constitution and the Civil Rights Act of 1871—applied only to state action, and not state inaction. This would have serious implications since violence by terrorists groups such as lynch mobs and the Ku Klux Klan was rampant during the Reconstruction era.<sup>23</sup> Later that year, eight months after Nixon's birth, in the *Civil Rights Cases* the high court deemed the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional. This act outlawed racial discrimination in public accommodations, however, the court felt that while states were obligated to respect the rights of

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<sup>20</sup> *Tenth Census of the United States*, Schedule 1, City of Marshall (2<sup>nd</sup> Ward), Harrison County, Texas, enumerated on 1 June 1880, Series T9, Roll 1309, Page 339 Subpage A, Line 31-3.

<sup>21</sup> The United States Civil War ended 9 April 1865 and the Thirteenth Amendment was passed by the Congress on 31 January 1865, signed by Abraham Lincoln on 1 February 1865, and ratified by the states on 6 December 1865, see James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 839-41 and 848-51; *Primary Documents in American History: 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution*, Library of Congress, Virtual Services Digital Reference Section, <<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/13thamendment.html>> (accessed 27 July 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Alfaretta S. Walker's summary of the Nixon family history found within the LAWFP.

<sup>23</sup> Donald G. Nieman, ed., *Black Southerners and the Law, 1865-1900* (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 1994), 409-10; and Mark Tushnet, ed., *I Dissent: Great Opposing Opinions in Landmark Supreme Court Cases* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2008), 45-68.

Black Americans, individual business owners could discriminate.<sup>24</sup> The court's decision also nullified the two Enforcement Acts that were passed by Congress in 1870 and 1871.<sup>25</sup> This was the national context in which Nixon was born and it marked the official end of Reconstruction, when Southern communities were being "redeemed."<sup>26</sup>

At the age of twenty-two, Charles B. Nixon married fifteen-year-old Jennie Valerie Engledow. Reverend Elder Luke officiated their wedding on January 19, 1881.<sup>27</sup> Lawrence Nixon's grandparents were African captives and his parents were both Southern-born. Jennie Valerie Engledow, Lawrence Nixon's mother, was born in March 1865, making her only a few weeks old when the Civil War ended; and Charles B. Nixon, Lawrence Nixon's father, was born in 1858.<sup>28</sup> In 1883, two years after having been married, their first son, Lawrence Aaron Nixon, was born.

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<sup>24</sup> Marcus D. Pohlmann and Linda Vallar Whisenhunt, *Student's Guide to Landmark Congressional Laws on Civil Rights* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 126-27.

<sup>25</sup> One Enforcement Act was passed on 31 May 1870 and the other Enforcement Act was passed 20 April 1871, see Forty-First Congress, Session 2, Chapter 114 (1870) in George P. Sanger, ed., *The Statutes at Large and Proclamations of the United States of America, and Treaties and Postal Conventions*, December 1869 to March 1871, vol. 16 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1871), 140-41; and Forty-Second Congress, Session 1, Chapter 22 (1871) in George P. Sanger, ed., *The Statutes at Large and Proclamations of the United States of America, and Treaties and Postal Conventions*, March 1871 to March 1873, vol. 17 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1873), 13, found in <<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwslink.html>> (accessed 27 July 2009).

<sup>26</sup> The Redeemers were a loose political coalition in the post-Civil War South which consisted of prewar former slave owners, conservative Democrats, Union Whigs, and Confederate army veterans. They sought to 'redeem' the South by undoing the changes brought about by the Civil War. They were committed to reducing the role of government and institutionalizing the economic and political exploitation of African Americans. The Redeemers' policies inhibited regional economic development and exacerbated the class strife and racial violence that followed the Civil War, see Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, eds., *The Reader's Companion to American History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1991), 924; and Richard M. Valelly, *The Two Reconstructions: The Struggle for Black Enfranchisement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 50, 93-4, 115-17.

<sup>27</sup> Alfaretta S. Walker's summary of the Nixon family history found within the LAWFP.

<sup>28</sup> In a letter to Walter White (NAACP Secretary), Lawrence A. Nixon writes, "my mother was born the 'year of surrender' as she used to say," see Bryson, "Progress Report," 186. The author confirmed this account by looking at Jennie Valerie Engledow's stated birth year in the census, see *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Schedule 1-Population, City of Marshall (2<sup>nd</sup> Ward), Harrison County, Texas, enumerated on 13 June 1900 by J. Garrison, Series T623, Roll 1643, Page 186 Subpage B, Line 82. Charles B. Nixon's birth year was determined by subtracting his stated age at the time of the 1880 census, although, Lawrence A. Nixon writes, "My father [Charles

## **Pullman Porter**

It is not known when Charles B. Nixon was hired by the Texas and Pacific Railway Company, although the 1880 census has his occupation as “servant,” but does not indicate an employer.<sup>29</sup> Steady employment with Texas and Pacific must have given Charles B. Nixon some confidence in his financial ability to contribute to a family thus his proposal to his future wife, Jennie Valerie Engledow. Years later, Lawrence Nixon wrote of their relationship,

When my father married my mother, he owned his own home [in Marshall, Texas], the house where my older sister and I were born. All the years of his adult life he worked for the same corporation, the Texas and Pacific Railroad Co.—as a laborer when the road was building and later, up to the time of his death, on the General Manager’s private car.<sup>30</sup>

Railroad employment provided income to thousands of Black men (and to a lesser extent Black women) at any given time, allowing them to make a vital contribution to the economic health of African-American communities both in the North and the South.<sup>31</sup> The Pullman Porters for the Pullman Palace Car Company was established by George Pullman in 1862. The company soon after became the largest employer in the nation of African American men, primarily the South’s former African captives.<sup>32</sup>

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B. Nixon] was ten years of age at the end of slavery” which would make his birth year 1855 and not 1858, see *Tenth Census of the United States*, Schedule 1, City of Marshall (2<sup>nd</sup> Ward), Harrison County, Texas, enumerated on 1 June 1880, Series: T9, Roll 1309, Page 339, Subpage A, Line 31; and Bryson, “Progress Report,” 186.

<sup>29</sup> *Tenth Census of the United States*, Schedule 1, City of Marshall (2<sup>nd</sup> Ward), Harrison County, Texas, enumerated on 1 June 1880, Series T9, Roll 1309, Page 339 Subpage A, Line 31. On the early history of the Texas and Pacific Railroad, see Richard N. Griffith Means, “Empire, Progress, and the American Southwest: The Texas and Pacific Railroad, 1850-1882” (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 2001); and on the Texas and Pacific Railway, see Augustus J. Veenendaal, *American Railroads in the Nineteenth Century* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 67-8.

<sup>30</sup> Bryson, “Progress Report,” 186.

<sup>31</sup> Eric Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>32</sup> Liston E. Leyendecker, *Palace Car Prince: A Biography of George Mortimer Pullman* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1992).

The security, stability, and mobility of employees with the railways cannot be overstated during this time period, particularly for most Black men who were restricted from traveling during the antebellum days. Traveling symbolized freedom; mobility was freedom in the eyes of many.<sup>33</sup> It was because they had been enslaved that George Pullman hired African American men in the 1860s to serve the mostly white customers on his cars.<sup>34</sup> This helped to perpetuate the notion that Black men were non-threatening, jovial, and submissive servants who relished serving whites at their every request. As late as the 1940s, Pullman officials still felt that former African captives were best suited for this type of work. Louis S. Hungerford, Pullman company president, stated that he preferred Southern Blacks because their “training” in the South made them better fit for service in the train cars.<sup>35</sup>

Prior to the Civil War, and even after, many whites failed to recognize that the Black men who did engage in docile behavior, were actually engaging in a form of resistance and survival.<sup>36</sup> They clearly were “wearing the mask” and “putting on Mr. Charlie” so as to extract a small slice of pleasures such as food or favors, amusement, or simply survive another day avoiding the whip or lash.<sup>37</sup> Pullman Porters perpetuated this same behavior to survive their work environments

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<sup>33</sup> Jack Santino, *Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle: Stories of Black Pullman Porters* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 13-4.

<sup>34</sup> Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color*, 17-8.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 17; Francis P. Walsh and Basil M. Manly, *Industrial Relations: Final Report and Testimony*, document 415, vol. 10, United States Commission on Industrial Relations, United States Senate, 64th Congress, 1st session (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1916), 9551-54. The ‘Sambo’ image was an invention of hopeful plantation owners “who wanted to believe that black men were less capable of exercising freedom than themselves.” Ridiculing and belittling people through humor is what the ‘Sambo’ image attempted to do, along with emasculating Black men, see Brett Rushforth, *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2003), 424; and Joseph Boskin, *Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>36</sup> Santino, *Miles of Smiles, Years of Struggle*, 99.

<sup>37</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, “The Mask of Obedience: Male Slave Psychology in the Old South” in J. William Harris, ed., *Society and Culture in the Slave South* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 128-61. On “Wearing the Mask,” see Paul Laurence Dunbar, *The Collected Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia

and astutely extract additional tips from whites. Additionally, many African American porters “embraced the role of courtesy in their work, carefully drawing the distinction between politeness and servility.” The former marked them as gentlemen, “the aristocracy of Negro labor...the latter undermined their struggle for fair treatment from employers and passengers.” The *Pullman Porters’ Review*, a Pullman Company publication, portrayed porters as courteous gentlemen, not servants: “By courtesy is not meant obeisance, bowing, etc....[but] politeness which comes from the Latin verb, ‘polite’ to polish, to be finished, to be well bred, a smooth, refined, sober and polished gentility.”<sup>38</sup> Although there was a fine line between adopting the mannerism of the genteel Victorian age and slavish behavior so as to extract tips, the line was there however and unfortunately blurred in the minds of some Blacks and whites.

The opportunities train jobs offered included allowing Black men to reach a level of middle class status within their respective communities. During the first half of the twentieth-century, the Black middle-class mostly sprung from blue-collar occupations, and most of those who held white-collar jobs knew the “stitching on those collars was noticeably weak.” Middle class for most African American families during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was less about “wealth than in values, lifestyle, and aspiration. They believed in the sanctity of home, family, and church; placed a premium on self-discipline, and education; had a penchant for thrift, savings, and acquiring real estate. They were strivers and joiners.” And although “economic racism blunted their financial ambitions, they had faith in the promise of upward

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Press, 1993), 71; and Marcyliena Morgan, *Language, Discourse and Power in African American Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 16-7. “Ms. Ann” and “Mr. Charlie” are generic phrases used to describe white women and men, see James Baldwin, *Blues for Mister Charlie: A Drama in Three Acts* (New York: Samuel French, 1964); and William Safire, *Safire’s Political Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 111.

<sup>38</sup> Amy G. Richter, *Home on the Rails: Women, the Railroad, and the Rise of Public Domesticity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 115.



mobility for themselves and their children.”<sup>39</sup> This is what being employed in the railroad industry afforded the Nixon family and so many other African Americans during this time.

Despite the rigors and drudgery of the actual positions, it would be this middle class and higher social status—relatively speaking—that would give some in the African American community the disposable time and income to do other things such as uplifting the race and “assume important leadership positions within” their communities.<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, such as in the case with Lawrence Nixon, these railroad employees would become “the civil rights leaders of their era. They themselves seldom used the term *middle class*, which had not become an everyday term in America. Instead they spoke of themselves as the “better class of Negroes,” or as “the educated class,” or “the right sort.”<sup>41</sup> Some examples of those civil rights leaders who were employed within the railroad industry at “a temporary occupational stage in a life of social advancement” included Malcolm X, Harry Haywood, Benjamin Mays, Roy Wilkins, and Thurgood Marshall.<sup>42</sup> Other luminaries were singer Taylor Gordon, writers Claude McKay and Langston Hughes, adventurer Matthew Henson, and Blues legend ‘Big Bill’ Broonzy.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color*, 1. Black women were also active with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, see Melinda Chateauvert, *Marching Together: Women of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

<sup>41</sup> Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*, 8. Over time Pullman Porters became more active in their demands for better wages, working conditions, and unionization see Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>42</sup> Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color*, 2. At the time of his death Malcolm X’s name was El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz to reflect his embrace of Sunni Islam, see Robert Terrill, *Malcolm X: Inventing Radical Judgment* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004), 5; Harry Haywood was a prominent intellectual, organizer, and communist leader who established the Maoist New Communist Movement, see Walter T. Howard, ed., *Black Communists Speak on Scottsboro: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 84-98; Son of a sharecropper, Benjamin E. Mays went on to serve as president of Morehouse College for twenty-seven years, the first Black president of the Atlanta School Board, and mentor to the prominent civil rights leader Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., see Benjamin E. Mays, *Born to Rebel: An Autobiography* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003); Roy Wilkins started as assistant secretary for the NAACP, succeeded W. E. B. Du Bois as editor of *The Crisis*, and eventually succeeded Walter White as executive director, see Roy Wilkins and Tom Mathews, *Standing Fast: The Autobiography of Roy Wilkins* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994); and Thurgood Marshall was

## **The Nixons in New Orleans**

Charles B. Nixon's status as a train employee, particularly chief steward for the private car of the general manager of the Texas and Pacific Railway, afforded him not only a semblance of status in his own community, but it also allowed him to travel, see the country, meet new people from other regions, become more cosmopolitan in his worldview, and to offer his family opportunities he otherwise might not have been able to.<sup>44</sup> One of those opportunities was temporarily relocating to New Orleans in 1886 or 1887 where he enrolled his children in a private school within the city. In describing his upbringing, Lawrence Nixon said, "My early childhood was spent in New Orleans, Louisiana. I went to a private school for colored children and lived in a neighborhood composed of colored people and descendents of German and Italian immigrants. It was a clean, thrifty neighborhood and we were all good neighbors." Nixon further elaborated saying "I can't imagine a more happy childhood than my two sisters, my brother and I lived. We came up knowing how to work. A great deal of the joy of my boyhood came out of the work I did. My father disliked people who were ashamed to work with their

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the premier civil rights attorney of the 1930s through the 1960s and then the first African American United States Supreme Court Judge, see Mary L. Dudziak, *Exporting American Dreams: Thurgood Marshall's African Journey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>43</sup> Tye, *Rising from the Rails*, xi; and Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color*, 2.

<sup>44</sup> The name of the of the general manager that Charles B. Nixon worked for is not known and could not be determined at this time, although a list of Texas and Pacific Railway officers and directors included the following personnel in Marshall, Texas: J.W. Addis, Master Machinist and Superintendent of Motion, Power, and Rolling Stock; B.S. Wathen, Resident Engineer; J. H. Freeman, Assistant Resident Engineer; C.W. Hammond, Superintendent of Telegraph; J.W. Stacey, Assistant Superintendent of Telegraph; Leroy Trice, Superintendent of Eastern Division; N.G. Pearsall, Superintendent of New Orleans Division (Marshall to New Orleans); and W.J. Taylor, General Baggage Agent, see *1893 Poor's Directory of Railway Officials* (New York: Poor's Railroad Manual, 1893), 137; *Annual Report of the Texas and Pacific Railway Company to the Stockholders for the Year Ending December 31, 1893* (New York: John C. Rankin Company, 1894), 3; and Waldo H. Marshall and E.N. Lewis, eds., *The Official Railway List: A Complete Directory* (Chicago: Railway Purchasing Agent Company, 1892), 237.

hands.”<sup>45</sup> In New Orleans, during these early years of his education, Nixon was influenced by an English woman whose British accent impacted his speech pattern and syntax. This “remained with him all his life, for he never spoke with a typical southern accent, but a softly clipped manner of speech” causing people to believe he might be a native of the English-speaking Caribbean.<sup>46</sup> Too, the time in New Orleans was beneficial in other ways: the family expanded by two with the addition of Lawrence Nixon’s sister Alfaretta and his brother Charlie. After approximately five years, the Texas and Pacific Railway reassigned Charles B. Nixon back to Marshall, prompting the Nixon family to end their stay in New Orleans in 1891 or 1892.<sup>47</sup>

### **Life and Political Climate in Marshall (Harrison County), Texas**

Marshall was incorporated in 1844 and became the county seat of Harrison County just prior to the Civil War.<sup>48</sup> The 1870 census indicates that the city had a population of 1,920, forty-four percent of whom were African American.<sup>49</sup> By 1880, just three years before Lawrence

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<sup>45</sup> Letter from Lawrence A. Nixon to Walter White, NAACP National Secretary, 25 February 1952, reprinted in Bryson, “Progress Report,” 186.

<sup>46</sup> Bryson, *Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon and the White Primary*, 20.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*; Bryson indicates that Nixon was three years old at the time of the move, but since he has his birth year incorrectly as 1884 instead of 1883, then the year Lawrence Nixon leaves to New Orleans is not exactly known for sure. The year of the move to New Orleans from Marshall, Texas was confirmed by looking at 1900 census in which Annie Lucillia Nixon is labeled as having been born in Texas (presumably in Marshall) March 1885 and Alfaretta Sally Nixon is labeled as having been born in Louisiana (presumably in New Orleans) March 1887, see *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Schedule 1-Population, City of Marshall (2<sup>nd</sup> Ward), Harrison County, Texas, enumerated on 13 June 1900 by J. Garrison, Series T623, Roll 1643, Page 186 Subpage B, Line 84-5. Charles J. Nixon, Lawrence A. Nixon’s brother, was born in 1889 in Louisiana, see earlier footnote of this chapter and *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas enumerated on 7 April 1930 by Edith A. Finch, Series T626, Roll 2328, Page 104 Subpage A, Line 41. Charles J. Nixon died in El Paso on 22 September 1976, ten years after Lawrence A. Nixon’s death, see El Paso County Clerk, Charles J. Nixon Death Certificate, 22 September 1976, reel no. 301, frame no. 964.

<sup>48</sup> Randolph B. Campbell, *A Southern Community in Crisis: Harrison County, Texas, 1850-1880* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1983), 373.

Nixon's birth, the Black population had more than tripled to 2,787 representing nearly fifty-percent of the city's population. The number of whites in Marshall increased to 2,837, bringing the total population in 1880 to 5,624.<sup>50</sup> In the 1890 census, African Americans were over fifty-percent of the population, comprising 3,673 people. Additionally in 1890, the census lists 336 foreign-born individuals and two Chinese persons along with the 3,532 whites.<sup>51</sup>

Although whites were clearly a numerical minority in Marshall, albeit a large one, they continued to have the overwhelming economic and political control of the city and county.<sup>52</sup> This is an important point to stress in light of the views of the "Redeemers" who perceived that their social and economic status had been jeopardized with the loss of the Civil War and the advent of Reconstruction. The facts do not bear this out, particularly in Harrison County. This is due to a variety of reasons including, "the wealthiest class persisted because while the loss of the Civil War led to the end of slavery, it did not mean confiscation and redistribution of real property" from the former slave owners. The white planter elite in Harrison County held more African captives "and land than anyone else in 1860" in Texas. Although the federal government may have eliminated white people's ability to own Africans, they nevertheless left the "landed property largely untouched, and there would be no socioeconomic revolution."<sup>53</sup> In

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<sup>49</sup> There were 851 African Americans and 1,069 whites for a total of 1,920 citizens in the city. *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census*, United States Department of the Interior, Census Office, June 1880, Population by Race, Sex, and Nativity, Table VI Population by Race, of Cities and Towns, etc.: 1880 and 1870, Texas (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1881), 424.

<sup>50</sup> *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Tenth Census*, Department of the Interior, Census Office, June 1880, Population by Race, Sex, and Nativity, Table VI Population by Race, of Cities and Towns, etc.: 1880 and 1870, Texas (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1881), 424.

<sup>51</sup> *Statistics of the Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census*, Department of the Interior, Census Office, June 1890, Population by Race, Sex, and Nativity, Table XIX Population by Race, of Cities and Towns, etc.: 1890, Texas (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1891), 482.

<sup>52</sup> Campbell, *A Southern Community in Crisis*, 369, 377, 379, 384, 389, 393 and 395.

this period racism became steadily more institutionalized. Through the first half of the twentieth century, East Texas remained more Southern than Western in demographics and race relations. The history of the institution of slavery continued to cast a shadow over the region; and race remained at the heart of the experiences and history of all East Texans, Black and white, and according to historian Cary Wintz “the centrality of these events underscores the fundamental connection of African American history to East Texas.”<sup>54</sup>

We have built up your country; we have worked in your fields, and garnered your harvests, for two hundred and fifty years! And what do we ask of you in return? Do we ask you for compensation for the sweat our fathers bore for you—for the tears you have caused, and the hearts you have broken, and the lives you have curtailed, and the blood you have spilled? We ask it not. We are willing to let the dead past bury its dead, but we ask you now for our rights. —Henry M. Turner, Georgia State Representative, 1866.<sup>55</sup>

Reconstruction was the most violent era in United States history, particularly against African Americans because they simply asked, used, and demanded their rights as Henry McNeil Turner so eloquently stated in the above quote. Nevertheless, violence against Blacks persisted due in large measure to the aggression of domestic terrorist groups such as the Regulators, the Constitutional Union Guards, the '76 Association, the Council of Safety, the Pulaski Ku Kluxers, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Knights of the Rising Sun, Knights of the White Camellia, the White Brotherhood, the White League, the Red Shirts, the Whitecaps, and the Order of Pale

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 392; Barry A. Crouch, *The Dance of Freedom: Texas African Americans During Reconstruction* (Austin: University of Texas Press: 2007), 17-8.

<sup>54</sup> Cary D. Wintz, forward to *Blacks in East Texas History: Selections from the East Texas Historical Journal*, edited by Bruce A. Glasrud and Archie P. McDonald (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), vii.

<sup>55</sup> Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: Voices of Resistance, Reform, and Renewal: An African American Anthology* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 117-18.

Faces.<sup>56</sup> Harrison County in East Texas was no different. The planter class in the county retained its power and wealth during the Reconstruction era, and the members of this class frequently resorted to violence against Blacks to reinforce their position.<sup>57</sup> On the eve of 1867 in Marshall, Captain Charles Rand of the Union Army asserted that the situation for Blacks was terrible. “Yesterday,” he wrote, a Black man “presented himself with two bullet holes through him” for no other than participating in a Christmas celebration. Rand also noted that outrages were “committed daily with impunity and all pass unnoticed for lack of assistance.” Less than two months later in February 1867, Rand informed his superiors of ten Blacks being murdered by whites in Harrison County. Hoodlums “would kill a f.m. [sic] for 75 cents and boast of the action as a laudable one of high minded chivalry.” As often was the case for Blacks in Marshall during Reconstruction, local officials took no action despite the presence of federal troops in the city.<sup>58</sup>

By 1878 Marshall was described as “a rapidly advancing” city with “first class” schools, elegant Capitol Hotel, a “fine” jail, six churches for whites, four churches for Blacks, and two newspapers, the *Tri-Weekly Herald* and *Messenger*. These developments were due to the increase in the population which was attributed to the Texas and Pacific Railroad Company

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<sup>56</sup> Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1999), 26, 51, 82-3, and 420; and James Michael Martinez, *Carpetbaggers, Cavalry, and the Ku Klux Klan: Exposing the Invisible Empire during Reconstruction* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 10.

<sup>57</sup> Kenneth M. Hamilton, “White Wealth and Black Repression in Harrison County, Texas: 1865-1868” *Journal of Negro History* vol. 84, no. 4 (Fall 1999): 340-59.

<sup>58</sup> Randolph B. Campbell, *Grass-Roots Reconstruction in Texas, 1865-1880* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1997), 111-12, 120. The phrase “f.m.” is probably an acronym for ‘Freed Men’ or ‘Freedmen.’ Violence against African Americans in East Texas during this time period was pervasive, see *Criminal Offence Committed in State of Texas*, assistant commissioner, Austin, vols. 11-13, Records of the Bureau of Freedom, Refugees, and Abandoned Lands, Texas, Record Group (RG) 105, National Archives, quoted in Barry A. Crouch and Larry Madaras, “A Spirit of Lawlessness: White Violence, Texas Blacks, 1865-1868” in *The Dance of Freedom: Texas African Americans during Reconstruction* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 95-117, particularly 113 n11, and 114 n15-7.

relocating its operations to Marshall.<sup>59</sup> However, the economic growth would not prevent the violent conservative backlash in Marshall that ultimately manifested itself in the political rise of the Citizens' Party of Harrison County, which in 1878 took power from the majority Black Republicans and held on to it for decades to come. The Citizens' Party lauded itself as a nonpartisan group whose rhetoric was one of "racial harmony" focused on local issues and the restoration of "fiscal responsibility and honesty to local government" while stressing that they were *not* Democrats *per se* yet labeled their opponents (Republicans) as so-called radicals. The conservative takeover was accomplished by promising Blacks that their rights would be protected "at least as effectively as did the carpetbaggers and scalawags," which of course did not prove to be the case.<sup>60</sup> The Citizens' Party also appealed to non-racial issues such as "how radical taxing and spending threatened the well-being of blacks as well as whites." In addition, as Randolph documents, "the conservatives told blacks that white radical leaders had simply used their votes to take offices and the income from those positions for themselves."<sup>61</sup>

The Citizens' Party's fustian discourse appeared to work on some within the county's majority Black population, particularly Black conservatives in Marshall such as Jasper Black

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<sup>59</sup> Campbell, *A Southern Community in Crisis*, 373. The Jefferson Division of the Texas and Pacific ran northward to Texarkana, where Charles N. Nixon (Lawrence Nixon's grandfather) lived. Charles N. Nixon would frequently visit his grandchildren in Marshall, which was about seventy-five miles from Texarkana, see Bryson, *Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon and the White Primary*, 19 and 20.

<sup>60</sup> Campbell, *Grass-Roots Reconstruction in Texas, 1865-1880*, 131, 132, and 131-38. The term Carpetbagger described Northerners who moved to the South after the Civil War and assisted or sympathized with African Americans and/or were elected as Republicans to public office. Southern Democrats accused Carpetbaggers of political corruption and ineptness, see Randolph B. Campbell, "Carpetbagger Rule in Reconstruction Texas: An Enduring Myth" *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 97 (1994): 587-96. Scalawag were Southern whites who were perceived to be traitors to their region and race for support of Reconstruction policies, see James Alex Baggett, *The Scalawags: Southern Dissenters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2004).

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 132. African Americans were not a political monolith, see Edmund L. Drago, *Hurrah for Hampton!: Black Red Shirts in South Carolina During Reconstruction* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1998); Bernard E. Powers, Jr., *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822-1885* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994); and Clarence E. Walker, *Deromanticizing Black History: Critical Essays and Reprisals* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991).

who wrote a letter to the editor of the *Tri-Weekly Herald* encouraging African Americans to vote for the Citizens' Party nominees. Other conservative Blacks actually joined the Party and made campaign speeches with its candidates. But the Party did not feel confident enough in this support from the African American community in Marshall, so along with the misrepresentation or outright lies in the 1878 elections or coup, the Party also resorted to violence, intimidation, and electoral fraud. The Party even made the empty promise Blacks would be recognized "as white folks."<sup>62</sup>

The take-over and subsequent seventy-year reign by the Citizens' Party in Harrison County not only dethroned the local Republican party on the eve of Lawrence A. Nixon's birth, but it also indicated just how much moderate Republicans statewide had become more isolated as their electoral losses throughout state government mounted and conservative Democrats quickly gained a foothold, becoming politically entrenched. While many of the white Republicans found other jobs within the party, African Americans drifted into "political limbo, lacking effective political voice until well into the next century."<sup>63</sup> Support for the Republican party slowly waned among African Americans, particularly at the local level, which encouraged Blacks to either become disengaged from the political process, or look at alternatives such as the Populist, Progressive, and even the Democratic Parties as viable options. Despite the political hardships and racially-charged violence, between 1865 and 1878, African Americans in Marshall "supported and attended schools, voted, held office and exercised civic responsibilities such as jury service" and they determined the outcome of every election in the county before losing their

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 132-33.

<sup>63</sup> James T. Gunderson, "The Rise of the Citizens Party in post-Reconstruction Harrison County," (Master's Thesis, University of Houston, 2004), 14; and Campbell, *Grass-Roots Reconstruction in Texas, 1865-1880*, 15-26.



political strength to the white Citizens' Party.<sup>64</sup> Yet, the brute force against Blacks continued as seen in 1883—the same year Lawrence Nixon was born—when Harrison County Blacks organized their own militia to protect themselves from the racist assaults of whites. Local whites, with the help of state forces, crushed the Black initiative.<sup>65</sup>

### **Wiley College**

Notwithstanding the political turmoil in Harrison County, the Nixon family returned to Marshall from New Orleans in the early 1890s. Lawrence Nixon enrolled at Wiley College where he continued his grade and high school training, and completed his undergraduate degree by 1902. He then moved on to Meharry Medical College in Tennessee.<sup>66</sup> Originally known as Wiley University, Wiley College was founded in 1873 by the Methodist Episcopal Church's Bishop Isaac Wiley and chartered by Freeman's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1882.<sup>67</sup> Wiley offered its first bachelor's degree in 1888 and changed its name from Wiley University to Wiley College in 1929.<sup>68</sup> It is notable in that it is one of the oldest predominantly Black colleges west of the Mississippi River.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Campbell, *A Southern Community in Crisis*, 140.

<sup>65</sup> Alwyn Barr, "The Texas Black Uprising Scare of 1883," *Phylon* vol. 41, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 179-86; James N. Leiker, *Racial Borders: Black Soldiers along the Rio Grande* (College Station: Texas A&M University, 2002), 72.

<sup>66</sup> Bryson, *Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon and the White Primary*, 21.

<sup>67</sup> Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education, *Negro Education: A Study of the Private and Higher Education Schools for Colored People in the United States*, 1916 Bulletin, vol. 2, no. 39 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), 581.

<sup>68</sup> David Gold, *Rhetoric at the Margins: Revising the History of Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1873-1947* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 24; and Lloyd K. Thompson, "The Origins and Development of Black Religious Colleges in East Texas" (Ph.D. diss., University of North Texas, 1976), 30.

<sup>69</sup> Michael R. Heintze, *Private Black Colleges in Texas, 1865-1954* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1985).

During Lawrence Nixon's matriculation at Wiley, Matthew W. Dogan became president in 1896. Dogan was born in Mississippi in 1863 and graduated from Rust University in 1886.<sup>70</sup> He earned his Doctor of Philosophy in 1904 and his Doctor of Divinity in 1910, both from New Orleans University. Dogan taught mathematics at Walden University in Nashville between 1890 and 1896.<sup>71</sup> He was a registered Republican, President of Standard American Mutual Fire Insurance Company, the National Association of Teacher's in Colored Schools, the East Texas Colored Teachers' Association, and a member of the Knights of Pythias.<sup>72</sup> It may well have been Dogan who encouraged Lawrence Nixon to attend Meharry to continue his formal training, since Dogan was familiar with the institution, its personnel, and its offerings prior to his arrival at Wiley.<sup>73</sup>

Many Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have traditionally instilled a sense of activism in their students and Wiley was no exception.<sup>74</sup> HBCUs varied widely in

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<sup>70</sup> Originally known as Shaw University, the name changed to Rust University in 1882, and again in 1915 to Rust College. It is Mississippi's oldest HBCU, see Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York: Macmillan, 2009), 23.

<sup>71</sup> Walden University was also a co-educational Methodist school located in Nashville, Tennessee whose original name was Central Tennessee College during Dogan's tenure as a Math Instructor and Librarian. Mrs. Dogan was also on faculty, teaching Piano and Organ, see Edwin Emerson, ed., *The College Year-Book and Athletic Record for the Academic Year 1896-97* (New York: Stone and Kimball, 1897), 56-7.

<sup>72</sup> Frank Lincoln Mather, ed., *Who's Who of the Colored Race: A General Biographical Dictionary of Men and Women of African Descent, vol. 1* (Chicago: F.L.M., 1915), 93. In 1900 the thirty-six year-old Dogan (born in December 1863) lived at College Avenue on Wiley's campus with his thirty-four year-old wife Fannie Dogan (born in April 1866), and their three daughters, six year-old Lucile Dogan (born June 1893), three year-old Clara Dogan (born March 1897), four-month old Ruth Dogan (born January 1900), additionally, they had a twenty-two year-old boarder, Dodie Block, an African American woman from Arkansas who was a teacher at Wiley, see *Twelfth Census of the United States, Schedule 1-Population, City of Marshall (Ward: 3), Harrison County, Texas*, enumerated on 15 June 1900 by Levin Perry Haywood, Series T623, Roll 1643, Page 218 Subpage A, Line 18-23.

<sup>73</sup> Warmoth T. Gibbs, *President Matthew W. Dogan of Wiley College: A Biography* (Marshall: Firmin-Greer, 1930), 24 and 27. This is the only biography on Dogan, an updated account is waiting to be written.

<sup>74</sup> For example, students at Bishop and Wiley Colleges (both located in Lawrence Nixon's hometown of Marshall) were one of the first in Texas to engage in sit-ins during the early 1960s. Using Gandhi's technique of nonviolent civil disobedience that was espoused by Wiley graduate James Farmer in the early 1940s, Wiley and Bishop students R.J. Peabody, Donald J. Guinyard, Mark R. Hannon, Jr., and six other students along with Dr. Dorey A. Wilkerson of Bishop unsuccessfully attempted to receive service at the F. W. Woolworth Company's

“degree of religious emphasis, student freedom, political tenor, faculty makeup, administrative independence and stability, financial security, academic rigor, explicitness of race-conscious ideology, and class tensions.”<sup>75</sup> To understand what and who inspired Lawrence Nixon with a desire to excel and become an engaged and a responsible member of the community, we not only have to look at his family, upbringing, and community, but also the educational institutions Nixon was a part of, including their teachers and staff.<sup>76</sup> For such a small school, Wiley has produced some notables within the civil rights arena: Emmett J. Scott, James L. Maximilian Farmer, Sr., James Farmer, Jr., Melvin Tolson, and Heman Sweat.<sup>77</sup> Lawrence Nixon is part of that tradition of engagement. On small HBCU campuses, an individual administrator or faculty

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lunch counter in Marshall, and days later nearly a hundred Texas Rangers would order fire hoses on dozens of students from both schools when they took over the Harrison County Courthouse. Bishop fired Wilkerson for his involvement in the protest, see “Negro Group Seeks Service in Marshall” *Abilene Reporter-News* 27 March 1960, 2; “Marshall Tense As Fire Hoses Used on Negroes” *Del Rio News-Herald*, 31 March 1960, 1; Raymond Holbrook, “Marshall, Armed Camp, Expects New Troubles: March of Negro Students Feared” *Big Spring Daily Herald*, 1 April 1960, 1; “Bold Sit-Ins in Marshall” *Observer* vol. 51 (1 April 1960); “From Chapel to Dousing” *Observer* vol. 52 (8 April 1960); and Betty Swales, “Local Café Integration Demanded in 7 Days” *Texan* vol. 59 (2 April 1960). On Wilkerson’s life, see Maceo C. Dailey, Jr. and Ernest D. Washington, “The Evolution of Doxey A. Wilkerson, 1935-45,” *Freedomways* vol. 3, no. 1 (Fall 1985): 101-15. On the ultimate integration of higher education in Texas at the behest of African Americans see, Amilcar Shabazz, *Advancing Democracy: African Americans and the Struggle for Access and Equity in Higher Education in Texas* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2004).

<sup>75</sup> David Gold, *Rhetoric at the Margins: Revising the History of Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1873-1947* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 22-3; and Doug Rossinow, “The Break-Through to New Life”: Christianity and the Emergence of the New Left in Austin, Texas, 1956-1964” *American Quarterly* vol. 46, no. 3 (September 1994): 326 and 339 n.41-2.

<sup>76</sup> African American teachers have played a critical role in inspiring students with strategies and tools to challenge oppression, see Adam Fairclough, *Teaching Equality: Black Schools in the Age of Jim Crow* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

<sup>77</sup> James Leonard Maximilian Farmer, Sr. was the first African American in Texas to have a Ph.D., see Gail K. Beil, “Sowing the Seeds of the Civil Rights Movement: Dr. J. Leonard Farmer and Wiley College, Marshall, Texas, as Case Studies of the Educational Influence on the Modern Civil Rights Leaders” (Master Thesis, Stephen F. Austin State University, 1999), 2 and 5. In 1920 the thirty-four year-old Farmer lived on University Avenue in Marshall with his pregnant twenty-seven year-old wife Pearl M. Farmer, and their seventeen-month old daughter Helen Farmer. Farmer had an occupation listed as Methodist Minister and his famous son, James L. Farmer, Jr., would be born within a few days after the census was taken, see *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of Marshall (Justice Precinct 3), Harrison County, Texas, enumerated on 7 January 1920 by Charles J. Baldwin, Series T625, Roll 1815, Page 268 Subpage B, Line 53-5. It is unknown how large Lawrence Nixon’s 1902 Wiley graduating class was, but in 1903 the school had a student enrollment of 284 students, see Henry F. Kletzing and William Henry Croghan, *Progress of a Race: The Remarkable Advancement of the Afro-American Negro from the Bondage of Slavery, Ignorance and Poverty, to the Freedom of Citizenship, Intelligence, Affluence, Honor and Trust* (Atlanta: J.L. Nichols, 1903), 693.

member could have tremendous impact on institutional mood and direction as well as on the lives of individuals.<sup>78</sup>

Wiley students, particularly those who graduated in the 1930s and 1940s, called the school the “Harvard West of the Mississippi.”<sup>79</sup> This may be because in 1933, under Dogan’s leadership, Wiley became the first Black college west of the Mississippi River to be granted the “A” rating by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.<sup>80</sup> Despite Dogan’s successful forty-six year tenure, there were some who did not hold him in high esteem. For example, in 1937 Wiley students James Farmer and Benjamin Ball attempted to establish a college branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Across town rivals, Bishop College had had a chapter of the civil rights organization for over a year and students at Wiley felt it was now time for them to have one as well.<sup>81</sup> The city of Marshall started a NAACP branch in 1919, but within months it folded due to the Longview race

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<sup>78</sup> Gold, *Rhetoric at the Margins*, 23.

<sup>79</sup> Beil, “Sowing the Seeds of the Civil Rights Movement,” iii. On James L. Farmer, Jr., see James Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart: An Autobiography of the Civil Rights Movement* (Fort Worth: TCU Press, 1998) and “The Higher Education of James Farmer” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* no. 18 (Winter, 1997-1998), 79. On Emmett J. Scott, see Maceo C. Dailey, Jr., “Emmett J. Scott: The Career of a Secondary Black Leader” (Ph.D. diss., Howard University, 1983). On the life of Melvin B. Tolson, see Robert M. Farnsworth, *Melvin B. Tolson, 1898-1966: Plain Talk and Poetic Prophecy* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984). In 1930, as a teacher at Wiley College, the twenty-seven year-old Melvin Tolson lived on University Street in Marshall with Ruth Tolson, his twenty-eight year-old wife, and their four children: six-year old Melvin Tolson, four year-old Arthur Tolson, three year-old Wiley Tolson, and one year-old Ruth Tolson, see *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of Marshall (3<sup>rd</sup> Ward), Harrison County, Texas, enumerated on 7 April 1930, Series T626, Roll 2354, Page 84 Subpage B, Line 62-7.

<sup>80</sup> David A. Williams, *Bricks Without Straw: A Comprehensive History of African Americans in Texas* (Austin: Eakin Press, 1997), 255. On Bishop College, see E. Egar, “Development and Termination of Bishop College between 1960 and 1988” (Ph.D. diss., University of North Texas, 1990). “In addition to their differences, black colleges were often in competition or conflict with one another, especially across interfaith lines. Clarence Norris, a Bishop College faculty member who later became dean of St. Philip’s, noted that competition between the Baptist Bishop and the Methodist Wiley, both in Marshall, was so fierce that when, in 1933, he taught as a dual appointee at the two schools to substitute for a Wiley professor on leave, he felt “caught in the middle” between their presidents and under pressure to declare his loyalty: “During their entire existence both colleges were very antagonistic to each other” see Gold, *Rhetoric at the Margins*, 23.

<sup>81</sup> Gail K. Beil, “Melvin B. Tolson: Texas Radical” in Bruce A. Glasrud and Archie P. McDonald, eds., *Blacks in East Texas History: Selections from the East Texas Historical Journal* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 126-27.

riots in July.<sup>82</sup> Because African Americans outnumbered whites in Marshall and had done so for many decades, Dogan frowned upon an NAACP presence on campus which potentially could disrupt the racial status quo. He stated:

We will do all we can to make the coming of Miss Jackson comfortable. As stated in my wire, we will talk over with her the advisability of organizing an NAACP chapter here. You understand, I am sure, that racial antagonism can more easily develop in sections where Negroes constitute a large part of the population, as is the case in Marshall. I support the NAACP financially because I feel it is a fine organization, but up to this time, it has not been thought best by some of us here in Marshall to form a chapter here.<sup>83</sup>

Civil Rights icon, Wiley graduate, and organizer of CORE and the Freedom Rides, James Farmer explains Dogan's attitude:

At the top, on the black side, there was Wiley's president, Dr. Matthew Dogan, D.D., L.L.D., and Professor Pemberton, principal of Central High School. Both were respected by the white world. They knew the town's banker and top businessmen; and that gave them influence with the white world and power in the black. Dogan and Pemberton were buffers between the two worlds; they kept the black one from collision with the white one. In return, they were honored and privileged persons. Yet, they had to respect the etiquette of the caste system: they were called not "Mister," but "Doctor" and "Professor," and there was some grinning and bowing and scraping and foot shuffling. They treated whites like sacred cows in their presence; but behind their backs, they talked about them and laughed at them. It was a classic case of role playing. Many students considered them "Uncle Toms," but that did not define them; they were not owned by the whites, just rented. They were fully conscious of the role they were playing. They served their wards as well as their masters. Pemberton got money from the white school board for the segregated black high school, and Dogan raised a \$600,000 endowment for Wiley.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> For an analysis of the racial uprising in Longview, Texas, see William M. Tuttle, "Violence in a 'Heathen' Land: The Longview Race Riot of 1919" *Phylon* vol. 33, no. 4 (1972): 324-33.

<sup>83</sup> Beil, "Melvin B. Tolson" in *Blacks in East Texas History*, 126-27.

<sup>84</sup> Farmer, *Lay Bare the Heart*, 121. Farmer was one of the 'Big Six' leaders of the 1960s civil rights movement, along with Martin Luther King, Jr. (Southern Christian Leadership Conference), Asa Philip Randolph (Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters), Roy Wilkins (NAACP), John Lewis (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) and Whitney Young (National Urban League). Farmer co-founded in 1942, along with Bernice Fisher, Bayard Rustin, and George Houser, the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE). Born in Marshall in January 1920, Farmer organized and participated in the "Freedom Rides" of the 1960s. On Bernice Fisher, see Mary Kimbrough and Margaret W. Dagen, *Victory without Violence: The first Ten years of the St. Louis Committee of Racial Equality (CORE), 1947-1957* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 21. On Rustin, see John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Bayard Rustin, *Down the Line: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971). On George Houser, see George Houser, *No One Can Stop the Rain: Glimpses of Africa's Liberation Struggle* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1989).

Many students instead preferred the leadership style of individuals such as Wiley longtime professor Melvin Tolson, who began his teaching career at Wiley in 1924, nearly twenty years after Nixon's graduation. Tolson remained at Wiley until 1947 and his impact was felt for many years. Historian Gail Beil explains, "...he inspired one of his students to become a leading civil rights leader in the 1960s, another who successfully sued to integrate the University of Texas School of Law, and others who changed the segregated face of the nation in quieter ways." One of those *not-so-quiet* ways was a 1948 lawsuit filed against the Harrison County Citizens' Party by one of Tolson's students and a classmate of James Farmer: Fred Lewis. Filed through the NAACP, the association won the suit in 1950, and Lewis attributed the "courage to take on the white establishment in his home town to Tolson's teachings."<sup>85</sup>

### **Meharry Medical College**

Since his early teenage years Lawrence Nixon had as a goal to become a medical doctor.<sup>86</sup> It is not clear what led Nixon to this specific profession, however at various times there were other Black medical doctors in Marshall during Nixon's upbringing that he could have

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<sup>85</sup> Beil, "Melvin B. Tolson," 119, 124-25, and 128. As a writer, educator, and debate coach, Melvin Tolson was asked by Texas governor James Allred to represent the State at the "National Negro Day Celebration" in 1935 during the International Exhibition in San Diego. The governor wrote Tolson, "we are glad to have a man of your standing represent Texas, and are quite proud of the name Wiley College has made for itself through its debating team, with you as coach." Unlike the Denzel Washington movie, *The Great Debaters* (2007), the real Tolson debate team, which James Farmer was a part-of, beat national champions University of Southern California, not Harvard University as the film depicts. Nevertheless, the victory was an outstanding achievement and brought much needed attention to the city and school. Tolson departed Wiley College in 1947 after the institution underwent significant upheavals under President Egbert C. McLeod, leading to a nationally reported student strike, see Gold, *Rhetoric at the Margins*, 23. Screen actor Denzel Washington donated one million dollars to Wiley College so they could reestablish their debate team, see Jamie Stengle, "Inspired by Movie, Wiley College has a New Debate Team" *Dallas Morning News*, 2 January 2009; and Gail K. Bell [sic], "Tolson, Farmer intertwined by Wiley debate team" *Marshall News Messenger*, December 2007, <[http://www.marshallnewsmessenger.com/featr/content/features/great\\_debaters/farmer\\_tolson.html](http://www.marshallnewsmessenger.com/featr/content/features/great_debaters/farmer_tolson.html)> (accessed 28 July 2009).

<sup>86</sup> Bryson, *Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon and the White Primary*, 22.

admired and wanted to emulate. They included Mason J. Snowden, Edward Abner, and John Walter Fridia. Whatever the reason Nixon decided to become a doctor, he graduated from Wiley College and earned admission into the same medical institution of those doctors he saw in his community as a child: Meharry Medical College.<sup>87</sup> Meharry was established as the Meharry Medical Department of Central Tennessee College, which then became Walden University in 1900 with a new name of Meharry Medical College of Walden University. In 1905, while Lawrence Nixon was still there, Meharry separated itself from the financially failing Walden University, establishing itself as a stand-alone nonprofit institution. Then in October of 1915 the medical school applied and received “a charter of incorporation in the name of Meharry Medical College.”<sup>88</sup> When Nixon graduated in 1906 his diploma stated: Meharry Medical College of Walden University.<sup>89</sup>

An early history of this prestigious college was written by one of its longtime professors who likely taught Nixon. In 1904, Charles V. Roman became Professor of Ophthalmology and Oto-Laryngology at Meharry and remained so until 1931. Also in 1904, Roman was named President of the National Medical Association—the association for African American doctors.

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<sup>87</sup> Mason J. Snowden (class of 1888), Edward Abner (class of 1893), and John Walter Fridia (class of 1895), see *Meharry Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Departments of Central Tennessee College Catalogue of 1894-95 and Announcement for 1895-96* (Nashville: Cumberland Presbyterian Publishing House, 1895), 5 and 9; *Meharry Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Colleges of Walden University Catalogue of 1907-1908 and Announcement for 1908-1909* (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce Company Printers, 1908), 37; *Meharry News* vol. 1, no. 1 (August 1902): 1.

<sup>88</sup> Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, xi, 40, and 56-7. To this day, Meharry continues to play a vital role in educating African Americans entering the medical professions. In 1996, *Religious Higher Education in the United States* stated:

Meharry Medical College is the largest private, comprehensive institution for education African-American health professionals in the United States. Meharry graduates constitute nearly 40 percent of the African-American faculty in medical schools and 15 percent of the African-American faculty in dental schools across the nation. Three-fourths of Meharry graduates practice in medically underserved inner-city and rural areas where the nation’s immense unmet health needs are concentrated, see Thomas C. Hunt and James C. Carper, eds., *Religious Higher Education in the United States: A Source Book* (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 1996), 468-69.

<sup>89</sup> Lawrence A. Nixon’s original diploma is in the possession of his seventy-two year-old daughter, Mrs. Edna McIver (Nixon).

For ten years, 1908-1918, he served as editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the National Medical Association*.<sup>90</sup> In addition, Nixon received training from Daniel Hale Williams, the famed surgeon who was a lecturer on clinical and operative surgery at Meharry.<sup>91</sup> Williams is best known for becoming the first doctor to perform successfully open-heart surgery in 1893, the first Black cardiologist in the United States, and for establishing the first integrated hospital in the nation, Chicago's Provident Hospital, in 1891.<sup>92</sup> In 1899, Williams began teaching at Meharry in a series of annual clinics. Williams' classes became very popular with students, along with physicians who traveled from almost every southern state to attend. At Meharry, Williams gave lectures, clinics, and even conducted operations for the benefit of students, patients, and physicians alike.<sup>93</sup> Some of the doctors Williams trained at Meharry who would go on to graduate with honors and join the faculty included W.A. Reed, J.A. McMillan, and John Hale Williams.<sup>94</sup> These three physicians also trained Lawrence Nixon during the years he was a student.<sup>95</sup> John Henry Hale, a 1905 Meharry graduate, became a professor immediately after graduating and must have known of Nixon as both a student and professor during Nixon's senior

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<sup>90</sup> Charles V. Roman, *Meharry Medical College: A History* (Nashville: Sunday School Publishing Board of the National Baptist Convention, 1934), v.

<sup>91</sup> *Meharry Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Colleges of Walden University Catalogue of 1905-1906 and Announcement for 1906-1907* (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce Company Printers, 1906), 5.

<sup>92</sup> Helen Buckler, *Doctor Dan: Pioneer in American Surgery* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1954), 75; Michael W. Williams, *The African American Encyclopedia* vol. 6 (New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1993), 1705-7; Washington, *Medical Apartheid*, 156; and Helen Buckler, *Daniel Hale Williams: Negro Surgeon* (New York: Pitman Publication, 1968).

<sup>93</sup> Ward, *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South*, 82; Buckler, *Doctor Dan*, 194-96, 200-1, 217, 254-5, and 272; Buckler, *Daniel Hale Williams*, 200-1; Williams, *The African American Encyclopedia*, 1707; Roman, *Meharry Medical College*, 52 and 71; Summerville, *Educating Black Doctors*, 44 and 46.

<sup>94</sup> Buckler, *Doctor Dan*, 201.

<sup>95</sup> N/MFP, see list of entire 1906 Meharry faculty at the appendix of this dissertation.



year. Hale, after Roman's tenure, would also serve as president of the National Medical Association in 1935.<sup>96</sup>

During his Meharry tenure, Lawrence Nixon secured work as a Pullman porter, working from Chicago to San Francisco to pay his way through college. In addition to this employment Nixon also worked one summer at a Chicago bar.<sup>97</sup> Charles Nixon must have felt pride in Lawrence's educational aspirations and employment selection. The children of Pullman porters or railway workers were "the best affirmation of their esteem for their fathers" as seen by "how many followed them into the sleeping car business. And the most precious inheritance those fathers could pass on was a job with the Pullman Company."<sup>98</sup> Lawrence Nixon was not making the Pullman company a career as his father had, he was merely using this opportunity to get himself through school and occupy his summers with money-earning activities. Yet, Charles Nixon could feel comfortable in knowing that if the educational route did not work-out for his oldest son, that at least Lawrence Nixon already had his 'foot in the door' with the company and could perhaps return for a permanent position if needed. Often, the job of Pullman porter would transfer from generation to generation within a family.

Nixon graduated from Meharry on April 4, 1906.<sup>99</sup> Although no records exist of Nixon's academic performance or social life while attending Meharry (or Wiley College), the well-known school must have prepared Nixon well. Two months after graduating, Nixon

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<sup>96</sup> "In Memoriam: Dr. John Henry Hale," *Journal of the National Medical Association* vol. 34, no. 4 (July 1944): 130-31; and Mather, *Who's Who of the Colored Race*, 127.

<sup>97</sup> Bryson, *Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon and the White Primary*, 22-3. During this time many Meharry students waited on tables, cleaned out laboratories, and worked on Pullman cars during their time-off from classes, see Buckler, *Doctor Dan*, 200.

<sup>98</sup> Babe Smock in Tye, *Rising from the Rails*, 86.

<sup>99</sup> "Meharry Commencement" *Meharry News* vol. 4, no. 1 (February 1906): 8.

immediately took the Texas State Medical examination in Dallas and received a passing score of 76.3%. He was among two other Meharry graduates who passed the examination that day. A.L. Hunter of Hearne, Texas had an identical score and W.H. White of Bastrop, Texas earned a 75%.<sup>100</sup> Unfortunately, there were five others of Lawrence Nixon's classmates from Meharry who did not pass on this particular attempt. There were twelve subject areas covered on the written examination, distributed over 146 questions. Of the 144 would-be doctors who took the test, forty-two did not earn the minimum score of 75%.<sup>101</sup> Of Nixon's sixty-nine member graduating class, three were Black women, and ten were from Texas. In addition to the sixty-nine classmates from the medical department, there were an additional fifteen dental graduates, and ten graduates from the pharmaceutical department, four of whom Black women.<sup>102</sup>

### **Cameron (Milam County), Texas**

In the fall 1906, Lawrence Nixon established his medical practice in Cameron, Texas in Milam County in central Texas, approximately two-hundred miles southwest of Marshall and fifty miles southeast of Waco.<sup>103</sup> He moved to this small farming community at the urging of an

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<sup>100</sup> In 1950, A.L. Hunter was elected to serve as president of the Lone Star State Medical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Association during their sixty-fourth annual convention held in Galveston, see "Negro Medics Elect," *San Antonio Light*, 16 June 1950, 49. For a brief history of this all-Black professional medical organization, see Alwyn Barr, "The Lone Star State Medical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Association," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/LL/sal1.html>> (accessed 1 March 2010).

<sup>101</sup> "Report of the Examination Held by the Board of Medicine Examiners at their Meeting in Dallas, Texas" *The Texas Medical News: A Journal of Medicine, Surgery and Hygiene* vol. 15, no. 10 (August 1906): 527-29; and "Report of Examination for Licenses to Practice Medicine" *Texas State Journal of Medicine*, vol. 2, no. 5 (September 1906): 141. Sources do not indicate the first names of the other two Meharry graduates who passed their examination along with Nixon. Interestingly, these two journals listed Nixon as having graduated from Meharry Medical School in 1905 when other accounts have him graduating from Meharry in 1906.

<sup>102</sup> N/MFP. See list of entire 1906 Meharry graduating class at the appendix of this dissertation.

<sup>103</sup> *Meharry Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Colleges of Walden University Catalogue of 1907-1908 and Announcement for 1908-1909* (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce Company Printers, 1908), 39; and *Meharry Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Colleges of Walden University Catalogue of 1908-1909 and Announcement for 1909-1910* (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce Company Printers, 1909), 39.

unnamed friend. Nixon writes, “I had never seen the town, but I decided to rely on the judgement [*sic*] of the friend who induced me to go there.” He arrived with “fifteen dollars worth of [medical] instruments” and “about thirty dollars” in his pocket. While in Cameron, Nixon quickly became “very much disappointed,” partly because he was lonely, but also because he “had never before seen [Black] people living in such wretched surroundings.” He went back to Marshall to marry his childhood sweetheart, Esther Josephine Calvin.<sup>104</sup> They were married in Marshall on October 23, 1907 and Reverend Bryant officiated the ceremony.<sup>105</sup> Alfaretta S. Nixon (Lawrence Nixon’s sister) and Jessie C. Calvin (Esther J. Calvin’s sister) were the bridesmaids and A.L. Hunter and E.E. Nesbitt (both Nixon’s Meharry classmates) were groomsmen.<sup>106</sup> Their only child together, Lawrence Joseph Nixon, was born in Marshall on July 4, 1909.<sup>107</sup> Despite already living in Cameron, this Marshall birth of their son suggests that Esther Nixon went back for the delivery and to be nursed back to health near family and dear friends.

After graduating from Meharry, Lawrence Nixon could have gone anywhere, especially places where he had family or had already traveled to such as Chicago, San Francisco, New Orleans, Nashville, and most importantly of all, his own home town of Marshall where he had a network of friends, family, and professional contacts through the railroad companies and Wiley and Bishop Colleges. The desire to be near friends and family lured many Black medical school

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<sup>104</sup> Lawrence A. Nixon to Lawrence J. Nixon, 19 March 1919, letter found in N/MFP.

<sup>105</sup> “Marriages” *Meharry News* vol. 6, no. 1 (January 1908): 5; and excerpt from Nixon Family Bible in LAWFP.

<sup>106</sup> Lawrence A. Nixon to Lawrence J. Nixon, 19 March 1919, letter found in N/MFP. First names of both Hunter and Nesbitt are not known.

<sup>107</sup> Obituary for Lawrence Joseph Nixon, Memorial Service Program (Pittsburgh: Samuel J. Jones Funeral Home, 24 February 2006), 3. Lawrence Joseph Nixon died on 16 February 2006, see N/MFP.

graduates back to the South.<sup>108</sup> The 1900 United States census indicates that there were 7,855 people in Marshall and 3,769 were African American or nearly forty-eight percent of the population.<sup>109</sup> According to *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South*:

Many black doctors were recruited to come south by communities in desperate need of medical care; others believed that their greatest opportunity for financial success lay in the South. A few came south as medical missionaries to care for the region's large and impoverished black population. But perhaps the greatest force that drew black physicians to the South was that it was—despite its prejudice and violence, its poverty and discrimination—*home*.<sup>110</sup>

One has to wonder why Nixon chose Cameron when going back to Marshall would have allowed him to be near his immediate family and mature professionally in a place that he intimately knew. He was home grown and the city would have been proud to embrace him, his educational accomplishments, and his fledging medical practice. His departure from the community that nurtured, protected, and insulated him for so many years speaks to his risk-taking and courage. One reason for not returning to Marshall may have been that the city already had too many Meharry graduates practicing their profession such as Mason J. Snowden (class of 1888), Edward Abner (class of 1893), John Walter Fridia (class of 1895), and W.M. Drake (class of 1905).<sup>111</sup> A safer, if not more calculated, location for his initial practice could have been in the nearby Texas counties of Gregg (55% Black), Panola (43% Black), and Smith (41% Black);

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<sup>108</sup> Ward, *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South*, 99.

<sup>109</sup> *Twelfth Census of the United States—1900*, Table 23: “Population by Sex, General Nativity, and Color, for Places having 2,500 Inhabitants or More” Census Reports, vol. 1, part 1, City of Cameron, Milam County, Texas, 643.

<sup>110</sup> Ward, *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South*, 99. Emphasis not in original quote.

<sup>111</sup> *Meharry Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Departments of Central Tennessee College Catalogue of 1894-95 and Announcement for 1895-96* (Nashville: Cumberland Presbyterian Publishing House, 1895), 5 and 9; *Meharry Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Colleges of Walden University Catalogue of 1907-1908 and Announcement for 1908-1909* (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce Company Printers, 1908), 37; *Meharry News* vol. 1, no. 1 (August 1902): 1.

the City of Longview (43.7% Black); or even Shreveport, Louisiana (49.6% Black).<sup>112</sup> These locations were twenty to sixty miles from Marshall, which would have allowed Nixon to remain closer to his family. Instead Nixon chose the much farther Cameron.

Cameron in 1900 had a total population of 3,341 of which 1,040 were African American.<sup>113</sup> Agriculture, primarily corn and cotton, was the dominant economic force within the county, with coal mining playing a smaller, but important role. Most residents were sharecroppers, tenant farmers, or coal miners.<sup>114</sup> The Black community was one much smaller than the Black presence Lawrence Nixon had been accustomed to in the past, but Cameron's Black population was sizable enough (31%) whereby he could still have an impact, gain a reputation, and make a name for himself among his own people. Despite having recently moved to the city in 1907, just starting a new medical practice, relocating his new wife, and having a

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<sup>112</sup> In 1910, there were 7,781 Blacks in Gregg County, making up 55% of the overall population; in Panola County Blacks numbered 8,842 or 43% of the overall population; in Smith County they were 17,246 or 41% of the overall population; in Longview there were 2,253 Blacks and they were 43.7% of the overall population; in Shreveport, Louisiana Blacks totaled 13,896 or 49.6% of the overall population, see *Thirteenth Census of the United States—1910*, Volume 3, Section 6, "Texas, Utah, Vermont," Chapter 1: Number of Inhabitants "Population—Texas, Table IV—Composition and Characteristics of the Population for Places of 2,500 to 10,000" City of Longview, Texas, 856; *Thirteenth Census of the United States—1910*, Volume 3, Section 6, "Texas, Utah, Vermont," Chapter 1: Number of Inhabitants "Population—Texas, Table IV—Composition and Characteristics of the Population for The State and For Counties," 822, 838, 842, and 844; *Thirteenth Census of the United States—1910*, Volume 2, Section 6, Population: Reports By States For Counties, Cities, And Other Civil Divisions, "Kentucky-Maine," Population—Louisiana, Table II—Composition and Characteristics of the Population for Cities of 25,000 or more" Shreveport, Caddo Parish, Louisiana, 790.

<sup>113</sup> *Twelfth Census of the United States—1900*, Table 23: "Population by Sex, General Nativity, and Color, for Places having 2,500 Inhabitants or More: 1900" Census Reports, vol. 1, part 1, City of Cameron, Milam County, Texas, 643.

<sup>114</sup> Agriculture, particularly cotton, dominated Cameron's economy in the late nineteenth century and diverse industrial interests came into play in the early twentieth century. By the turn of the century tenant farmers and sharecroppers were working 60 percent of the 5,337 farms in Milam County. In 1900 farmers planted 147,683 acres in cotton and 71,151 acres in corn, totaling 75 percent of the improved land. Cotton production rose from 10,844 bales in 1880 to 66,555 bales in 1900. Regarding coal, at the turn of the century Milam County had six mining operations, producing a total of twenty railcars of coal per day. At its peak between 1910 and 1920 the mines shipped as many as forty-five to fifty cars of coal each day. Most of the mine workers were immigrants from Mexico, see Vivian E. Smyrl, "Cameron, Texas" *Handbook of Texas Online*, <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/hfc1.html>> (accessed 1 February 2010); and Cecil Harper and Vivian E. Smyrl, "Milam County" *Handbook of Texas Online*, <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/MM/hcm13.html>> (accessed 1 February 2010).

child, all in a short period of time, Lawrence Nixon found it necessary to leave Cameron. By 1910, on the eve of Nixon's regrettable departure from the city, the over-all population actually decreased to 3,263, but the Black community experienced a three-person increase to 1,043 or nearly thirty-two percent of the city's population.<sup>115</sup>

Central Texas had had a long and storied tradition of racial violence that dates back to the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>116</sup> The reasons are varied and complex as to why this racial violence was a particular phenomenon in central Texas, but this was at the core of why Nixon departed Cameron and abandoned his budding medical practice that he had worked nearly three years to build. Lawrence Nixon's office was in downtown Cameron, not too far from the courthouse. On November 4, 1907 a mob had taken Alex Johnson, an African American, from a jail cell and according to newspaper accounts hanged him from a tree for the alleged crime of "attempting to attack a young girl." News reports indicate that the lynch mob was 500 strong and refused to give in to pleas from "officers and influential citizens" to allow "the law to take its course." The crowd battered down the doors of the jail and took Johnson away, immediately hanging him from a nearby tree.<sup>117</sup> This differs from the account Nixon gave years later in that Johnson was burnt at the stake, and not hanged from a tree. Nixon was at his medical office at the time and

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<sup>115</sup> *Thirteenth Census of the United States—1910*, vol. 3, section 6: "Texas, Utah, Vermont," Chapter 1: Number of Inhabitants "Population—Texas, Table IV-Composition and Characteristics of the Population for Places of 2,500 to 10,000" Sex, Color, and Nativity, City of Cameron, Milam County, Texas, 855. Smyrl and Harper write: "The number of black residents in the county increased steadily, rising from 2,977 in 1870 to a high of 10,473 in 1900; however, because the volume of white immigrants was so great, the percentage of blacks with respect to the total population fell from 33 percent to 25 percent in 1890. After the turn of the century the county's total population began to decline. The number of blacks fell steadily, but at a faster rate than the population of the county as a whole; by 1980 blacks numbered 3,061, or less than 14 percent of the population." Cecil Harper, Jr. and Vivian Elizabeth Smyrl, "Milam County" *Handbook of Texas Online*, <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/MM/hcm13.html>> (accessed 1 August 2009).

<sup>116</sup> William D. Carrigan, *The Making of a Lynching Culture: Violence and Vigilantism in Central Texas, 1836-1916* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 148-49.

<sup>117</sup> "Mob was Quicker than Troops" *Cedar Rapids Evening Gazette*, Tuesday, 5 November 1907, 1.

remembers “that chairs were placed on the balcony of the two-story building to accommodate the crowds gathered to witness the lynching,” while he stayed behind locked doors in his office, “listening to the cries of the dying man.”<sup>118</sup>

Having been in the city for less than a year, this indeed was a very traumatic experience for Nixon. As a Black man in the United States, he was accustomed to hearing gory details of lynch mobs. An earshot away, Nixon personally heard the shouts and agony of Alex Johnson pleading for mercy from an unsympathetic crowd. Whether he was burned at the stake as Lawrence Nixon recalls, or whether Alex Johnson died from a noose around his neck, Nixon heard the horrors of his death and the crazed cries of a mad crowd. Nixon did not intervene, for to do so would invite his own death. Texas governor Thomas Campbell, having entered office ten months earlier, called in the state militia to assist local Cameron officers, but the state guards arrived one hour too late to subdue the emotional crowd and prevent the death of Alex Johnson.<sup>119</sup>

Lynchings for 1907 were actually down from 1906 levels. Seventy-two people died from Texas mobs in 1906 versus forty-two for 1907, including three Black women, four white men, and twenty-five Black men. These figures only include incidents “of unmistakable lynching, leaving out those in which the victims were killed by pursuing posses while resisting capture.”<sup>120</sup> Although Lawrence Nixon had reasons to feel depressed about these circumstances, a sense of hopelessness did not overcome him. Besides starting his medical career, he had a new bride in

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<sup>118</sup> Bryson, *Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon and the White Primary*, 23-4.

<sup>119</sup> *Waterloo Semi Weekly Courier*, Friday, 8 November 1907, 8. For biography of Thomas M. Campbell, see Jesús F. de la Teja and Ty Cashion, eds., *The Human Tradition in Texas* (Wilmington: SR Books, 2001), 129-44.

<sup>120</sup> *Semi Weekly Reporter*, Friday, 20 December 1907, 1; *Galveston Daily News*, Tuesday, 17 December 1907. Online sources such as “The Lynching Calendar: African Americans who died in Racial Violence in the United States 1865-1965,” has thus far documented nearly sixty lynch victims for the year 1907, see <<http://www.autopsys.org/foot/lynchdates2.html>> (accessed 13 August 2009).

1907 and eighteen months after this brutal lynching in Cameron, Nixon had his first and only son who would carry his name.

Yet, in 1909, the same year Nixon's son was born, there would be many more lynchings throughout the country including Texas. Between 1880 and 1930, only Mississippi and Georgia would surpass Texas in the most lynchings in the nation.<sup>121</sup> This violence was so imbedded in the minds of Texans that one white newspaper editor stated the obvious: "Lynching becomes chronic and contagious. Boys grow to manhood with the idea, ingrained in them that lynch law is right and proper, and worthy of applause, and they follow the example set them by their fathers."<sup>122</sup> This cultural attitude fostered an arrogance that allowed many white Texans to think that "there is not much danger to any of the Negroes who attend to their business and keep their mouths shut, but there are some who must be checked by some means or other."<sup>123</sup> It was under this atmosphere that caused many African Americans at the turn of the century to move to other states or into less hostile regions within Texas. The flight for safety from racial violence and to seek economic opportunities into the western "frontier" by Blacks during this era was so great that one central Texas newspaper stated in 1902, "The exodus of the colored people from this

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<sup>121</sup> Howard Smead, *Blood Justice: The Lynching of Mack Charles Parker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 26.

<sup>122</sup> *Waco Weekly News*, 24 February 1893.

<sup>123</sup> *Waco Times-Herald*, 10 August 1905. Too often the charge of rape or sexual assault of white women were levied at Black men to justify the barbaric act of lynching, when the real culprit was self-defense, labor and monetary disputes, or a minor infraction of the racial etiquette of the day. "But chivalry in defense of imperiled white womanhood was only a rationalization, not an explanation of the epidemic of mob murder that consumed the South. Of the nearly three thousand Blacks known to have been lynched between 1889 and 1918, for example, only 19 percent were accused of rape. But in many cases what the public thought had occurred became much more important than what did happen. The public's perception of lynching, fed by the media and improved means of communication, was invariably that a sexual crime by Black men had precipitated it. As Walter White noted, "having created the Frankenstein monster the lyncher lives in constant fear of his own creation," See James Allen, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000), 24; Walter F. White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1929), 56-57; Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998).



city still continues. The territories are the mecca and there is hardly a day but a large party does not leave.”<sup>124</sup> Less than two weeks after hearing of another lynching in nearby Rosebud (sixteen miles from Cameron), Nixon too became part of this movement when he finally departed to El Paso, Texas at the very end of the year—December 31, 1909. African American Cope Mills was lynched in Rosebud after an altercation with a white officer on December 20, 1909.<sup>125</sup> Rosebud had also experienced the lynching of another Black man, Mitchell Frazier, just three years earlier on September 15, 1906.<sup>126</sup>

Unfortunately, Nixon could not return to his hometown of Marshall due to the racial violence in that city. Between 1897 and 1917, thirteen Black women and men had been lynched in Harrison County.<sup>127</sup> In 1909 alone Marshall witnessed four lynchings within a four-day period in April.<sup>128</sup> William Pickens, who taught at Wiley College for one year (1914-15) and later became NAACP Field Secretary, described Marshall as “notorious for frequent and particularly barbaric lynchings,” and called the town “one of the worst sections in all this round world...for any Negro to live in.”<sup>129</sup> The violence in Marshall surely must have devastated Nixon, knowing he could not go from bad to worse in the sense of the severity of racial violence

<sup>124</sup> *Waco Weekly Tribune*, 8 November 1902.

<sup>125</sup> Bryson, *Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon and the White Primary*, 26.

<sup>126</sup> “The Lynching Calendar: African Americans who died in Racial Violence in the United States 1865-1965,” <<http://www.autopsis.org/foot/lynchdates2.html>> (accessed 13 August 2009).

<sup>127</sup> Those thirteen individuals lynched were: Hal Wright, Harrison County, Texas 27 April 1897; Russell Wright, Harrison County, Texas, 27 April 1897; Robert Brown, Harrison County, Texas 27 April 1897; Walker Davis, Marshall, Texas 1 October 1903; James Hodges, Marshall, TX 27 April 1909; Matthew Chase, Marshall, Texas 30 April 1909; “Pie” Hill, Marshall, Texas 30 April 1909; “Mose” Creole, Marshall, Texas, 30 April 1909; 1 unidentified Black man, Marshall, Texas 29 October 1911; George Saunders, Marshall, Texas 13 February 1912; Mary Jackson, Marshall, Texas, 13 February 1912; Anderson, Marshall, Texas, 25 February 1913; Charles Jones, Marshall, Texas 22 August 1917, see “The Lynching Calendar: African Americans who died in Racial Violence in the United States, 1865-1965,” <<http://www.autopsis.org/foot/lynchdates2.html>> (accessed 13 August 2009).

<sup>128</sup> *Denton Record-Chronicle*, 30 April 1909, 1; *Grand Rapids Tribune*, 5 August 1908.

<sup>129</sup> Avery, *Up From Washington*, 36 and 203-4 n.2-4.

and tension. For decades Black doctors in the South feared acts of racial violence against them. In the 1930s, scholar Carter G. Woodson found that more than one in ten Black physicians who established practices in the South eventually left the region “because of the terrorism.” Physicians told Woodson that they left not only because of violence and economic difficulties but also “to get away from inferiority-complex Negroes and superiority-complex whites.” One doctor told Woodson that he had to leave town for “replying in the affirmative to a white man’s question as to whether I thought I was as good as he was.”<sup>130</sup> Lawrence Nixon too would leave the region and sharpen his oyster knife in the dry and dusty border city of the southwest: El Paso, Texas.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Ward, *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South*, 99.

<sup>131</sup> The phrase “sharpen his oyster knife” was borrowed from the Harlem Renaissance writer Zora Neale Hurston when she stated “No, I do not weep at the world—I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife” in describing her refusal to wallow in self-pity due to being a Black woman in a sexist, racist, and patriarchal society, see Valerie Boyd, *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 172-73.

## CHAPTER 2 – MOVE TO EL PASO, 1910-1919

“Through struggle are great men and useful races produced.”  
-Booker T. Washington, 1911<sup>1</sup>

Lawrence Nixon departed Cameron, Texas on New Year’s Eve 1909. He and his good friend, Le Roy White, loaded their personal belongings, including household and office furniture, and a horse and buggy, onto a freight car. It is not clear how Le Roy White and Nixon became friends or where they had met. They could have been childhood friends from Nixon’s days in New Orleans or Marshall. Perhaps they met in the city of Cameron during the three years that Nixon lived there or his years in Nashville while a student at Meharry. If they were childhood friends from Marshall then perhaps Nixon moved to Cameron at White’s urging. Nevertheless, the pair made the ten-day 565-mile trek across Texas together and arrived in El Paso in January 1910.<sup>2</sup> They both would make El Paso their new permanent home. White would become assistant pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, a government employee at the Stanton Street Bridge, and a barber at a shop owned by George W. Meroney.<sup>3</sup> Nixon would practice medicine in El

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<sup>1</sup> Booker T. Washington to James C. Napier, quoted in Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930*, 240 and 298 n.21.

<sup>2</sup> Drusilla Elizabeth Nixon interview conducted by Sarah E. John and Oscar J. Martínez, *Bicentennial Project*, 11 December 1975, “Interview no. 194,” transcribed by Rhonda Hartman, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, page 18; and Bryson, *Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon and the White Primary*, 26.

<sup>3</sup> Information on Le Roy White was taken from Bryson, *Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon and the White Primary*, 26. No other specific details have been uncovered as to the exact position title White held during this specific time period or the government agency he was employed under. The city directory indicates that White was “(c)” or “Colored,” lived at 1015 E. Overland, and his employer, George W. Meroney Barbershop, was located at 116 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. John F. Worley, ed., *Worley’s 1911 City Directory of El Paso, Texas* (Dallas: John F. Worley Directory Company, 1911), 496. This directory can be found at the Charles Leland Sonnichsen Special Collections, University of Texas—El Paso, hereafter cited as CLSSC-UTEP. According to the 1930 census Le Roy White was born and raised in South Carolina and was fifty years old at the time of this census making his birth year 1880. He is also listed as a Barber owning his own shop. His wife, Callie White is forty-six years old and is employed as a maid in an unnamed private home in El Paso, see *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 14 April 1930, Series T626, Roll 2328, Page 132, Line 59-60. The 1920 census list the forty year-old Le Roy White as an engineer with the city of El Paso and his wife Callie White as being unemployed. Josephine White is their eleven-year old daughter, see *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department

Paso for the next fifty years. Of all the cities Nixon could have moved to, El Paso was chosen, yet it is not altogether made clear as to why. Nixon had been to El Paso in 1893 when he was about ten years old.<sup>4</sup> His mother, Jennie V. Engledow Nixon, had a brother in the city who was a barber.<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Nixon and Lawrence visited him from Marshall on the Texas and Pacific railroad. This initial stay must have left enough of a positive impression on the young Nixon to make him want to return and embark on a new chapter in his life, one that would spawn a level of civic and political activism that we have not seen from him up to this point in his life.

### **El Paso, Texas**

El Paso is the westernmost city within Texas, located 564 miles northwest of San Antonio, 617 miles southwest of Dallas, and forty-three miles southeast of Las Cruces, New Mexico.<sup>6</sup> The first Europeans, Spanish conquistadors, called it El Paso del Norte due to its

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of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso, El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 11 January 1920 by Mrs. F.K. Strong, Series T625, Roll 1799, Page 2, Line 20-2.

The Stanton Street Bridge crosses the Río Bravo connecting the México and United States border cities of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua and El Paso, Texas. Other names this bridge is known by include “The Good Neighbor International Bridge,” “Friendship Bridge,” “Puente Río Bravo,” and “Puente Ciudad Juárez-Stanton El Paso.” <[http://www.txdot.gov/project\\_information/projects/border\\_crossing/neighbor.htm](http://www.txdot.gov/project_information/projects/border_crossing/neighbor.htm)> (accessed 21 September 2009); Charles L. Sonnichsen, *Pass of the North: Four Centuries on the Rio Grande*, vol. 2 (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1980), 467.

<sup>4</sup> “El Pasoan Ends Medical Career,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 24 July 1963, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Bryson, *Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon and the White Primary*, 20. Lawrence A. Nixon’s uncle’s name is unknown. If he had the same last name as his sister, Jennie V. Engledow, his last name is not listed in the 1880, 1900, or 1910 United States Census for El Paso, Texas. In addition, the Engledow name is not listed in the El Paso city directories for the 1880s, 1890s, or early 1900s. Unable to extract the precise name of Nixon’s uncle from family records or current living family members.

<sup>6</sup> *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide* (Dallas: Belo and Company, 1910), 183-184. These three cities (San Antonio, Dallas, and Las Cruces, New Mexico) were chosen because they are the nearest, most populated, or most easily identifiable cities to El Paso. In 1904 El Paso County had geographically become the largest in the State. *Texas Almanac and State Industrial Guide* (Galveston: Clarke and Courts, 1904), 257-258. Today El Paso is the largest United States city on the Mexican border, the sixth largest city in Texas, and twenty-first largest city in the United States, see Eric Peterson, *Frommer’s Texas* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publications, 2007), 338. Cities within El Paso county include El Paso, Fabens, Tornillo, Clint, San Elizario, Socorro, Horizon City, Canutillo, and Anthony, see United States Census Bureau, Economics and Statistics Administration, *2000 Census of*

natural passageway through the mountains.<sup>7</sup> El Paso's sister city, immediately across the international border of the Rio Grande, is Ciudad Juárez, a former colony of the Spanish crown who used it as a strategic entry to their towns in New Mexico beginning in 1659.<sup>8</sup> Initially also known as El Paso del Norte, in July 1888 Lauro Carrillo, the constitutional governor of Chihuahua, decreed the official name change of El Paso del Norte to Ciudad Juárez which took effect that September.<sup>9</sup> The name comes from the patriot president, Benito Pablo Juárez García, who took refuge there during the French occupation (1862-1867).<sup>10</sup> Juárez (1806-1872) was one of the few indigenous presidents who served México.<sup>11</sup> Ciudad Juárez has always been strategic, even more so after the railroads' arrival in the 1880s, due to it being an important entryway for the exchange of goods between México and the United States.<sup>12</sup>

In 1849 Major Van Horne and his troops reached El Paso, where they established a new military post.<sup>13</sup> Fort Bliss would become an important strategic military asset and a strong

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*Population and Housing: Summary Populations and Housing Characteristics*, PHC-1-45, Texas (Washington, D.C.: Department of Commerce, 2002), 146.

<sup>7</sup> Donald E. Chipman, *Spanish Texas, 1519-1821* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 63-70.

<sup>8</sup> Ramón Eduardo Ruiz, *On the Rim of Mexico: Encounters of the Rich and Poor* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 35.

<sup>9</sup> Guadalupe Santiago Quijada, *Propiedad de la tierra en Ciudad Juárez, 1888 a 1935* (Tijuana, México: UACJ, 2002), 37 n58. Today Ciudad Juárez is the largest populated city on México's northern border.

<sup>10</sup> For more information on the French intervention in México, also known as the Maximilian Affair or the Franco-Mexican War, see Enrique Krauze, *Mexico, Biography of Power: A History of Modern Mexico, 1810-1996* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), 152-204.

<sup>11</sup> Michael S. Werner, ed., *Concise Encyclopedia of Mexico* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2001), 311-314.

<sup>12</sup> Ruiz, *On the Rim of Mexico*, 35; Oscar J. Martínez, *Border Boom Town: Ciudad Juárez since 1848* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), 16, 17, and 176 n23-4; and Floyd S. Fierman, *The Schwartz Family of El Paso: The Story of a Pioneer Jewish Family in the Southwest* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1980), 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ken Hudnall and Connie Wang, *Spirits of the Border, vol. II: The History and Mystery of Fort Bliss, Texas* (El Paso: Omega Press, 2003), 11-20.

economic force in the El Paso area throughout Lawrence Nixon's stay in the city.<sup>14</sup> Despite a very tiny minority of El Paso's residents actually owning African captives, in February 1861, El Pasoans nevertheless voted almost unanimously to support secession and formally join the Confederate States of America to maintain and preserve the oppressive institution of slavery.<sup>15</sup> Sympathies with the South in general and support for the Confederacy in particular would remain strong throughout the war's duration.<sup>16</sup> Fort Bliss was surrendered peacefully to Union forces soon after secession when the expedition under Gen. Henry Sibley attempted to claim all of New Mexico and Arizona for the Confederacy failed. Upon their return to El Paso in 1862 these Confederate soldiers found Union troops under Gen. Carleton had already reclaimed the city.<sup>17</sup> El Paso remained in Union hands for the remainder of the war, and although the city was occupied by both Union and Confederate forces it saw little actual combat.

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<sup>14</sup> Perry Jamieson, "A Survey History of Fort Bliss, 1890-1940" *Historic and Natural Resources Report No. 5*, Cultural Resources Management Program (Fort Bliss, Texas: United States Army Air Defense Artillery Center, 1993). The military installation is named after William "Perfect Bliss" W. Smith Bliss who fought the Cherokees, the Seminoles in Florida, and participated in the American invasion of Mexico, 1846-48, see Zachary Taylor, *Letters of Zachary Taylor, From the Battle-Fields of the Mexican War* (Alcester: Read Books, 2008), xii-xiii; and Samuel R. Curtis, *Mexico Under Fire* (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1994), 267 n.14.

<sup>15</sup> William Wallace Mills, *Forty Years at El Paso, 1858-1898: Recollections of War, Politics, Adventure, Events, Narratives, and Sketches* (El Paso: W.W. Mills, 1901), 38-39; see also Dale Baum, "Pinpointing Apparent Fraud in the 1861 Texas Secession Referendum" *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* vol. 22, no. 2 (Fall 1991): 206, 218. The 1860 United States census indicates that there were fifteen African captives in El Paso, along with fourteen free African Americans, see Kristine Navarro and Maceo C. Dailey, Jr., eds., *Wheresoever My People Chance to Dwell: Oral Interviews with African American Women of El Paso* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 2000), 13. Also, at least five officers and other soldiers brought African captives with them to Fort Bliss during the Civil War, see Martin Hardwick Hall, "Negroes with Confederate Troops in West Texas and New Mexico," *Password* vol. 13, no. 1 (Spring 1968): 11-12. Hall cites the *Eighth Census of the United States: 1860*, Texas Slave Schedules, microfilm no. 286, National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C.

<sup>16</sup> Wilbert H. Timmons, "El Paso," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/EE/hde1.html>> (accessed 27 September 2009); and Conrey Bryson, "El Paso County," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/EE/hce5.html>> (accessed 27 September 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Jerry D. Thompson, ed., *Civil War in the Southwest: Recollections of the Sibley Brigade* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001), xxi; Ralph A. Wooster, "Texas in the Southern War for Independence," in Joseph G. Dawson III, ed., *The Texas Military Experience: From the Texas Revolution through World War II* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 76-77; *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, vol. 25, June to November, 1862 (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1862), 838.

As El Paso grew it became a western boomtown with a reputation as “Six Shooter Capital” and “Sin City,” where scores of saloons, dance halls, gambling establishments, and houses of prostitution lined the main streets.<sup>18</sup> The arrival of the railroads in the early 1880s was a major event in El Paso history bringing employment and encouraging population growth. The Southern Pacific became the first railroad company to enter El Paso in May 1881. The following month El Paso welcomed the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe. The Texas and Pacific, the railway that Lawrence Nixon’s father worked for from the early 1880s to 1910, arrived into El Paso in January 1882.<sup>19</sup> One San Antonio newspaper reported in 1881, “The scene at El Paso just now beggars [sic] description. The fact that three railroads are practically there has caused a world of people of all classes, nations and colors to rush to this new center.”<sup>20</sup> This included different ethnic groups and many Mexicans from different classes and hues. A visitor to El Paso in the early 1890s commented:

El Paso is part Mexican and part American. The Mexicans and a great many of the Chinamen live in adobe houses...When I speak of Mexicans, you must remember that they are of all kinds and types, from a tawny yellow...to the deep red of the Indian, and even as black as a Congo negro. And right here [El Paso] you have them all in a bunch. Then there are tourists representing all the States in and out of the Union. As a cosmopolitan crowd, there is nothing to beat it.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Francis Edward Abernethy, ed., *Legendary Ladies of Texas* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1994), 133-40; see also H. Gordon Frost, *The Gentlemen's Club: The Story of Prostitution in El Paso* (El Paso: Mangan Books, 1983), 33 and 72.

<sup>19</sup> For a recent history of these three railways, see Richard N. Griffith, “Empire, Progress, and the American Southwest: The Texas and Pacific Railroad, 1850-1882” (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern Mississippi, 2001); Richard J. Orsi, *Sunset Limited: The Southern Pacific Railroad and the Development of the American West, 1850-1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); and Pamela Berkman, *The History of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe* (New York: Smithmark Publishers, 1994) and James H. Ducker, *Men of the Steel Rails: Workers on the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad, 1869-1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> Eugene C. Barker, Ernest W. Winkler, and Francis W. Johnson, eds., *A History of Texas and Texans*, volume 2 (Chicago and New York: American Historical Society, 1914), 1056. A brief biography of the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio railroad company can be found at George C. Werner, “Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/GG/eqg6.html>> (accessed 3 January 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Rudolf Eickemeyer, *Letters from the Southwest* (New York: J. J. Little and Company, 1894), 10 and 20. The Afro-Mexican presence in El Paso was pronounced enough for Eickemeyer to comment further: “A Mexican

A fourth major railway, Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio entered the city in 1883.<sup>22</sup> Often referred to by its acronym in newspaper accounts, “G., H. & S.A.,” the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio Railway was described by one commentator as “one of the best constructed and most efficiently operated railways in the State,” and constituted “an important link in the great Southern Pacific Transcontinental Railway system, one of the most powerful and successful railway systems in the world.”<sup>23</sup> The Mexican Central Railroad started its service from Ciudad de México to El Paso in 1884.<sup>24</sup> The *Lone Star* newspaper, one of El Paso’s first dailies, commented that the city was now connected with the “Paris of America” and encouraged increased trade with México. For the Southwest, the railroads symbolized a new American era dominated by a modernizing economy which would change El Paso into a railroad, mining, ranching, and labor center. The railroads became major employers of labor in El Paso, hiring thousands of Mexican immigrants to work in construction and maintenance crews throughout the Southwest.<sup>25</sup>

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soldier in dark blue uniform, himself as black as the ace of spades, walks to and fro [sic] in front of the gate, and a set of ragged urchins keep him company,” see Eickemeyer, *Letters from the Southwest*, 10, 18, and 49. For more on Afro-Mexicans in the Southwest, see Laura E. Gómez, *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race* (New York: New York University, 2007) and Martha Menchaca, *Recovering History, Constructing Race: The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001).

<sup>22</sup> Barker, *A History of Texas and Texans*, 1056.

<sup>23</sup> Cadwell Walton Raines, *Year Book for Texas, Volume 2* (Austin: Gammel-Statesman, 1903), 388.

<sup>24</sup> Mexican Central Railroad was one of the main lines connecting the north and south of México, opening passenger service from México City to Ciudad Porfirio Díaz in Coahuila in 1884. By 1894, the Mexican Central Railroad lines had reached the most populous states of México in the central plateau, see Michael R. Haines and Richard H. Steckel, eds., *A Population History of North America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 625 n16; also see “Mexican Central” in Fred W. Powell, *The Railroads of Mexico* (Boston: The Stratford Company, 1921), 127-31; and John M. Hart, *Revolutionary Mexico: The Coming and Process of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 124, 133, 146, 149, and 269.

<sup>25</sup> Mario T. García, *Desert Immigrants: The Mexicans of El Paso, 1880-1920* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 14, 16, and 17.



The population of El Paso County grew from 15,678 in 1890 to 24,886 in 1900, 52,599 in 1910, and 131,957 in 1930. Factors contributing to this growth included El Paso's regional, national, and international rising economic importance that included railroad transportation, proximity to the mining areas of México, New Mexico, and Arizona; its increased trade and gateway into México, and ranching—all of which required a large supply of cheap Mexican labor.<sup>26</sup> The 1916 completion of Elephant Butte Dam in New Mexico allowed the El Paso area to have a consistent water supply for manufacturing and farming (including cotton) to develop and flourish as well as much needed electricity to residents.<sup>27</sup> After 1900, El Paso began to shed its frontier image and develop as a modern municipality and significant industrial, commercial, and transportation center. The exodus of Mexican refugees fleeing the disruption of the Mexican Revolution contributed heavily to El Paso's population growth after 1910.<sup>28</sup>

The railroads in El Paso meant a new prosperity and greater job variety for African Americans. As the town grew into an important transportation center, many Black families arrived as railroad employees. On the trains they worked as day-coach porters, dining-car waiters, chefs, and sleeping-car porters. The day-coach porters made the shorter 300-mile runs to Tucson, Arizona; Albuquerque, New Mexico; and to Sanderson, Texas. Black porters functioned also as brakemen, jumping off the trains to switch tracks and to help direct the flow of traffic.<sup>29</sup> The hours were long and hard. For example, the men assigned to the California run

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>27</sup> H.H. Windsor, ed., "Elephant Butte Dam in New Hydroelectric Project," *Popular Mechanics* vol. 35 (1921): 568; Arthur Powell Davis, *Irrigation Works Constructed by the United States Government* (New York: J. Wiley, 1917), 237-251; Paul Ganster, David E. Lorey, *The U.S.-Mexican Border into the Twenty-first Century* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 43.

<sup>28</sup> Timmons, "El Paso," and Bryson, "El Paso County," *Handbook of Texas Online*.

<sup>29</sup> Charlotte Ivy, "Forgotten Color: Black Families in Early El Paso" *Password* vol. 35, no.1 (Spring 1990): 7.

worked a 240-hour month with no days off.<sup>30</sup> In the rail yard, Black men were employed as yard laborers, car repairmen and cleaners, boilermakers and cleaners, and locomotive inspectors with the boilermaker holding the most respected job in the yard.<sup>31</sup> In addition, Blacks in El Paso held positions such as barbers, laundresses, maids, janitors, school teachers, and mail carriers.

These were the economic and social conditions at the time of Lawrence Nixon's arrival in 1910. He established his initial medical office at 101 South Campbell Street, which was across the street from the court house.<sup>32</sup> A short time later, Nixon would live and work a few blocks away in the City's Second Ward district. Also known as the Segundo Barrio, it was a largely Mexican and Mexican American enclave, yet "a small percentage of the barrio's population was of other ethnicities, as indicated by some of the unusual surnames;" however, "they usually spoke Spanish as fluently as any Mexican."<sup>33</sup> Lawrence Nixon had no qualms about acquiring a new tongue. Nixon not only learned to speak Spanish fluently so as to communicate more effectively with his clients, he also wrote well enough to inscribe prescriptions for his Spanish-speaking patients.<sup>34</sup> Flora Wolf and Henry O. Flipper were other prominent Spanish-speaking African Americans who lived in this neighborhood. Wolf, also known as Florida J. Wolfe or "Lady Flo," was the elegant and genteel heiress to the Delaval James Beresford fortune. He

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<sup>30</sup> Tye, *Rising from the Rails*, 86.

<sup>31</sup> Ivy, "Forgotten Color" *Password*, 7.

<sup>32</sup> Bryson, *Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon and the White Primary*, 28.

<sup>33</sup> Gloria López-Stafford, *A Place in El Paso: A Mexican-American Childhood* (Albuquerque: University New Mexico Press, 1996), 7-8.

<sup>34</sup> Dr. Nixon's Spanish hand-written patient prescription was made-out to Ms. Mendoza of 12M-Smeltertown, see original in unprocessed and unnamed collection within the El Paso County Historical Society, 603 West Yandell Drive, El Paso, Texas.

lived at 417 S. Ochoa Street.<sup>35</sup> Flipper, the first African American cadet to graduate from the United States Military Academy at West Point, lived at 202 or 212 Third Street while employed as an office clerk for the local “Colored” YMCA.<sup>36</sup> Second Ward also housed the all-Black Douglass School and Second Baptist Church (located at the end of Virginia Street). The church was listed under the heading “Colored Churches” in *Coles*, the El Paso city directory during this time.<sup>37</sup> The Segundo Barrio was “a kind of Ellis Island for Mexicans” before they migrated to other parts of the United States. Some felt that the neighborhood was a “Little Mexico in the city of the pass, in the elbow of the state of Texas, at the bottom of the United States.”<sup>38</sup> Local lore has it that this unique district is where the term “Chicano” originated.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce and Labor—Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 20 April 1910 by Harvey A. Davis, Series T624, Roll 1548, Page 164 Subpage A, Line 13. In this census, Flora Wolf is listed as a thirty-nine year-old Black woman who was born in Virginia, as were both of her parents. As her physician, Lawrence A. Nixon signed Wolf’s death certificate in May 1913 when she died of tuberculosis. On Wolf’s life, see Drusilla E. Nixon, “Interview no. 194,” page 29-30; Eugene O. Porter, *Lord Beresford and Lady Flo* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1970); and Maceo C. Dailey, Jr., “Florida J. Wolfe (c.1867-1913),” *BlackPast.org: An Online Reference Guide to African American History*, <<http://www.blackpast.org/?q=aaw/wolfe-florida-j-c-1867-1913>> (accessed 18 April 2010).

<sup>36</sup> *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (2<sup>nd</sup> Ward, Precinct 2), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 12 January 1920, Series T625, Roll 1798, Page 199 Subpage B, Line 95. On Flipper’s life, see Don Cusic, *The Trials of Henry Flipper: The First Black Graduate of West Point* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009).

<sup>37</sup> López-Stafford, *A Place in El Paso*, 7-8.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> “They called all of us down in the Second Ward pochos. We would combine Chihuahua and Mexicano together and came up with the word Chicano,” see interview with Mike Romo conducted by Oscar J. Martínez, 1976, “Interview no. 215,” Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso. The early use of Chicana/o may have been derogatorily used to describe the poorest of Mexicans and Mexican Americans in the United States, yet Mexican Americans students and activists in the 1960s and 1970s reclaimed Chicano “as a term of ethnic pride, capitalizing it as an ethnonym and building a political and artistic movement around it that still endures.” For Mexican American women, “saying *She is Chicano* may be taken as emphasizing an identity with Chicano culture in general, while *She is Chicana* may suggest a feminist perspective on that identity,” see Catherine Pratt and Joseph P. Pickett, eds., *The American Heritage Guide to Contemporary Usage and Style* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005), 90.

## **El Paso's Douglass School**

The segregated Douglass School was an important fixture and institution for El Paso's small Black community. Black education in El Paso was established in March 1883 under the leadership of Andrew Morelock. Initially named Franklin School, its seven pupils met at the home of Joseph Snick, and in 1885 it moved to a church building on Seventh Street.<sup>40</sup> Renamed Douglass School in 1883 to honor Frederick Douglass (c1818-1895), one of the most prominent figures in United States' history—well-known abolitionist, women's suffragist, editor, orator, author, statesman and reformer.<sup>41</sup> In 1886, Alfred C. Murphy became the new principal, Douglass moved to a new structure on the corner of Fourth and Kansas, and was formally adopted into the city's public school system.<sup>42</sup> By 1900 enrollment was eighty-seven and in 1909 it was 260. The school moved again in 1920 to 101 S. Eucalyptus Street. Additional Douglass principals included W.R. Taylor, William Coleman (1908-1927), William Oliver Bundy (1927-1937), Olalee McCall, Emmanuel Campbell (1944-1952), William Marshall (1952-1952), and Edwin W. Mangram (1952-1956).<sup>43</sup> In 1956, Douglass permanently closed, and its

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<sup>40</sup> Maceo C. Dailey, Jr., ed., "I'm Building Me A Home: El Paso's African American Community, 1539-1998" (El Paso: Chase Bank of Texas, 1998), 15.

<sup>41</sup> Emmanuel Campbell, *The Development of Negro Education in El Paso* (El Paso: El Paso Public Schools, 1945), 6.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 7. Immediately prior to the 1886 move to their new school building on the corner of Fourth and Kansas Streets, the school had a temporary location at Second and Oregon Streets.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 4 and 7-10. Olalee McCall died September 14, 1957, see El Paso County Clerk, Olalee McCall Death Certificate, 14 September 1957, reel no. 0486, frame 1625. On William O. Bundy, see *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct no. 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 13 April 1930, Series T626, Roll 2328, Page 269 Subpage A, Line 2-8; and "4 Pioneer E.P. Blacks Are Profiled," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 13 February 1976, 18. On Alfred C. Murphy, see *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Schedule 1-Population, City of El Paso, El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 8 June 1900, Series T623, Roll 1631, Page 112 Subpage A, Line 37-42. On Emmanuel Campbell, see "Emmanuel Campbell, Principal of Douglass School, Resigns," *El Paso Times*, 21 May 1952, 1, newspaper clipping found in El Paso Public Library—downtown branch, Southwest Collection, "El Paso Vertical File – Blacks"; "School Principal Quits," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 21 May 1952, 9; "Principals Discuss High School Openings," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 16 August 1951, 17. On Edwin W. Mangram, see "Name New Principal," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 18 June 1952, 3.

building torn down due to federal and state integration policies.<sup>44</sup> Under the leadership of William O. Bundy, Douglass School incorporated for the first time a course on Black history into its curriculum.<sup>45</sup>

Bernice Love Wiggins (b.1897), one of the school's many accomplished graduates, wrote poetry that was published in the *El Paso Herald*, *Chicago Defender*, and the *Houston Informer*. Referred to as Texas' Paul Laurence Dunbar, Wiggins's poetry focused on the ordinary Black community.<sup>46</sup> She received her primary and secondary education at Douglass, which so influenced her that when she published a volume of poems in 1925, *Tuneful Tales*, it was dedicated to Douglass teacher Alice Lydia McGowan and the introduction was written by longtime Douglass principal William Coleman.<sup>47</sup>

Zephyr Chisom Carter was also another early and prominent graduate of Douglass School. She was born in El Paso in 1891, graduated Douglass in 1909, and Howard University in 1913. While at Howard University she helped establish the well-known Delta Sigma Theta Sorority along with twenty-one other Black women at Howard. Carter was a lover of the arts, a member of the Howard College Dramatics Club, and involved with the Literary and Social Club on campus. Carter joined Vashti Turley Murphy, Winona Cargile Alexander, and Madree Penn White as members of the Howard branch of the NAACP. *The Crisis* described Carter as the

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<sup>44</sup> Dailey, "I'm Building Me A Home," 15.

<sup>45</sup> Campbell, *The Development of Negro Education in El Paso*, 9.

<sup>46</sup> Bruce A. Glasrud and Merline Pitre, eds., *Black Women in Texas History* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 119.

<sup>47</sup> Bernice Love Wiggins, *Tuneful Tales*, edited by Maceo C. Dailey, Jr., and Ruthe Winegarten (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2002); Lorraine Elena Roses and Ruth Elizabeth Randolph, *The Harlem Renaissance and Beyond: Literary Biographies of 100 Black Women Writers, 1900-1945* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1990), 347-48.

“leading spirit in the organization.” After graduating from Howard, Carter moved back to Texas and taught briefly in San Antonio before relocating to California where she died in 1976.<sup>48</sup>

Coleman was a teacher and principal who was born in Georgia in 1870, attended Valdosta Academy, and earned his undergraduate degree from Brown University in 1897. He was a professor of modern languages at Benedict College, assistant principal at Colored High School in Fort Worth, and in 1907 he became principal of Douglass School. Coleman was a member of the El Paso NAACP, National Association of Teachers in Colored Schools, Texas Colored Teachers’ Association, Knights of Pythias, Knights Templar, Odd Fellows, and a registered Republican. He was also a Thirty-second degree Royal Arch Mason, Shriner, Grand Lecturer of Negro Masons in Texas, and Grand Director for the Court of Heorines of Jericho. In the 1910 census, Coleman is characterized as a thirty-seven year-old ‘mulatto’ public school teacher living at 518 Tornillo Street with his thirty-four year-old wife Emma Coleman, who is also classified as a ‘mulatto’ and a dress maker, and a thirty year-old lodger named Lida [sic] McGowen [sic], who was categorized as a ‘mulatto’ and a teacher at Douglass. Conceivably, this is the same person as Lydia McGowan to whom Bernice Love Wiggins dedicated her first and only book.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Gregory S. Parks, ed., *Black Greek-Letter Organizations in the Twenty-First Century: Our Fight Has Just Begun* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2008), 80-1. Other Douglass School graduates that would enroll at Howard University included William Perry Coleman (Doctor of Dental Surgery); Arthur Earl Burke, Vernon Collins (Medical College), and Clarence C.B. Friday (School of Liberal Arts), see *Howard University Catalogue, 1919-1920* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University, 1920), 251, 257, 259, 292, 294, and 298.

<sup>49</sup> *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce and Labor—Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 19 and 20 April 1910, Series T624, Roll 1548, Page 212 Subpage B, Line 89-91; *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Precinct 6), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 24 January 1920, Series T625, Roll 1798, Page 123 Subpage A, Line 21-2; and Frank Lincoln Mather, ed., *Who's Who of the Colored Race: A General Biographical Dictionary of Men and Women of African Descent* (Chicago: F.L. Mather, 1915), 73.

Lawrence A. Nixon's first child and only son, Lawrence Joseph Nixon, graduated from El Paso's Douglass High School in 1926 and then attended the University of California at Berkeley. Members of Lawrence J. Nixon's 1926 graduating class at Douglass High School included: Arthur Bradley, Booker Collins, W.C. Finney, Louise Moore, Elizabeth Potts, and Ruben Ray. Lawrence J. Nixon ultimately settled in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the late 1920s or early 1930s where he became a master printer-machinist for the famed liberal *Pittsburgh Courier* for over twenty-one years and for the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette/Press* for thirteen years.<sup>50</sup> At its height, the *Pittsburg Courier* was one of the most popular national African American newspapers and it influenced public opinion on a range of political and economic issues.<sup>51</sup>

Before Nixon could celebrate his first anniversary in El Paso the Mexican Revolution began and the city found itself thrust into the national spotlight due to its geographic importance and economic influence. Historian Gerald Horne describes the Mexican Revolution as an outgrowth to the oppression the poor and various indigenous groups had experienced for many decades that became "a rending upheaval of mass movements marked by profound anticlericalism, far-reaching land reform, deep seated hostility to United States imperialism, and democratic promise." The Mexican Revolution would result in nearly one million deaths due to combat, starvation, and disease dropping the nation's population from over 15 million in 1910 to

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<sup>50</sup> Obituary for Lawrence Joseph Nixon, Memorial Service Program (Pittsburgh: Samuel J. Jones Funeral Home, 24 February 2006), 3; Campbell, *The Development of Negro Education in El Paso*, 24. Lawrence Joseph Nixon died on February 16, 2006 and strangely—considering his father's own politics—the junior Nixon was very active in the ultra-right wing "Lyndon LaRouche Political Organization and made frequent trips to Harrisburg, PA and Washington, D.C. to support" this group's many causes.

<sup>51</sup> Andrew Bunie, *Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier: Politics and Black Journalism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974); Charles A. Simmons, *The African American Press: A History of News Coverage during National Crises with Special Reference to Four Black Newspapers, 1827-1965* (London: McFarland and Company, 1998), 43-50. As a child, Frances Hills, longtime African American El Paso resident, recalled the *Pittsburgh Courier* being commonplace in the city and fondly remembers regularly reading it and so we may conclude that Nixon's son may have first encountered the paper in his father's home, see Frances Hills, "Interview no. 751," page 24.

14.3 million in 1921. Between 300,000 to 1,000,000 Mexicans fled to the United States which dramatically swelled the number of Mexican/Mexican Americans already in the United States.<sup>52</sup>

Life in the western half of the United States was not the racial utopia that many believed it would be. Although Lawrence Nixon was fleeing Cameron due to its hostility toward Blacks, he had no illusions about moving further west and encountering a racially faultless setting. Many African American leaders felt the west held a more hospitable racial environment for Blacks. In 1913 W.E.B. Du Bois, the foremost intellectual in the Black community, visited the western states of Texas, California, and Washington.<sup>53</sup> He described Black people of the western region as “colored folk,” who “are educated; not college-bred, but out of the shackles of dense ignorance; they have pushed, for their very coming westward proves it; and, above all they are a part of the greater group and they know it.”<sup>54</sup> Du Bois was not the only leader optimistic regarding his view of the West. In 1925, when visiting Colorado and other western states as

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<sup>52</sup> Gerald Horne, *Black and Brown: African Americans and the Mexican Revolution, 1910-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 5. For a more detailed account of the Mexican Revolution, its different dimensions and major figures see, Friedrich Katz, *The Life and Times of Pancho Villa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Samuel Brink, *Emiliano Zapata: Revolution and Betrayal in Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995); Friedrich Katz, ed., *Riot, Rebellion, and Revolution: Rural Social Conflict in Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988); and Friedrich Katz, *The Secret War in Mexico: Europe, the United States, and the Mexican Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). El Paso's relationship to the Mexican Revolution is detailed in Charles H. Harris and Louis R. Sadler, *The Secret War in El Paso: Mexican Revolutionary Intrigue, 1906-1920* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009).

<sup>53</sup> William Edward Burghardt Du Bois (1868-1963) was a pioneering sociologist, historian, novelist, playwright, cultural critic, and preeminent American intellectual of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who committed his life to articulating the strivings of African Americans, demonstrating the significance of Black culture before the world, combating racial and social injustice, and an international spokesperson for peace and the rights of the oppressed. He helped found both the Niagara Movement and the NAACP, and fostered several Pan African Congresses. For twenty-four years Du Bois was editor of *The Crisis* and other progressive journals, see David Levering Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois: Biography of a Race, 1868-1919* (New York: H. Holt, 1993) and *Du Bois Central: Resources on the Life and Legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Special Collections and University Archives at the Du Bois Library), <<http://www.library.umass.edu/spcoll/dubois/>> (accessed 30 September 2009).

<sup>54</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “I Go A-Talking,” *Crisis* vol. 6, no. 3 (July 1913): 130-132; Du Bois, “The Great Northwest,” *Crisis* vol. 6, no. 5 (September 1913): 237-240. For more on Du Bois' trip to the West, see *Crisis* vol. 6, no. 4 (August 1913): 192-195; Lonnie G. Bunch, “A Past Not Necessarily Prologue: The Afro-American in Los Angeles,” in *20<sup>th</sup> Century Los Angeles: Power, Promotion, and Social Conflict* (Claremont, CA.: Regina Books, 1990), 101; Albert Broussard, *Black San Francisco: The Struggle for Racial Equality in the West, 1900-1954* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 73.



national secretary for the NAACP, James Weldon Johnson proclaimed that the region provided more prospects for Blacks “than any other section of the country.” Although he did not know why this was the case, he nevertheless was convinced of this notion when he said “I cannot attempt to analyze the reasons for this, but the fact remains that there is more opportunity for my race, and less prejudice against it in this section of the country than anywhere else in the United States.”<sup>55</sup> Yet, not all of the sentiments on Blacks in the West were welcoming or positive as one major western city daily commented, “there is room for only a limited number of colored people here.” The relatively small numbers of African Americans did not pose an immediate economic and political threat, but the newspaper warned “overstep that limit and there comes a clash in which the colored many must suffer. The few that are here do vastly better than they would do if their number were increased a hundredfold.”<sup>56</sup>

### **El Paso and African Americans**

El Paso County had a “Negro” population of 377 in 1890 and 620 in 1900. By 1910, the year of Lawrence Nixon’s arrival, the Black population in the county had more than doubled to 1,562. Of this figure 768 were men and 794 were women. Also, 1,196 were classified as “Black” and 366 were classified as “Mulatto.” There was a total population in the county of 52,599 which meant that Blacks were 2.97% of the overall population.<sup>57</sup> The city of El Paso had

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<sup>55</sup> *Denver Post*, June 24, 1925; quoted in Taylor, Quintard Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier: African Americans in the American West, 1528-1990* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), 17.

<sup>56</sup> *Seattle Daily Intelligencer*, 28 May 1879; quoted in Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 17.

<sup>57</sup> *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Reports by States, Statistics for Counties, Cities, and other Civil Divisions: Nebraska—Wyoming, Alaska, Hawaii, and Porto [sic] Rico, Population, Volume III (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1913), 816 and 817.

a Black population of 1,452 in 1910.<sup>58</sup> At the time of Lawrence Nixon's arrival into El Paso, the local newspaper had no qualms about printing derogatory words to describe African Americans. In characterizing Black participation in El Paso's annual Circus Day, city recorder Adrian Pool stated, "Circus day is one time the 'nigger' likes to celebrate and if his celebration includes a little over-indulgence without aggravated circumstances I wouldn't feel like fining."<sup>59</sup>

Despite the racism in El Paso, some saw the city and the region as a continual expression of westward movement, encouraged by many other African American leaders, that allowed the racially persecuted to ease their lot from the oppressiveness of the East, South, and Northern sections of the country. African Americans sought an imagined oasis of racial utopias that the west was thought to possess. These illusions included ignoring racial animosity in the region and overlooking that discriminatory "laws moved westward with the pioneers' wagons."<sup>60</sup> These pioneers of course included the white frontier people of El Paso, many of whom came from the racially divisive south where social norms between Blacks and whites were rigid and strictly

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<sup>58</sup> Work, *Negro Year Book and Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro*, 387.

<sup>59</sup> "Negro May Get Drunk In El Paso Circus Day," *El Paso Herald*, 28 September 1911, 3. No session of the "corporation court" was held Thursday afternoon, "owing to the absence of offenders." According to the 1910 El Paso census Adrian Pool was a Texas-born single thirty-three year-old white male lawyer, who was a "roomer" at 207 San Antonio Avenue. In the 1930 census, Pool continues to be a "lodger," and is a fifty-three year-old 'attorney' who lives on West Franklin Avenue. He was forty years-old when he was married. He became an El Paso County Court Judge, although the exact year is not known, see *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce and Labor—Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso, El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 3 May 1910, Series T624, Roll 1549, Page 41 Subpage B, Line 93; *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 15 April 1930 by Elizabeth H. Marshall, Series T626, Roll 2329, Page 206 Subpage B, Line 77; *The Southwestern Reporter*, vol. 190 (St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1917), 522 and 542; Adrian Pool, "Good Roads," Thirty-fifth Annual Convention, May 27-29, 1919, Convention Proceedings, *The Texas Bankers Record*, vol. 8, no. 10 (June 1919): 57-8; and J. Morgan Broadbudd, Jr., *The Legal Heritage of El Paso* (El Paso: Texas Western College Press, 1963), 156 and 177.

<sup>60</sup> The 1844 Iowa constitutional convention is just but one example of many in the west who had an adverse reaction to the presence or arrival of Blacks; Iowans adamantly felt that "there are strong reasons to induce the belief that the two races could not exist in the same government upon equality without discord and violence." It is clear that "the intrepid pioneers who crossed the western plains carried the virus of racism with them," see William L. Katz, *The Black West* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971), 50, 54, and 284.

enforced. For Lawrence Nixon and other African Americans in El Paso, it was no different. They experienced the joys and pains, laughter and sorrows, and the successes and failures of the human odyssey. Yet, the small number of African Americans in El Paso did not mean they were not a threat to the status quo or precluded from absorbing the blows of racism.<sup>61</sup>

Animosity towards Blacks in El Paso can be seen in the sentiments expressed by police court Judge Adrian Pool when he stated the following upon sentencing Jasper Smith, an African American:

Gentlemen, I am sorry that the maximum fine in this court is but \$100; that, however, is the limit, and the court can go no further. Personally, however, I can warn Smith that if he can get out of the country by morning, he had better do it. There are many who would not hesitate to start a little bonfire in which Smith would be the chief actor. And I might also add that there are some that would resign office to participate in the affair.<sup>62</sup>

Smith's crime that would merit not only the barbaric act of a lynching—a public one at that—but the boastful suggestion that a city official would resign to participate in the lynching: making an “insulting proposal” to a white woman. The one-hundred-dollar fine already levied against Smith in the presence of a packed courtroom “buzzing with ill controlled anger” was not sufficient for such a minor offense, but oddly, death surely was for a Black man who violated the tenuous racial norms of this border city.<sup>63</sup> Oddly, nearly two decades earlier the border also

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<sup>61</sup> Anti-Black attitudes in El Paso were not restricted to civilians, but to Black troops as well. In 1900 soldiers of the Twenty-fifth Infantry on assignment in El Paso fought townspeople. An officer sent to El Paso to investigate the episode observed that Black troops were arrested for offenses that, when committed by whites, were overlooked, and he added that African Americans were abused even when they behaved “with perfect propriety.” “There is unquestionably a very strong prejudice throughout all of the old slave states against colored troops,” the officer concluded. “It is not because the colored soldier is disorderly—for as a rule, they behave better than white soldiers...but because they are soldiers.” The War Department cancelled the maneuvers and sent the Black troops to Fort Brown instead, see Garna L. Christian, *Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas, 1899-1917* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1995), 46-68 and 92-6; and Taylor, *In Search of the Racial Frontier*, 176-77.

<sup>62</sup> *El Paso Herald*, 1 November 1911, quoted in David D. Romo, *Ringside Seat to a Revolution: An Underground Cultural History of El Paso and Juárez: 1893-1923* (El Paso: Cinco Puntos Press, 2005), 205.

<sup>63</sup> Romo, *Ringside Seat to a Revolution*, 203.

allowed for Black men to fraternize with white women permitting a more fluid nuanced relationship when compared to other regions of the South. In 1893, Black men “engaged in militant protest” against enforcement of a Texas state law barring miscegenation which would have “complicated the lives of all those who had married women of Mexican descent,” who for legal purposes were deemed white.<sup>64</sup>

### **Prelude to the El Paso NAACP Branch**

Although their numbers were modest, El Paso’s African American community had been very active in their quest for racial equality and dignity. Part of that activism included creating a lyceum three years after Lawrence Nixon’s arrival in the city. The term lyceum has its origins within Greek culture where it was the site of Aristotle’s Peripatetic school in Athens 336 BCE.<sup>65</sup> Lyceum was one of the main public gymnasia in Athens, named after the sanctuary dedicated to Apollo—the Greek version of the African Netcher Heru—and Asclepius, the Greek name for the African scholar Imhotep. In the fourth and fifth centuries BCE various Sophists, as well as Socrates, lectured in the Lyceum.<sup>66</sup> Lyceums in the United States flourished in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some lyceums were important in the development of adult education, including improving the social, intellectual, and moral fabric of society. Prominent individuals such as Frederick Douglass, John B. Gough, Ralph Waldo Emerson,

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<sup>64</sup> *El Paso Daily Times*, 10 October 1893, 7; *El Paso Daily Times*, 18 October 1893, 7; quoted in Marilyn T. Bryan “The Economic, Political, and Social Status of the Negro in El Paso,” *Password* vol. 13, no. 3 (Fall 1968): 86 n89-91; *El Paso Evening Tribune*, 9 October 1893; quoted in Horne, *Black and Brown*, 9.

<sup>65</sup> Angela G. Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century United States* (E. Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2005), 3-6.

<sup>66</sup> Nigel Guy Wilson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece* (London: Routledge, 2006), 431; Anthony T. Browder, *Nile Valley Contributions to Civilization: Exploding the Myths*, vol. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Karmic Guidance, 1998), 126, 155-56.

Henry David Thoreau, Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Victoria Woodhull, Anna Dickinson, Mark Twain, and William Lloyd Garrison all spoke at lyceums.<sup>67</sup>

For African Americans, who had a tremendous thirst for education after the Civil War, lyceums throughout the country provided members with the opportunity to explore ideas for racial uplift. Though led by community elites, lyceums were open to all classes. Many African American lyceums were literary and cultural clubs that sponsored lectures, public meetings, travel tours, held literary discussions, and participated in charitable and civic activities. Some Black lyceum meetings included poetry and dramatic readings and performances, musical presentations, book discussions and lectures. Participation in lyceums provided members with opportunities to practice public speaking and debating skills, to receive constructive feedback and group recognition, and to develop friendships, fellowship, and professional networking.<sup>68</sup> Activist, civil rights leader, and anti-lynching proponent Ida B. Wells Barnett described lyceum meetings in her diary entries of the late 1880s and early 1890s by noting that members listened to lectures on issues of race and racism, difficulties of Africa, readings from *Macbeth*, and a speech by prominent former Louisiana Republican Governor Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback, along with her own presentations on a variety of topics.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century United States*, 21, 30-2, 34, 36-9, 42, 116, 132, 134, 155, and 175.

<sup>68</sup> Jeffrey B. Perry, *Hubert Harrison: The Voice of Harlem Radicalism, 1883-1918* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2009), 70; and Nina Mjagkij, ed., *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Associations* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2001), 89, 312, 328, 330 and 525. Ray, *The Lyceum and Public Culture in the Nineteenth Century United States*, 113-42, 119, and 176-77.

<sup>69</sup> Miriam DeCosta-Willis, ed., *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells: An Intimate Portrait of the Activist as a Young Woman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 22, 34, 51, 110, 121, 129, and 145. Recent books on Ida B. Wells include Mia Bay, *To Tell the Truth Freely: The Life of Ida B. Wells* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009) and Paula Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions: Ida B. Wells and the Campaign against Lynching* (New York: Amistad, 2008). Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback was the grandfather to well-known Harlem Renaissance writer Jean Toomer, author of *Cane* (1923). During Reconstruction Pinchback served as Louisiana state senator and lieutenant governor prior to becoming governor for one month (December 1872–January 1873) and then elected to the United States House of Representatives and United States Senate, but prevented from serving by Democrats. James

The El Paso Lyceum and Civic Improvement Society (EPLCIS) was established in September 1913 by various members of the African American community. Officers of EPLCIS included Jasper B. Williams (President), Frank D. Burdett (Vice President), Le Roy White (Secretary), Jerry B. Baldwin (Corresponding Secretary), William Coleman (Treasurer), William M. Sublett (Sergeant at Arms) and Mack H. Carmichael (Musical Director).<sup>70</sup> In 1920 Jasper B. Williams was a thirty-eight year-old druggist who lived on Park Street with his wife Clara Belle Williams (thirty-two years-old) and their sons, Jasper F. Williams (b.1918) and James B. Williams (b.1919).<sup>71</sup> Jerry B. Baldwin was born and raised in Louisiana and at the time of the 1920 census is a thirty-eight year-old barber who lived with his twenty year-old wife at 2918 Frutas Avenue.<sup>72</sup> William M. Sublett was a thirty-eight year-old African American from Texas who was a “lodger” on Tays Street and was employed as a letter carrier for the United States Post Office.<sup>73</sup> Also in the 1920 United States El Paso census, Mack H. Carmichael is listed as thirty-six year-old African American from Texas who was a “lodger” on Tays Street and was employed as a music teacher, focusing on the piano. Presumably Carmichael was working for

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Haskins, *Pinckney Benton Stewart Pinchback* (New York: Macmillan, 1973) and Nicholas Lemann, *Redemption: The Last Battle of the Civil War* (New York: Macmillan, 2007), 196-99.

<sup>70</sup> No additional information could be found on Frank D. Burdett. On Le Roy White and William Coleman, see earlier footnotes in this chapter.

<sup>71</sup> *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Voting Precinct 6), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 23 January 1920, Series T625, Roll 1798, Page 120, Line 65-68; and *Hudspeth's 1923 El Paso City Directory* (El Paso: Hudspeth Directory Company, 1923), 848 and 891. In this city directory, Jasper B. Williams is listed as the only “colored” druggist. His pharmacy was located at 401 S. Oregon Street.

<sup>72</sup> *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Voting Precinct 10), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 29 January 1920, Series T625, Roll 1798, Page 223 Subpage A, Line 6-7. Wife’s name is indiscernible due to the enumerator’s poor script.

<sup>73</sup> *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Voting Precinct 6), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 13 February 1920 by Henry Wise, Series T625, Roll 1798, Page 138, Line 17.

himself, as the census does not indicate if he was affiliated with an institution such as Douglass School.<sup>74</sup>

The EPLCIS met every Sunday afternoon at the Masonic Temple located at 409 S. Virginia Street.<sup>75</sup> Although it is not altogether clear what was the impetus to organize the EPLCIS, some reasons may include the African American community in the city wanting to become a more formally cohesive unified group, so as not to lose a sense of who they were culturally and ethnically. Their actual numbers were very low in this growing southwestern city, so that probably encouraged them to become more culturally active and unified in their activities even more so than communities back East where African Americans resided in much larger numbers. Or, Black El Pasoans simply could have organized the EPLCIS for the very same reasons other Black lyceums were created throughout the country. After just a few meetings they were spurred into action to take the bold step of seeking membership into the premier civil rights organization: the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

### **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People**

The NAACP had been established in New York City in 1909—the centenary of Lincoln’s birth.<sup>76</sup> The NAACP founders, nearly all of whom were white, wanted to bring attention not only to Lincoln’s presidential accomplishments, but also point to the fact that such an organization was needed due in large measure to address issues related to the race riot that

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<sup>74</sup> *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Voting Precinct 6), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 13 February 1920 by Henry Wise, Series T625, Roll 1798, Page 138, Line 16.

<sup>75</sup> Letter from Jerry B. Baldwin to Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois, November 27, 1913. LOCMD, NAACP Papers, Part I, Branch Files: El Paso, Texas, 1913-1925, Box G-202, Folder 2.

<sup>76</sup> Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 390.

occurred six months earlier in Lincoln's adopted hometown, Springfield, Illinois.<sup>77</sup> The children of white abolitionists, along with white Jews and white liberals came together out of genuine concern for the plight of Blacks in the United States. They were horrified about the attacks upon African Americans in a northern city after having been accustomed for decades to seeing Black overt oppression restricted to southern states. The shock and fear among liberal whites was that the barbarity of the southern treatment of its Black citizenry would now spread northward. In May 1909 the organization convened for the first time and invited some progressive African Americans to its initial meeting, including Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Mary Church-Terrell, Archibald Grimké, Kelly Miller, Bishop Alexander Walters, William Monroe Trotter, William Scarborough, and W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois would be the lone African American when appointments to the executive board were made and fulltime paid positions were assigned.<sup>78</sup>

In its infancy the organization struck a delicate chord between the conservative strategies of Booker T. Washington, Tuskegee Institute principal, author, and civil rights leader and the militant approach of William Monroe Trotter (1872-1934), civil rights activist, newspaper editor, and publisher.<sup>79</sup> Trotter helped establish the Niagara Movement (1905) and National Equal Rights League (1908).<sup>80</sup> The Niagara Movement was instrumental in the later formation of the NAACP. Along with George Forbes, Trotter co-founded the *Boston Guardian* in the same building that had once housed William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*. The *Boston Guardian* quickly became a nemesis for Booker T. Washington, as Du Bois recalled, "This opposition

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<sup>77</sup> Roberta Senechal de la Roche, *In Lincoln's Shadow: The 1908 Race Riot in Springfield, Illinois* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).

<sup>78</sup> Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 386-407.

<sup>79</sup> Stephen R. Fox, *The Guardian of Boston: William Monroe Trotter* (New York: Atheneum, 1970).

<sup>80</sup> Information on both of these important civil rights organizations can be found in Fox, *The Guardian of Boston*, 81-114; and Mjagkij, *Organizing Black America*, 456-57 and 523-25.



[against Washington] began to become vocal in 1901 when Trotter and Forbes began the publication of the *Boston Guardian*. The *Guardian* was bitter, satirical, and personal; but it was earnest, and it published facts. It attracted wide attention among colored people; it circulated among them all over the country; it was quoted and discussed. I did not wholly agree with the *Guardian*, and indeed only a few Negroes did, but nearly all read it and were influenced by it.” Trotter famously chastised Woodrow Wilson during a fall 1913 meeting at the White House when, despite promises to the contrary, Wilson segregated the federal workforce.<sup>81</sup>

The NAACP challenged institutional white racism through public protests, demands for political participation, legal campaigns that focused on lynching and the redress of other racist assaults, and their official organ: *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*.<sup>82</sup> When it began in November 1910 the first issue had a circulation of 1,000, a year later it would be 9,000 and within five years the circulation jumped to 35,000. Du Bois fought for its establishment and was its first editor who believed that Booker T. Washington “had a tight hold of most” of the Black press, which resulted in the NAACP getting “a pretty raw deal from the colored press and none at all from the white papers.”<sup>83</sup> Despite the South’s insistent claims of the organization being too radical, or in later years dominated by communist sympathizers, the fact is the NAACP operated within the legal structure—primarily the court system—and “remained firmly committed to the

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<sup>81</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept* (Edison: Transaction, 1984), 72-73; Fox, *The Guardian of Boston*, 179-85; and Christine A. Lunardini, “Standing Firm: William Monroe Trotter’s Meetings with Woodrow Wilson, 1913-1914” *Journal of Negro History* vol. 64, no. 3 (Summer 1979): 244-64; William Harrison, “Phylon Profile IX: William Monroe Trotter—Fighter” *Phylon* vol. 7, no. 3 (Fall 1946): 237-45.

<sup>82</sup> Manfred Berg, “*The Ticket to Freedom: The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005), xiv-xv.

<sup>83</sup> Abby A. Johnson and Ronald M. Johnson, *Propaganda and Aesthetics: The Literary Politics of African American Magazines in the Twentieth Century* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1979), 32-33 and 35.

institutional and normative framework provided by the United States Constitution and the American political system.”<sup>84</sup>

### **El Paso's NAACP Branch**

Blacks in El Paso found themselves in a social and racial climate that precipitated their attempts to write the national headquarters of the NAACP in New York and ask for the establishment of a local outlet to fight against Jim Crow and racial oppression in the border city. Within two months after having been formed in September 1913, members of the EPLCIS wrote the New York headquarters of the NAACP requesting to become an official branch.<sup>85</sup> The NAACP responded to their request on December 5 stating “we are gratified to learn that you are interested in the work of this Association and that the El Paso Lyceum and Civic Improvement Society is contemplating becoming formally identified with us.” In this initial letter to the EPLCIS, the NAACP was careful to stress that “you cannot announce yourselves as a branch until your constitution has been formally approved.”<sup>86</sup> Months later, May 1914, the national office had mailed the constitution and bylaws that allowed the El Paso branch to be officially chartered. The local members planned their first meeting the following month, Sunday June 14, where their officers were named: Jasper B. Williams (President), Le Roy White (Secretary), and William Coleman (Treasurer). The El Paso NAACP executive committee consisted of Lawrence A. Nixon (Chairman), Sylvester M. Collins, Le Roy W. Washington, John F. Kelley, John Slater,

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<sup>84</sup> Berg, *The Ticket to Freedom*, xv.

<sup>85</sup> Letter from Jerry B. Baldwin to Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois, 27 November 1913, LOCMD, NAACP Papers, Part I, Branch Files: El Paso, Texas, 1913-1925, Box G-202, Folder 2.

<sup>86</sup> Letter from NAACP to Jerry B. Baldwin, 5 December 1913, LOCMD, NAACP Papers, Part I, Branch Files: El Paso, Texas, 1913-1925, Box G-202, Folder 2.

and J.H. Donnell.<sup>87</sup> This initial step by El Paso Blacks was an important one. “Organization is sacrifice,” emphasized W.E.B. Du Bois to his readers in the April 1915 *Crisis*: “It is sacrifice of opinions, of time, of work and of money, but it is, after all, the cheapest way of buying the most priceless of gifts—freedom and efficiency.”<sup>88</sup>

### **Booker T. Washington Visits El Paso**

The establishment of an NAACP branch—what was then considered one of the more aggressive or even radical civil rights organizations—was a tremendous ideological shift that occurred in a span of two years among Blacks in El Paso. In September 1911, less than two years after Lawrence Nixon’s arrival, this tiny Black border community welcomed Booker T. Washington, one of the most celebrated African American leaders of his day. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Washington had become the most influential African American in the United States, if not the world.<sup>89</sup> This was an extraordinary accomplishment

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<sup>87</sup> Letter from Le Roy White to Ms. May Childs Nerney of the NAACP, 15 June 1914, LOCMD, NAACP Papers, Part I, Branch Files: El Paso, Texas, 1913-1925, Box G-202, Folder 2.

In 1930 John Kelley was a fifty year-old janitor for a shoe parlor, his wife Lena Kelley was a forty-five year-old homemaker, and they had a thirteen year-old son named Rogers Kelley. *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 7 and 8 April 1930 by Edith A. Finch, Series T626, Roll 2328, Page 105, Line 71-3.

Sylvester M. Collins was an African American mail carrier for the post office, see *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Voting Precinct 6), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 21 January 1920, Series T625, Roll 1798, Page 116, Line 13-17; *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 4 April 1930 by Margaret E. Bowden, Series T626, Roll 2328, Page 3, Line 54-7.

J.H. Donnell is listed in 1910 Census without his first name fully spelled-out. The forty-three year-old porter of a bank was married to forty year-old Mary Donnell who had no occupation listed, and they had a twenty-one year-old son, Clayton Donnell who also was not employed, see *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce and Labor—Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso, El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 22 April 1910, Series T624, Roll 1548, Page 86, Line 8-10.

<sup>88</sup> Lewis, *W.E.B. Du Bois*, 513.

<sup>89</sup> Michael Bieze, *Booker T. Washington and the Art of Self Representation* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 5-6. This publication is among many others that have begun to reexamine Booker T. Washington and complicate

considering Washington's humble origins. Born into the peculiar institution of slavery in 1856, Washington rose to prominence after becoming principal of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama and delivering his famous 1895 Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition speech before a segregated audience.<sup>90</sup>

Booker T. Washington arrived in El Paso from Arizona on Sunday evening September 24, 1911.<sup>91</sup> It is not known whether Lawrence Nixon was in attendance either to meet Washington upon his arrival or to hear him speak publicly while Washington was in El Paso—his first and only visit to the border city. One would think that with the prominent position that Nixon held within the Black community—by being one of the few, if not the only Black physician in the city—that he would not only have been present to hear Washington speak, but to play a role in the planning of the events prior to or participate in the execution of the day's

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the conventional wisdom that Washington was simply an accommodationist who did more harm than good, see Maceo C. Dailey Jr., "Neither 'Uncle Tom' nor 'Accommodationist': Booker T. Washington, Emmett Jay Scott, and Constructionalism," *Atlanta History* vol. 38, no. 4 (winter 1995): 20-33; Andrew Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Michael B. Boston, *The Business Strategy of Booker T. Washington: Its Development and Implementation* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010); David H. Jackson, *Booker T. Washington and the Struggle Against White Supremacy: The Southern Educational Tours, 1908-1912* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Robert J. Norrell, *Up From History: The Life of Booker T. Washington* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009); Raymond Smock, *Booker T. Washington: Black Leadership in the Age of Jim Crow* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009); Michael R. West, *The Education of Booker T. Washington: American Democracy and the Idea of Race Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008); Lee H. Walker, Diane C. Bast, and T.S. Karnick, *Booker T. Washington: A Re-Examination* (Chicago: Heartland Institute, 2008); and Kenneth M. Hamilton, *Booker T. Washington: America's Early Memory of a National Icon* (working title, forthcoming).

<sup>90</sup> Washington used the occasion to exploit the white South's legend of the content slave, which whites transformed into a myth of Black loyalty during the Civil War. In addition, Washington advised white-controlled business and industry to entrust its destiny to Blacks, saying, "Cast down your bucket...among the eight millions of Negroes whose habits you know, whose fidelity and love you have tested in days when to have proved treacherous meant the ruin of your friends." Also, Washington exploited the South's xenophobia with respect to European emigrants, promising a loyalty "that no foreigner can approach," and casting suspicion on those "of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits," see Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought: Frederick Douglass, Alexander Crummell, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 152.

<sup>91</sup> *El Paso Herald*, 25 September 1911, 8.

activities on Washington's arrival.<sup>92</sup> In all likelihood, Nixon heard Washington speak as a student during his last semester at Meharry when Washington visited the campus on January 7, 1906 and gave four addresses throughout the day, the last of which was entitled "Young Men, Keep Yourselves Clean."<sup>93</sup> For Washington's El Paso visit, Nixon was not mentioned in the press as having been present, acknowledged, or part of the formal events.

Although Nixon may not have been a visible or vocal community leader during his early years in El Paso, in some parts of the south Black doctors were accepted as spokespersons because few were what one would call "race men." Physicians instead tended to be "racial diplomats," those who did not accept Jim Crow as either right or just but who had learned to work within the South's racist caste system, developing successful institutions and businesses within the "separate but equal" myth.<sup>94</sup> Historian Thomas Ward reminds us that many physicians actually depended upon aspects of segregation for their livelihoods and were therefore not as willing as other Black leaders to try to tear the Jim Crow system down at all costs. This conservative attitude not only made physicians more acceptable to whites as race leaders, but

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<sup>92</sup> Nixon is the only "Colored" or Black doctor listed in the business section under the heading "Physicians" of the 1911 El Paso city directory, see *Worley's 1911 City Directory of El Paso Texas*, CLSSC-UTEP. Prentiss S. Gathings, an African American physician who graduated from Meharry Medical College the same year as Lawrence A. Nixon, practiced medicine in El Paso for about two years, 1907 to 1909, before moving to Oklahoma, see *Meharry Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Colleges of Walden University Catalogue of 1907-1908 and Announcement for 1908-1909* (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce Company Printers, 1908), 39; *Meharry Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Colleges of Walden University Catalogue of 1908-1909 and Announcement for 1909-1910* (Nashville: Marshall and Bruce Company Printers, 1909), 39; *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce and Labor—Bureau of the Census, City of Lawton (4<sup>th</sup> Ward), Comanche County, Oklahoma, enumerated on 15-18 April 1910, Series T624, Roll 1248, Page 269 Subpage A, Line 4; and *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of Lawton (Ward 1), Comanche County, Oklahoma, enumerated on 27-28 January 1920, Series T625, Roll 1458, Page 100, Line 85-7. Dr. Sterling Langdon Smith was an African American physician and surgeon who also practiced in El Paso, yet the time period is unknown, see Dailey, "I'm Building Me A Home," 35.

<sup>93</sup> *Meharry News* vol. 4, no. 1 (February 1906): 3.

<sup>94</sup> Daniel C. Thompson, *The Negro Leadership Class* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 44, 68-70, and 74-76. For a brief definition of the three types of Black leadership, see Rufus Burrow, Jr., *James H. Cone and Black Liberation Theology* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1994), 227 n130.

also often allowed these “racial diplomats” to get more for their communities from the white society than aggressive “race men”—Black men who were committed to racial uplift through social, economic, and political means.<sup>95</sup> They were usually viewed as agitators who were thorns in the side of the racial status quo, standing on firm principles and refusing to capitulate under the weight of white supremacy, domination, and control. Unfortunately, the idea and phrase leaves out the contributions of Black women to the struggle of racial advancement.<sup>96</sup>

While it is unknown whether Lawrence Nixon attended Booker T. Washington’s event in El Paso, he certainly must have known about it and learned what took place. The African Americans who did attend conceivably were his associates, friends, and perhaps patients. Prior to speaking publicly Washington visited the home of Charles W. Bradley, owner of two barbershops, and his wife Geneva Bradley who was a teacher at the segregated Douglass School. Washington then had dinner with a number of Black women at the home of Georgia Ann Perett.<sup>97</sup> Washington was a staunch supporter of the temperance movement, yet dined at this

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<sup>95</sup> Ward, *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South*, 273.

<sup>96</sup> Hazel Carby gives an excellent critique of the sexist notion of “Race Men” in Hazel V. Carby, *Race Men* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 1-8.

<sup>97</sup> “Booker Washington Discusses The Negro In South And His Need” *El Paso Herald*, 25 September 1911, 8; “Noted Negro Speaks Here” *El Paso Morning Times*, 25 September 1911, 5. The *El Paso Herald* states that “A. Perett” resides at 507 South Campbell Street and the *El Paso Morning Times* indicates the same address for the Peretts [*sic*]. In the 1900 census Arnold Perett is described as a Black man who lives at 505 S. Campbell with his wife Georgia A. Perett, who is also Black. Georgia A. Perett was born February 1867 in Texas and Arnold Perett was born October 1864. They both lived with Ann Godfrey (Georgia Ann Perett’s mother) and their eleven year-old niece, Elsie Naderman [*sic*], who was born in November 1888. In the 1910 census, Georgia Ann Perett is labeled as “Mulatto,” and by 1920, the Perett family continues to live at 505 South Campbell and they have four nieces and nephews living with them, see *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900 Population Schedule*, Schedule No. 1—Population, City of El Paso (Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 9 June 1900 by Oscar D. Owen, Series T623, Roll 1631, Page 114 Subpage A, Line 40-43; *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Labor Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso, El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 27 April 1910 by Romaldo [*sic*] Mais, Series T624, Roll 1548, Page 83 Subpage A, Line 12-19; and *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Voting Precinct 4), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 19 January 1920 by Alphonse J. Rios, Series T625, Roll 1798, Page 14 Subpage A, Line 20-5.

home despite Arnold Perett, Georgia's husband, being a Saloon Keeper.<sup>98</sup> Local Blacks who were also on the platform at the Sunday night address of Booker T. Washington in the El Paso Theater included William Coleman, principal at Douglass School; Frederick D. Clopton, a teacher at Douglass School; Charles W. Bradley, barbershop owner; Emory Douglass Williams, Las Cruces barbershop owner and farmer; Le Roy White, barber at Meroney's barbershop; Henry R. Wilson, Reverend at Second Baptist Church; Lemuel M. Sanders, Reverend at Visitors Chapel; Reverend E.L. Russell, Reverend L.J. Jacks, Amos Williams, janitor at City Hall; Jasper Williams, messenger with the Immigration Service; and William M. Sublett, mail carrier for the post office.<sup>99</sup> The El Paso theater stage was 36 feet deep and 75 feet wide, and the proscenium arch was 29 feet high and 36 feet wide.<sup>100</sup>

Other "Bookerites" of El Paso who were in attendance included: Exel T. Perrett, a railroad switchman; James G. Browne, Reverend at East El Paso Methodist Episcopal Church; Charles S. Long, Pastor at Visitors Chapel; and George W. Meroney, barbershop owner.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> On the issue of race, racism, Booker T. Washington, and the Temperance Movement see, Doris M. Provine, *Unequal Under Law: Race in the War on Drugs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 49-58; and Hanes Walton, Jr. and James E. Taylor, "Blacks and the Southern Prohibition Movement" *Phylon* vol. 32, no. 3 (Fall 1971): 247-59. On Arnold Perett being an El Paso Saloon Keeper, see *Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900 Population Schedule*, Schedule No. 1—Population, City of El Paso (Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 9 June 1900 by Oscar D. Owen, Series T623, Roll 1631, Page 114 Subpage A, Line 40.

<sup>99</sup> *El Paso Herald*, 25 September 1911, 8. Rev. Henry R. Wilson resided at 509 Tays and Second Baptist Church was located at 401 S. Virginia, see "The Texas Capital: Regular Correspondence of *The Age*..." *New York Age*, 7 September 1911; and *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce and Labor—Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated 26 April 1910 by Harry A. Davis, series T624, roll 1548, page 173 subpage A, line 4-7; and *Worley's 1911 City Directory of El Paso, Texas*.

<sup>100</sup> *El Paso Herald*, 27 February 1907, quoted in Cynthia F. Haines, *Showtime!: From Opera Houses to Picture Palaces in El Paso* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 2006), 39.

<sup>101</sup> Jackson, *Booker T. Washington and the Struggle Against White Supremacy*, 132. 'Bookerite' is a phrase used to describe those who endorsed Washington's particular strategy of racial advancement. Frederick Clopton lived at 1015 E. Overland and would serve as Secretary of the El Paso NAACP; Charles W. Bradley and Geneva Bradley lived at 1209 Wyoming and their two barbershops were located at 114 Texas and 110 San Francisco; William Coleman lived at 518 Tornillo; James G. Browne lived at 1013 E. 2<sup>nd</sup>; Charles S. Long's Visitors Chapel Church was located at 501 Tays; another Black church in El Paso at this time was Phillips Chapel which was located

These were all members of the respectable Black working and aspiring middle class of El Paso who heard Washington assert to them:

The outside world hears of the worst things that take place between the black man and the white man in the South...In nine-tenths of the cases, the two races in Texas are living together in peace and harmony, but the world does not hear of this. It hears about the lynching, of the burnings, about the mob. In a large degree, as a race, we must learn to advertise our friends more and our enemies less.<sup>102</sup>

Washington spoke these words to a standing room capacity crowd, most of whom were white and covered nearly all of the rental costs for the El Paso Theater, formerly named the Texas Grand. Then managed by Crawford and Rich, the Theater was located at 415 Texas Avenue and had a seating capacity of approximately 1,500. At the time of Washington's visit, the audience at the El Paso Theater was about one-third African American. Eighty-five percent of the Theater rental was paid for by the remaining two-third presumably white majority.<sup>103</sup> In addition, Washington further elaborated:

Is it possible for these two races unlike in color, unlike in tradition, to live together in peace and harmony for all time?...there is no greater enemy today to a state than the man, whether he be black or white, who will spend his time stirring up racial strife...there is no

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at 301 Tornillo; George W. Meroney lived at 504-1/2 Broadway and his barbershop was located at 116 E. 2<sup>nd</sup>; William M. Sublette resided at 1201 East 4<sup>th</sup>; Le Roy White was Lawrence Nixon's good friend who moved with Nixon from Cameron, Texas. White lived at 1015 East Overland and was employed as a barber at George W. Meroney's barbershop; Amos Williams lived at 1009 E. Missouri; Jasper Williams lived at 1015 E. Overland, the same residence as Le Roy White; Douglass School was located at the NW corner of S. Kansas and East 4<sup>th</sup>, see *Worley's 1911 City Directory of El Paso, Texas*, 27, 28, 145, 176, 178, 353, 463, 496, 498, 499, 501, and 516. Rev. Lemuel M. Sanders lived at 415 Park, see *Worley's 1912 City Directory of El Paso, Texas*, 33 and 422. On Frederick Clopton's NAACP membership and title, see Work, *Negro Year Book and Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro*, 392.

<sup>102</sup> *El Paso Herald*, 25 September 1911, 8.

<sup>103</sup> The Texas Grand was built in 1907 with 500 seats located on the first floor, 500 on the second floor, and between 400 to 600 in the gallery (depending how close people sat together). The theater building was four stories tall with the theater occupying three of the stories. Ironically, this would be the same theater that would air the terribly racist film, *The Birth of A Nation*, for the first time in El Paso, see *El Paso Herald*, 10 February 1906; *El Paso Herald*, 27 February 1907; quoted in Farah Haines, *Showtime!*, 38-9, 40, and 122. On the racial make-up of the attendees and financiers of the rental see "Booker T. Washington Ends Tour of Texas," *New York Age*, 12 October 1911, 1. On the location and managers of the theater see *Worley's 1911 City Directory of El Paso Texas*, 215. Washington often spoke to both Blacks and white audiences, see "Dr. Washington Tours Arkansas: Both Negroes and Whites Turn Out In Large Numbers to Greet Nation's Greatest Citizen," *Afro-American Ledger* (Baltimore), 21 September 1911, 1.



greater friend today to a state than the man, whether he be black or white, who uses his talents and influence to promote the progress of both races and to see to it that peace and goodwill are maintained.<sup>104</sup>

As a clever and skillful chameleon, Washington used psychology to maneuver whites and their harbored racist views and prejudices in order to benefit The Race (African Americans). Washington's El Paso address reflected advice no different than in his previous speeches. He preached thrift, hard work, and the folly of racial antagonism that ultimately leads to little gains for the masses of Blacks in the South at this unique juncture in United States history. Just four years earlier, Washington even asked whites for their assistance in educating the infamous Black Mammy so "that she shall be morally fit to come into contact with that pure and innocent [white] child!"<sup>105</sup>

After Washington finished his talk at the El Paso Theater, he gave addresses at the First Methodist Church and at the Second Baptist Church. The next morning Washington crossed into Ciudad Juárez and met with Mayor Guillermo Alvarez and the city council, before moving onward to San Antonio.<sup>106</sup> Accompanying Washington to Ciudad Juárez were Dr. R.E. Park of Boston, Massachusetts; Douglass School principal William M. Coleman, barber Charles W. Bradley and interpreter G.O. Sanders, both of El Paso; and barber Emory Douglass Williams of

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<sup>104</sup> *El Paso Herald*, 25 September 1911, 8; Jackson, *Booker T. Washington and the Struggle Against White Supremacy*, 133.

<sup>105</sup> Bobby L. Lovett, *The African-American History of Nashville, Tennessee, 1780-1930* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1999), 239.

<sup>106</sup> On Washington visiting Ciudad Juárez, see *El Paso Herald*, 25 September 1911, 8. On Washington visiting Ciudad Juárez and meeting with Alvarez, see "Noted Negro Speaks Here" *El Paso Morning Times*, 25 September 1911, 5; and Jackson, *Booker T. Washington and the Struggle Against White Supremacy*, 133-34. On Guillermo Alvarez, see Armando B. Chávez Montañez, *Sesenta Años de Gobierno Municipal: Jefes Políticos del Distrito Bravos y Presidentes del Municipio de Juárez, 1897-1960* (México: Gráfica Cervantina, 1959), 61-5; "Alvarez Will Resign," *El Paso Herald*, 10 November 1911, 1; and *El Paso Herald*, 7 November 1911, 11.

Williams Barbershop in Las Cruces.<sup>107</sup> In 1910, this thirty-eight year-old Black barbershop owner lived with Annie Williams, his thirty-six year-old wife, and his twenty year-old sister, Esse H. Williams. By 1920, Emory D. Williams also became a farmer in Las Cruces. Born in January 1872 and educated in the public schools of Pensacola, Florida, Emory D. Williams moved to Las Cruces, New Mexico in 1896. He also became significant owner of real estate, member of the Mesilla Valley Chamber of Commerce, president of the Doña Ana County NAACP, and was appointed deputy game warden by the governor of New Mexico. Despite not living in El Paso, he nevertheless became an early member of its NAACP chapter and recognized for his activism in convincing the management of a Las Cruces movie theater to “refrain from showing the film,” *The Birth of a Nation*. He and Lawrence A. Nixon were good friends.<sup>108</sup>

### **Jim Crow in El Paso**

Notwithstanding Washington’s claims, less than two years later Black El Pasoans would begin to seek a chapter of the NAACP, one of the first—if not the first—Texas city to do so.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> “Washington Visited Juárez Yesterday,” *El Paso Morning Times*, 26 September 1911, 5.

<sup>108</sup> *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce and Labor—Bureau of the Census, City of Las Cruces (Precinct 20), Doña Ana County, New Mexico, enumerated 22 April 1910 by J.C. Rodriguez, series T624, roll 914, page 185 subpage A, line 32-4; *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of Las Cruces (Precinct 20), Doña Ana County, New Mexico, enumerated on 9, 10, and 12 January 1920, Series T625, Roll 1075, Page 139 Subpage B, Line 78-9; “Still Fighting The Film,” *Crisis* vol. 12, no. 2 (June 1916): 87; “Emory Williams Dies Thursday; Funeral Pending,” *Las Cruces Sun-News*, 9 December 1949, 1; “Last Rites For Emory Williams Will Be Tuesday,” *Las Cruces Sun-News*, 12 December 1948, 1; “Owner Denies Price Holdup,” *Las Cruces Sun-News*, 26 November 1940, 1; and *NAACP Papers*, LOCMD, Branch Files, Box G-128, Folder: Las Cruces, New Mexico.

<sup>109</sup> Kenneth Mason, *African Americans and Race Relations in San Antonio, Texas, 1867-1937* (New York: Garland Publication, 1998), 212; and Ramona Houston, “The NAACP State Conference in Texas: Intermediary and Catalyst for Change, 1937-1957” *Journal of African American History* vol. 94, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 510; Michael L. Gillette, “The NAACP in Texas, 1937-1957” (Ph.D. dissertation: University of Texas at Austin, 1984), 1. While these three scholars—Mason, Houston and Gillette—indicate that El Paso was the first Texas city to establish a NAACP chapter, their start date of 1915 is incorrect. Some feel Houston became the first city in Texas, see Melvin James Banks, “The Pursuit of Equality: The Movement for First Class Citizenship Among Negroes in Texas, 1920-1950” (D.S.S. dissertation: Syracuse University, 1962), 178; and Alwyn Barr, *Black Texans: A History of African Americans in Texas, 1528-1995* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 144.

The reason for this act if not timing, could be the level of activism, community involvement, and sense of duty to the Race on the part of African Americans in El Paso. Another perhaps more significant reason was the insidious level of racial intolerance and Jim Crow in El Paso, although race relations being much better than the rest of the state. Nonetheless, such intolerance was far-reaching enough to warrant Blacks to act and charter a branch of this national civil rights organization, whose purpose was to combat racist aberrations. Unfortunately, many whites throughout the South attempted to keep African Americans barely a step above slavery, using a variety of dubious legal acts known collectively as Jim Crow laws, which ironically had their origins in the North, but still forced the South—and to an extent the entire nation—into state-sponsored, state-sanctioned racial apartheid.<sup>110</sup>

These racial affronts included separate water fountains, phone booths, and bathrooms, as well as barring Blacks from restaurants, hotels, swimming pools, and other public facilities. African Americans had their own sections in movie theaters, courtrooms, hospitals, churches, prisons, and attended their own schools. In many theaters throughout the nation Blacks were relegated to the side aisles or balconies, abhorrently called “buzzard roosts,” “crows’ nests,” or “nigger heaven.”<sup>111</sup> Theaters in El Paso such as the Crawford and Texas Grand adhered to this policy.<sup>112</sup> The Plaza Theater, the city’s premier movie palace, followed the path of the Crawford

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<sup>110</sup> On the origins of Jim Crow, see Comer Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 13-21 and 25-9; Comer Vann Woodward, “Strange Career Critics: Long May They Persevere,” *Journal of American History* vol. 75 (December 1988): 857-68; and Michael J. Pfeifer, “Review of Comer Vann Woodward’s *The Strange Career of Jim Crow: A Commemorative Edition*” *H-Net Reviews*, May 2003, <<http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=7561>> (accessed 27 January 2010).

<sup>111</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008), 139. Some Denver theaters were known to ring a bell to beckon ushers to escort Black ticket holders to the balcony, issue special red tickets to Black customers, which were only for upstairs seating, and tickets sold to Blacks were stamped “Good only in the upper right balcony.”

<sup>112</sup> Frances Hills interview conducted by Charlotte Ivy, 12 October 1985, “Interview no. 751,” transcribed by Anita Burdett, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, page 5. See also, Drusilla E. Nixon, “Interview no. 194,” page 10; and Navarro and Dailey, *Wheresoever My People Chance to Dwell*, 91.

and Texas Grand twenty years later when it opened in September 1930, by restricting Black patrons to only enter through a side entrance that led to a special balcony.<sup>113</sup>

Additional Jim Crow practices in El Paso included medical services. When Lawrence Nixon arrived in El Paso, Dr. H. Arthur Magruder advertised in the *El Paso Herald* of his dentistry services which excluded Blacks. In 1911, the white dentist, with ten-years of service to El Paso, boldly proclaimed “I Don’t Work for Negroes.”<sup>114</sup> In the residential arena, El Paso too limited Blacks to certain areas including residences within the Second Ward neighborhood near downtown. This was done in subtle ways, but also often through overt tactics such as racially restrictive covenants which often simply stated “Said property shall not be sold to nor occupied by Negroes, nor for any immoral use.”<sup>115</sup> Racially restrictive covenants had the potential to deny Blacks opportunities to participate in social modernization through housing modernization. By forcing Blacks to live in overcrowded areas, racially restrictive covenants could lead to “social disintegration, social pathology, and personal ill health on them.”<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Haines, *Showtime!*, 129. The Plaza Theater had special screenings of its regular movie fare for Black El Pasoans at midnight. Many segregated movie theaters throughout the nation engaged in this practice which they often termed “Midnight Rambles,” see Haines, *Showtime*, 129; and S. Torriano Berry and Venise T. Berry, *Historical Dictionary of African American Cinema* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2007), xxix. See also, “Negroes Seek Desegregation In E.P. Theaters,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 17 August 1956, 20.

<sup>114</sup> *El Paso Herald*, 9 November 1911, 5. Dr. Magruder’s full name is not listed in the advertisement, simply his initials “H.A. Magruder,” which is similar to his 1910 census entry, yet his 1920 census entry gives an inverted name, listing his first name as “Arthur” with a middle initial of “H.” In both census entries he is listed as a dentist, see *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Voting Precinct 38), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 20 January 1920 by Mrs. N. Graham, Series T625, Roll 1799, Page 95 Subpage A, Line 10-6.

<sup>115</sup> “Restrictions Running With The Land In Lafayette Place,” clause no. three, 16 March 1939, Block 4, Lot 4, Book 646, page 507, Deed Records of El Paso County, Texas, from Waldo M. Lewis, trustee, to Max G. Trunillo [*sic*], and wife, Enriqueta H. Trujillo; quoted in Dailey, “I’m Building Me A Home,” 30.

<sup>116</sup> Ronald C. Tobey, *Technology as Freedom: The New Deal and the Electrical Modernization of the American Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 199, 198-200, and 259 n10. The racially restrictive covenants “became widespread after 1917,” when the Supreme Court invalidated racially exclusionary zoning laws that segregated Blacks into certain neighborhoods. The courts enforced the covenants by “permitting homeowners to sue to enjoin neighbors from voluntarily selling” to Black buyers. In 1948, in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, the “Court killed all racially restrictive covenants by ruling that they are judicially unenforceable,” see Jethro K.

Besides Jim Crow, Blacks in El Paso also had to contend with racist imagery. In a June 2, 1914 edition of the *El Paso Herald* the Gold Dust Twins not only belittled African Americans by way of crass caricatures, but also offended both Mexican and Mexican Americans who were the majority of El Paso's inhabitants.<sup>117</sup> The advertisement shows the geographically-shaped country of México painted black to resemble suppose dirt and filth, and the geographic shape of the United States painted white, presumably already clean and pure. The Gold Dust Twins, 'Goldie' and 'Dustie,' are visibly cleaning over the shape of México with their product, broom, mop and bucket.<sup>118</sup> In addition, Black El Pasoans contended with having to tolerate Aunt Jemima and her speaking in stereotypical Black-southern dialect ("I'se in town, Honey!") in local newspaper advertisements.<sup>119</sup>



**Figure 2.**  
Aunt Jemima Buckwheat Flour  
advertisement,  
*El Paso Herald*, February 20, 1919.

Segregation in El Paso also permeated the educational system as one visitor to the city described the all-Black Douglass School, "which, under the State laws of Texas, is an independent institution. No white children can go to it, and no negro can attend a white school;

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Lieberman, *A Practical Companion to the Constitution: How the Supreme Court has Ruled on Issues from Abortion to Zoning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 428.

<sup>117</sup> "By 1920 El Paso had the second largest (next to San Antonio) Mexican population of any American City and was the only major southwestern metropolis with more Mexicans than Americans," see García, *Desert Immigrants*, 36 and 244 n10.

<sup>118</sup> *El Paso Herald*, 2 June 1914; and Romo, *Ringside Seat to a Revolution*, 206. On 'Goldie' and 'Dustie' (the Gold Dust Twins), see John Strausbaugh, *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 2007), 275 and 279.

<sup>119</sup> *El Paso Herald*, 20 February 1919, 7. See also, Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), 61, 83, and 107; and Kenneth W. Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), xiii, 1, and 88.

and yet I saw children in the negro school *whiter than you or I* [sic].”<sup>120</sup> Some Southern states even went so far to prohibit Blacks in courtrooms from swearing on the same Bible as whites, engaging in games of checkers with whites, and even patronizing the same prostitutes as whites!<sup>121</sup> Lawrence Joseph Nixon, Lawrence A. Nixon’s son, recalled years later how as a young boy, he and his father were removed from their seats at an El Paso circus by the circus manager at the insistence of two police officers. The younger Nixon remembered “It was a large, oval tent, and the best seats were in the center, and we were moved to the very end.”<sup>122</sup> Those who dared to cross racial barriers faced public verbal abuse and embarrassment, and at times violence and death, including lynchings. In an eighty-five year period (1882-1968), approximately 4,742 Blacks were lynched and as many if not more were “victims of legal lynchings (speedy trials and executions), private white violence, and “*nigger hunts*,” murdered by a variety of means in isolated rural sections and dumped into rivers and creeks.”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Eickemeyer, *Letters from the Southwest*, 48 (emphasis as in original). Eickemeyer may have been referring to Mexican/Mexican American or light-skinned African American students. It is doubtful that Anglos in El Paso sent their children to Douglass School, a predominately or all-Black school.

<sup>121</sup> On Jim Crow and prostitution, see Frost, *The Gentlemen's Club*, 140, 189, and 234-35; and Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 192. On the absurdity of segregated courtroom Bibles, see Carl N. Degler, *Out of Our Past: The Forces that Shaped Modern America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1984), 253; and Shane K. Bernard, *The Cajuns: Americanization of a People* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 53.

<sup>122</sup> Susan Borreson, “The Good Fight: Lacking in Experience and Money, Fred Knollenberg Takes on the All-White Primary in Texas” *Texas Lawyer* vol. 15, no. 40 (December 1999): 26.

<sup>123</sup> James Allen, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000), 12 and 24-5. As puzzling and ridiculous Jim Crow was, it unfortunately further promoted the idea among some whites that Blacks, as an undifferentiated group, were criminal, violent, dirty, ignorant, lazy, loud, unsanitary, oversexed, carefree, and un-ambitious because of the lack of meaningful and sincere interaction between the two races. While some whites imposed these blanket characterizations, many middle-class Blacks—including those in El Paso—spent most of their lives trying to dispel those false notions. Jim Crow came with a humiliating price for many Blacks in some parts of the South: a muted critique of institutional racism, a neglect of political organization and demands, and at times a strict adherence to a racial etiquette that demanded the perpetuation of ridiculous societal norms including not looking at whites in the eye, stepping to the side on sidewalks so whites could pass unfettered, and deferentially calling whites “Sir,” “Miss,” “Ma’am,” “Boss,” and “Captain;” and in exchange tolerating “Boy,” “Uncle,” “Aunt,” “Mammy,” and other derogatory phrases. Of course, this was a throwback to the antebellum period whereby many southern whites created a romantic nostalgic view of Black’s perceived submissiveness and servility, see Jennifer Lynn Ritterhouse, *Growing up Jim Crow: How Black and White Southern*

The level of activism by the Black community in El Paso—to minimize the effects of Jim Crow and address issues of racial inequities—can be seen in the number of members the local NAACP branch had. For example, based on the NAACP 1917 Annual Report, amazingly the El Paso branch was the only chapter in the state mentioned. It is surprising that bigger cities in Texas, with much larger Black populations, had not already established branch chapters of this nationally well-known civil rights organization. When one considers prominent cities with sizable Black communities in Dallas, Austin, Houston, San Antonio, Marshall, and Galveston this fact becomes even more perplexing.<sup>124</sup> The annual report states that “at present fifty-four branches, nine locals and four college chapters—sixty-seven organizations in all, varying from twenty to eleven hundred members.” The account further describes the work of all sixty-seven units, citing that under the leadership of Jasper B. Williams, President, and Frederick D. Clopton, Secretary, the El Paso branch of the NAACP had “45 members and has been protesting against discrimination in certain stores and in street cars.”<sup>125</sup> By 1921, the El Paso branch had increased its membership to 103 members, while the rest of the NAACP chapters in Texas were actually experiencing a decline in membership.<sup>126</sup> The total Black population in El Paso County during the early 1920s was approximately 1,548 of whom 1,096 were “21 years of age and over.”<sup>127</sup>

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*Children Learned Race* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 25, 30, 31, and 37; and David M. Oshinsky, *Worse Than Slavery: Parchman Farm and the Ordeal of Jim Crow Justice* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 122-27.

<sup>124</sup> There are some scholars who believe that Houston became the first city in the state to establish a NAACP chapter, see Banks, “The Pursuit of Equality,” 178; and Barr, *Black Texans*, 144. While others believe that distinction belongs to El Paso, see Mason, *African Americans and Race Relations in San Antonio*, 212; Houston, “The NAACP State Conference in Texas,” 510; and Gillette, “The NAACP in Texas, 1937-1957,” 1.

<sup>125</sup> *Freeing America: Seventh Annual Report of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (New York: NAACP, 1917), 15-22, and 18. See also Frances Hills, “Interview no. 751,” page 17-9.

<sup>126</sup> Mason, *African Americans and Race Relations in San Antonio*, 215. On the decline of NAACP memberships in Texas see, Steven A. Reich, “Soldiers of Democracy: Black Texans and the Fight for Citizenship, 1917-1921” *Journal of American History*, vol. 82, no. 4 (March 1996): 1501 and 1503.

The 103 NAACP members meant over nine percent of the Black community had been dues-paying members.

### **The Death of Esther J. Calvin Nixon**

The second half of the decade also saw many dramatic events for Lawrence Nixon. His maternal grandmother, Lucy Patterson Engledow, died on January 1, 1917.<sup>128</sup> Months later, in April 1917, the United States would enter World War I and by June 1917 draft or conscription laws were passed for the compulsory enlistment of able-bodied male citizens between the ages of twenty-one and thirty. In September 1918 the age range had been expanded to eighteen to forty-five years-old making the thirty-five year-old Nixon eligible to fight.<sup>129</sup> Nixon quickly registered, submitting his draft card to the local El Paso draft board the same month the new directive was issued.<sup>130</sup> Although he never was called for duty since the war ended in November 1918, he instead found himself fighting a different battle altogether. Tragically, his childhood sweetheart and wife, Esther Nixon, died of influenza on February 21, 1919.<sup>131</sup> Despite having a husband who was a medical doctor, she lost her life to this deadly disease. In addition, her

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<sup>127</sup> Additionally, there was a total population in El Paso county of 101,877 which meant that Blacks were 1.5% of the overall population, see *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, General Report and Analytical Tables, Population, Volume II (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1922), 1363. In 1930, the “Negro” population in El Paso county increased by 422 to 1,970 and they remained 1.5% of the overall population within the county, see *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Reports by States, Showing the Composition and Characteristics of the Population for Counties, Cities, and Townships or Other Minor Civil Divisions: Montana—Wyoming, Population, Volume III, Part II, Table 21—Population by Sex, Color, Age, etc., for Counties by Minor Civil Divisions: 1930 (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1932), 1064.

<sup>128</sup> “Nixon Family Bible,” in LWFP.

<sup>129</sup> Mark R. Henry, *The U.S. Army of World War I* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2003), 6.

<sup>130</sup> 1918 Military Registration, Card 3153, Draft 1827, Local Board 1, El Paso, Texas, 12 Sept 1918.

<sup>131</sup> El Paso County Clerk, Esther J. Calvin Nixon Death Certificate, 21 February 1919, File 6695; and Lawrence A. Nixon to Lawrence J. Nixon, 19 March 1919, letter found in N/MFP. Two days earlier, 19 February 1919, Carrie C. Calvin (Esther J. Nixon’s mom) had died in El Paso from unknown complications.



middle-class status as the wife of a physician did not prevent her succumbing to influenza.<sup>132</sup>

Esther Nixon supported Lawrence through sixteen years of marriage and had cared for their child the past nine years. Jennie V. Nixon, Lawrence Nixon's mother, would move-in from Marshall with Lawrence to assist with the rearing of her grandchild, Lawrence Joseph Nixon.<sup>133</sup> Charles B. Nixon, Lawrence Nixon's father, had died in Marshall, Texas in 1910.<sup>134</sup>

Although sometimes known as the "Spanish flu" because it was once thought to have originated in Spain, the 1918 influenza may have had its origins in the United States, more precisely in Philadelphia.<sup>135</sup> Born in Natchitoches, Louisiana on July 28, 1883, Esther Nixon

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<sup>132</sup> "Historians have also attempted to find correlations between vulnerability to influenza and such variables as class, race, gender, and ethnicity. Of these, class and gender seem most likely. Women generally suffered higher mortalities, perhaps because pregnant women were especially vulnerable, perhaps because women (as the primary caregivers themselves) were less likely to receive nursing care when they fell ill. Arguments linking influenza mortality to race and class in the United States have been inconclusive. African Americans suffered low mortality, American Indians high mortality, yet both were economically poor groups." Jo N. Hays, *Epidemics and Pandemics: Their Impacts on Human History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2005), 394.

<sup>133</sup> Jenny Nixon is listed as living with her son Lawrence in both the 1920 and 1930 El Paso United States Census, see *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Precinct 17), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 21 January 1920 by Viola Rogers, Series T625, Roll 1799, Page 113, Line 64-6; and *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 7 April 1930 by Edith A. Finch, Series T626, Roll 2328, Page 104, Line 40-2. Lawrence A. Nixon (twenty-seven years-old) is listed in the 1910 Census, although surprisingly not in El Paso, but in Marshall, Texas along with his father Charles Nixon (fifty-two year-old "head of household"), Jennie Nixon (forty-five year-old wife), Charlie Nixon (twenty-one year-old son), Alfaretta Nixon (twenty-three year-old daughter), Annie Richardson (twenty-five year-old daughter), J.H. Richardson (thirty-five year-old son-in-law), Alfaretta Richardson (three year-old granddaughter), Charles Richardson (one year-old grandson), and Lucy Patterson (sixty-five year-old mother). An explanation for Lawrence Nixon's presence in Marshall, Texas in April 1910 when the census enumerator arrived was probably due to him wanting to spend time with his family particularly his father who may have been ill and ultimately would die on July 7, 1910, less than three months later, see *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Labor Bureau of the Census, City of Marshall (Precinct 11, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ward), Harrison County, Texas, enumerated on 18 April 1910, Series T624, Roll 1562, Page 138, Line 18-27. Alfaretta Nixon is listed as "Colored" in the 1912 city directory boarding at 517 E. Fannin Street and Jennie V. Nixon is listed as a "Laundress" in the 1914 city directory, see *R.L. Polk's 1912 City Directory for Marshall, Texas* (Detroit: Ralph Lane Polk and Company, 1912), 146; and *R.L. Polk's 1914 City Directory for Marshall, Texas* (Detroit: Ralph Lane Polk and Company, 1914), 148. These two directories were found within the archives of the Harrison County Genealogical Society, 117 East Bowie Street, Marshall, Texas.

<sup>134</sup> Charles B. Nixon died on July 7, 1910, see "Nixon Family Bible," in LWFP.

<sup>135</sup> John M. Barry, *The Great Influenza: The Epic Story of the Deadliest Plague in History* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 171 and 197-228.

was nearing her thirty-six birthday when she fell ill and died.<sup>136</sup> Despite Lawrence Nixon's medical training, he was unable to save the life of his wife. The disease was so powerful that it would ultimately kill more people than any other outbreak the world has ever known, fifty to one hundred million, or eight to ten percent of the then population. Typically influenza kills the elderly and infants, whose immune systems are weak or still developing. But the 1918-1919 influenza outbreak killed young women and men who were in their prime, in their twenties and thirties.<sup>137</sup> Another unusual characteristic of this disease was the speed in which it attacked. At its peak, most of the victims died in a twenty-four week period, and more than half of those deaths occurred from mid-September to December 1918. Some scholars have noted that this influenza strain killed more people in twenty-four weeks than the Bubonic plague killed in a century; it killed more people in twenty-four weeks than AIDS has killed in twenty-four years.<sup>138</sup>

In El Paso, the epidemic hit hardest in the fall of 1918 and in parts of the city that were "south of the tracks" which of course was a euphemism for the south side of El Paso where mostly poor, African American, and Mexican/Mexican Americans resided. The *El Paso Herald* aptly described that "the city has not only neglected the elementary welfare of half of its population, but it has tolerated conditions in that section that have constituted a terrible menace to all the rest of the city." This neglect resulted in the El Paso Board of Health reporting 131 deaths the week of October 18, 102 of whom were Mexican/Mexican Americans. The hospitals

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<sup>136</sup> Lawrence A. Nixon to Lawrence J. Nixon, 19 March 1919, letter found in N/MFP. Natchitoches, Louisiana is 108 miles southeast of Marshall, Texas.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5. The correlation between the United States Army troop increases and the spread of influenza is well documented. El Paso had a large presence of troops in the city during this time which undoubtedly encouraged the spread of influenza. Taking this into account, ironically other Texas military bases and cities are documented, yet no mention is made of El Paso's Fort Bliss or El Paso itself in Carol R. Byerly, *Fever of War: The Influenza Epidemic in the U.S. Army during World War I* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), 18, 53, 56, 79, 154, 159, and 175.

and clinics at both Fort Bliss and the city were filled and overtaxed, and city leaders called for more doctors and nurses to assist. A makeshift hospital was created at the 28-room Aoy school located on Seventh Street and Kansas Street to address the many south-side patients. It is likely that Lawrence Nixon was one of the many physicians attending the ill, particularly on the south side of El Paso where he and his family lived and worked. Although by December 1918 the numbers of reported cases began to decline to twenty to forty per day, people continued to die, but at a much slower pace.<sup>139</sup> Esther Nixon would be among that group when she passed two months later. For Lawrence Nixon it would be a tremendous emotional loss. He would not marry again for sixteen years.

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<sup>139</sup> Bradford Luckingham, *Epidemic in the Southwest, 1918-1919* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1984), 7, 8, 9, and 17. For an analysis of how El Paso reacted to other medical concerns such as tuberculosis, infant mortality, and venereal diseases in a racialized manner during this era, see Ann R. Gabbert, "Defining the Boundaries of Care: Local Responses to Global Concerns in El Paso Public Health Policy, 1881-1941" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at El Paso, 2006).

### CHAPTER 3 – WADING IN TROUBLED WATERS, 1919-1924

Out of this war will rise, soon or late, an independent China; a self-governing India, an Egypt with representative institutions; an Africa for the Africans and not merely for business exploitation. Out of this war will rise, too, an American Negro, with a right to vote and a right to work and a right to live without insult. - W.E.B. Du Bois<sup>1</sup>

In the spring of 1918, Du Bois offered the above vision in the *Crisis*. It is likely that Lawrence Nixon, as a member of the El Paso NAACP, received and regularly read the monthly *Crisis* which was delivered to the homes of thousands of African Americans throughout the country. By 1919, the official organ of the NAACP had nearly 100,000 subscribers.<sup>2</sup> These words from its most famous editor would be prophetic, particularly for Nixon who lived in a state that was determined on limiting the vote of African Americans. Nixon would be involved directly in helping to dismantle the racial status quo in his own state, heeding Du Bois' call. Yet, as a member of the NAACP Nixon also knew the political realities and implications of his affiliation with an organization that posed a threat to the status quo of the state. This chapter will look at the status of the NAACP in Texas, Nixon's involvement, by way of the local NAACP, in the Henry Lowry tragedy, explore Nixon's attempts to secure an all-Black pool in El Paso through his association with the local Negro Ministerial Alliance, and analyze Black El Pasoans' political influence via Texas' Juneteenth celebration.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Ellis, "'Closing Ranks' and 'Seeking Honors': W.E.B. Du Bois in World War I" *Journal of American History* vol. 79, no. 1 (June 1992): 100.

<sup>2</sup> *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* is the official magazine of the NAACP which began in November 1910 with a national circulation of 1,000 and a year later it increased to 9,000, within five years it was 35,000, and by the end of 191 it was nearly 100,000. However, by the end of 1920 it had less than 65,000 subscribers, under 30,000 copies circulated in 1930, and 31,000 in February 1944, see Johnson, *Propaganda and Aesthetics*, 35; and "Along the N.A.A.C.P. Battlefront," *The Crisis* vol. 51, no. 2 (February 1944): 51.

Unfortunately violence continued unabated against African Americans after World War I. Bernice Love Wiggins, born in El Paso and a Douglass School graduate, eloquently wrote of her feelings in this regard when she published the following excerpt:

Lynched!  
Somewhere in the South, the “Land of the Free,”  
To a very high branch of a very strong tree,  
Lynched! One of my sons,—  
When the flag drooped so lowly they heeded the call,  
I gave them, my black sons, Ah, yes, gave them all,  
When you came to me.<sup>3</sup>

Wiggins graduated from Douglass about the same time as Lawrence Nixon moved to El Paso. The “war to end all wars” demanded African Americans to participate uncritically and patriotically by way of their manpower and moral support, as the country had asked them to do in previous wars. For Nixon, he too supported the war as seen by his completing and submitting his draft card to the local El Paso draft board.<sup>4</sup> Yet, in “Ethiopia Speaks” Wiggins exclaims the frustration that many African Americans, including those in El Paso, felt in the irony and hypocrisy of the nation asking African Americans to fight for democracy overseas while being denied it in the United States. Upon returning from abroad, Blacks continued to feel the stings and blows of white supremacy, domination, and control.

The economic exploitation and physical violence was so severe and ongoing that before and during the war it increased the wave of outward migration of Blacks from the South to seek opportunities elsewhere. By 1918, more than 100,000 Afro-Texans had participated in the Great Migration by going to Western and Northern states.<sup>5</sup> The city of Austin, Texas lost over one-

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<sup>3</sup> Bernice Love Wiggins, *Tuneful Tales*, 38-9. See the appendix for the entire poem.

<sup>4</sup> 1918 Military Registration, Card 3153, Draft 1827, Local Board 1, El Paso, Texas, 12 Sept 1918.

<sup>5</sup> The term “Great Migration” commonly refers to the movement of millions of Southern Blacks (and to a lesser extent Blacks from the Caribbean) to the urban North, Midwest, and Western parts of the United States

third of its Black population within three years. Texas border cities such as Laredo witnessed their Black population decline from 205 to forty-one between 1900 and 1920.<sup>6</sup> El Paso also saw a decline, although much lower in comparison to other Texas cities. The Black population in El Paso County decreased from 1,562 in 1910 to 1,548 in 1920.<sup>7</sup> On its surface this slight decrease is insignificant, yet when one considers the troop increases at Fort Bliss—due to the upheaval of the Mexican revolution and the United States entry into World War I—then the declining El Paso Black population becomes more telling since the U.S. military had a large percentage of African Americans, which should have been at least one contributor to a possible increase in El Paso’s Black community. By mid-1916, there were “65,000 American troops bivouacked in El Paso.”<sup>8</sup> There were 400,000 African Americans in the entire Army during World War I, comprising at least ten percent.<sup>9</sup>

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between the years 1910-1930 and 1940-1970, see Steven A. Reich, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Great Black Migration* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006).

<sup>6</sup> James N. Leiker, *Racial Borders: Black Soldiers along the Rio Grande* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 116 and 212 n43. Somewhere between 275,000 and 750,000 southern Blacks migrated during the years 1916-1918, see Gerald W. Patton, *War and Race: The Black Officer in the American Military, 1915-1941* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 27.

<sup>7</sup> *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1910*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Reports by States, Statistics for Counties, Cities, and other Civil Divisions: Nebraska—Wyoming, Alaska, Hawaii, and Porto [sic] Rico, Population, Volume III (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1913), 816 and 817. In 1920, the “Negro” population of El Paso County was 1,548 of which 1,096 were “21 years of age and over.” There was a total population in the county of 101,877 which meant that Blacks were 1.5% of the overall population, see *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, General Report and Analytical Tables, Population, Volume II (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1922), 1363. In 1930, the “Negro” population in El Paso County totaled 1,970 of which 1,886 resided in “Justice Precinct 1.” There was a total population in the county of 131,597 which meant that Blacks were nearly 1.5% of the overall population, see *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Reports by States, Showing the Composition and Characteristics of the Population for Counties, Cities, and Townships or Other Minor Civil Divisions: Montana—Wyoming, Population, Volume III, Part II, Table 21—Population by Sex, Color, Age, etc., for Counties by Minor Civil Divisions: 1930 (Washington D.C., Government Printing Office, 1932), 1064.

<sup>8</sup> García, *Desert Immigrants*, 194 and 275 n55. Six months prior to this large Army encampment, the city and county conducted an “off-year” census that indicated a total of 1,763 soldiers in El Paso, along with 7,047 Mexican “refugees,” and a city civilian population of 61,902 of which 32,737 (52.8%) were of Mexican descent, 27,359 (44.2%) Anglos, 1,514 (2.5%) Blacks, 243 (.04%) Chinese, forty-four Japanese, and five Native Americans, see “El Paso’s Population,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 14 February 1916, 4. During World War I Texas had many

## **The NAACP in Texas, 1918-1921**

The political, social, and economic threats and physical retaliation were not limited to Blacks, but also to whites, such as the NAACP National Executive Secretary John R. Shillady, who engaged in the work of ensuring basic constitutional rights on behalf of African Americans. Shillady's pummeling during his visit to Austin, Texas in the summer of 1919 exposed the danger of being affiliated with the NAACP in Texas.<sup>10</sup> Shillady was prompted to go to Texas after Governor William P. Hobby's call for an investigation and threat of ridding all NAACP branches within the state for allegedly operating without a state charter. These acts by the Governor were precipitated when Austin NAACP branch President Pinckney A. Williams protested the beating of a Black veteran by saying veterans, "have returned to old homes but are not going to submit to old conditions."<sup>11</sup> In other words, Texas had better get used to a "New Negro," one who no longer was going to tolerate the racial status quo of the recent past. As a local NAACP leader and business insurance agent, Williams was simply attempting to address the poor treatment and gross disrespect Black soldiers were receiving upon their return from

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of the nation's military installations, see John W. Storey and Mary L. Kelley, eds., *Twentieth-Century Texas: A Social and Cultural History* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2008), 164-65 and 170; and Herbert A. Johnson, *Wingless Eagle: U.S. Army Aviation through World War I* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2001), 157, 159, 165, and 256.

<sup>9</sup> Henry, *The U.S. Army of World War I*, 6; Byerly, *Fever of War*, 30 and 34; Patton, *War and Race*, 175; Arthur E. Barbeau and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: African-American Troops in World War I* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 33-55; Mark Ellis, *Race, War, and Surveillance: African Americans and the United States Government during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 76.

<sup>10</sup> "The Case of Mr. Shillady," *Crisis* vol. 18 (October 1919): 300-301; *Mobbing of John R. Shillady, Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, at Austin, Texas, Aug. 22, 1919* (New York: NAACP: 1919); Mark R. Schneider, *"We Return Fighting": The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002), 39. John Shillady became executive director of the NAACP in 1918. He and James Weldon Johnson were credited with greatly increasing NAACP membership. Under Shillady's leadership, the NAACP decided to take a stance on lynching, one of the most pressing contemporary issues concerning the safety and well-being of Blacks. He oversaw *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States: 1889-1918*, the first NAACP book publication, see Nia Woods Haydel and Kijua Sanders-McMurtry, "Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States: 1889-1919" in Rucker and Upton, *Encyclopedia of American Race Riots*, 637.

<sup>11</sup> Schneider, *"We Return Fighting"*, 30.

overseas duty.<sup>12</sup> This brief, but forceful statement by Williams was enough for the Governor to order the Texas Rangers to investigate “Bolshevik” activities within the Black community. When Texas officials secured a copy of the *Crisis* they concluded that it was subversive and determined that the NAACP could be forced to close all its branches in the state.<sup>13</sup>

The state attorney general, Calvin M. Cureton, ordered local NAACP branches to submit their administrative and financial records for review. This action alarmed the national office and thus Shillady’s attempted visit with Hobby was to make clear that the NAACP was not a threat to the state, they were merely attempting to secure basic rights for Afro-Texans guaranteed to all Americans by way of the Constitution. Ultimately Shillady did not get a meeting with the Governor or the attorney general, but instead received a severe beating at the hands of county judge David J. Pickle and Constable Charles Hamby outside the Driskill Hotel in the open afternoon of August 22, 1919.<sup>14</sup> Soon after, these same officials boastfully told the tale of their involvement in the affair, “I whipped him and ordered him to leave because I thought it was for the best interests of Austin and the State”, Pickle proclaimed. The Governor concurred, asserting “Shillady was the only offender in the connection with the matter” and then offered the

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<sup>12</sup> For other injustices against Black troops during World War I, see Vincent Mikkelsen, “Coming from Battle to Face a War: The Lynching of Black Soldiers in the World War I Era” (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2007). African American Rev. Francis J. Grimké aptly said: “That shameful record is going to be written up, and published, so that the whole world may read it, and learn how these black men, who went out from these shores to die at their country’s call, were treated simply because of the color of their skin,” see Herbert Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, 1933-1945, Volume 2* (Secaucus: Citadel Press, 1974), 243.

<sup>13</sup> For an account of alleged and actual socialist and communist sympathies within the African American community during this era, see Theodore Kornweibel, Jr., *Seeing Red: Federal Campaigns against Black Militancy, 1919-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> The position of County Judge was more likened to County Executive in that the position served as “budgeting officer of the county,” and “numerous duties pertaining to elections,” see Dick Smith, “County Judge,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/muc9.html>> (accessed 13 March 2010).



following advice, “your organization can contribute more to the advancement of both races by keeping your representatives and their propaganda out of this state than in any other way.”<sup>15</sup>

When NAACP co-founder and board member Mary White Ovington wrote law enforcement officials in Austin, the deputy sheriff replied that Shillady was confronted by “red-blooded white men,” who did not want “Negro-loving white men” in Texas.<sup>16</sup> Shillady was physically and emotionally demoralized and within a year resigned his post, thus creating the opportunity for African American James Weldon Johnson to become the NAACP Acting Secretary in June 1920. The Board would formally approve his permanent appointment making Johnson the first African American to hold this position within the organization. Also, Walter White, “an African American from Atlanta, who had fair complexion, blond hair, and blue eyes, became the organization’s chief investigator of lynching and mob violence.”<sup>17</sup>

In the face of this symbolic and physical beating, the organization was not beneath striking back with force if necessary. Six years earlier, as historian Gerald Horne reminds us, the NAACP in 1913 had called for the formation of a “vigilance committee.” This was an avowed “call to arms...to protect the colored people in their several communities from aggression.” The NAACP wanted to “federate local vigilance committees among colored people in every

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<sup>15</sup> *Tenth Annual Report of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for the Year 1919* (New York: NAACP, January 1920), 33. Governor Hobby was previously familiar with John Shillady when the latter publicly printed a telegram protesting the June 4, 1918 lynching of Sarah and Tenola Cabaniss in Hunstville, see Charles F. Kellogg, *NAACP: A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), 230.

<sup>16</sup> Kellogg, *NAACP*, 240. In addition to being a co-founder, board member, executive secretary, and chairman of the NAACP, Mary White Ovington was a suffragette, socialist, Unitarian, and journalist, see Carolyn Wedin, *Inheritors of the Spirit: Mary White Ovington and the Founding of the NAACP* (New York: Wiley, 1998).

<sup>17</sup> Sondra K. Wilson, ed., *In Search of Democracy: The NAACP Writings of James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, and Roy Wilkins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 11 and 9-17. Cary D. Wintz and Paul Finkelman, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance, Volume 2* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2004), 862.

community in the United States.”<sup>18</sup> Despite this earlier rhetoric the NAACP of 1919 was a bit wiser in its word use and smarter in its political and social activism. The Texas branches proceeded gently, although their numbers dipped during the period after Shillady’s assault. In 1918, the NAACP in Texas had the following number of branches and members:

<u>Branch</u>	<u>Members</u>	<u>Branch</u>	<u>Members</u>
Austin	75	Galveston	141
Beaumont	94	Gonzales	50
Dallas	169	Houston	414
El Paso	75	Orange	182
Fort Worth	166	San Antonio	1,228
		<u>Silsbee</u>	<u>58</u>
Total members of Texas NAACP in 1918			2,652 <sup>19</sup>

Yet, by the end of 1921, due to the violence and intimidation in Texas against NAACP branches and its members, the organization saw most of its branches in the state become dormant and membership dropped by more than half to 1,074.<sup>20</sup> This climate of fear and repression did not stop Nixon from getting involved in issues important to him and his community. The affiliation with an alleged subversive organization such as the NAACP could have placed Nixon in an awkward position with his medical clients or placed him at odds with more conservative local leaders. The historical record does not suggest that he muted his actions.

### **Nixon, El Paso NAACP, and the Henry Lowry Lynching**

Nixon’s past experiences with racial violence did not preclude him from future involvement in assisting others who were in danger because of their race at the hands of blood-

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<sup>18</sup> *Crisis* vol. 6, no. 1 (May 1913): 26-29, quoted in Horne, *Black and Brown*, 80.

<sup>19</sup> *Eighth and Ninth Annual Reports: A Summary of Work, Auditing, Report of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for the Years 1917 and 1918* (New York: NAACP, January 1919), 86-7.

<sup>20</sup> Reich, “Soldiers of Democracy,” *Journal of American History*, 1503 and 1501. Reich’s extensive list of 1918 to 1921 NAACP branches in Texas reflects thirty-three branches but oddly no mention in the entire article of El Paso’s May 1914 formal beginnings and activism during these years.

thirsty racist mobs. The lynching of Henry Lowry is a case in point. Lowry fled to El Paso after having murdered two whites and injuring two others in Arkansas on Christmas Day 1920. Knowing a lynch mob would kill him without proper legal due process, Lowry quickly left Arkansas with the intention of landing in México to take advantage of the safety and anonymity that the Borderlands was thought to possess.<sup>21</sup> Henry Lowry was poor and Black at a time when this combination could be deadly. His barbaric lynching made national news as evident from the front pages of the *New York Times*, whereby the mob kindly honored Lowry's request for a last meal.<sup>22</sup> The incident began in Nodena, Arkansas in December of 1920 when the forty-something year-old Lowry decided, after working two years, to get an accounting of his balance and depart from the farm debt-free.<sup>23</sup> Nodena is a hamlet in Mississippi County, near the town of Wilson, in northeast Arkansas—twenty-nine miles north of Memphis, Tennessee.<sup>24</sup>

As a sharecropper, Lowry felt trapped economically and a need arose to go elsewhere to carve-out his niche.<sup>25</sup> He visited the home of the sixty-nine year old white landowner, Osben T.

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<sup>21</sup> On Lowry's goal to go to México, see "Anxiety To Hear From Home Cause of Negro's Death," *Memphis Press*, 26 January 1921, 1; and Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, 1910-1932, Volume 3* (Secaucus: Citadel Press, 1977), 316-17; quoted in Horne, *Black and Brown*, 74

<sup>22</sup> "They Fed Before They Killed" *New York Times*, 27 January 1921, 1; quoted in Schneider, "*We Return Fighting*," 145. See also Todd E. Lewis, "Mob Justice in the 'American Congo': 'Judge Lynch' in Arkansas during the Decade after World War I" *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* vol. 52, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 156-84.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Lowry's exact age is unknown, however William Pickens—NAACP Field Secretary who investigated Lowry's murder—estimated that "Lowry was a man of forty years or more," see William Pickens, "The American Congo—Burning of Henry Lowry" *Nation* vol. 109 (23 March 1921): 426-28. Pickens' 1921 stinging indictment on U.S. southern culture, civilization, and economic system is also reprinted in *Negro Star* (Wichita, Kansas), 1 April 1921, 1; and Nancy Clara Cunard and Hugh D. Ford, eds., *Negro: An Anthology* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1934), 21-3.

<sup>24</sup> Nodena, Arkansas is only fourteen miles southwest of Fort Pillow (Lauderdale County, Tennessee), site of the Civil War's Fort Pillow Massacre that occurred on 12 April 1864. The Confederate victory saw Union soldiers, most of whom were African American, surrender and then immediately murdered under the command of the infamous Confederate Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest, the first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, see Andrew Ward, *River Run Red: The Fort Pillow Massacre in the American Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> For decades this region has been one of the poorest in the nation, see Bonnie Thornton Dill and Tallese Johnson, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Mothering, Work, and Welfare in the Rural South" in Sharon Harley

Craig, who was known to exploit Blacks and treat them cruelly.<sup>26</sup> Lucy Oliver, a sharecropper on the Craig farm, recalled years later that Osben Craig was “mean to black people,” and he “beat black folks who would let him.”<sup>27</sup> Lowry stood over six-feet in height and had a reputation of his own that included standing up for himself as well as his people. He commanded the respect of his fellow sharecroppers as a thirty-third-degree Mason, which was “the highest level within the Masonic order, awarded only to men of outstanding character and leadership qualities.” Mrs. Lucy Oliver recalled that “Mr. Henry,” as Lowry was known to the local Black community, “didn’t take nothing off of nobody,” including the Craig family.

After the Civil War, sharecropping became entrenched as a more decentralized system of agricultural production on previously large plantations that were now divided into small plots of land, that were mostly thirty to fifty acres each. Plots were leased year-to-year to individual families, and at the end of the season they received compensation which included a share of the crop, usually one-third to one-half. Generally, sharecroppers were responsible for feeding and

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and The Black Women and Work Collective, eds., *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 72; Earl Black and Merle Black, *Politics and Society in the South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 163-65.

<sup>26</sup> Books and newspaper accounts give Craig’s name as simply O.T. Craig, however the 1920 census reveals his name to be Osben T. Craig; a sixty-eight year-old white farmer, head of the household, who lived with his sixty-two year-old wife (Mary), two daughters, ages twenty-eight (Elizabeth) and twenty-one (Margret), and three sons, ages thirty-two, twenty-four (Richard), and nineteen. The enumerator’s script is illegible to determine the names of the entire family, see *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Troy, Mississippi County, Arkansas, enumerated on 27 January 1920, Series T625, Roll 73, Page 246, Line 22-8. Unfortunately there is no listing in this census for Henry Lowry or his wife Callie Lowry despite their 1918 move to Arkansas from Mississippi.

<sup>27</sup> Nan Elizabeth Woodruff, *American Congo: The African American Freedom Struggle in the Delta* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 110. This harsh treatment of Blacks by whites was not unusual during this period. Historian Leon Litwack summarizes it this manner: “Some thirty years after emancipation, between 1890 and 1920, in response to perceptions of a New Negro born in freedom, undisciplined by slavery, and unschooled in proper racial etiquette, and in response to growing doubts that this new generation could be trusted to stay in its place without legal and extra-legal force, the white South denied Blacks a political voice, imposed rigid patterns of racial segregation (Jim Crow), sustained an economic system—sharecropping and tenantry—that left little room for ambition or hope, refused Blacks equal educational resources, and disseminated racial caricatures and pseudo-scientific theories that reinforced and comforted whites in their racist beliefs and practices,” see Leon F. Litwack, “Hellhounds” in James Allen, *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe: Twin Palms Publishers, 2000), 11.

clothing themselves, while the landlord supplied all the farming provisions.<sup>28</sup> However, Osben Craig owned everything including the tools used and the clothes worn by sharecroppers, as well as the local commissary that sharecroppers were obligated to patronize. In addition, Craig rarely settled balances or accounted for expenses with sharecroppers, instead he worked Blacks year-to-year without payment.<sup>29</sup> The initial meeting between Lowry and Craig ended with Craig physically assaulting Lowry to make the point that a proper updated accounting would not be forthcoming.<sup>30</sup>

On December 25, 1920 Lowry returned to the Osben Craig home and this time he was armed. Soon after Craig answered the door an argument ensued where the elder Craig threw a stick at Lowry who attempted to flee, but then was fired upon and shot by Craig's son Richard. Lowry returned fire to defend himself, instantly killing Osben Craig and one of his married daughters.<sup>31</sup> Two of Craig's sons were also wounded in the exchange.<sup>32</sup> Lowry quickly fled the Craig property and was protected by J.T. Williams and his family who hid Lowry in their home for two days. Henry Lowry was fortunate in that the white mob that arrived at the Williams' home departed without finding him. In his escape Lowry covered his footwear with turpentine to distract his smell from scent hounds, which was a common practice by southern Blacks running away for their lives.<sup>33</sup> A mob of nearly six-hundred anxiously looked for Lowry's whereabouts,

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<sup>28</sup> Edward C. Royce, *The Origins of Southern Sharecropping* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 181-82 and 184-85, see also 181-222.

<sup>29</sup> Woodruff, *American Congo*, 110. Lucy Oliver's brother married Henry Lowry's daughter, see Woodruff, *American Congo*, 249 n1.

<sup>30</sup> Schneider, "*We Return Fighting*," 146.

<sup>31</sup> Pickens, "The American Congo" *Nation* (23 March 1921): 427; Cunard and Ford, *Negro*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> Woodruff, *American Congo*, 111.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* and 249 n4. The first name of Williams is unknown.

but to no avail.<sup>34</sup> Morris Jenkins, his wife, Jennie Jenkins, along with Mott Orr, John Radditt, and Walter Johnson—all members of the Turrell Odd Fellows Lodge—gave Lowry logistical and financial assistance to make his escape to El Paso possible.<sup>35</sup>

While in El Paso, Lowry rented a room at 1201 E. Third Street, which was located in the Segundo Barrio or Second Ward district just east of downtown. Until the mid 1960s this neighborhood was home to many of El Paso's African Americans.<sup>36</sup> Lowry fled to El Paso, over 1,100 miles from Nodena, in hopes of making a discreet escape into México, and he would have been successful were it not for his limited funds. In the short time he spent in the city, Lowry was able to secure employment that would pay him "\$40 a month and board" and he intended to send for his wife Callie Lowry and daughter as soon as he could save up enough money. Soon after settling into El Paso, Henry Lowry wrote his Masonic comrade Morris Jenkins requesting assistance in ensuring that his family knew his location and for them to plan on making the journey to the southwest in the coming months.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, Osben Craig's son Richard was the local postmaster and clerk of court, which placed him in a position to intercept Lowry's letter

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<sup>34</sup> "Negro, Hunted By Arkansas Mob, Tells El Paso Detective of Slaying Two Men On Farm," *El Paso Herald*, 19 January 1921, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Woodruff, *American Congo*, 111 and 113. On the history and influence of the Masons and Odd Fellows within the Black community see Anne S. Butler, "Black Fraternal and Benevolent Societies in Nineteenth-Century America" found in Tamara L. Brown, Gregory Parks, and Clarendia M. Phillips, eds., *African American Fraternities and Sororities: The Legacy and the Vision* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 75-81; and William A. Muraskin, *Middle-class Blacks in a White Society: Prince Hall Freemasonry in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975). After the Lowry lynching, local Black benevolent and fraternal organizations attracted negative attention from authorities due to their aiding Lowry's flight, see "Arkansans Propose to Break up Negro Fraternal Lodges" *Anniston Star*, 28 January 1921, 1; "Order Restored After Lynching" *The Emporia Gazette*, 27 January 1921, 1; and "Negro Burning; More Blacks Held" *The Evening Gazette*, 27 January 1921, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Schneider, "*We Return Fighting*," 146. For a map of the Segundo Barrio/Second Ward neighborhood in El Paso see Navarro and Dailey, *Wheresoever My People Chance to Dwell*, 14.

<sup>37</sup> Lowry writes of not having the ten dollar fee to cross over into México and estimates that the train's fare for his wife Callie Lowry to go El Paso would be forty-one dollars. The letter was postmarked 11 January 1921 and signed under the alias S.M. Thompson, see entire reprinted Lowry letter in Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States, 1910-1932, Volume 3*, 316-17.

and inform local authorities of Lowry's whereabouts, who in-turn contacted El Paso officials of his presence in the city.<sup>38</sup> On January 19, 1921 Lowry was arrested by Captain Claude T. Smith of the El Paso Police Department at a local downtown bank as Lowry worked the furnace. Lowry explained to the detectives that the shooting was initiated by the Craig family and he acted solely in self defense. Lowry of course knew his fate was sealed and stated the obvious to the arresting officer, "if they take me back to Arkansas, they'll burn me sure."<sup>39</sup> The same day of his arrest the landlady at his rooming house heard about Lowry's troubles and immediately contacted the local branch of the NAACP, then led by Le Roy W. Washington.<sup>40</sup> Washington quickly contacted Frederick C. Knollenberg, an Anglo attorney who was also a member of the El Paso NAACP, to represent Henry Lowry.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Lowry's intuition allowed him to astutely address his letter to his comrade Morris Jenkins in Turrell, Arkansas because he knew of Richard Osben's postmaster position. The city of Turrell is about twenty-seven miles southwest of Nodena in neighboring Crittenden County, Arkansas. In the letter, Henry Lowry asks Morris Jenkins to personally deliver the correspondence to his good friend J.T. Williams who knew his wife's whereabouts. Yet for unknown reasons Jenkins fails to follow these important instructions, opting instead to mail the letter to Williams and it was at this moment that the letter was seized by Richard Osben who in-turn notified the local sheriff and probably began to assemble the lynch mob to avenge the untimely deaths of his sister and father, as well as the injuries to his brothers.

<sup>39</sup> "Negro, Hunted By Arkansas Mob, Tells El Paso Detective of Slaying Two Men On Farm," *El Paso Herald*, 19 January 1921, 4; "Negro Arrested In Murder Of Two," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 19 January 1921, 4. The *Herald* indicates that "Capt. Smith will claim for the detective department a reward of \$1,000 offered for the arrest" of Henry Lowry, see "Negro Will Answer Charges Of Killing Two And Wounding One," *El Paso Herald*, Weekend Edition, 22-23 January 1921, 17. In the 1920 census, Claude T. Smith is listed as a forty-one year-old Lodger who is a detective for the police department. The name above his census entry is that of William E. Smith who is a forty-three year-old Lodger and is also a police department detective. They may be brothers since they both have the same last name, live at the same place, have the same occupation and employer, and indicate their parents and themselves being born in Texas, see *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Precinct 34), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 6 February 1920 by John T. Sullivan, Series T625, Roll 1799, Page 45, Line 8-9.

<sup>40</sup> Herbert Shapiro, *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 177; and Schneider, "We Return Fighting," 146.

<sup>41</sup> The precise date when Frederick Charles Knollenberg became a member of the local NAACP is unknown, but two years later—August 1923—he clearly was a paying dues member of the El Paso branch, see line item no. 47 in "Memberships of the El Paso Branch," Jerry B. Baldwin, Secretary of El Paso Branch, to NAACP Secretary, 27 August 1923, *NAACP Papers*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Part I, Branch Files: El Paso, Box G-202. The appendix of this dissertation has the entire membership list of the 1923 El Paso NAACP.

## **Le Roy W. Washington**

Le Roy Washington was born in Hard Times, Louisiana in 1880 and was a graduate of Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College in Lorman, Mississippi.<sup>42</sup> Alcorn A&M College was established in 1871 and is located eighty-five miles southwest of Jackson, Mississippi in the town of Lorman, Mississippi. Originally called Alcorn University, it changed its name to Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College in 1878. Hiram R. Revels (1827-1901), the first African American to serve in the United States Senate, became the college's first president in 1871 and served until his retirement in 1882. The initial mission of the school was to educate African American men, although in 1895 it became co-educational.<sup>43</sup> Washington taught school at Mary Holmes Industrial Seminary for Colored Girls in Mississippi.<sup>44</sup> He moved to El Paso with a civil service appointment in 1910 to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. Sometime between 1918 and 1920, Washington became president of the El Paso branch of the NAACP and

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<sup>42</sup> At the time of the 1880 census, Le Roy Washington was two months old, see *Tenth Census of the United States*, Schedule 1, Tensas Parish (Ward 1), Louisiana, enumerated on 9 June 1880, Series T9, Roll 472, Page 44 Subpage B, Line 7-11. The community of Hard Times is briefly mentioned in Mark Twain's 1883 classic *Life on the Mississippi*. Today this tiny village is no longer found in maps or directories, see Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (London: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1917), 4 and 152; Lori L. Smith, *Louisiana Directory of Cities, Towns, and Villages* (Hammond: SLU's Sims Memorial Library, 2005), 19, available at <<http://www.state.lib.la.us/empowerlibrary/LA%20Cities%20and%20Towns.pdf>> (accessed 27 December 2009).

<sup>43</sup> In 1978 the school renamed itself Alcorn State University. Some prominent students who attended or graduated from the school include Myrlie Evers-Williams (civil rights activist), Medgar W. Evers (Mississippi's first NAACP field secretary and 1952 graduate), J. Charles Evers (civil rights activist and politician), and Alexander "Alex" M.P. Haley (co-author/author of the bestsellers, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (1965) and *Roots: The Saga of an American Family* (1976), see Josephine McCann Posey, *Against Great Odds: The History of Alcorn State University* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994); and Myrlie Evers-Williams and Manning Marable, eds., *The Autobiography of Medgar Evers: A Hero's Life and Legacy Revealed Through His Writings, Letters, and Speeches* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2005), 7-9 and 26.

<sup>44</sup> The *El Paso Herald-Post* incorrectly states that the Mary Holmes Industrial Seminary for Colored Girls is in Louisiana; the school is actually in Mississippi, see error in "Washington, Top pioneer for blacks" *El Paso Herald-Post*, 9 February 1976, 40; for Mary Holmes Industrial Seminary in Mississippi see Day O. Kellogg, ed., *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 3 (Chicago: The Werner Company, 1897), 1724; and "A Glance at the Past and Present: Some Freedmen Schools" *The Home Mission Monthly* vol. 19 (November 1904—October 1905), 135.



served in that capacity until his death in May 1941.<sup>45</sup> He was a founding member of the El Paso branch and served in other capacities with the organization such as secretary and on its initial Executive Committee. He was a member of Shiloh Baptist Church in El Paso and was married to Viola E. Washington, who was a teacher in Louisiana before arriving in El Paso in 1918. In El Paso, Mrs. Washington became a civic worker and public speaker.<sup>46</sup> The couple lived at 3910 Manzana Street and had two children: Viola Edwina Washington, born in 1926 and Le Roy W. Washington, Jr., born in 1923. In the 1930 U.S. Census, Anna Wright, Viola E. Washington's seventy-one year-old mother, is listed as living in the Washington home and Le Roy Washington is listed as the head of the household with an occupation of guard at the U.S. Immigration Station.<sup>47</sup> Besides raising their own two children, they also helped rear their nephews, Edward W. Wright and Oscar B. Wright.<sup>48</sup>

Lawrence Nixon, Le Roy Washington, Fred Knollenberg, and an unnamed local minister visited Henry Lowry in jail.<sup>49</sup> Le Roy White could have been the unnamed local minister who accompanied Nixon, Washington, and Knollenberg to the El Paso jail when visiting Henry Lowry. White was a founding member (1913-1914) and former president (1918) of the local NAACP, and assistant pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church, the same church that Le Roy Washington belonged. White was a good friend of Lawrence Nixon and aware of Nixon's past experiences with racial violence as they had both moved in 1910 together from Cameron, Texas to El Paso

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<sup>45</sup> "Along The NAACP Battlefront: News From The Branches and Youth Councils," *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* vol. 48, no. 6 (June 1941): 200.

<sup>46</sup> "Washington, Top Pioneer for Blacks" *El Paso Herald-Post*, 9 February 1976, 40.

<sup>47</sup> *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Population Schedule*, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 3 April 1930, Series T626, Roll 2328, Page 31, Line 86-90.

<sup>48</sup> "Washington, Top pioneer for blacks" *El Paso Herald-Post*, 9 February 1976, 40.

<sup>49</sup> Schneider, "We Return Fighting," 146.

due to the lynching that occurred in that city in the fall of 1907. Nixon must have had on his mind the very lynching that he himself had witnessed in Cameron, Texas over a decade earlier as he stood by powerless and immobilized in his medical office in downtown Cameron. In El Paso, Nixon was now, due to his geographic location and organizational affiliation, in the midst of a power struggle between the institutional law enforcement apparatus and a fellow brethren from the working class who sorely needed assistance.

It was decided that the best course of action was for Lowry to not fight extradition efforts if Arkansas Governor Thomas C. McCrae would guarantee his safety back to Little Rock.<sup>50</sup> On January 20, Knollenberg negotiated directly with the Arkansas governor by telegraph and McCrae gave assurances to Lowry's safety.<sup>51</sup> Two days later, Saturday January 22, Arkansas deputies D.H. Dickson and J.J. Greer arrived into El Paso and departed the next morning with

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<sup>50</sup> The Thomas Chipman McCrae Papers are housed within Special Collections at the University of Arkansas Libraries in Fayetteville. Jeannie M. Wayne, past chair of the History Department at the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, looked at these papers for any mention of Lawrence Nixon, Le Roy Washington, Fred Knollenberg, or Henry Lowry and she stated, "I managed to get over to Special Collections [University of Arkansas Library in Fayetteville] yesterday afternoon after all. I'm afraid that the McCrae papers are very skimpy. There isn't much in the correspondence files at all and they skip about eight months (Nov. 1920 to June 1921 are blank). At least you know you haven't missed anything," see Jeannie M. Wayne, e-mail message to Will Guzmán, 12 February 2005.

<sup>51</sup> Frederick Knollenberg to Governor Thomas McCrae, 20 January 1921; Le Roy W. Washington to Elias C. Morris, Helena, Arkansas, 20 January 1921; Telegraph from Governor Thomas C. McCrae to Frederick Knollenberg, 23 January 1921, *NAACP Papers*, Part 7-A, reel 8, quoted in Schneider, "*We Return Fighting*," 146 and 422 n6; and Woodruff, *American Congo*, 111-12 and 250 n5. Elias C. Morris was one of the most prominent Black Baptist in the nation as the first president of the National Baptist Convention and according to the 1920 census, the sixty-four year-old Reverend lived at 401 Columbia Street in Helena City with his fifty-six year-old wife Fannie E. Morris (formerly Fannie E. Austin of Fackler, Alabama), their twenty-two year-old daughter, Sarah H. Morris, two sons, thirty-four year-old Elias A. Morris and twenty-one year-old John S. Morris, and twenty-six year-old nephew William H. Morris, along with Mary Campbell, a seventy year-old 'servant.' They are all classified as 'mulatto,' except for the 'servant' who is marked as 'Black,' see *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Helena City (2<sup>nd</sup> Ward), St. Francis Township, Phillips County, Arkansas, enumerated on 8 and 9 January 1920 by Richard A. Cunningham, Series T625, Roll 76, Page 120, Line 56-62. A brief biography of Morris is in Todd E. Lewis, "Elias Camp Morris (1855–1922)" *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History and Culture*, <<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?search=1&entryID=433>> (accessed 13 December 2009).

Lowry in-hand.<sup>52</sup> McRae, the twenty-sixth Governor of Arkansas whose inauguration was on January 12, 1921, ironically “proclaimed 23 January 1921 as Law and Order Day,” in Arkansas, the same day he communicated with Knollenberg, and just days prior to Lowry’s vicious lynching.<sup>53</sup> McRae gave orders to Arkansas deputies to bring Lowry straight to Little Rock so as to avoid the emotional atmosphere of the local community in Nodena.<sup>54</sup> The governor also unsuccessfully attempted to communicate with Mississippi County Sheriff Dwight H. Blackwood to inform him of his orders that Lowry not be harmed and fully protected from mobsters.<sup>55</sup> Deputies Dickson and Greer had different plans for Lowry that included taking him to Sardis, Mississippi and tipping-off mob leaders well in advance of their arrival. Sardis is 166 miles east of Little Rock, Arkansas, and since they were arriving from the west they were grossly off and fully intended to deliver Lowry to hoodlums and vagabonds.<sup>56</sup> A mob of unmasked men

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<sup>52</sup> “Negro, Alleged Slayer, Captured By El Paso Police For Crime Committed in Arkansas, Is Wrested From Officers On Train in Mississippi By Armed Mob Which Conveys Prisoner Into Woods and Disappears,” *El Paso Herald*, 26 January 1921, 1; “Armed Men Take Accused Negro From Deputies,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 26 January 1921, 2. The first names of the detectives are not given in newspaper accounts.

<sup>53</sup> Timothy Paul Donovan, Willard B. Gatewood, and Jeannie M. Wayne, eds., *The Governors of Arkansas: Essays in Political Biography* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995), 160. On McRae’s tenure as governor, see Calvin R. Ledbetter Jr., “Thomas C. McRae: National Forests, Education, Highways, and *Brickhouse v. Hill*” *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* vol. 59, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 1-29.

<sup>54</sup> Nodena (Mississippi County), Arkansas is nearly 175 miles northeast of Little Rock, Arkansas.

<sup>55</sup> “Mississippi Mob Makes Away with Arkansas Negro” *Fayetteville Democrat*, 26 January 1921, 1; *San Antonio Express*, 28 January 1921, 10. As county sheriff, Blackwood was thirty-four years-old at the time of Lowry’s lynching, see *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of Blytheville (2<sup>nd</sup> Ward), Mississippi County, Arkansas, enumerated on 19 January 1920 by T.J. Burns, Series T625, Roll 72, Page 230, Line 78-82.

<sup>56</sup> This obvious detail did not escape governor McRae’s ire. He was troubled by the officer’s return train route, “the round-about way through New Orleans, Mississippi and Tennessee instead of direct to Texarkana and thence to Little Rock and the state penitentiary,” was simply not logical, see “Mob Burns Negro Who Was Arrested Here On Charge of Murdering Arkansans,” *El Paso Herald*, 27 January 1921, 2. Sardis, Mississippi is about 103 miles south of Nodena, Arkansas.

took Lowry “with lamb-like docility” from Dickson and Greer and publically announced their intentions to lynch him.<sup>57</sup>

Lawrence Nixon would read about Lowry’s fate in the *El Paso Herald*, which did not condemn the obstruction and actions of the lynchers.<sup>58</sup> Instead, the *Herald* indicated that Blacks should feel fortunate in that this country only spends a “mere 40 minutes burning a negro” as compared to China where the punishment of criminals for certain crimes is extended over five or six days.<sup>59</sup> Unlike the *El Paso Herald*, Governor McRae was outraged stating that the lynching was “the most disreputable act ever committed in Arkansas.”<sup>60</sup> The gory details of Lowry’s public lynching would make anyone ill. In the late afternoon of Wednesday January 26, 1921 nearly six-hundred people descended on Osben Craig’s farm to watch Henry Lowry’s body slowly roast for nearly an hour while mob leaders threw dry leaves and poured gasoline as Lowry’s wife and young daughter were forced to watch.<sup>61</sup> Lowry joined the same fate as fifty-

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<sup>57</sup> “Negro, Alleged Slayer, Captured By El Paso Police For Crime Committed in Arkansas, Is Wrested From Officers On Train in Mississippi By Armed Mob Which Conveys Prisoner Into Woods and Disappears,” *El Paso Herald*, 26 January 1921, 1; “Mob Burns Negro Who Was Arrested Here On Charge of Murdering Arkansans,” *El Paso Herald*, 27 January 1921, 2; and Woodruff, *American Congo*, 111-12.

<sup>58</sup> “Mob Burns Negro Who Was Arrested Here On Charge of Murdering Arkansans,” *El Paso Herald*, 27 January 1921, 2; “Negro Burned At Stake Should Think Of Torture He Misses By Being In U.S. Instead of China,” *El Paso Herald*, 28 January 1921, 6. The *El Paso Times* condemned the lynching of Henry Lowry, see Schneider, “*We Return Fighting*,” 147 and 422 n10.

<sup>59</sup> “Negro Burned At Stake Should Think Of Torture He Misses By Being In U.S. Instead of China,” *El Paso Herald*, 28 January 1921, 6.

<sup>60</sup> “Mob Burns Negro Who Was Arrested Here On Charge of Murdering Arkansans,” *El Paso Herald*, 27 January 1921, 2; “Arkansas Governor Says Burning Of Negro State’s Most Disreputable Deed,” *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, 27 January 1921, 7.

<sup>61</sup> “They Fed Before They Killed” *New York Times*, 27 January 1921, 1; and “Mob Burns Negro Who Was Arrested Here On Charge of Murdering Arkansans,” *El Paso Herald*, 27 January 1921, 2. “In Most lynchings, the victim confessed after being beaten or tortured into admitting his guilt or as a desperate attempt to assuage the angry mob...the mob that burned Henry Lowry alive interrogated him as the flames scorched his body. According to one news account, as Lowry confessed, one man questioned him and another “wrote answers down in a notebook. It resembled a courtroom scene with prosecuting attorney and court reporter.” As this example makes evident, confessions lent lynchings the trappings of lawful punishment and served to justify the mob’s violence as rightful and warranted, despite that confessions were forced and were often obtained after the lynching was underway and not likely to be aborted. Newspaper reports and pro-lynching narratives took pains, however, to assure readers that

nine other African Americans that year: lynched in a nation which is, as James Weldon Johnson wrote, “on its way to Hell and Destruction.”<sup>62</sup>

Native Arkansan and Yale-educated William Pickens, NAACP field secretary, immediately traveled to the Delta and investigated the murder and found that the “rural districts of Arkansas are more unsafe for colored people to-day than they were thirty-odd years ago; perhaps more than they have ever before been.” The Mississippi River Valley—which encompassed Mississippi County, (Nodena) Arkansas—Pickens concluded, was the “Congo of America” where “labor is forced, and the laborer is a slave,” though the form of slavery “is a cunningly contrived debt-slavery, to give the appearance of civilization and the sanction of law.”<sup>63</sup> He blamed the sharecropping system for the lynchings that had occurred in recent years. Historian Nan Elizabeth Woodruff tells us that “Pickens correctly saw the persistence of sharecropping as the root cause of much of the postwar violence that swept the Delta, yet he failed to see the other side of the issue—the growing postwar militancy of rural Delta peoples that had grown out of wartime changes.”<sup>64</sup>

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these confessions were true. As in legal hangings, the insistence on confession also compelled the condemned to sanction and participate in his own demise,” see Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 61-2.

<sup>62</sup> Statistic on lynching is found in “A NAACP Crisis Timeline” *The Crisis* vol. 106, no. 4 (July/August 1999): 40. James Weldon Johnson quote is found in Christopher Waldrep, *African Americans Confront Lynching: Strategies of Resistance from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Era* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 166.

<sup>63</sup> Woodruff, *American Congo*, 112. Cunard and Ford, *Negro: An Anthology*, 21-3. In 1910 the twenty-nine year-old William Pickens was a professor at Talladega College who lived on West Battle Street in Talladega, Alabama with his twenty-nine year old wife, Minnie M. Pickens, and their three year-old son William Pickens, Jr., and one year-old daughter, Harriet “Hattie” Ida Pickens. Pickens married a graduate of Tougaloo College, the former Minnie Cooper McAlpine of Meridian, Mississippi in 1905. They had William Pickens, Jr. in 1906, their daughters Harriet Ida Pickens in 1909 and Rudy Annie Pickens was born in 1911, see *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce and Labor—Bureau of the Census, City of Talladega (Ward 3), Talladega County, enumerated on 15 April 1910 by W.W. Kendrick, Series T624, Roll 33, Page 144, Line 18-21; Sheldon Avery, *Up from Washington: William Pickens and the Negro Struggle for Equality, 1900-1954* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989), 35; and William Pickens, *The Heir of Slaves: An Autobiography* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1911).

<sup>64</sup> Woodruff, *American Congo*, 112.



Figure 3. Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon, c.1920-1930.

### **Lawrence Nixon, Race, and Public Pools in El Paso**

Militancy entailed Blacks becoming more assertive, as had Lowry, in their demands for protection and their constitutional rights. For someone with Nixon's mild-mannered demeanor this would entail becoming involved in local community issues whereby human dignity and respect would be observed, if not commanded. Besides civil and human rights, Lawrence Nixon also became involved in local civic matters with his participation in a community organization known as the Negro Ministerial Alliance.<sup>65</sup> He headed this committee, and as their spokesperson he petitioned the city of El Paso in the spring of 1924 on behalf of the Black community for a swimming pool. Nixon had been given the impression the previous year that the proposed pool location would be in Washington Park, the city's largest playground. Located between Alameda and Franklin canal, the popular Washington Park hosted a "bathing beach, baseball grounds, children's grounds, zoological collection," and a "free automobile camp," all of which barred Blacks.<sup>66</sup> As the premier recreational area in El Paso, having a public pool for the African American community in Washington Park would have confirmed the conventional wisdom that

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<sup>65</sup> "Negroes Want Pool at Washington Park; It Won't Do—Mayor" *El Paso Herald*, 18 April 1924. Newspaper clipping found in El Paso Public Library—downtown branch, Southwest Collection, Richard Moberley Dudley Scrapbook, no. 559 (4 March 1924 to 30 September 1924), 47. Scrapbook compiled by Deputy City Clerk, George N. Gorham and donated to the public library by Mrs. Frances "Fannie" Dudley, Mayor Dudley's wife.

<sup>66</sup> Holman Taylor, ed., "Miscellaneous: El Paso" *Texas State Journal of Medicine*, vol. 17, no. 12 (April 1922): 585. The "full membership of the Texas, New Mexico and Arizona medical associations, as well as a considerable number of the leading medicos of Mexico" were in attendance in El Paso, Texas at the Fifty-Sixth Annual Session of the State Medical Association of Texas May 8-11, 1922, see Taylor, *Texas State Journal of Medicine* (April 1922): 581.

El Paso was more tolerant on race issues than were other Texas locales, but this would not be the case. Although the city had agreed to finance the construction of a pool for the Black community the year before, in 1923, the exact location was in dispute, and despite promises a public pool for Black El Pasoans would never get built.<sup>67</sup>

Members of the Negro Ministerial Alliance consisted of Lawrence A. Nixon, Jerry B. Baldwin, William B. Gray and Le Roy W. Washington, all members of the local NAACP.<sup>68</sup> Baldwin was the manager or owner of the Elite Barber Shop and Cigar Store and at the time secretary of the El Paso NAACP.<sup>69</sup> William Gray was a Black barber from Tennessee who lived

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<sup>67</sup> Unable to find any records to support that the city did indeed fulfill their promise to the Black community and actually build an all-Black pool, see "Swimming Pool at Park For Negroes is Planned" *El Paso Herald-Post*, Saturday, 14 April 1934, 2; "Negro Pool Chance Considered Slight" *El Paso Herald-Post*, 17 May 1937, 2; "U.S. Projects Good Business, Harlan Says" *El Paso Herald-Post*, 8 April 1938, 18; *El Paso Herald-Post*, Tuesday 24 May 1938, 2; "\$10,000 More Asked to Repair [Washington Park] Pool" *El Paso Herald-Post*, 12 January 1939, 5; and "Negroes Ask \$3,000" *El Paso Herald-Post*, 11 May 1939, 14.

<sup>68</sup> "Negroes Want Pool at Washington Park; It Won't Do—Mayor" *El Paso Herald*, 18 April 1924. The 1920 census indicates William Bristow Gray is a Black forty-eight year-old barber who was born in Tennessee and lives at 507 S. Ochoa Street with Martha Gray, his thirty year-old wife, who was born in Mississippi and is unemployed and classified as 'Mulatto,' see *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Precinct 5), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 12 February 1920 by E.B. Ochoa, Series T625, Roll 1798, Page 57 Subpage B, Line 52-3.

Jerry B. Baldwin was born and raised in Louisiana and at the time of the 1920 census is a thirty-eight year-old barber who lives with his twenty year-old wife at 2918 Frutas Avenue; wife's name is indiscernible due to the enumerator's poor script. Surprisingly, both are classified as 'white,' which could be a possible error for three reasons: First, Jerry B. Baldwin is in the 1910 El Paso city directory as "(c)" or "Colored." Secondly, Jerry B. Baldwin was the corresponding secretary for the El Paso Lyceum and Civic Improvement Society which never indicated in any of their documents that they were an integrated group so one has to assume that all members were non-white or all-Black. And lastly, for at least a decade, 1914-1924, Jerry B. Baldwin was Secretary for the El Paso NAACP, which although the national organization did have white members, it was rare that a local branch would have white members and even more so a white member who served as an officer. Both husband and wife are listed as NAACP due-paying members living at "2918 Frutas" in the local organization's official list to the national office. It may be that Baldwin was a light-skinned Black man who either married a white woman or married a light-skinned Black woman (she too is labeled 'white' in the 1920 census), see John F. Worley, ed., *Worley's 1910 City Directory of El Paso Texas* (Dallas: John F. Worley Directory Company, 1910); *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Voting Precinct 10), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 29 January 1920 by Wise, Series T625, Roll 1798, Page 223 Subpage A, Line 6-7; and line item no. 51 and 52 in "Memberships of the El Paso Branch," Jerry B. Baldwin, Secretary of El Paso Branch, to NAACP Secretary, 27 August 1923, *NAACP Papers*, LOCMD, Part I, Branch Files: El Paso, Box G-202.

<sup>69</sup> Letter from Jerry B. Baldwin to Robert W. Bagnall, March 7, 1923. LOCMD, NAACP Papers, Part I, Branch Files: El Paso, Texas, 1913-1925, Box G-202, Folder 2. Baldwin was one of the original members, serving as Corresponding Secretary, for the El Paso Lyceum and Civic Improvement Society and had continued to serve as Secretary after the organization transformed itself into an NAACP branch. In this letter Baldwin writes Bagnall

at 507 S. Ochoa Street in El Paso. Le Roy Washington was the branch president of the El Paso NAACP and would hold this title until the early 1940s.<sup>70</sup> The Alliance's formal petition for the pool was made to the city council Friday morning April 18, 1924. Speaking for the Alliance, Nixon expressed reservations over the city's proposed location of the pool at the all-Black Douglass school versus the group's explicit wishes at Washington Park. In 1923, councilmen Andrew B. Poe and Harvey P. Jackson, accompanied by the city engineer and Lawrence Nixon looked over potential sites throughout the city for a segregated pool. Poe was a shoe store merchant and Jackson was the vice president of the Texas Mortgage Company.<sup>71</sup> "It seemed that a location at Washington park would be the most convenient," Nixon asserted. The Negro Ministerial Alliance was "under the impression that the matter had been decided in this way," that the all-Black pool would be built in Washington Park, and not at the Douglass School

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regarding NAACP matters on the letterhead of Elite Barber Shop and Cigar Store, which is located at 221 Texas Street. Baldwin scratches out the name "C.O. Borcharding" as Proprietor and hand-writes his own name. At the time of this letter, Bagnall was Director of Branches for the NAACP. The son of an Episcopalian minister from Virginia, in 1911 Reverend R.W. Bagnall became pastor of the "elitist St. Matthew's Episcopal Church" in Detroit. He was an activist who did away with pew rentals, challenged segregated schools in Ypsilanti, lectured widely throughout Michigan, opposed laws outlawing interracial marriages, organized branch chapters of the NAACP throughout the Midwest, and served as treasurer of Detroit's first NAACP who had their first branch meeting in the basement of his church. Phyllis Vine, *One Man's Castle: Clarence Darrow in Defense of the American Dream* (New York: Amistad, 2004), 63-64, 111, 139, 187, and 242.

"C.O. Borcharding" was Claud [sic] Borcharding, a thirty-six year-old brick mason white male who lived at 103 Wyoming Street, see *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Voting Precinct 33), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 14 January 1920 by Mary A. Birmingham, Series T625, Roll 1799, Page 16 Subpage B, Line 78.

<sup>70</sup> Le Roy W. Washington was one of the original members of the El Paso NAACP when it was first established—May 1914—serving on the executive committee. By January 1918 branch letterhead indicates that he held the title of Secretary, and by September 1923 letters address him as branch president. There are no letters between 1918 and 1923 that would indicate definitively when exactly Le Roy Washington became branch president. LOCMD, NAACP Papers, Part I, Branch Files: El Paso, Texas, 1913-1925, Box G-202, Folder 2.

<sup>71</sup> On Poe, see *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Precinct 20), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 17 January 1920 by Mrs. H. Hadley, Series T625, Roll 1799, Page 156 Subpage B, Line 84-87. On Jackson, see *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Voting Precinct 24), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 16 January 1920 by Ethel N. Lyman, Series T625, Roll 1799, Page 206 Subpage A, Line 16-20. The forty-seven year-old Poe lived at 2518 Montana Avenue and the forty-one year-old Jackson lived at 1107 E. Rio Grande Street.



location, until their surprise upon reading “in *The Herald* that the council had chosen a site at Douglass school” instead.<sup>72</sup> In 1920, Douglass School had moved one and a half miles northeast from its old location in the Mexican and Mexican American enclave of Chihuahuita.<sup>73</sup> At 200 Washington Street, Washington Park was two miles east of the new Douglass School location—101 S. Eucalyptus Street. Many Blacks in El Paso “felt the proposed pool at the Douglass school would be inconvenient” because as Dr. Nixon stated, “we [the Black community] would not have the advantage of car service. If it were placed at the Douglass school it would be off the car line.”<sup>74</sup> Presumably Nixon was referring to public transportation such as the city trolley, which many Blacks would have relied upon to get to Washington Park since most probably did not live within walking distance or have their own vehicles.<sup>75</sup>

Prior to the 1920s some large northern cities had municipal pools, but few could be found elsewhere. Yet, during the 1920s and 1930s over a thousand communities nationally constructed swimming pools.<sup>76</sup> The building occurred in two phases, the first of which lasted from 1920 to 1929 due to the nation’s relative prosperity, which permitted cities such as El Paso to build public pools to address the increasing demand for outdoor leisure activities.<sup>77</sup> This recreational

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<sup>72</sup> “Negroes Want Pool at Washington Park” *El Paso Herald*, 18 April 1924.

<sup>73</sup> Dailey, “I’m Building Me A Home,” 15. The Douglass School moved to the corner of Fourth and Kansas in south El Paso [Chihuahuita] in 1889. For the 1920 boundaries of Chihuahuita neighborhood, see Map no. 2 and no. 3 in García, *Desert Immigrants*, 128-29.

<sup>74</sup> “Dudley Draws Color Line on Park Bathing,” *El Paso Times*, 19 April 1924. Newspaper clipping found in El Paso Public Library—downtown branch, Southwest Collection, Richard Moberley Dudley Scrapbook, no. 559 (4 March 1924 to 30 September 1924), 47.

<sup>75</sup> On car ownership among African Americans during this era see Kathleen Franz, “The Open Road”: Automobility and Racial Uplift in the Interwar Years” found in Bruce Sinclair, ed., *Technology and the African-American Experience: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 131-54.

<sup>76</sup> Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 88.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*; William H. Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1990), 236.

increase was in large measure due to generally improved working conditions. Early twentieth strikes, worker agitation, and reforms—including such activities in El Paso—forced an eventual lowering of the hours worked per week nationwide.<sup>78</sup> By 1920, the average time spent on the job had dropped to forty-eight hours weekly, compared to fifty-five hours in 1910, and sixty hours in the 1890s. The reduced amount of hours required at work created disposable time, resulting in a demand for recreation and leisure facilities, including public pools for sun bathing, wading, and swimming.<sup>79</sup>

The federal government initiated the second building phase during the Great Depression in 1934 that lasted until the end of the decade. Historian Jeff Wiltse notes that the New Deal swimming pools were as “phenomenal a public works endeavor as the much-touted Grand Coulee Dam and the Tennessee Valley Authority.” These public pools provided leisure and recreation for millions of Americans “who desperately needed relief from the heat and hard times.”<sup>80</sup> This was particularly true for the Southwest where wages dropped and unemployment soared in a region where temperatures easily reached triple digits during the peak summer months.<sup>81</sup>

Despite the intense heat, ironically, both small and large cities in the West and South such as El Paso, provided few public swimming pools before 1920. The municipal pools that did exist were typically indoors, which is perplexing considering the regular heat waves this region of the country experiences. In 1925, for example, Los Angeles operated fifteen indoor and only

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 92; García, *Desert Immigrants*, 86, 96, and 107.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.; García, *Desert Immigrants*, 209-11, 217, and 221.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>81</sup> Timmons, *El Paso*, 238; and Christopher C. Burt and Mark Stroud, *Extreme Weather: A Guide and Record Book* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2007), 33.

three outdoor pools; although during the next five years eight more outdoor pools were constructed. Spokane operated no municipal pools before 1919 but then opened three outdoor facilities during the 1920s. Similar to Spokane, Southern cities such as Fort Worth, Texas operated no municipal pools before 1920, but opened four between 1921 and 1927, including a segregated pool for Blacks. Dallas opened three outdoor pools during the 1920s, one of which was assigned for African American use. Throughout the 1920s Jim Crow pools were also opened in Atlanta and New Orleans resulting in many urban Blacks in the South having access to public pools “in which to swim, just not the same ones as whites.”<sup>82</sup>

El Paso attempted to follow this same pattern of having a public pool established specifically for Blacks to use as other Southern cities had done. On Friday April 18, 1924 Mayor Richard Dudley emphasized to Lawrence Nixon and the Alliance, “I am in favor of a pool for negroes, and if the bond issue carries, a pool will be built. We will consult with your people and a site will be chosen which will be satisfactory to all concerned.”<sup>83</sup> “To all concerned” was coded language for where Anglos, and Anglos only, felt the all-Black pool should be located. No mention is made in newspaper accounts as to where Mexican Americans went to swim, sun bathe, and wade. Dudley (1862-1925) was an engineer and El Paso mayor between 1923 and 1925. Born in Kentucky, he helped build the New York harbor and later directed construction of the Chihuahua and Pacific Railway and the Mexico and Northwestern Railway. In 1912 Dudley permanently settled in El Paso, living at 711 Cincinnati Avenue, where he organized the Texas Bank and Trust Company, which was later merged into the First National Bank. Dudley's mayoral administration was known for the construction of public buildings and recreational

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<sup>82</sup> Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 90-1.

<sup>83</sup> “Negroes Want Pool at Washington Park; It Won’t Do—Mayor” *El Paso Herald*, 18 April 1924.

facilities. He became the only mayor of El Paso to be elected without opposition when he ran for a second term. He was sworn in 16 April 1925, but died two weeks later in an El Paso hospital after undergoing ulcer surgery.<sup>84</sup>

Dudley staunchly opposed the proposed pool's close proximity to the popular whites-only pool within Washington Park, which was located at 200 Washington Street.<sup>85</sup> He stressed, "I have never been, and am not now, in favor of a pool for negroes in the park." Furthermore, Dudley stressed that El Paso has "always had perfect harmony between the two races, and I think it would be unwise to create a situation that might lead to trouble."<sup>86</sup> This alleged "trouble" that Dudley was possibly referring to was the potential breach of El Paso's racial status quo of that era. The son of a Baptist preacher and a child of the segregated South who was born and raised during the Civil War and Reconstruction era, Dudley was a moderate Democrat who clearly was aware of the racial norms that El Paso wanted to preserve, including racist stereotypes of Blacks. However, twice elected as a Democrat to the state legislature, it was in his second term in which he became involved in a bitter city campaign against the Ku Klux Klan. The KKK was increasing its membership throughout the state, including in El Paso with their control of the

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<sup>84</sup> Arthur H. Leibson, "Richard Moberley Dudley," *Handbook of Texas Online* <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/DD/fdu55.html>> (accessed 22 November 2009); *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Voting Precinct 31), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 27 January 1920 by L. Stanley Heckman, Series T625, Roll 1799, Page 2 Subpage B, Line 59-61. In New York Dudley built his own contracting business and in 1896 he married Fannie Moore of Tarrytown, New York. The couple had no children. The 1920 census list Dudley as a white fifty-nine year-old male, employed as a contractor for an unnamed railroad construction company, who lives with his unemployed forty-four year-old wife, Francis Dudley, and Tomasa Ozaeta, a white twenty year-old 'servant' who was born, along with her parents, in México.

<sup>85</sup> Washington Park is located at 200 Washington Street, see Taylor, *Texas State Journal of Medicine* (April 1922): 581.

<sup>86</sup> "Negroes Want Pool at Washington Park; It Won't Do—Mayor" *El Paso Herald*, 18 April 1924.

local school board. As the anti-Klan mayoral candidate, Dudley was elected with his entire alderman slate in an electoral setback from which the local KKK never politically recovered.<sup>87</sup>

Many whites during this time, according to historian Jeff Wiltse, objected to swimming with African Americans for three primary reasons. First they feared coming into contact with the same water that Blacks had touched or swam in. The only way many whites would swim in a pool after Blacks was “if the water was drained and the tank scrubbed.”<sup>88</sup> Many whites of the 1920s thought Blacks to be unclean, uncouth, and unhealthy—prone to carrying transmissible maladies such as smallpox, venereal diseases, and tuberculosis.<sup>89</sup>

Secondly, sexuality and gender caused many whites to object to Black men viewing at public pools, what seemed for that era, the perceived nearly naked bodies of white women and interacting with them in such “intimate and erotic public spaces.” The irrational fear that Black men would act upon their “supposedly untamed sexual desire for white women” by accidentally or purposely touching them perpetuated sexism and racism. This objection permitted the continual restriction of white women’s social and sexual choices by limiting their opportunities to meet and form relationships with Black men. However, this particular anxiety—viewing the relatively scantily clad bodies of white women at public pools and interacting with them in such “intimate and erotic public spaces,”—one could argue, was not simply restricted to Black men, but all men. In June 1923 El Paso City Councilman Andrew Poe advised against the installation of any more lights for the wading basins at Florence and Seventh streets because he said women were

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<sup>87</sup> Arthur H. Leibson, “Richard Moberley Dudley,” *Handbook of Texas Online* <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/DD/fdu55.html>> (accessed 22 November 2009); and Shawn Lay, ed., *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 88-90.

<sup>88</sup> Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 148.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

“coming to bathe in the pool with such thin things on that it would not be well to have additional lights,” he added, “as it is now one can see but not too well.” In other words, he preferred inadequate lighting which could potentially lead to injuries and perhaps even crime over more lighting that could lead to the bodies of women being more visible to the human eye, presumably that of males.<sup>90</sup> What Black men symbolized was the more severe violation of conservative values as it related to barely-clad Anglo women and their potential fraternizing with Black men.<sup>91</sup>

Thirdly, some exposed Black male bodies at public pools would pose as a masculine and racial threat when put side by side with the supposed scrawny bodies of a few white males. “Turn of the century manhood,” writes Gail Bederman, “constructed bodily strength and social authority as identical.” The integration of public pools during the inter-war years would have resulted in a number of Black men displaying “powerful and muscular physiques and thereby conspicuously” challenge whites and their racist notions of Blacks being physically and biologically inferior.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> “No More Lights Needed In City’s Swimming Basin,” *El Paso Herald*, 20 June 1923, newspaper clipping found in Richard Moberley Dudley Scrapbook, no. 558 (23 April 1923–3 March 1924), 49. This scrapbook is located in the Southwest Collection of the El Paso Public Library—downtown branch.

<sup>91</sup> Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 124-25.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 124-25, 156; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 8. Wiltse also writes that “the emphasis on physical markers of manliness posed problems for white Americans’ assertion of racial superiority. As Gail Bederman explores in *Manliness and Civilization*, white Americans justified racial discrimination and their own assumed racial superiority in part by pointing to the superior manliness of white men. When manliness was defined in economic, political, and moral terms—as it was by the middle class during the nineteenth century—white men’s claim to superior manliness in relation to black men seemed secure. When it became defined more in physical terms, as it did during the early decades of the twentieth century, white men’s claim to superiority became more tenuous. After all, most black men worked at strenuous physical jobs that, in many cases, contributed to powerful, muscular physiques. Many white men, on the other hand, worked at sedentary white-collar jobs that did not strengthen the body. In most public settings, the physical shortcomings of some white men in comparison to some black men would not have been apparent because all were fully clothed. At the swimming pools of the interwar years, however, men exposed their bodies to the public. If blacks and whites were permitted to swim and sunbathe together at these pools, some black men could literally show themselves to be the masculine equal and in many cases superior of white men. The visual comparison would implicitly undermine one of the long-standing

If an all-Black pool were built adjacent to the all-white pool in heavily used Washington Park, it would obviously bring many El Pasoans in close proximity to each other, socially and sexually, thus raising the specter of violating the racial etiquette of this western and southern border city. It was perhaps due to these three reasons that Dudley asserted: "I am against having the two pools in the park. The council voted in favor of building a pool for you, and I am strongly in favor of carrying it out," but he condescendingly continued, telling Nixon "but I want to see it put in a place that would be to your best interests. I would advocate the arrest of a white man for interfering with your liberties just as quickly as I would that of a negro."<sup>93</sup> Clearly the mayor was more concerned with his political standing, expediency and re-election when he said:

There has always existed in El Paso the best possible feeling between the negroes and whites and I do not think it would be the part of wisdom to promote anything that would tend to disturb that feeling. *We are not going to start any war.* I am opposed to putting the swimming pool in Washington Park because I think we could find a more appropriate place. You are entitled to a pool and we are going to build one, but I am not going to do anything I think would create *trouble for myself* or anyone else.<sup>94</sup>

Dudley's exclamation of a possible race 'war' suggested that Anglos in El Paso could easily erupt in anger, using extreme racial violence if forced to share the same park by having an all-Black swimming pool next to their own in adored Washington Park.<sup>95</sup>

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justifications for white supremacy. In short, it would challenge racial hierarchy as it was constructed in America at the time, much like Jack Johnson's victory over Jim Jeffries did in the 1910 heavyweight title bout. One of the ways to defend the ramparts of white supremacy was to keep mostly naked black men from appearing alongside mostly naked white men at municipal swimming pools. Few, in any, public officials or white swimmers consciously reasoned all this out in their minds. Rather, they would have intuited that black men conspicuously displaying powerful physiques in front of thousands of people at local pools was objectionable," see Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 134-35; Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 1-31 and 170-215.

<sup>93</sup> "Dudley Draws Color Line on Park Bathing," *El Paso Times*, 19 April 1924.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. Emphasis not in original.

<sup>95</sup> As an indicator of the value and quality of the pool at Washington Park, after having inspected one-hundred pools in Detroit and other cities Jack McDonald, El Paso city recreation manager, noted that the "Washington Park swimming pool is the best" he has ever seen, see *El Paso Post*, 6 June 1925, quoted in *El Paso Herald-Post*, 6 June 1935, 4. The *El Paso Herald* was sold to the *El Paso Post* in 1931 becoming the *El Paso Herald-Post*, see Timmons, *El Paso: A Borderlands History*, 236.

Conceivably still fresh on the minds of many, including Dudley and others in El Paso, were the racially-charged disturbances of the previous five years throughout the nation including twenty-five cities exploding during the “Red Summer” of 1919 that saw violence in Longview, Texas (July 1919), just twenty-three miles west of Marshall, Lawrence Nixon’s town of birth and upbringing. Besides Longview, other cities such as Chicago (July 1919), Elaine, Arkansas (October 1919) and Greenwood, Oklahoma (June 1921) witnessed racial mayhem.<sup>96</sup> In addition, a year before Mayor Dudley’s statements suggesting ‘war’ to Lawrence Nixon, the Rosewood Massacre in Florida (January 1923) made national news when dozens of African Americans were killed.<sup>97</sup> And finally, in May of 1922 there was a month-long reign of terror on Blacks, including multiple lynchings, in Kirvin (Freestone County), Texas.<sup>98</sup> Lawrence Nixon proceeded to depart the city chambers after the mayor’s paternalistically racist statements, but

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<sup>96</sup> The phrase “Red Summer” of 1919 was coined by James Weldon Johnson, NAACP Field Secretary and later Executive Secretary, due to the racial violence and bloodshed against Blacks of that summer, see Sondra K. Wilson, ed., *The Selected Writings of James Weldon Johnson: The New York age Editorials, 1914-1923* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 53; Jan Voogd, *Race Riots and Resistance: The Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008); on specific riots mentioned see William M. Tuttle’s *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996) and “Violence in a ‘Heathen’ Land: The Longview Race Riot of 1919” *Phylon* 33, no. 4 (winter 1972): 324-333; Jan Voogd, “Longview (Texas) Riot of 1919,” in Walter Rucker and James Nathaniel Upton, eds., *Encyclopedia of American Race Riots* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), 369-371; Robert Whitaker, *On the Laps of Gods: The Red Summer of 1919 and the Struggle for Justice That Remade a Nation* (New York: Random House, 2008); Grif Stockley, Jr. *Blood in Their Eyes: The Elaine Race Massacre of 1919* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2001); and Alfred L. Brophy, *Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Riot of 1921: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>97</sup> Borderland newspapers that reported this ‘race war’ in Florida included, “Six Slain in Race Rioting; Help Rushed: Florida Trouble Beyond Control” *San Antonio Express*, 5 January 1923, 1; “22 Dead in Florida Race Riot” *San Antonio Evening News*, 5 January 1923, 1; “Races in A Gory War” *The Santa Fe New Mexican*, 5 January 1923, 1; “Five Dead Result of Fla. Race Riot” *Wichita Daily Times*, 5 January 1923, 7; “Florida Race War Dead Five” *The Port Arthur News*, 5 January 1923, 1; “Officers Control Florida Race War” *San Antonio Express*, 6 January 1923, 4; “Quiet Follows Racial Clash in Florida Towns” *The Brownsville Herald*, 6 January 1923, 1; “Florida Negro Taken to Side of Newly-Dug Graves and There Shot” *Galveston Daily News*, 7 January 1923, 17; “Negro Shot Down At Grave Of Mother Also Slain By Mob” *San Antonio Express*, 7 January 1923, 1 and 3. Some of those in Rosewood who died included Sam Carter, Lexie Gordon, Mingo Williams, Sarah Carrier, James Carrier, and Sylvester Carrier.

<sup>98</sup> Monte Akers, *Flames after Midnight: Murder, Vengeance, and the Desolation of a Texas Community* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999).



not without leaving the formal written swimming pool petition with the city council asking for the Washington Park location.<sup>99</sup>

Blacks in El Paso would never secure their own pool as promised by the Dudley administration.<sup>100</sup> Although they continued to fight for respect and the allocation of resources for the needs of their community which would result in a minor victory nine years later in 1933 when the city, under Park Commissioner Hugo Myer, did allow Blacks to use the Seventh Street swimming pool on “alternative four day periods.”<sup>101</sup> Two months later, in October of 1933, Anglo Attorney Frederick Knollenberg pressed forward with Nixon’s pool request when he himself presented a petition signed by 123 people to the city council asking that a swimming pool for Blacks be built in the new addition the city had proposed for Washington Park. The petition experienced a similar fate as Nixon’s request of nearly ten years earlier: it too was ignored and immediately “tabled.”<sup>102</sup> In all likelihood, Lawrence Nixon was perhaps one of the 123 petitioners since Knollenberg and Nixon knew of each other through the NAACP.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> “Dudley Draws Color Line on Park Bathing,” *El Paso Times*, 19 April 1924. The *El Paso Times* does not indicate if the other members of the Negro Ministerial Alliance were in attendance with Nixon.

<sup>100</sup> Frances Hills, “Interview no. 751,” page 15 and 23-4. By 1953 it would become a moot point since most public pools throughout the nation were required to become integrated due to a variety of successful legal challenges. The *El Paso Herald-Post* reported that “the Supreme Court ruled in effect” that Blacks “must be admitted to the Swope Park Municipal Swimming and Wading Pool at Kansas City, Mo. By refusing to review the case the high court upheld a court of appeals injunction requiring the admission” of Blacks “to the half million dollar pool,” see *El Paso Herald-Post*, 12 October 1953, 20; and “‘More Sensitive Than Schools’: The Struggle to Desegregate Municipal Swimming Pools” found in Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 154-80.

<sup>101</sup> “Let Negroes Use Pool,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 28 July 1933, 9.

<sup>102</sup> “Ask Negro Swin [sic] Pool” *El Paso Herald-Post*, Friday, 6 October 1933, 11.

<sup>103</sup> The names or ethnicity of the 123 people on this petition is not known at this time.

## **El Paso's 1923 Juneteenth Celebration**

Although African Americans in El Paso never did secure their own pool, either at Washington Park or at the Douglass School, they nevertheless appeared to have some influence with, if not the respect of local Anglo political elites when they sought votes. In June of 1923, Mayor Dudley, County Attorney Will H. Pelphrey, and Sheriff Seth Orndorff attended the Juneteenth celebration program at Pastime Park in East El Paso.<sup>104</sup> Dudley denounced lynchings and affirmed “a square deal” for all races.<sup>105</sup> Sheriff Orndorff stated that African Americans in El Paso county had made “remarkable progress” and referenced the large number of Black employees in his lower valley ranch, who were “giving excellent service and rearing their families to be good citizens.” The *El Paso Times* described the event as “one of the outstanding

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<sup>104</sup> On what Juneteenth is, see footnote in the introduction of this study. Seth M. Orndorff is described in the 1920 census as a thirty-eight year-old white male, sheriff for the county, who lives in the 1100 or 1200 block of Cincinnati Avenue with Mattie D. Orndorff, his thirty-three year-old wife, and their five children: Ruth (twelve years-old), Buford (ten years-old), Martha (seven years-old), Mildred (five years-old), and Nancy (four years-old). In addition, the Orndorff family had two live-in “servants,” Aluzalia [*sic*] Rico (thirty-four years-old) and her husband Lorenzo Rico (thirty-five years-old) who spoke Spanish and were both born in México, see *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Voting Precinct 31), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 26 January 1920 by L. Stanley Heckman, Series T625, Roll 1799, Page 1 Subpage B, Line 80-8. William “Will” H. Pelphrey was born in Johnson County, Texas and graduated from New Mexico A&M College and earned his law degree from Cumberland Law School. In 1906 he was elected tax assessor for Alamogordo, Otero County, New Mexico and elected El Paso County attorney in 1918, serving six years. He then became Justice in the Eighth Court of Civil Appeals (1924-1936) and died in Washington, D.C. in 1938, see In 1920 census, Pelphrey was described as a thirty-eight year-old white male county lawyer who lived at 1519 N. Alta Street with his thirty-five year-old wife, Alma and her sister Florence Rigney (eighteen years-old), niece Mable Pearson (seventeen years-old), and nephew Elmer Pearson (nineteen years-old), see *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Voting Precinct 15), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 14 and 15 January 1920 by L. Stanley Heckman, Series T625, Roll 1799, Page 84 Subpage B, Line 65-9; and Broadus, *The Legal Heritage of El Paso*, 177, 182, 191, and 225.

<sup>105</sup> The phrase “square deal” was coined by President Theodore Roosevelt “in the 1904 election to convey the essence of his domestic policies for the economy and antitrust actions: a “square deal” for laborers and consumers as well as big business.” In the preceding years following Roosevelt’s initial use of the phrase, “square deal” became synonymous with “fair treatment” or “an equitable arrangement,” see Thomas L. Purvis, *A Dictionary of American History* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), 383; and Ian Stuart-Hamilton, *An Asperger Dictionary of Everyday Expressions* (Philadelphia: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2004), 203.

emancipation day events for the negro colony of the city.”<sup>106</sup> Local African American Reverend P.D. Saddler, pastor of Visitor’s Chapel Church at 501 Tays Street in El Paso, was in attendance at this afternoon Emancipation Day event in Pastime Park.<sup>107</sup> In addition, Black leader Jasper Williams, first president of the El Paso NAACP, was on hand to give the following speech:

I have a profound respect for the M.E. [Methodist Episcopal] church, for Abraham Lincoln, the great emancipator, for the Republican party of Lincoln, and for all other agencies that have contributed towards the uplift of the negro in America. The negro is an American to all intents and purposes. Of all the races which have contributed to the peopling of this nation none has shown more enthusiastic loyalty then the negro. His war record is excellent, covering a period from 1788 to the present. America’s march toward to wealth and world power has been stimulated by the product of negro labor, by genius of negro intellect and by his unfaltering citizenship. The negro has tried to answer Lincoln’s call to the higher life by buying homes, building churches, schools, banks and powerful insurance companies. He has answered the civilization around him by copying its virtue and vices. He has answered the teachings of the church by forgiving more than any other race on earth has been called upon to forgive.<sup>108</sup>

It is interesting that Williams would give such complimentary words to Republicans while in the presence of at least one Democrat, Mayor Dudley, and perhaps the county attorney and sheriff were also Democrats. It shows Williams’ political courage and refusal to mute his words regardless of his audience. Although his complimentary words towards Lincoln and the Republicans were a bit too generous, when considering the deterioration of race relations in the South particularly after Lincoln’s death.

Five years earlier, in 1918 the NAACP chapter in El Paso attempted to create a movement to alter the Juneteenth celebration so as “to concentrate on the observance of the real

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<sup>106</sup> “Emancipation Day Observed In City By Negro Colony” *El Paso Times*, 20 June 1923, newspaper clipping found in Richard Moberley Dudley Scrapbook, no. 558 (23 April 1923 – 3 March 1924), 49. This scrapbook is located in the Southwest Collection of the El Paso Public Library—downtown branch.

<sup>107</sup> John F. Worley, ed., *Worley’s 1923 City Directory of El Paso, Texas* (Dallas: John F. Worley Directory Company, 1923), 169. Visitor’s Chapel Church is listed in this directory under the heading, “Methodist Episcopal (Colored).” Both the newspaper and city directory accounts do not list P.D. Saddler’s first name. It is not known when Saddler arrived or departed El Paso, yet in 1935 he is listed as heading an A.M.E. church in Dallas, Texas, see Reverdy C. Ransom, *Year Book of Negro Churches* (Wilberforce: Wilberforce University with the authority of the Bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1935), 36.

<sup>108</sup> “Emancipation Day Observed In City By Negro Colony” *El Paso Times*, 20 June 1923.

emancipation day, according to history, the anniversary” of which was January 1.<sup>109</sup> The unsuccessful campaign was viewed as an elitist attempt to neglect the folk traditions of the masses.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, most of El Paso’s Black community continued to support the June 19 date as seen by their large attendance of another Juneteenth celebration in 1923 at Fort Hancock. Located fifty-four miles southeast of El Paso in Hudspeth County, nearly 200 hundred El Paso Blacks, all employees of the Galveston, Harrisburg and San Antonio Railway, were “supplied a special train for the trip” by the railroad company to visit Fort Hancock.<sup>111</sup> Not only were Anglo political elites, such as Mayor Dudley and his political appointees, seeking support from Blacks, but so too did the business community show its appreciation by offering-up this small gesture for their Black employees of El Paso. It is unknown whether Lawrence Nixon attended either Juneteenth celebration on this day, he scarcely could have avoided the recognition Blacks were receiving from the political class of El Paso. This could have allowed Nixon to have some hope that the possibility of the racial climate being more nuanced could indeed occur, but only with continual pressure from the overall Black community, community activists such as himself, and

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<sup>109</sup> *El Paso Herald*, 19 June 1918, quoted in Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 254 and 302 n44.

<sup>110</sup> Kachun, *Festivals of Freedom*, 254.

<sup>111</sup> “Emancipation Day Observed In City By Negro Colony” *El Paso Times*, 20 June 1923. No information could be found as to why such a large contingency of Blacks from El Paso would travel for nearly an hour by rail to participate in a Juneteenth celebration in rural Hudspeth County, where the overall Black population was very small and their percentage of Blacks was lower than that of El Paso. Additionally, no evidence exists of a historically large Black presence at Fort Hancock or it having a significant event related to the Black experience, see William H. Leckie, “Black Regulars on the Texas Frontier, 1866-1885” in Dawson, ed., *The Texas Military Experience*, 91; and Christian, *Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas*, 46, 50, and 108. Ft. Hancock was part of eastern El Paso County until the State created a new county in February 1917, naming it after El Paso state senator Claude B. Hudspeth. On October 28, 1880 Apaches killed seven Buffalo Soldiers, members of the Black Tenth United States Cavalry. The Apaches were avenging the death of Warm Springs Apache Chief Victorio, which occurred two weeks earlier. In 1988, Texas historical marker no. 5295 was placed at the gravesite of Buffalo Soldiers Carter Burns, George Mills, William Backus, Jeremiah Griffin, James Stanley, Scott Graves, and Thomas Rach in Indian Hot Springs, Hudspeth County fifty-one miles southwest of Fort Hancock (or 104 miles southwest of El Paso), see Martin Donell Kohout, “Hudspeth County,” *Handbook of Texas Online*, <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/HH/hch21.html>> (accessed 2 January 2010).

members of the local NAACP, which included Afro-Latinos such as Rudolph W. López, Jews such as Louis Laskin, and whites such as Fred Knollenberg.<sup>112</sup>

Lawrence Nixon's next foray into leadership and activism would test his persistence and perseverance. His attempts to secure the vote for Blacks in Texas during the Democratic primaries would become a twenty-year protracted struggle, but one filled with ultimate victory for African Americans.

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<sup>112</sup> More will be discussed about these three individuals in the next chapter. On their memberships into the El Paso NAACP, see Rudolph W. López (line no. 4), "Membership Report," 27 June 1929, Viola E. Washington, El Paso Branch Secretary to NAACP New York headquarters, received 3 July 1929, in *NAACP Papers*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Part I, Box G-202, Folder 4, Branch Files: El Paso; and Louis Laskin (line no. 42) and Frederick C. Knollenberg (line no. 47), see "Memberships of the El Paso Branch," Jerry B. Baldwin, Secretary of El Paso Branch, to NAACP Secretary, 27 August 1923, *NAACP Papers*, LOCMD, Part I, Branch Files: El Paso, Box G-202. The appendix of this dissertation has the entire membership list of the 1923 and 1929 El Paso NAACP.

CHAPTER 4 –  
“WE ARE LOOKING FOR SOMEONE WHO IS NOT AFRAID”:  
THE NAACP, NIXON, AND THE COURTS, 1924-1934

Lawrence Nixon was involved in two major Supreme Court Cases, *Nixon v. Herndon* (1927) and *Nixon v. Condon* (1932), each of which helped set legal precedent that ultimately led in *Smith v. Allwright* (1944), to the dismantling of all-white primaries throughout the entire South. Eighty years removed from his initial involvement in these legal cases, it would be easy to see his actions as being non-threatening, if inevitable. However, when one considers the level and threat of violence experienced by African Americans throughout the South during this era, one would have to conclude that Nixon was courageous. This chapter will focus on the political and social climate at the local, state, and national levels of the 1920s, as well as the historical background that led up to the 1923 Texas law which barred African Americans from voting in the Democratic primaries to especially understand better Nixon’s involvement in both *Nixon v. Herndon* (1927) and *Nixon v. Condon* (1932). This chapter also will look at the little discussed case of *Nixon v. McCann* (1934), which was Nixon’s third attempt to dismantle the all-white Democratic primary; explore the national NAACP’s involvement and support of the Nixon cases, and its relationships to the local El Paso NAACP.

**El Paso and the Ku Klux Klan**

The rise of the El Paso Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s is—on its surface surprising—when one considers the historical reputation of the city and its alleged racial tolerance and perceived relaxed racial relations. The contradiction of El Paso being a racially progressive city is exposed when considering the existence of African American slavery, the city’s staunch embrace of the Confederacy during the Civil War, the rigid enforcement of Jim Crow laws (including segregated

pools, schools and trains), the casual use of the term “nigger” in the city’s press, public officials who were too willing to encourage and participate in lynch mobs, and the creation of a chapter of one of the more infamous terrorist organizations: Ku Klux Klan (KKK).

The initial rise of the Klan occurred soon after the Civil War ended “to exercise absolute control over blacks, drive them and their fellows from power, and establish ‘white supremacy.’” The second rise of the Klan in 1915 vehemently hated African Americans, Japanese and other Asians, Roman Catholics, Jews, and all foreign-born individuals.<sup>1</sup> Many people often associate the revival of the twentieth century Klan with the infamous film *The Birth of a Nation*.<sup>2</sup> The event that sparked the revival of the Klan, however, was the unjust lynching of Leo Frank in 1915 for his alleged involvement in the killing of Mary Phagan.<sup>3</sup> When outgoing Georgia Governor John Slayton commuted Frank’s death sentence to life in prison, a lynch mob from Marietta killed Frank, who was Jewish, on August 16, 1915. Soon after this tragedy, demands were made for the igniting of the Klan in order to restore local rule.<sup>4</sup> On October 26, 1915 a formal application was submitted to the state of Georgia for the Klan’s charter, and a month later

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<sup>1</sup> John Hope Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr., *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of African Americans*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 275 and 384.

<sup>2</sup> The film played an important role in increasing the Klan’s membership. A closer look at the time line, however, reveals the film actually preceded the start of the Klan’s revival in Atlanta, Georgia. *The Clansman*—the film’s initial name—first premiered in Riverside, California on January 1, 1915. It then made its way to Los Angeles on February 8, 1915 and eventually to the White House on February 18, 1915 where it received a warm reception from President Woodrow Wilson. It was on this occasion that Supreme Court Chief Justice Edward D. White, a former confederate soldier, had confided to Thomas Dixon—the film’s writer—that he had once been a member of the KKK. The film title changed to *The Birth of a Nation* for its premier in New York City on March 3, 1915, see Rory McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 20; Anthony Slide, *American Racist: The Life and Films of Thomas Dixon* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 83-4; John Milton Cooper, *Woodrow Wilson: A Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2009), 3, 13, 33, and 121-39; Wyn C. Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 126-27.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen A. Brown, “‘A Thing So Illogical’ in Georgia: Reconsidering Race, Myth, and the Lynching of Leo Frank,” in Philip D. Dillard and Randal L. Hall, *The Southern Albatross: Race and Ethnicity in the American South* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999), 163-94.

<sup>4</sup> McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan*, 20.

initial members climbed up Stone Mountain, engaging in their first ritual and ceremonial cross burning.<sup>5</sup> *The Birth of a Nation* premiered in Atlanta on December 6, 1915 with much anticipation and buzz that ultimately resulted in a recruitment bonanza for the terrorist organization. By 1921, the organization spread, with the film's assistance, throughout the West and North with a membership of about 100,000. Four years later, membership in the Klan rose to nearly five million in 4,000 local chapters.<sup>6</sup> And although the Klan may have originated in the South, the organization of the 1920s actually had more support and members in the North, including the states of Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois.<sup>7</sup>

The main driver of the Klan's spectacular rise was the "devaluation in the economic, political, and status-based 'purchasing power' of the movement's constituents." In other words, the Klan provided "individuals with an effective vehicle for preserving status-based political and economic interests."<sup>8</sup> The Klan also had an appeal to many during this era because of the tremendous changes the nation was undergoing. According to a leading historian of the Klan, the typical recruit...

is tossed about in the hurly-burly of our industrial and so called democratic society. Under the stress of social competition he is made to realize his essential mediocrity. Yet according to traditional democratic doctrine he is born free and the equal of the fellow who is out-distancing him in the race. Here is a large and powerful organization offering to solace his sense of defeat by dubbing him a knight of the Invisible Empire for the small sum of ten dollars. Surely knighthood was never offered at such a bargain!<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> James Michael Martinez, *Carpetbaggers, Cavalry, and the Ku Klux Klan: Exposing the Invisible Empire During Reconstruction* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 251.

<sup>6</sup> Melvyn Stokes, *D. W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation: A History of "The Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time"* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 233 and 235; McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan*, 23. The Klan had more members than other well-known and large groups such as the American Federation of Labor, see McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan*, 7.

<sup>7</sup> McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>9</sup> John M. Mecklin, *The Ku Klux Klan: A Study of the American Mind* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1963), 107-8; and Frank Tannenbaum, *Darker Phases of the South* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1924), 24-34;



In Texas, Klan membership increased sharply in the early 1920s, as it did in the rest of the nation, when Imperial Wizard William Simmons personally helped bring the organization to Houston. It soon spread to cities and towns throughout the state, including El Paso, which resulted in tens of thousands being added into the ranks of the organization. In El Paso particularly, a perception of a general breakdown of law, order, and social morality drove the rapid rise in the Klan's popularity.<sup>10</sup> The popularity of the group marked a dramatic increase in violent attacks against Blacks. As one noted historian found:

In Texas the Klan became the instrument of a new enslavement, forcing blacks to work and pick cotton at wages they would not have accepted if the decision had been left to them. Throughout the South and Southwest African Americans lived in constant fear of the hooded bands of night riders who burned crosses to terrify those whom they considered undesirables. In the West the Klan was also active, especially against the Japanese. There were floggings, brandings with acid, episodes of tarring and feathering, hangings, and burnings. The victims were largely, though not entirely, African Americans.<sup>11</sup>

To place El Paso's Klan activities in local and national perspective, it is important to keep in mind that there were only four other cities—outside of Texas—in the entire country which had more Klan rallies than El Paso. They were Terre Haute, Indiana with twelve rallies; Indianapolis with sixteen rallies; Altoona, Pennsylvania with seventeen rallies; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with fifteen. Texas led the entire nation with the most Klan rallies during this era with 216 scattered throughout 112 cities. Of these Texas cities, El Paso ranked third in most rallies with a

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quoted in Norman D. Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug: Texas Politics, 1921-1928* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1984), 50 and 446 n5.

<sup>10</sup> Shawn Lay, ed., *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 67.

<sup>11</sup> Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 385.

total of seven. Only Fort Worth and Dallas had more with twelve and twenty-three respectively. Houston had four and San Antonio had six Klan rallies.<sup>12</sup>

By 1920, other than San Antonio, El Paso had the second largest Mexican/Mexican American population of any United States city and was the only major southwestern city with more Mexican/Mexican Americans than Anglos.”<sup>13</sup> Their large numbers in the city attracted the ire of the local Klan because most Mexican/Mexican Americans were non-white, Roman Catholic, and perceived to be un-American. Although the Klan continued to hate Blacks, its disdain also included Catholics, Jews, immigrants, labor unions, communists, and socialists. Klan leaders such as Hiram Wesley Evans, a Dallas dentist who became the Klan’s Imperial Wizard from 1922-1939, summed up their sentiments about Blacks in this manner: “The Negro is not a menace to Americanism in the sense that the Jew or Roman Catholic is a menace. He is not actually hostile to it. He is simply racially incapable of understanding, sharing in or contributing to Americanism.”<sup>14</sup> The Klan also targeted for attack Anglo “moral transgressors and bootleggers” in its “crusade for conformity.”<sup>15</sup> El Paso’s geographic location was ripe for Klan rhetoric. In the first half of the 1920s, the Mexican Revolution and its resulting conflict in the U.S./Mexican Border, was still fresh on the minds of many. This brought a sense of insecurity that caused many Anglos to become convinced that Mexicans on both sides of the border “were cruel mercurial people inherently prone toward social disorganization.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan*, 15.

<sup>13</sup> García, *Desert Immigrants*, 36 and 244 n10.

<sup>14</sup> McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan*, 103.

<sup>15</sup> Brown, *Strain of Violence*, 284.

<sup>16</sup> Lay, *The Invisible Empire in the West*, 69-70.

Law and order entailed upholding the prohibition of liquor which contributed to the rise in crime due to its illegal distribution. For many middle-class Protestants of the time—including those aspiring to be in middle class—abstinence from alcohol was thought to differentiate them from working class people. Protecting children from exposure to alcohol and other addictive drugs was important to Klansmen in El Paso.<sup>17</sup> In February 1923, John W. Dye, United States Consul in Ciudad Juárez, reported that a grand jury investigation in El Paso “revealed that drugs are being peddled to school children in El Paso,” which in at least one instance caused the death of a seventeen year-old “prominent and popular society girl of El Paso” following a “dope party” in Juárez.<sup>18</sup>

There were anywhere between 1,500 to as many as 3,500 Klan members in El Paso, including a small number within the police force, during the first-half of the 1920s.<sup>19</sup> The Klan especially sought to elect “100 percent Americans” to political office. The Klan’s success in Texas was substantial enough to elect Earle B. Mayfield, who in 1922 became the first member of the Ku Klux Klan to join the United States Senate. After defeating ex-governor and anti-Klan candidate James E. Ferguson in the Democratic primary, Mayfield went on to defeat Republican challenger George E.B. Peddy in the general election. The defeated Ferguson charged that in Dallas “the Ku Klux Klan is in the saddle. It has elected nearly all the county officials, and the law, therefore, can be violated with impunity.”<sup>20</sup> Simply put, the Klan derived its prestige and support from “political and civic leaders; without them the organization would have had no real

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<sup>17</sup> McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan*, 136.

<sup>18</sup> Francisco Arturo Rosales, *Pobre Raza!: Violence, Justice, and Mobilization among México Lindo Immigrants, 1900-1936* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 72.

<sup>19</sup> Lay, *The Invisible Empire in the West*, 83 and 86.

<sup>20</sup> McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan*, 25.

base of power from which to expand.”<sup>21</sup> For El Paso, however, many of the political elites had believed that the different races within the city lived harmoniously and thus the Klan would not have the entrenched presence and influence as they would have in other major Southern cities.<sup>22</sup>

In the process of advocating clean government at the local level, Klan leaders attacked Catholics for their alleged involvement in political corruption. Combining the themes of immigration and Catholic corruption, the Klan claimed that “in certain Texas towns like El Paso, and Corpus Christi, and in many towns in Arizona and New Mexico where the Roman Catholic influence is a power in politics, these Mexicans are voted at the polls like sheep in order to thwart government by loyal Americans.”<sup>23</sup> Charles V. Porras, a Mexican American from El Paso who was born in 1901 and one of the election judges that would deny Lawrence Nixon the ballot in the 1924 Democratic primary, recalled the physical intimidation and fear that many Mexican and Mexican Americans “they feared for physical hurt from the majority of the so-called Anglos. Because in those days, shooting down a Mexican was not looked upon as any serious crime.”<sup>24</sup>

It was within this climate—with the Klan deeply entrenched in the minds of many in El Paso—that Lawrence Nixon began to challenge the revised 1923 Terrell Election law which barred African Americans from voting in the Democratic primary. The threat of violence against Nixon from the El Paso Klan was real, yet despite Nixon’s past experience with racial violence

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<sup>21</sup> Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug*, 52.

<sup>22</sup> “Negroes Want Pool at Washington Park; It Won’t Do—Mayor” *El Paso Herald*, 18 April 1924.

<sup>23</sup> McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan*, 102.

<sup>24</sup> Charles V. Porras, “Interview no. 212,” interview by Oscar J. Martinez, 18 November 1975, Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso, page 1 and 3.

he nevertheless became politically engaged. The General Laws of the State of Texas, chapter 32 entitled “Qualifications of Voters in Democratic Primaries,” explicitly stated:

All qualified voters under the laws and Constitution of the State of Texas who are bona fide members of the Democratic party, shall be eligible to participate in any Democratic party primary election, provided such voter complies with all laws and rules governing party primary elections; however, in no event shall a negro be eligible to participate in a democratic party primary election held in the state of Texas, and should a negro vote in a Democratic primary election, such ballot shall be void and election officials are herein directed to throw out such ballot and not count the same.<sup>25</sup>

This amendment, Senate Bill number 44, was initiated in early 1923 by Texas state representative Douglas Davenport of Bexar County when he introduced a bill to legally prevent African Americans from voting in Democratic primary elections. State Senator Richard M. Dudley, who later would become El Paso’s mayor, prevented the bill from coming to the floor during the first regular session. Yet, Texas Governor Patt M. Neff resurrected the bill during the second session of the legislature, asserting, “It’s a demand of the Democratic platform, isn’t it?” Dudley was not able to defeat the bill during this second attempt, and the House passed the bill by a vote of 93 to 11. It was presented to governor Neff on May 10, 1923, although without explanation it became law ninety days after adjournment without his signature.<sup>26</sup>

### **Prelude to the revised 1923 law**

The actions that led the Terrell law to be revised in 1923 had their roots Texas’ Reconstruction era. Beginning soon after the Civil War, Southern whites developed strategies to suppress and eventually eliminate Black political participation, and in particular voting.

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<sup>25</sup> Sidney Lee Staples (1865–1937), Texas Secretary of State (1921-1924), *General Laws of the State of Texas, 38<sup>th</sup> Legislature* (Austin: A.C. Baldwin and Sons Printers, 1923), 74-75; and Brown, Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug, 151.

<sup>26</sup> Dorothy J. Blodgett, Terrell Blodgett, and David L. Scott, *The Land, The Law, and The Lord: The Life of Pat Neff* (Austin: Home Place Publications, 2007), 138.

Famously, segments of the white population initiated political terrorism through violence and intimidation in the form of various groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. In the 1870s and 1880s, the Black vote was minimized in some Southern states which passed laws granting the legislature or the governor the power to appoint local government officials who had previously been selected by popular vote. Most often Black politicians were not appointed, thus the interest of Blacks were frequently ignored. Also, most Southern states gerrymandered voting districts to water-down the Black impact of large black voting populations. While some states divided their Black majorities into multiple voting districts so they could always be outvoted by unified white voters. In other southern states the opposite approach was taken by gathering its Black voting-block into a single district so that the Black vote could swing only a single election out of multiple contests.<sup>27</sup>

In 1902, the Texas constitution was amended, as in many Southern states, requiring the payment of a poll tax as a qualification for voting.<sup>28</sup> Strong sentiments for the implementation of a poll tax was ignored in the Texas Constitutional Convention of 1876, which granted almost unlimited male suffrage.<sup>29</sup> A brief history of the repeated attempts to impose the poll tax is vital to the understanding of its final adoption. Alexander Watkins Terrell, father of the Terrell Election Law of 1905, which put the finishing touches to the poll tax requirement, was an avid supporter of disfranchisement measures. Terrell carried some weight in Democratic circles,

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<sup>27</sup> Charles L. Zelden, *The Battle for the Black Ballot: Smith v. Allwright and the Defeat of the Texas All-White Primary* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004), 15.

<sup>28</sup> By this time, most southern states had already adopted the poll tax as a prerequisite for voting, including Georgia (1877), Virginia (1876-1882; 1901-1902); Mississippi (1890); South Carolina (1895); Louisiana (1898); and North Carolina (1900). The United States Supreme Court in *Williams v. Mississippi*, 170 U.S. 213 (1898), gave approval to the poll tax prerequisite.

<sup>29</sup> Charles W. Ramsdell, "Reconstruction in Texas" (Ph.D. diss.: Columbia University, 1910), 176-80, 225-28, and 251-57.

having served as a judge in the state courts, as a member of the Texas legislature, and as American diplomat to Turkey.<sup>30</sup> His attitude towards African American civil rights is illustrated by his efforts to impose a poll tax while a member of the legislature in 1878. In regards to his election, Terrell wrote to Governor Oran M. Roberts stating, “My vote was a white man’s vote—I do not think I received 50 negro votes out of 1500—The bare face villainy of the gutter snipe-tramp and negro element—On election day they beat anything I ever saw—Please think what can be done to purify the ballot box—On what line shall the effort be made? Unless some flank movement can be made on the mass of ignorant voters, we will soon be at Sea in Texas”<sup>31</sup>

Some may view the implementation of the poll tax as being targeted at poor whites that supported the Populist movement during the 1890s.<sup>32</sup> But the evidence suggests that it was Blacks who were the main “benefactors” or targets of the poll tax. As Terrell’s views and those of many of his colleagues indicate, Texas lawmakers were adamant about suppressing the political rights of African Americans. Five of the eight attempts to impose a poll tax occurred before the rise of Populism in Texas, and two others before the fusion of 1896 posed any real threat to the political hegemony of the Democrats in the State. No doubt it was also intended to serve as a voter registration system to prevent repeat voting among cowboys and labor gangs in West Texas and other mobile portions of the population. But the fear of African Americans voting, particularly within the Black Belt of Texas, was the overriding issue.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Lewis L. Gould, *Alexander Watkins Terrell: Civil War Soldier, Texas Lawmaker, American Diplomat* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Gould, *Alexander Watkins Terrell*, 74.

<sup>32</sup> Donald Strong, “The Poll Tax: The Case of Texas,” *American Political Science Review* (August, 1944): 693-94; and Dick Smith, “Texas and the Poll Tax,” *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 44 (September 1964): 167-68.

<sup>33</sup> Lewis L. Gould, *Alexander Watkins Terrell: Civil War Soldier, Texas Lawmaker, American Diplomat* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 74.

The poll tax amendment was approved by a substantial majority during the election held on November 4, 1902.<sup>34</sup> In February 1903, the Texas Legislature passed the first Terrell Election law, which provided for the regulation of party primary elections and conventions. One of the provisions of this law was that all qualified voters should be eligible to vote in any party primary, upon taking the prescribed party test. Up to the time that this law was enacted, party conventions and party committees controlled nominations and conventions.<sup>35</sup> This primary law became particularly important since Texas was centrally a one-party state and primaries of the Democratic party determined election to statewide, district, and county offices. African Americans continued to vote, albeit in lesser numbers.<sup>36</sup> The practice of paying the poll taxes for Blacks and Mexicans in exchange for their votes became so common among politicians that the Terrell Election Law of 1905 was enacted declaring such a practice to be a misdemeanor.<sup>37</sup>

During the passage of the Terrell Election law, the question of admitting or barring African Americans in Democratic primary elections was a pressing one. The first Terrell election declared, “The county executive committee of the party holding any primary election

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<sup>34</sup> Lawrence D. Rice, *The Negro in Texas, 1874-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1971), 136. Before the poll tax’s 1902 adoption in Texas, white voting rates stood well above 60%: 88% in 1900, and 62% in 1902. However, in 1904 only 46% of whites voted. The dramatic reduction was followed by a voting rate of just 27 percent of eligible voters in the next election, see Zelden, *The Battle for the Black Ballot*, 36.

<sup>35</sup> *General Laws of the State of Texas*, Section 93, 28<sup>th</sup> Legislature–Regular Session, Secretary of State Jim R. Curl (Austin: Von Roeckmann-Jones Company Printers, 1903), 133-59. In the post-Reconstruction era, the poll tax emerged in the South as one of the elements used by whites to impose Jim Crow. Add to disenfranchising techniques such as literacy tests and understanding clauses, the poll tax allowed the South to evade the reach of the federal government. Too, the poll tax became one of the key instruments that southern political and economic elites used to minimize or eliminate the influence of both African Americans and working class whites, see Julie Novkov, ed., *Race and American Political Development* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 163.

<sup>36</sup> Blodgett, Blodgett, and Scott, *The Land, The Law, and The Lord*, 33-43.

<sup>37</sup> Clark Hine, *Black Victory*, 85.



may prescribe additional qualifications necessary to participate therein.”<sup>38</sup> With no other state-wide qualifications for voting in primary elections, the Democratic party in the state could bar Blacks from voting in the primary if it wished by having county executive committees outline additional rules targeted at African American voters. In 1910 the Texas House of Representatives voted 51 to 34 in favor of instructing their U.S. Senators and Congressmen to work for the repeal of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution.<sup>39</sup> This was the sense of the Texas election laws from 1903 until 1923 with regard to Black people.<sup>40</sup> But even these provisions were not good enough for the political elites of the Lone Star State. There were many whites who were opposed to Blacks casting any vote, no matter how few their numbers, in the Democratic primary in any county of the state.

Between August 29 to September 5, 1923, just a few months after Governor Neff supported and approved the amendment to the Terrell election law which mandated an all-white primary, the NAACP held its Fourteenth Annual Conference in Kansas City, Missouri. The city was selected specifically to lend moral support and visit the fifty-four former military men of the Third Battalion of the all-Black 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry at Leavenworth Federal Prison. These soldiers were wrongfully convicted, and some hastily executed, for engaging in a 1917 uprising against whites in Houston, Texas. Over 558 delegates, including LeRoy W. Washington of El Paso’s NAACP, were led by James Weldon Johnson, as they proclaimed November 11, 1923 as

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<sup>38</sup> “Primary Elections and Conventions,” *General Laws of the State of Texas*, Section 93, 28<sup>th</sup> Legislature—Regular Session, Secretary of State Jim R. Curl (Austin: Von Roekmann-Jones Company Printers, 1903), 150.

<sup>39</sup> “Along The Colored Line,” *Crisis* vol. 1, no. 1 (November 1910): 5; and “Turning The Pages of The Crisis,” *Crisis* vol. 40, no. 12 (December 1933): 294.

<sup>40</sup> Robert W. Hainsworth, “The Negro and the Texas Primaries,” *Journal of Negro History* vol. 18, no. 4 (October 1933): 426.

“Houston Martyrs’ Day.”<sup>41</sup> Representative Leonidas C. Dyer addressed the conference and spoke on new plans to reintroduce the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill during the next session of Congress.<sup>42</sup>

It was at this 1923 meeting that William Pickens, NAACP field secretary, instructed LeRoy Washington to return to El Paso and find a Black Democrat to “present himself at the polls at the time of the election.”<sup>43</sup> Pickens stressed, “We are looking for someone who is not afraid.”<sup>44</sup> Locating a Black person who was not afraid in Texas was by no means as an easy task given the history of violence and terrorism against African Americans in the state and in particular the activities of the Ku Klux Klan. Nevertheless, Le Roy Washington thought immediately of his longtime friend, Lawrence Nixon, to answer Pickens’ call to attempt to vote the following summer on July 26, 1924.<sup>45</sup>

Four months after this meeting between Pickens and Washington, Lawrence Nixon paid his 1924 poll tax as he had in the previous thirteen years. The amount was \$1.75 and Robert D. Richey, El Paso County Tax Collector, issued the poll tax receipt on January 15, 1924. The receipt also indicates that the forty-one year old Nixon had been a resident of both the city and

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<sup>41</sup> NAACP, eds., *NAACP: Celebrating a Century 100 Years in Pictures* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008), 62-64. On the Houston uprising of 1917, see “Campaign For Signatures To Petition For 24<sup>th</sup> Infantrymen An Overwhelming Success,” *Crisis* vol. 27, no. 4 (February 1924): 165-67; Christian, *Black Soldiers in Jim Crow Texas, 1899-1917*, 145-72; and Brian D. Behnken, “Houston (Texas) Mutiny of 1917” in Rucker and Upton, *Encyclopedia of American Race Riots*, 280-89.

<sup>42</sup> NAACP, eds., *NAACP: Celebrating a Century 100 Years in Pictures* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2008), 62. Leonidas Carstarphen Dyer (1871-1952) was a white Republican United States House of Representative member (1911-33) from Missouri who introduced the Dyer Anti-lynching Bill on May 19, 1919. The bill, H.R. 13, passed the House chamber by a vote of 231 to 119 on January 16, 1922, although it was defeated in December 1922 by a Democratic filibuster in the Senate, see Claudine L. Ferrell, *Nightmare and Dream: Anti-Lynching in Congress, 1917-1922* (New York: Garland, 1986), 94, 166, 298-300, 374, and 390; and Marilyn K. Howard, “Dyer, Leonidas C. (1871-1952)” in Rucker and Upton, *Encyclopedia of American Race Riots*, 182-84.

<sup>43</sup> Clark Hine, *Black Victory*, 113.

<sup>44</sup> Borreson, “The Good Fight” *Texas Lawyer*, 26.

<sup>45</sup> Clark Hine, *Black Victory*, 113.

the county for fourteen years, his occupation was listed as a “M.D.,” address was 2029 Myrtle, and his precinct number was nine. Nixon’s poll tax qualified him to vote in elections, and the records indicate that he did vote in a local election on May 7, 1924.<sup>46</sup>

Nixon was the ideal person for a variety of reasons. The NAACP looked for four main qualifications in selecting the right individual: one was the person had to be an African American registered as a Democrat. Soon after arriving into El Paso in 1910, Lawrence Nixon paid his poll tax and registered to vote as a Democrat despite his father’s misgivings. Charles B. Nixon “had no respect for a Negro Democrat” and felt that a Black man “would not want to vote with the Democrats.”<sup>47</sup> Charles B. Nixon died in Marshall, Texas on July 7, 1910, just six months after Lawrence Nixon’s move to El Paso.<sup>48</sup> During most of Charles B. Nixon’s lifespan most Black people throughout the country were either registered members or sympathetic to the Republican party because of the party’s role in abolishing slavery and its attempts to secure some civil rights for African Americans. This history of party loyalty made it difficult for many Blacks to break-away from the tradition of group attachment to the Republican party, even in Texas where Republicans were by the 1920s politically irrelevant.<sup>49</sup> The Democratic party was viewed as the

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<sup>46</sup> Poll Tax Receipt No. 3496, State of Texas, El Paso County, Precinct No. 9, Robert D. Richey, Tax Collector, 24 January 1924, see N/MFP and the Lawrence Aaron Nixon Papers, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas.

<sup>47</sup> Lawrence A. Nixon to Walter White (Secretary of NAACP), February 25, 1952. A copy of this letter is reprinted in Bryson, “Progress Report,” 186. Original letter is housed in the N/MFP.

<sup>48</sup> “Nixon Family Bible,” in LWFP.

<sup>49</sup> “One of the first questions Black leaders faced was the character of their position toward the Republican party in the post-1877 period. The natural inclination of most Blacks was to continue to vote Republican and hope to weather the storm of neglect. Others, however, felt that a discipline inherent in providing political support to a party is that when it betrays the interests of the group, that support should be withdrawn and the party, thereby, punished. Accordingly, by the early 1900s there had developed among some Black leaders (notably among what would become the Niagara Movement group of 1905), an anti-Republican sentiment. However, Black leaders with this tendency were effectively cancelled out by the more moderate leadership of Booker T. Washington and his associates who still counseled Blacks to vote for Republican candidates.” The pages of the *Colored American Magazine* in 1904 carried articles by Robert Terrell (first Black Federal District Court Judge) praising Theodore

white man's party which for those few Blacks who did join, it was tantamount to being called a "house negro" or an "uncle tom."<sup>50</sup> This made Nixon's decision bold and is an example of his independent minded thinking on the issue of party affiliation. Undoubtedly most of his clients, friends, and neighbors, as well as his own attorney, in El Paso were Republicans, but he nevertheless affiliated with the Democrats at least at the local level. During this time in Texas the Democratic party was the only effective party to turn to if one wanted to engage in the political process, resulting in some Blacks voting with the Democrats because they had nowhere else to go; it was the only game in town.<sup>51</sup> It was not so much that Nixon believed in the ideals and philosophy of the traditional Democratic party *per se*. It appears instead that he was pragmatic and voted as a Democrat in local and state elections, but may not have been feverishly loyal to a Democratic candidate especially ones who were very conservative or overtly racist.<sup>52</sup>

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Roosevelt and an equally negative article on the Democrats, see Ronald W. Walters, *Black Presidential Politics in America: A Strategic Approach* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 10.

<sup>50</sup> As recently as the turn of the century, Hubert H. Harrison explains that Blacks "who joined the Democratic Party were regarded by their fellows much as white Americans [came to] regard pacifists and pro-Germans in War time—and they were treated accordingly." Perry, *Hubert Harrison*, 270. See also Rebecca Carroll, *Uncle Tom or New Negro? African Americans reflect on Booker T. Washington and Up From Slavery One Hundred Years Later* (New York: Random House, 2006), 3 and 153.

<sup>51</sup> Frederick Douglass's often cited words (from the 1872 Black worker convention in New Orleans) on why Blacks remained with the Republicans—"The Republican party is the deck, all else is the sea." Matthew R. Rees, *From the Deck to the Sea: Blacks and the Republican Party* (Wakefield, NH: Longwood Academic, 1991), 1. Afro-Texan Norris Wright Cuney is a poignant exception to the Republican party's neglect of their Black constituency in Texas prior to 1900. While in appointed office and as a dispenser of patronage, Cuney was effective and powerful. In 1873 Cuney was appointed secretary of the Republican State Executive Committee and presided at the state convention of Black leaders at Brenham. Cuney became inspector of customs of the port of Galveston and revenue inspector at Sabine Pass in 1872, special inspector of customs at Galveston in 1882, and finally collector of customs of the port of Galveston in 1889. From his appointment as the first assistant to the sergeant-at-arms of the Twelfth Legislature in 1870, he went on to serve as a delegate to every national Republican convention from 1872 to 1892. In 1883 Cuney was elected alderman on the Galveston City Council from the Twelfth District. In 1886 he became Texas national committeeman of the Republican party, the most important political position given to an African American of the South in the nineteenth century, see Merline Pitre, "Norris Wright Cuney (1846–1898)," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/fcu20.html>> (accessed 13 January 2010).

<sup>52</sup> James Monroe Trotter, father of civil rights activist William Monroe Trotter, was "characteristically independent" and a Black Democrat in an era when most Blacks were Republicans. When Republican President Rutherford B. Hayes withdrew last federal troops from the South in 1877, James Trotter considered it an affront to Black people. By 1883, the elder Trotter stated "although it cannot be fairly claimed that the colored 'break' from

The second qualification Pickens, Washington and others within the NAACP looked for in choosing the ideal plaintiff was someone who regularly paid his/her annual poll tax. Many African Americans could not afford this tax because of their precarious financial situation, which in turn was often due to racism and discrimination. Too, the NAACP wanted in their plaintiff someone who was committed for the long legal battle, as well as having a cool, calm and intelligent demeanor; all characteristics Nixon possessed. Nine years after his death, Drusilla Nixon fondly recalled her husband as a “very quiet man and sort of shy. If he did something, he just went ahead and did it without any flurry.” Additionally, she also spoke to his persistence, “if he set his mind to it, he went ahead regardless of what people would say. I think, by that time, he had felt that he was paying taxes just like anybody else and it was terrible not to allow him to vote. I think he just decided, ‘this is it, whatever happens.’ And then he went through with it.”<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, the person the NAACP backed had to derive personal income independent of the white community. Whoever would rise to the challenge needed to not depend on whites for a livelihood and financial survival. This almost required that the person be of the professional, educated class. Nixon certainly had a middle-class educational background and his medical practice, one including Mexican/Mexican American and African American patients. Nevertheless, Nixon may have felt the financial pinch for his political actions. Drusilla Nixon commented that she felt “in some of his business dealings he was sort of rebuffed [because of his involvement in the two major NAACP legal cases].”<sup>54</sup>

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the so-called Republican party has been general, yet it has been of proportions so large as to occasion surprise and delight, and to be without a parallel in any of the states.” He also proudly asserted: “We did not go over to the Democrats, the Democrats came to us,” see Stephen R. Fox, *The Guardian of Boston: William Monroe Trotter* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 11-3.

<sup>53</sup> Drusilla Nixon interview, “Interview no. 194,” page 28-9.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Lastly, the person had to be courageous, particularly during this time when racial violence against African Americans was increasingly tolerated at the highest levels of government. As mentioned above, the climate in the state was one of terror, whereby African Americans were easily assaulted for the slightest offenses. Years later, Drusilla Nixon aptly stated, “any place that there was anyone trying to change things, there was always trouble.” She also recalled, “my husband’s lawyer [Frederick C. Knollenberg], the same lawyer who took this case, said to him, ‘Get rid of all your property but what you’re living in because this thing [challenging the Texas all-white Democratic primary] is going to be like a snowball, and you might have to leave suddenly.’” Drusilla also said that Lawrence told her that “some of the people who had been very good friends quit speaking to him.” This social isolation also included some African Americans in El Paso who were not pleased with Lawrence Nixon challenging the status quo. These Black detractors felt that Nixon was “going to stir up trouble” for them.<sup>55</sup>

The stage was thus set when on a typical El Paso hot summer day—July 26, 1924—election judges Champ C. Herndon and Charles V. Porras refused Nixon’s request to vote in the Democratic primary despite his being a long-time Democrat who had his poll tax paid with a receipt as proof. Lawrence Nixon’s Anglo attorney, Fred Knollenberg, filed a \$5,000 damage suit against election judges Herndon and Porras in the federal district court. Knollenberg charged that the 1923 Texas law violated the Fifteenth Amendment that provided that all qualified voters should be permitted to vote. Attorneys William “Will” H. Fryer and Robert E. Cunningham represented the defendants, Herndon and Porras.<sup>56</sup> Fryer and Cunningham

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., page 17.

<sup>56</sup> In the 1930 census, Robert E. Cunningham is listed as a thirty-four year-old white male who lives at the 1000 block of Park Road with Mary Cunningham, his wife, and Mary F. Cunningham, his daughter. Both of their

contended three points: first, that the election judges acted properly because the rules were established by the Democratic party, a private entity. Secondly, Fryer and Cunningham asserted that Nixon's Fifteenth Amendment rights were not violated. And lastly, that the issues being raised by the plaintiff were more political in nature, and thus beyond the scope of court's jurisdiction. Fryer and Cunningham asked Judge Du Val West—San Antonio Court of the Western District—for a dismissal, and he gladly obliged them on December 4, 1924.<sup>57</sup>

The NAACP then sent Knollenberg, and his law partner Robert J. Channell, much needed assistance, which arrived via the organization's National Legal Committee which became more involved once the Supreme Court of the United States agreed to hear *Nixon v. Herndon* on writ of error.<sup>58</sup> The attorneys who joined Knollenberg and Channell included a wide range of some of the best legal minds the nation had to offer at that time. African American James A. Cobb (1878-1958), progressive Arthur B. Spingarn (1878-1971), Jewish advocate Louis Marshall (1856-1929), and former abolitionist Moorfield Storey (1845-1929). After numerous delays, the case was finally argued on January 4, 1927.<sup>59</sup> A reversal had been issued; a unanimous decision was rendered on March 7, 1927 in favor of Lawrence Nixon.<sup>60</sup> The Justices on the bench were

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ages are indiscernible due to the poor script of the enumerator. Robert, and his parents, were born in Alabama and Mary Cunningham, and her parents, were born in Mississippi. Robert is listed as a "Lawyer" employed with a "Law Office." Robert E. Cunningham was elected member of the El Paso Bar Association in December 1929. On January 28, 1939 he became a director of the El Paso Bar Association and in addition, Robert E. Cunningham was elected president of the El Paso Bar Association on December 14, 1940. In February 1941, Robert T. Cunningham was admitted as a member of the El Paso Bar Association, see *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 8 April 1930 by Mrs. Dorothy P. Roberts, Series T626, Roll 2329, Page 86, Line 64-6; *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Precinct 35), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 26 January 1920 by Abbie [sic] Frank Smith, Series T625, Roll 1799, Page 66, Line 18-22; and Broadus, *The Legal Heritage of El Paso*, 191 and 194-96.

<sup>57</sup> Clark Hine, *Black Victory*, 115.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> "Local Negro Vote Case In High Court," *El Paso Times*, 5 January 1927, 1.

<sup>60</sup> "Court Upholds Texas Negro Can Vote," *Brownsville Herald*, 7 March 1927, 1.

Chief Justice and former United States president William H. Taft and Associate Justices: Oliver W. Holmes, Jr., Willis Van Devanter, James C. McReynolds, Louis Brandeis, George Sutherland, Pierce Butler, Edward T. Sanford, and Harlan F. Stone.

It was a significant victory for the NAACP, although not all shared with this assessment. Senator Thaddeus H. Caraway (1871-1931) of Arkansas “expressed astonishment at the decision of the United States Supreme Court in the Texas primary case, denying the right of a state to deprive Negroes of the vote.”<sup>61</sup> Later that summer, Lawrence Nixon took the time from his busy medical practice to write fellow Texan Charles I. Francis (1893-1969) of Wichita Falls, who was the vice chairman of the state Democratic executive committee. Nixon stressed the importance for the Texas Democratic party of embracing the federal decision of a few months earlier and no longer ignoring the Black vote. Francis responded by advising Nixon that “the Republican Party in its platform and through its presidential nominee has made a bid for Negro support, and it may be that the Republican policies are more in line with your ideas of government than those of the Democratic Party of Texas.”<sup>62</sup>

Back in El Paso, the responses from the political elites were equally not as welcoming. “Negroes will never vote in Texas Democratic Primaries,” stressed Robert Cunningham, chairman of the El Paso City Democratic Executive Committee. County Judge Edward B. McClintock agreed, commenting that the “Supreme Court or no Supreme Court, here is one

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<sup>61</sup> “Negro Vote Decision Surprises Caraway,” 7 March 1927, 1; unnamed newspaper clipping in LBJ Library, L.A. Nixon Collection, 1924-1933, Box 2, Folder: Legal Docs., Notes, Correspondence, Clipping, document no. 46.

<sup>62</sup> “Demands Negroes Vote in Primary,” 13 July 1927, 1; unnamed newspaper clipping in LBJ Library, L.A. Nixon Collection, 1924-1933, Box 2, Folder: Legal Docs., Notes, Correspondence, Clipping, document no. 790.



executive chairman who will see that they [Black people] do not vote.”<sup>63</sup> McClintock also cited that “the Supreme Court has held the Texas Democratic primary law prohibiting Negroes from voting unconstitutional, but they can’t keep the various local executive committees from passing rules prohibiting the Negro vote.”<sup>64</sup> Although one white newspaper made the obvious observation that “the [Texas] Democratic primary in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, determines in this state what men shall rule over the Negro citizen,” so it would only be logical that Black people wanted to vote in the primaries in order to exercise their citizenship rights.<sup>65</sup>

The Texas white primary statute was the only one of its kind in the country. In other Southern states, African Americans were excluded from Democratic primaries by party rule, not by state statute. *Nixon v. Herndon* had little, if any, impact on the constitutionality of white primaries in other states.<sup>66</sup>

Two months after *Nixon v. Herndon*, on May 9, 1927 newly elected Texas Governor Daniel J. Moody asked the legislature to repeal article 3107 that the Supreme Court had declared unconstitutional. The governor instead recommended a new law which would give the authority

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<sup>63</sup> In 1910 Edward B. McClintock was a thirty-five year-old Justice of the Peace and Attorney who lived at 114 Arizona with Blanche T. McClintock, his forty-one year-old wife, Edgar F. Sparks, his thirty year-old nephew, Richard C. Sparks, his twenty-seven year-old nephew, and Ralph D. McClintock, his six year-old son. Born in Decatur, Illinois Edward B. McClintock came to El Paso from Poplar Bluff, Missouri in 1897. He became district clerk and then Justice of the Peace in 1910, the same year Lawrence Nixon, Le Roy White, Le Roy Washington, and Fred Knollenberg arrive into El Paso. In 1914 McClintock became county clerk and then in 1916 he became county judge. He entered private practice in 1932 specializing in probate matters. He became a Charter member of the El Paso Bar Association on June 24, 1919. In 1930, Edward B. McClintock is listed as a fifty-four year-old lodger at 619 Magoffin Avenue and has an occupation of Judge for El Paso County, see *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce and Labor—Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 29 April 1910 by James Allave, Series T624, Roll 1549, Page 145, Line 87-91; *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 3 April 1930 by Buford B. Bunnell, Series T626, Roll 2328, Page 60 Subpage A, Line 18; and Broadus, *The Legal Heritage of El Paso*, 180, 189, and 224.

<sup>64</sup> Clark Hine, *Black Victory*, 120.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>66</sup> Michael J. Klarman, “The White Primary Rulings: A Case Study in the Consequences of Supreme Court Decision Making” *Florida State University Law Review* vol. 29, no. 1 (Fall 2001): 58.

to the Democratic executive committees to determine eligibility for its members. At least one House of Representative member, Alexander Royce Stout, recognized the ultimate misguided results of this action when he rightfully stated: “In my humble judgment, it is far more dangerous to entrust our whole political destiny to a few men than the scare of the Negro question can ever be. I believe the whole affair makes a mountain out of nothingness, and it is un-American and un-democratic.” Stout’s concerns about the implications of such a law were coupled with an assertion that in any case the Governor’s new law would not be necessary since the South “has always handled the ‘nigger’ in a satisfactory manner and will continue to do so.”<sup>67</sup> The law would pass, despite the objections given.

As expected, the executive committee of the Texas State Democratic party quickly passed a resolution excluding Blacks from their party membership.<sup>68</sup> Under the authority of this law, the executive committee of the Texas Democratic party created a rule that indicated “all white Democrats who are qualified under the constitution and laws of Texas” would be allowed to vote. Predictably, when Lawrence Nixon attempted to vote in the Democratic primary in July of 1928, election officials in El Paso, Charles H. Knolle and James C. Condon, refused him the ballot citing the amendment to the voting law that the Texas legislature had passed the previous year.<sup>69</sup> Now, since the State granted the executive committee the authority to determine its own voter criteria, then Nixon would not be allowed to vote on the basis that he was Black and the rules specifically stated that only whites were permitted to vote in the Democratic primaries.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> *Legislature Journal of the House of Representatives* vol. 40, General Assembly, 40<sup>th</sup> Legislature, House of Representatives, State of Texas (Austin: A.C. Baldwin and Sons Printers, 1927), 300 and 302.

<sup>68</sup> Klarman, “The White Primary Rulings, 58-9.

<sup>69</sup> Clark Hine, *Black Victory*, 80.

<sup>70</sup> “Negro Appeals Vote Case,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 31 July 1931, 1.

This action would force Nixon and his legal team to petition the United States Supreme Court to hear the case.

The legal team representing Nixon before the high court included James Marshall, Nathan R. Margold, and Arthur B. Spingarn; along with El Paso attorney Fred Knollenberg. Nixon contended the hastily approved law was passed to defeat or circumvent *Nixon v. Herndon* (1927) which held unconstitutional an act barring Blacks from the primaries.<sup>71</sup> *Nixon v. Condon* was argued on January 7, 1932 and then reargued on March 15, 1932. The Supreme Court rendered a 5 to 4 decision on May 2, 1932 favoring Nixon. The justices, all of the liberal wing of the court, who ruled on Nixon's behalf included Chief Justice Charles E. Hughes; and Associate Justices Louis Brandeis, Harlan F. Stone, Owen J. Roberts, and Benjamin N. Cardozo. Justices James C. McReynolds, Willis Van Devanter, George Sutherland, and Pierce Butler dissented.

The issue in *Nixon v. Condon* (1932) was whether the state properly could be held responsible for the racially discriminatory actions of the party. The Court in *Nixon v. Condon* found discriminatory state action on the ground that the Texas legislature, rather than the State Democratic party, "had reposed authority in the party executive committee to prescribe membership qualifications." Despite having won the suit, Nixon did not collect the initial \$5,000 he sought. Instead he settled for \$1 plus costs. At the time Dr. Nixon told the press that he was satisfied because he was "fighting only for a principle."<sup>72</sup> Although winning, the majority justices declined to address the question of whether a political party's exclusion of

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<sup>71</sup> "Party Power To Bar Negro Held Illegal," *Mexia Weekly Herald* (Mexia, Texas), 6 May 1932, 3.

<sup>72</sup> "Texas Negro Wins His Damage Suit," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 17 October 1932, 1; "Negro Is Victor In Election Suit," *Evening Independent* (Massillon, Ohio), 17 October 1932, 2; "Negro, Refused Ballot Right, Wins Damage Suit," *Lima News* (Lima, Ohio), 17 October 1932, 10; "Negro Wins Vote Suit," *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, 17 October 1932, 1.

Blacks would qualify as state action in the absence of a statute specifying which decision-making entity within the party was responsible for determining membership qualifications.<sup>73</sup> In other words, the high court failed to rule on whether the Democratic party itself had the power to empower the State Committee.<sup>74</sup>

According to legal scholar Michael Klarman, the unresolved question was whether the Constitution prevented a political party from excluding Blacks from membership when the state had not altered the party's "natural" decision making apparatus. In June 1932 the annual convention of the Texas State Democratic party passed a resolution barring Blacks from membership. Unfortunately, *Nixon v. Condon*'s rationale for making the white primary invalid had now disappeared. The Democratic party had acted on its own, free from state influence over its own voting and membership criteria. The Court now had to confront directly to the question of whether the state was constitutionally responsible for a political party's independent decision to bar Blacks from membership.<sup>75</sup>

When Lawrence A. Nixon attempted to vote, yet again, in the Democratic primary on July 23 and August 27, 1932, he was thwarted once again by election judges George L. McCann and Frank Brenk.<sup>76</sup> The attorneys representing McCann and Brenk included Ben R. Howell and Robert L. Holliday, both of El Paso.<sup>77</sup> Judge Charles A. Boynton, of the District Court of United

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<sup>73</sup> Klarman, "The White Primary Rulings," 58-9.

<sup>74</sup> "Court Rules Texas Democratic Chiefs Can't Bar Negroes," *Big Spring Herald* (Big Spring, Texas), 6 May 1932, 2.

<sup>75</sup> Klarman, "The White Primary Rulings," 59.

<sup>76</sup> "Negro Vote Suit Called For Trial," undated newspaper clipping found in LOC, Manuscript Division, NAACP Papers, Part I, Legal Files, Cases Supported—Texas Primary, Box D92, Folder no. 1, January-March 1934. Also see, "Starts Third Suit For Negro Voters," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 1 June 1933, 10. Three years later, election judge George L. McCann ran for local elected office, see "Candidate For Alderman Held Wide Range of Jobs" *El Paso Herald-Post*, 9 December 1936, 5.

State, Western District of Texas, El Paso Division, awarded Nixon five-dollars while ruling that the newly adopted Democratic State convention rules attempting to ban African Americans from voting in their primaries do “not in itself exclude negroes from voting in primaries,” but rather simply cite that whites could vote. Thus, when the Democratic executive committee instructed the Democratic El Paso County Chairman to exclude Blacks, it was an action by the executive committee and not the convention.<sup>78</sup>

The African American editor of the *Houston Informer*, Clinton F. Richardson, Jr., sarcastically said “Is ‘white supremacy’ endangered by a few thousand black men and women casting their votes for Democratic candidates in a state that is overwhelmingly white and democratic?” Sadly, the answer was yes. The fact is that many whites in Texas felt that “this is a white man’s government way down here in Texas. This is a white man’s country. The Texas Negro is popular in his place—that of hewer of wood and drawer of water.”<sup>79</sup>

### **El Paso NAACP**

In support of the NAACP, Lawrence Nixon took the time to write the editor of the *Houston Defender* in 1935 asking for the paper’s assistance in convincing its East Texas readership to give credit to the efforts of the NAACP. Nixon wrote, “we had received two favorable Supreme Court decisions against the Texas Democratic primary practices not because of any individual effort, but because a great national organization—the N.A.A.C.P.—had prosecuted those cases.” Regarding other unsuccessful individual challenges to the all-white

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<sup>77</sup> Fred C. Knollenberg to Ben R. Howell and Robert L. Holliday, 19 January 1934, LOC, Manuscript Division, NAACP Papers, Part I, Legal Files, Cases Supported—Texas Primary, Box D92, Folder no. 1, January-March 1934.

<sup>78</sup> “El Paso Negro Wins Suit For Voting Rights,” *El Paso Times*, 7 February 1934, 1; “Negro Vote Suit Called For Trial,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 31 January 1934, 1; *El Paso Herald-Post*, 7 February 1934, 1.

<sup>79</sup> Clark Hine, *Black Victory*, 145.

Democratic Primary in Texas, Nixon wrote they “had succeeded only in wasting, in the aggregate, a considerable sum of money.” Somewhat frustrated at the lack of progress in general and support from this newspaper in particular, Nixon paternalistically, if not sarcastically, ends his letter on a sour note: “you East Texans have succeeded most admirably in tearing down everything that had been built for you.”<sup>80</sup> Nixon obviously admired the NAACP for its courageous stance, principles, and outreach; so much so that he became a life member of the organization in June 1928.<sup>81</sup>

Lawrence Nixon was not the only member of the El Paso NAACP who demanded suffrage for African Americans. Black women in El Paso also asserted themselves in their advocacy for voting rights.<sup>82</sup> In March of 1918, women in Texas had won the right to vote in Democratic primaries. Maud Edith Sampson, as president of the El Paso Colored Woman’s Club, attempted to apply for membership to the Texas Equal Suffrage Association.<sup>83</sup> Like Lawrence Nixon, she and her husband Edward P. Sampson, both of 710 South St. Vrain Street, were members of the El Paso NAACP.<sup>84</sup> In June 1918, Maud Sampson sent a letter applying for membership in the National American Woman Suffrage Association on behalf of the El Paso Colored Woman’s Club. The NAWSA had no individual club members, membership was

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<sup>80</sup> *Houston Defender*, 20 April 1935, newspaper clipping found in the NAACP Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Part I, folder entitled “Texas Primary: Undated News Clipping, 1935.”

<sup>81</sup> James Weldon Johnson, NAACP Secretary, to Lawrence A. Nixon, 11 June 1928. Copy of original letter is in Dailey, “I’m Building Me A Home,” 57.

<sup>82</sup> Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 105.

<sup>83</sup> On the Texas suffrage movement, see A. Elizabeth Taylor, “The Woman Suffrage Movement in Texas,” *Journal of Southern History* vol. 27 (May 1951): 194-215; and Mary S. Cunningham, *The Woman’s Club of El Paso: Its First Thirty Years* (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1978).

<sup>84</sup> Line no. 89 and no. 90, “Membership Report,” 27 June 1929, Viola E. Washington, El Paso Branch Secretary to NAACP New York headquarters, received 3 July 1929, see *NAACP Papers*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Part I, Box G-202, Folder 4, Branch Files: El Paso.

through state associations only.<sup>85</sup> The matter was referred back to Texas.<sup>86</sup> The Texas Equal Suffrage Association sought advice about Sampson's application from the NAWSA. A response came from the president, Carrie Chapman Catt, longtime women's advocate and founder of the League of Women Voters.<sup>87</sup> Chapman Catt wrote State chapter president, Mrs. Edith Hinkle League, indicating:

if you find it so, you write Mrs. Sampson and tell her that you will be able to get the vote for women more easily if they do not embarrass you by asking for membership and that you are getting it for colored women as well as for white women and appeal to her interest in the matter to subside.<sup>88</sup>

The comment makes it clear that the national leadership of the Women's Suffrage Movement did not want to be affiliated with Black women, because in doing so would alienate their base and thus jeopardize their cause.<sup>89</sup>

El Paso NAACP members' activism also entailed attending the organization's annual meetings and conferences. As an official delegate representing the El Paso branch, Lawrence Nixon attended the Sixteenth Annual Conference of the national organization, which was held June 24-30, 1925 in Denver, Colorado. Also meeting Nixon there as official delegates for El Paso's NAACP were Reverend and Mrs. H.A. Rogers who, however, were not at the opening

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<sup>85</sup> Ruthe Winegarten, *Black Texas Women: A Sourcebook: Documents, Biographies, Timeline* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 187. On the National American Woman Suffrage Association, see Mari Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle, eds., *The Concise History of Woman Suffrage: Selections from History of Woman Suffrage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

<sup>86</sup> Winegarten, *Black Texas Women*, 291.

<sup>87</sup> Sara Hunter Graham, *Woman Suffrage and the New Democracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 24-5.

<sup>88</sup> Winegarten, *Black Texas Women*, 188-9; and Ruthe Winegarten, ed., *Black Texas Women: 150 Years of Trial and Triumph* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 209.

<sup>89</sup> Ann D. Gordon and Bettye Collier-Thomas, eds., *African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 12.

session because they had attended the Baptist Young People's Union Congress in Wichita, Kansas earlier in the week. NAACP El Paso branch president Le Roy Washington was not able to attend due to illness within his family. In a letter addressed to Walter White, Washington regretted "not to come in contact with you men who are giving your very lives to such a worthy cause as is the N.A.A.C.P." <sup>90</sup>

While at this NAACP conference, Lawrence Nixon met Edna Tandy, the person who four years later, in 1929, would introduce him to his future second wife, Drusilla E. (Tandy) Attwell. It was at this conference that the NAACP proclaimed five key principles as its aim: "the complete abolition of lynching and mob law; full political freedom; industrial democracy; better education; and the absolute ending of segregation on race and color." The organization believed that the values that United States professed to hold were not only worthy enough to fight for, but necessary so as to redeem the nation from its evil past and present. As made clear in the Fifteenth NAACP Annual Conference in 1924, "it is not to obtain mere benefits and privileges for the Negro that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is striving; it is striving to vindicate the American idea. That idea is: that every man shall have opportunity for the highest self development and that his achievements shall not be denied recognition on their merits." <sup>91</sup>

Nixon's presence at the national conference for the NAACP reflected the local chapter's activism and level of participation. Additionally, the local branch was diverse in its ethnic representation. For example in the 1929 El Paso NAACP membership roll, African American

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<sup>90</sup> Letter from Le Roy W. Washington to Walter F. White, 11 June 1925, *NAACP Papers*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Part I, Branch Files: El Paso, Box G-202.

<sup>91</sup> Lee Sartain, *Invisible Activists: Women of the Louisiana NAACP and the Struggle for Civil Rights, 1915-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007), 38.



Mary López and her Afro-Latino husband Rudolph W. López.<sup>92</sup> According to the 1930 El Paso United States census, the López couple lived at 1009 South Third Street in El Paso and did not have any children residing with them.<sup>93</sup> Rudolph López was a thirty-five year-old Black man who taught Manual Training at Douglass School.<sup>94</sup> Mary López was a thirty-six year-old maid for a local family.<sup>95</sup> Frances Hills, longtime African American El Paso resident, remembers Rudolph López as “one of the leaders in [the] Pullman car.” López may have had another career after teaching at Douglass School either as a Pullman Porter or as a union representative for their Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters union.<sup>96</sup> This second career may have been due to the financial shortcomings in public education brought upon by the onslaught of the Great Depression. In the 1930s, Douglass School laid-off some of its teachers and Rudolph López may have been one of them. That is what happened to Blanche Grundy, whose daughter, Francis

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<sup>92</sup> Line no. 4 and no. 5, “Membership Report,” 27 June 1929, Viola E. Washington, El Paso Branch Secretary to NAACP New York headquarters, received 3 July 1929, see *NAACP Papers*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Part I, Box G-202, Folder 4, Branch Files: El Paso. In 1929, the López family lived at 3328 Manzana Avenue.

The term Afro-Latino is a contemporary word used by activist and scholars to describe individuals of African descent who are born in Africa (such as Equatorial Guinea or Angola), the Americas, or the Iberian peninsula and speak Spanish/Portuguese and/or have been acculturated into Spanish or Portuguese culture. The term Afro-Latino, and similar terms such as Afro-Caribbean/Afro-Latin America, announce a reclamation of, and sense of pride in, the African heritage as well as a social and political connection with others throughout the African Diaspora based on the legacies of slavery, segregation, discrimination, and racial violence in the Americas and abroad. The phrase Afro-Latino also complicate homogenizing uses of Latino/a and definitions of Latinos/as as a mixed-race constituency, see Paul Allatson, *Key Terms in Latino/a Cultural and Literary Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 11; George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 7; Anani Dzidzienyo and Suzanna Oboler, eds., *Neither Enemies Nor Friends: Latinos, Blacks, Afro-Latinos* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 29.

<sup>93</sup> *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated: no month or day given, 1930 by Margaret E. Bowden, Series T626, Roll 2328, Page 1 Subpage B, Line 86-7.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*; and “4 Pioneer E.P. Blacks Are Profiled,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 13 February 1976, B-6.

<sup>95</sup> *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated: no month or day given, 1930 by Margaret E. Bowden, Series T626, Roll 2328, Page 1 Subpage B, Line 86-7.

<sup>96</sup> Frances Hills, “Interview no. 751,” page 21.

Hills, later recalled that her mother “taught for twelve years at Douglass School. In the 1930s when they were cutting down on teachers, she lost her job.”<sup>97</sup>

Hills recalled that López “came here from somewhere, I think it might have...he might have been a Cuban or something like that, West Indian descendant, because he came here from that part of the country, Florida.”<sup>98</sup> It is clear that López was not originally from El Paso. Rudolph W. López was born in October of 1894 to Feribee López and Manuel López. Feribee López (b.1870) and both of her parents were born in Florida. Manuel López (b.1864) and both of his parents were born in Portugal. The 1900 census labeled the entire López family as being Black. They lived at 3 Ruseau Street in the tiny community of Warrington, Florida which is located in Escambia County, six miles southwest of Pensacola and ten miles southeast of the Alabama state line.<sup>99</sup> Both of Rudolph López’s parents may have been Afro-Latinas/os. Although both of Feribee’s parents were born in Florida, the presence of Afro-Latinas/os in Florida stretch back into the eighteenth century when Florida was a Spanish borderland.<sup>100</sup> In the nineteenth century, the specific presence of Afro-Cubans in Florida included cities such as

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<sup>97</sup> Dailey, *Wheresoever My People Chance to Dwell*, 87. In 1930, Frances Hills was four years-old and she lived at 1101 Park Street with Blanche E. Grundy, her twenty-seven year-old mother who was a teacher at Douglass School. Hills also lived with Lau Henderson (sixty-eight year-old grandmother) and William H. Henderson (eighty-year-old grandfather), see *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 4 April 1930 by Larine Evans, Series T626, Roll 2328, Page 52 Subpage B, Line 64-69.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., Hills abruptly ends her thought within the transcript without explanation from either the interviewee or interviewer.

<sup>99</sup> *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Schedule 1-Population, Nix Precinct, Warrington (Village), Escambia County, Florida, enumerated on 14 June 1900 by B.R. Stewart, Series T623, Roll 168, Page 75 Subpage A, Line 33-7. Manuel López could also have been born in Cape Verde, and thus part of the Cape Verdean Diaspora when he moved to Florida. Located off the coast of West Africa, the Portuguese colonized Cape Verde between 1462 and 1975, see Luís Batalha and Jørgen Carling, eds., *Transnational Archipelago: Perspectives on Cape Verdean Migration and Diaspora* (Amsterdam University Press, 2008).

<sup>100</sup> Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

Pensacola, Tallahassee, West Tampa, Key West and others.<sup>101</sup> Since Manuel López is classified as Black and both he and his parents were born in Portugal, it could be possible that they were descendants of Africans who had been in the Iberian Peninsula for many centuries due to commercial trade, migration, or forced importation by Portuguese colonizers.<sup>102</sup>

When and why Rudolph López arrived into El Paso is not clear, but he like Lawrence Nixon, was very active within the relatively small Black enclave in the city. He not only was a member of the local NAACP, but also involved in musical groups at Douglass School and various churches in the city. For a brief time López was heard on the local AM (Amplitude Modulation) radio station KTSM, and was a member of the Prince Hall Masonic House—achieving the rank of Thirty-Third-Degree Mason. In addition, he was active in the American Legion and the St. James Myrtle United Methodist Church.<sup>103</sup> Lawrence Nixon must have served as a mentor to the younger López, who was named an honorary pallbearer at Nixon's funeral on March 8, 1966.<sup>104</sup> At the age of eighty-seven López himself died in El Paso on November 6, 1981.<sup>105</sup>

Another individual which made El Paso's NAACP multi-racial, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural was Louis Laskin, a white Jewish 1924 member who also must have known Lawrence

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<sup>101</sup> Louis A. Perez, Jr., ed., *Cuban Studies* vol. 25 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996), 54-55; and Susan D. Greenbaum, *More than Black: Afro-Cubans in Tampa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002).

<sup>102</sup> Stefan Goodwin, *Africa in Europe: Antiquity into the Age of Global Exploration* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 168; and *Stefan Goodwin, Africa in Europe: Interdependencies, Relocations, and Globalization* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 134 and 313.

<sup>103</sup> "4 Pioneer E.P. Blacks Are Profiled," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 13 February 1976, B-6.

<sup>104</sup> "Nixon," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 8 March 1966, 21.

<sup>105</sup> El Paso County Clerk, Rudolph W. López Death Certificate, 6 November 1981, reel no. 0366, frame no. 1179.

Nixon.<sup>106</sup> Laskin was one of the proprietors—his older brother Israel Laskin being the other—of the Globe Department store which was located in downtown El Paso at 214-18 East Overland Street. The Lenox Hotel occupied the upper floors while The Globe operated on the bottom floor.<sup>107</sup> By the late 1920s, the Globe had eighty employees.<sup>108</sup> Under the management of Louis Laskin, Helen Laskin (Israel Laskin's wife), and Harold Laskin (Israel's Laskin sole son), the Globe Department store incorporated in the midst of the Great Depression in 1931 at a sum of \$50,000.<sup>109</sup>

In the 1920 census, Louis Laskin is listed as a forty-seven year-old white male merchant of a dry goods store who lived at 1126 Los Angeles Drive with Celia Laskin, his thirty-eight year-old wife and Minda Laskin, their eighteen year-old daughter. Louis Laskin was born in Russia in 1887 and Celia was born in Russia in 1895. Both Celia and Louis became naturalized citizens in 1908 and they list Russian as their mother tongue, additionally, all their parents were born in Russia and all spoke Russian. The daughter, Minda was born in Arizona.<sup>110</sup>

Louis Laskin was an "Annual Member" of the Jewish Publication Society, a scholarly organization which published Jewish works in English. In 1918, this national organization had

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<sup>106</sup> "Memberships of the El Paso Branch," Jerry B. Baldwin, Secretary of El Paso Branch, to NAACP Secretary, 27 August 1923, line item no. 42, *NAACP Papers*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Part I, Branch Files: El Paso, Box G-202.

<sup>107</sup> James R. Murphy, *El Paso, 1850-1950* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2009), 45.

<sup>108</sup> "Immigration from Countries of Western Hemisphere," United States Congress, House of Representatives, Hearings of Committee on Immigration and Naturalization (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1928), 787.

<sup>109</sup> "The Globe, 218 E. Overland, Has Capital Stock of \$50,000" *El Paso Herald-Post*, 14 August 1931, 10.

<sup>110</sup> *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Precinct 36), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 5 January 1920 by John T. Sullivan, Series T625, Roll 1799, Page 72 Subpage A, Line 24-6.

nearly 15,000 members which included sixty-four in El Paso and a total of 290 in Texas.<sup>111</sup> Cyrus Adler, Mayer Sulzberger, and Solomon Solis-Cohen created the Jewish Publication Society in 1888 and the American Jewish Historical Society in 1892, both based in Philadelphia, to promote serious Jewish scholarship throughout the United States.<sup>112</sup>

Jewish involvement in the NAACP is not surprising when one considers that some Jews, particularly those who arrived from Europe after 1880, sympathized with the plight of African Americans in light of their own historical oppression.<sup>113</sup> And if Jews were not directly involved with the NAACP in El Paso as members, there were some actively engaged in social justice causes such as endorsing the passage of the Costigan-Wagner anti-Lynching bill.<sup>114</sup> On Sunday February 3, 1935 progressive whites, and many Jews, met at the predominately African American Second Baptist Church in El Paso's Second Ward neighborhood to read the letters that had been sent to various politicians in support of stopping the barbarity of lynchings in the

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<sup>111</sup> Samson D. Oppenheim, ed., *The American Jewish Year Book, Volume 20* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1918), 424 and 578.

<sup>112</sup> Stephen H. Norwood and Eunice G. Pollack, eds., *Encyclopedia of American Jewish History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 31 and 142.

<sup>113</sup> A brief history of Jews in El Paso can be found in H. Ava Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Works* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 102-19. On Jewish sympathies with the plight of African Americans, see Hasia R. Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915-1935* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977), 12, 23, 28, 35, 71, 154 and 229; and Rafael Medoff, *Jewish Americans and Political Participation: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2002), 89.

<sup>114</sup> Edward P. Costigan (1874-1939) was a Democratic United States Senator (1931-1937) from Colorado who co-sponsored a bill with New York Democratic Senator (1927-1949) Robert F. Wagner (1877-1953) that was designed to punish sheriffs who did not adequately protect the prisoners within their custody from mob rule. Despite Eleanor Roosevelt's support of the bill, her husband President Franklin D. Roosevelt did not support the bill and it eventually did not pass.

nation.<sup>115</sup> The groups and individuals included Women's City Government Club, Rabbi Joseph M. Roth, and Rabbi Martin Zielonka.<sup>116</sup>

Frederick C. Knollenberg, another white member of the El Paso NAACP throughout the 1920s, was born in Quincy, Illinois in January 1877 to parents who had roots in Germany and Britain. Knollenberg's father was in the merchant milling business.<sup>117</sup> Fred Knollenberg earned his law degree from the University of Michigan in 1901.<sup>118</sup> In 1902, he moved to Missouri to practice law and eventually made his way to New Mexico—Silver City and Alamogordo—where he practiced between 1907 and 1910. In 1910, he moved to El Paso where he was admitted to the Texas Bar and soon after became a member of the Bar Association of El Paso County.<sup>119</sup> Also in 1910, he established a law partnership with his fellow 1903 Michigan Law School

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<sup>115</sup> "Branch News" *Crisis*, vol. 42, no. 4 (April 1935): 121.

<sup>116</sup> The Women's City Government Club was a predominately white civic local organization, see Judith N. McArthur, *Creating the New Woman: The Rise of Southern Women's Progressive Culture in Texas, 1893-1918* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 77. In 1930, the thirty-five year-old Rabbi Joseph M. Roth lived with his family at 1216 Los Angeles Drive in El Paso. Roth's parents were born in Hungary, as he too was originally from Hungary, arriving into the United States in 1903, see *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 9 April 1930 by Grace C. Tannelvill, Series T626, Roll 2329, Page 159 Subpage A, Line 45-50. In 1930, the German born fifty-three year-old Martin Zielonka lived with his family at 837 W. Yandell Drive in El Paso. The German-speaking Rabbi arrived into the United States in 1898 and his father was born in Poland and his mother was born in Germany. There is also an entry for him in the 1910 and 1920 El Paso census, see *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 18 April 1930 by Grace C. Tannelvill, Series T626, Roll 2329, Page 167 Subpage A, Line 13-5.

<sup>117</sup> *Twelfth Census of the United States*, City of Quincy (Ward 4, Precinct 15), Adams County, Illinois, enumerated on 6 June 1900 by John E. Fick, Schedule 1-Population, Series T623, Roll 236, Page 131 Subpage A, Line 38-43.

<sup>118</sup> *University of Michigan, Department of Law, Catalogue of Students for 1899-1900 and Annual Announcement, 1900-1901* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1900), 35, 40, and 43; *University of Michigan, General Catalogue of Officers and Students, 1837-1911* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1912), 485 and 1031.

<sup>119</sup> Broadus, *The Legal Heritage of El Paso*, 171, 177, 178, and 223.

alumnus Charles R. Loomis.<sup>120</sup> When the law partnership between Knollenberg and Loomis dissolved in 1915, Loomis partnered with James F. McKenzie in 1916 who was formerly associate justice of the Court of Civil Appeals in El Paso.<sup>121</sup>

In October 1916, Knollenberg became a member of the newly-formed Tri-State Bar Association and after the Bar Association of El Paso County disbanded, he became a member of the newly created El Paso Bar Association in August 1919, two months after its inception.<sup>122</sup> In 1941, Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes appointed Knollenberg to serve as the Southwestern representative for the American Law Institute, a national governing body with restricted membership.<sup>123</sup> Knollenberg was a “self-described green country lawyer with a trademark mouth full of gold teeth and a jovial personality.”<sup>124</sup> As one of the few Anglos in El Paso’s NAACP, Knollenberg served as Lawrence Nixon’s legal council during his court battles with the judicial system to secure the right to vote during the Texas Democratic Primaries. El Paso Lawyer Julian Bernat described Elisha F. Cameron and Fred C. Knollenberg as “two fine old

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<sup>120</sup> “News from the Classes” *The Michigan Alumnus* vol. 22 (October 1915—August 1916): 251. In January 1920 Charles Russell Loomis was forty-six years-old, head of the household, and living with his thirty year-old wife Ethel W. Loomis, and their nearly three year-old daughter, Jane Hunter Loomis, as well as a live-in nineteen year-old “servant” or “domestic” named Margarita Marquez. Charles R. Loomis died August 28, 1959, see *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Precinct 35), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 26 January 1920 by Abbie [sic] Frank Smith, Series T625, Roll 1799, Page 66, Line 18-22; and El Paso County Clerk, Charles R. Loomis Death Certificate, 28 August 1959, reel no. 0489, frame no. 1294.

<sup>121</sup> Eugene Campbell Barker, Francis White Johnson, and Ernest William Winkler, eds., *A History of Texas and Texans*, vol. 3 (Chicago and New York: The American Historical Society, 1914), 1421. The first name of McKenzie was taken from “Funeral Services For Judge M’Kenzie [sic],” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 6 March 1939, 10.

<sup>122</sup> The El Paso Bar Association had its first organizational meeting 24 June 1919 and adopted its new constitution which was stronger than the previous. Knollenberg’s application for membership was approved 2 August 1919. The Tri-State Bar Association consisted of attorneys and judges of West Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona, see Broadbuss, *The Legal Heritage of El Paso*, 177-78 and 181.

<sup>123</sup> “Death Takes Well Known Attorney,” *El Paso Times*, 12 June 1951, A-1. The American Law Institute (AIL) “was organized in February, 1923, for the purpose of restating in simpler and clearer form the principal topics of American law,” see “Notes and Personals,” *The American Law School Review*, vol. 5, no. 4 (December 1923): 246; *The American Law Institute: Seventy-fifth Anniversary, 1923-1998* (Philadelphia: The Institute, 1998).

<sup>124</sup> Borreson, “The Good Fight” *Texas Lawyer* (December 1999): 26.

gentlemen of the old school. They were good lawyers and good people.” Bernat, who practiced in Cameron’s firm, says his partner spoke often and proudly of his involvement in the case. “It was a challenge to them, but they went ahead and did it.”<sup>125</sup> In describing Knollenberg to Walter White, national secretary of the NAACP, in 1932 Le Roy Washington wrote:

He is very interested in our welfare here and throughout the country. There has never been a time when we have called on him for legal advice or aid but that we got it without question as to the fee. In fact, he is the only lawyer whom we have found here, as yet, who will go to the bat with and for the NAACP, locally and nationally. As we understand it, he is thoroughly conversant with southern tactics in evading the law.<sup>126</sup>

He obviously was well liked by many within the Black community in El Paso.

Knollenberg died at the age of seventy-four in El Paso on June 11, 1951 at his 2613 Silver Street home. He was survived by his seventy-three year-old wife Florence C. Knollenberg, his daughter, Florence K. Roy, two grandchildren, Bobby and Marilyn Roy, all of El Paso, and four sisters: Mary E. Orr (b. April 1883), Louella M. Johnson (b. May 1889), Cora E. Johntz (b. October 1880), all of Kansas City, and Florence Herr (b. April 1891) of Benton, Illinois. Funeral arrangements were handled by his longtime friend Barry Hagedon and services were conducted at Kaster and Maxon Chapel with Reverend B.M.G. Williams officiating.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Le Roy W. Washington, president of El Paso NAACP, to Walter White, NAACP Secretary, 25 January 1932, *NAACP Papers*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Part I, Box G-202, Folder 4, Branch Files: El Paso.

<sup>127</sup> “Death Takes Well Known Attorney,” *El Paso Times*, 12 June 1951, A-1; “Fred Knollenberg Taken by Death,” *El Paso Herald*, 12 June 1951, A-1. Knollenberg was buried in Evergreen Cemetery. In the 1930 census, the fifty-three year-old Frederick C. Knollenberg is listed as having only one daughter and her name is Elizabeth A. Knollenberg, see *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Population Schedule*, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 11 April 1930, Series T626, Roll 2328, Page 101, Line 91-4. Florence C. Knollenberg, Frederick C. Knollenberg’s wife, died over twenty years after her husband, see El Paso County Clerk, Florence C. Knollenberg Death Certificate, 14 July 1972, reel no. 0088, frame no. 1334.



## **Conclusion**

The end of legal disfranchisement against African Americans in 1944 (*Smith v. Allwright*) not only modified the politics of the Democratic primary, but also altered the democratic process as a whole. By the mid-1960s, Black participation in politics generally “injected a new liberal element” into the Democratic party. Racially progressive and pro-federal government, African American political beliefs were in contrast to the traditional political values of historically conservative Democrats. When combined with white moderates, progressives, and liberals, by the 1970s Black voters became more influential in their ability to sway elections. These varied reasons would result in conservative white politicians attempting to stigmatize, often with success, any moderate white candidate who appealed to Black voters as liberal integrationist. In addition, conservative candidates began to lose to strong moderate candidates who made them appear as relics wanting to defend an undemocratic, racist political system. And finally, as the new racial reality secured a foothold, conservative Democrats fled the party in mass and became Republicans, and couched their politics in more coded language, and subtly race-baiting constituents to vote for them.<sup>128</sup> Lawrence Nixon’s steadfast involvement in the political process in Texas helped usher in the changes mentioned and many others.

Was the ballot the ticket to freedom for Black America? Joseph Madison, former NAACP voter registration director, replied: “It has been the ticket to the train but the train has not arrived at the final destination which would be the sharing of wealth and power. The great problem is that in many black communities there is not even a stop to board the train.”<sup>129</sup> The decades following Nixon’s involvement in the struggle for political participation, the right to

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<sup>128</sup> David Lublin, *The Republican South: Democratization and Partisan Change* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 116.

<sup>129</sup> Berg, “*The Ticket to Freedom*,” 264.

vote remained an important component in the NAACP's strategic approach. The logic was that unrestricted access to the polls and the "intelligent" use of the ballot would provide the Black community with the tools necessary "to win inclusion into the democratic and egalitarian promise of America."<sup>130</sup> However, as Lawrence Nixon himself once said, the Black man just "wants true democracy as laid down in the constitution, and feels he will be satisfied if he gets that."<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>131</sup> "El Paso Negro Doctor To Fight Again For Vote," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 4 August 1932.

CHAPTER 5 –  
A BLACK PROGRESSIVE IN AN UN-PROGRESSIVE ERA

“You have no idea how many people are dying from the lack of sympathy.”<sup>1</sup>  
-unnamed undertaker, 1897

In the mid-1920s, while in the mist of battling in the courts for the right to vote in the Texas Democratic Primary, Lawrence Nixon sought to start a hospital in El Paso to address the healthcare needs of African Americans. By all indications, he invested a large amount of time and resources in his attempts, which spanned at least a nine-year period from 1926 to 1934. Charting the process of his attempting to establish the hospital not only reveals a great deal about access to healthcare for African Americans in El Paso during this period, but it tells us a great deal about Nixon’s ideas and politics. His work on the hospital not only reflects his views as a physician, but illuminates his concept of race—his commitment to the idea of progress for African Americans.

Nixon’s attempt to start a hospital for African Americans also give insight to his racial politics and his willingness to stay firm in his belief. Because little of what he wrote survives, we lack explicit statements of his political views. Was he a conservative or a liberal? Was he progressive or pragmatic? Was he an activist for social justice, limited government, or a proponent of unchecked, unfettered, laissez faire capitalism? Instead of drawing answers to those questions from explicit statements, we have instead to look at his actions, which may in any case provide a truer sense of his politics than overt political statements. Nixon’s membership in the progressive, left-leaning Southern Conference for Human Welfare in 1945 is somewhat telling. Did his membership reflect his political views, or did Nixon simply turn to

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel K. Roberts, Jr., *Infectious Fear: Politics, Disease, and the Health Effects of Segregation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 1.

this organization because the left-leaning organization had an interest in and support for African American issues. This chapter will also examine why Nixon joined an organization with rumored communist affiliations.

### **El Paso's Frederick Douglass National Tubercular Hospital**

Historically, tuberculosis, or TB as it is commonly known, has been linked to “poverty and environmental factors” and “has always had a socioeconomic and political profile,” such as inadequate housing, poor nutrition, stress, and overwork.<sup>2</sup> The disease attacks the lungs and is usually fatal if left untreated. During the antebellum period enslaved Blacks, disproportionately more so than whites, suffered respiratory infections such as TB, due in large measure to scantily constructed quarters or cabins which permitted weather elements to enter their homes. The immune systems of New World Africans were not accustomed to “microbes that caused various pneumonias and tuberculosis” which impacted their “immunological rigor.”<sup>3</sup>

The earliest documented attempts that exist of Lawrence Nixon seeking to start-up a hospital for TB patients date from 1926. The proposed name for the institution, Frederick Douglass National Tubercular Hospital for Negroes, was to honor Frederick Douglass, the abolitionist and human rights champion of the nineteenth century.<sup>4</sup> Nixon's foray into this

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>3</sup> Washington, *Medical Apartheid*, 29 and 326. Today, in the developing world, many deaths from AIDS are due to the tuberculosis that accompanies it. Too, in the United States, half of incarcerated TB sufferers are not only Black “but also homeless and many have a history of mental illness, alcohol and drug abuse, or all of the above risk factors,” see Washington, *Medical Apartheid*, 326.

<sup>4</sup> Copy of the original architectural design plans found within N/MFP. Percy Wear McGhee was the El Paso architect who designed the formal plans for the Frederick Douglas National Tubercular Hospital. His office was located at 425 First National Bank Building. In 1909, McGhee was an El Paso city clerk. In 1930, McGhee was a forty year-old white male who lived at 805 Campbell Street and was employed as an architect. McGhee was also a member of the American Institute of Architects. In 1936 the El Paso Centennial Museum commissioned McGhee to design the “Bhutanese Revival” that Henry Trost had introduced at University of Texas—El Paso twenty years earlier, but McGhee substituted “uncoursed fieldstone for plaster in the massive sloping walls,” see *Fifteenth*

major, long-range endeavor instantly made him a part of a movement of African Americans who for decades prior to Nixon had attempted to establish better medical facilities and healthcare for African Americans. In 1923, the National Medical Association (NMA), just three years before Nixon's initial documented attempts, formally began the Black hospital movement with the creation of the National Hospital Association (NHA). Founded in 1895, the NMA was established to help organize and promote the interest of the African American medical profession including physicians, dentists, surgeons, and pharmacists. The NMA's creation of the NHA was necessary for a multitude of reasons, including the need to improve the standards among the Black hospitals already in existence. The NMA anticipated that with tougher guidelines from accrediting bodies that Black hospitals would make themselves obsolete if they did not keep up with the latest procedures and standards. If the NMA allowed this to happen without a strategy in place then their constituents, Black doctors, would be placed at serious risk of losing their own ability to practice medicine in a hospital setting. The NMA encouraged Black doctors to become active in the hospital reform movement for self-interest and self-preservation, but more importantly for the betterment of the overall Black community.<sup>5</sup> Nixon became part of this reform movement through his attempts to open a hospital to address the needs of Black TB patients.

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*Census of the United States: 1930 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 2 April 1930, Series T626, Roll 2329, Page 43, Line 50; *Municipal Journal and Engineer*, vol. 26 (New York: Swetland Publishing Company, 1909), 399; American Institute of Architects, *American Architects Directory* (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1955), 84, 353, and 387; *Power Engineering* vol. 38 (Tulsa: Penn Well Publishing Company, 1934), 498; Jay C. Henry, *Architecture in Texas: 1895-1945* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), 276.

<sup>5</sup> Susan L. Smith, "National Medical Association," in Mjagkij, *Organizing Black America*, 468-70. The Black medical profession's fears were well founded, given the closure of most Black medical schools in the previous two decades. Between 1900 and 1923 eight of the ten Black medical schools in the country were forced to close when the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching invited the influential Dr. Abraham Flexner to critique the nation's 147 medical schools. Howard and Meharry, Lawrence A. Nixon's alma mater, were the only two Black medical schools to survive this stinging and damning report, Washington, *Medical Apartheid*, 156.

Nixon attempted to get the advice of experts, consultants, and other professionals on a variety of issues related to the establishment of the hospital, including the practicality of certain locations. Lieutenant Colonel Albert A. King, Army officer stationed at Fort Bliss, wrote Nixon on May 20, 1926 indicating that he [King] had done a professional and thorough observation of Evergreen Ranch in Socorro, New Mexico and the summary-findings included: “Climatic conditions: excellent, Water Supply: abundant, Quality: excellent, Surroundings: good, Amusement: fair,” and in the final analysis King concludes, “the site was recommended for a tubercular sanitarium.”<sup>6</sup> It is clear from this letter that Nixon contracted King to prepare this formal report because he intended to build a hospital specializing in treating African Americans inflicted with tuberculosis. What is unusual and unexplained is the choice of this location. Evergreen Ranch, which was owned by the Salvation Army, was located 190 miles north of El Paso, and seventy-six miles south of Albuquerque, New Mexico. Not only was this site very rural and somewhat difficult to get to, but also one has to wonder if Nixon intended to move to Socorro if the hospital were to be built in order to run the day-to-day operations of the facility. This concern notwithstanding, the central New Mexico location offered great potential due to the need in the state. In 1933, the *Land of Enchantment*, New Mexico’s state nickname, had the second highest death rate for tuberculosis. Texas was also high, ranking fourteenth among all states. Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Colorado, and California were so-called “sun care” states whose high mortality rates were skewed by the high number of TB patients who went there to ease their pain, die in comfort, or be cured altogether.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Albert A. King (Fort Bliss Army Base, El Paso, Texas) to Lawrence A. Nixon, 20 May 1926, copy of letter found in N/MFP.

<sup>7</sup> Roberts, *Infectious Fear*, 34-5 and 234 n.20.

Additional benefits of the New Mexico location are mentioned in a letter from Clarence C. Clarke, Socorro dentist and Secretary of the New Mexico State Board of Dental Examiners, to Salvation Army Adjutant Ensign W.H. Pollgreen, when Clarke stated “Socorro cannot be beaten for the ‘all the year around’ climate.” Clarke also seems to have felt that Socorro was at the “center of the health zone,” in other words, “a medium high altitude—(not too high, and not too low).” Additionally, Socorro had “an abundance of the finest water in the world.” And finally, the location of Evergreen Ranch in Socorro is at the foot of the Socorro mountains, which “gives a most wonderful background, and the view of the valley and the mountains East is always beautiful.”<sup>8</sup>

During this time, tuberculosis ranked among the top three causes of mortality among Blacks in urban communities.<sup>9</sup> Lawrence Nixon’s vision did not simply encompass treating African Americans in El Paso or the Southwest, but Blacks nationwide including those in the inner cities. In a December 1933 letter to Dr. Kendall Emerson, president of the National Tuberculosis Association, Nixon expected “an institution for the tuberculars [patients with TB]” geared towards the “twelve or fourteen millions of Negroes” as his potential market or patient pool. Nixon further elaborated “we felt we were not projecting our plan on a too great a scale

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<sup>8</sup> Clarence Cornell Clarke, Socorro dentist, to Ensign/Adjutant W.H. Pollgreen, Salvation Army, 1 June 1926, copy of letter found in N/MFP. In 1925 Clarence C. Clarke was not only practicing dentistry in Socorro, but he also served as Secretary-Treasurer for the New Mexico State Board of Dental Examiners, see *Polk's 1925 Dental Register and Directory of the United States and Canada*, vol. 14 (Detroit: Ralph Lane Polk and Company, 1925), 511 and 515. In a follow-up letter on July 7, 1926, Salvation Army Major Albert E. Baynton writes Nixon stating, “I am instructed to say that the Salvation Army is prepared to accept \$10,000 cash down payment with 7% interest on the balance, and a principal payment of \$2,500 semi-annually plus interest. If the full amount of purchase price is paid within twelve months, it is my opinion that the Salvation Army would consider waiving the interest payment for that period in order to assist your worthy project,” see Major Albert E. Baynton, Assistant Property Secretary, Salvation Army, to Lawrence A. Nixon, 7 July 1926, copy of original letter found in N/MFP.

<sup>9</sup> Roberts, *Infectious Fear*, 4; and Barbara Bates, *Bargaining for Life: A Social History of Tuberculosis, 1876-1938* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 293. For all groups “throughout the nineteenth century, tuberculosis (or consumption as it was then called) was the most common cause of death in the United States, as in much of western Europe,” see Bates, *Bargaining for Life*, 1.

when we thought of the hundreds of thousands of Negro sufferers from Tuberculosis and respiratory ailments.”<sup>10</sup> An ambitious vision indeed, but by no means unwarranted. For example, between 1900 and 1940, Black mortality due to pulmonary tuberculosis ranged 8.4% to 15%; compared to white mortality for the same period ranging 3.2% to 9.8%.<sup>11</sup>

The statistics reflect the pervasive impoverishment of African American communities and thus the impact and severity of institutional racism and Jim Crow throughout the nation. Booker T. Washington recognized this when in 1915 he attacked segregation by saying “wherever the Negro is segregated it means that he will have poor sewerage, poor sanitary conditions generally, and this reflects itself in many ways in the life of my race to the disadvantage of the white race.”<sup>12</sup> One scholar suggests that “any African American alive in or before 1940 may well have either known or been closely related to someone who had suffered with or died from tuberculosis.” No doubt that many Blacks were concerned about this insidious disease. Many who were aware of these dismal statistics agreed that Black involvement, including prominently Black doctors and other healthcare professionals, was the key to reducing Black tuberculosis mortality.”<sup>13</sup>

Part of Nixon’s impetus for the establishment for a Black hospital specifically for TB patients in the mid-1920s may have been rooted in the fact that the state of New Mexico or Texas did not have such a facility. In 1921 Texas Governor Pat Neff rejected attempts for the state to formally establish an all-Black TB hospital. House of Representative member Orlando B. Black

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<sup>10</sup> Lawrence A. Nixon to Kendall Emerson, National Tuberculosis Association, 12 December 1933, copy of original letter found in N/MFP.

<sup>11</sup> Roberts, *Infectious Fear*, 4 and 64-5.

<sup>12</sup> Ronald L. Braithwaite and Sandra E. Taylor, *Health Issues in the Black Community* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 29.

<sup>13</sup> Roberts, *Infectious Fear*, 4 and 64-5.



of San Antonio (future mayor of the city) introduced House Bill no. 36 which called for the allocation of \$300,000 for a Black sanatorium. The bill was initiated by the all-white Texas Public Health Association and endorsed by the all-white Texas State Medical Association. State Senator William H. Bledsoe of Lubbock took the bill, now Senate Bill No. 38, and ensured its passage in that chamber, yet Texas Governor Pat Neff vetoed the appropriation of \$300,000 on February 20, 1921. Neff argued that the state already operated one such sanatorium and that, if a hospital were to be built for Negroes, it should be located adjacent to the existing facility so as to use existing central plant and equipment.<sup>14</sup> The backers of the bill stressed that the state “loses \$14,600,000 annually from loss of services” and “\$200,000 for medical care and treatment.” Those who wanted the bill to pass hoped that Neff would see having a Black TB facility as “health insurance,” since so many Blacks in Texas worked in close proximity to whites.<sup>15</sup> Sadly if predictably, white support of this important legislation “was predicated on concerns that the black domestics who cared for their children, cleaned their homes, drove their cars, and prepared their meals might import tuberculosis into white households.”<sup>16</sup> On the one hand Nixon may have been dispirited by the governor’s actions since that meant a further delay in addressing the pressing need of saving Black TB sufferers in Texas, but Nixon could also have been encouraged by Neff’s veto and saw it as an opportunity to start his own facility.

During this period, whites often perceived African Americans as “vectors of disease,” with the potential to infect whites.<sup>17</sup> To combat this pervasive image, in January 1915, Booker

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<sup>14</sup> Holman Taylor, “A Tuberculosis Sanatorium for Negroes,” *Texas State Journal of Medicine* vol. 16, no. 10 (February 1921): 419-20; and Blodgett, Blodgett, and Scott, *The Land, The Law, and The Lord*, 100.

<sup>15</sup> Roberts, *Infectious Fear*, 287 n.34; and “Why a Negro Sanatorium in Texas,” *Journal of the Outdoor Life* vol. 18 (May 1921): 172.

<sup>16</sup> Washington, *Medical Apartheid*, 326.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

T. Washington launched Negro Health Week to bring awareness to tuberculosis prevention and other health issues.<sup>18</sup> In 1921, in order to honor the memory of Washington, who had died on November 14, 1915—just eleven months after launching the first Negro Health Week—the initiative was changed from January to the week of his birthday, April 5<sup>th</sup>.<sup>19</sup> In keeping with this tradition, Lawrence Nixon, along with other Black doctors in El Paso such as Vernon Collins, who would become the El Paso NAACP president throughout the 1950s; Eugene R. Gravelly, who moved to El Paso from Dewitt County, Texas; and the dentist, Dr. Emerson M. Williams conducted health clinics on various topics during El Paso’s observance of National Negro Health Week.<sup>20</sup>

On May 15, 1926, Nixon wrote a letter addressed to Dr. Edward Starr Judd, one of the founding partners of the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, requesting some literature that might be of some assistance and also to ask Dr. Judd to serve on the board of directors for the “Fred Douglass National Tubercular Hospital for Negroes.” Dr. Henry S. Plummer, in the absence of Dr. Judd who was away from the city at the time, replied to Dr. Nixon indicating that such literature did not exist and that Dr. Judd would reply directly regarding the request that he become a part of the Board of Directors.<sup>21</sup> Judd eventually wrote Nixon a supportive letter indicating that “this is very commendable and I shall be glad to do anything I can to help you.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Booker T. Washington and Albon L. Holsey, *Booker T. Washington’s Own Story of His Life and Work* (Atlanta: J.L. Nichols, 1915), 427.

<sup>19</sup> Braithwaite and Taylor, *Health Issues in the Black Community*, 29.

<sup>20</sup> “Hold Health Meeting,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 7 April 1933, 10. More details on National Negro Health week, including Monroe N. Work antecedents, see Susan L. Smith, *Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: Black Women’s Health Activism in America, 1890-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 35-9.

<sup>21</sup> Henry S. Plummer, Clinical Section of the Mayo Clinic, to Lawrence A. Nixon, 25 May 1926, copy of letter found in N/MFP.

<sup>22</sup> Edward Starr Judd, Surgical Section of Mayo Clinic, to Lawrence A. Nixon, 1 June 1926, copy of original letter found in N/MFP.

Judd, however, left unaddressed Nixon's request that he join the nascent hospital board. This must have been a disappointment for Nixon, since a connection to Judd, with his affiliation with the Mayo Clinic could have provided a crucial boost to the TB hospital project. It was also the sad truth that having visible white support for such a project was regarded as vital, since it would provide in the eyes of many a sense of credibility, prestige, and stature to Nixon's cause. And finally, Judd's Board membership could have potentially opened a network of friends and professional contacts, some of whom may have had influence or access to potential financing and funding in the form of low-interest loans from the government or grants from foundations in assisting the hospital.

The most realistic, if not stinging, criticisms came from Dr. John A. Kenney, former personal physician to Booker T. Washington and at the time of his letter to Nixon, Editor in Chief of the *Journal of the National Medical Association*. Kenney and Nixon would later have an association through Kenney's good friend and one-time business partner, Earnest T.E. Attwell, who, as we will see in the next chapter, was then married to Drusilla E. Tandy, who would later become Nixon's second wife. At this point, Kenney reminded Nixon that he "must take into consideration that it [Evergreen ranch in New Mexico] is far removed from the center of civilization, and that our people as a whole have not a great deal of money with which to travel such distances, and that many who could be helped, could they reach the location, will die where they are because of lack of funds." Kenney pessimistically told Nixon, "I must say to you frankly that I cannot express myself too favorably along this line. It is unquestionably a big undertaking for our people at this stage of our development."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> John A. Kenney, Editor in Chief of *Journal of the National Medical Association*, to Lawrence A. Nixon, 7 September 1926, copy of original letter found in N/MFP. Despite his negative opinion to Nixon in this letter, John A. Kenney (1874-1950) took an active role in the Black hospital movement, specifically serving as secretary for the NHA. For thirty-two years he was Editor in Chief of *Journal of the National Medical Association*. Similar to L.A.

By 1933, Nixon no longer had in mind a New Mexico location for the hospital. By that date, and presumably persuaded by arguments like Kenny's, Nixon had now decided to focus on developing a hospital in El Paso. Unfortunately, the available documents provide no indication of the timing and specific reasons for his shift of plan. Nevertheless, Nixon wrote Kendall Emerson, stating "we have selected for our location a section of land some eight or ten miles north of El Paso, on the eastern side of the Franklin mountains, where the elevation is 4,200 feet. This land is costing us ten dollars an acre, making the whole section cost us but six thousand four hundred dollars."<sup>24</sup> The attorney handling this issue for Lawrence Nixon was none other than Fred Knollenberg, who at this same time was also assisting Nixon in his fight against the Texas all-white Democratic primary. Knollenberg wrote Nixon and the Federal Emergency Administration alerting them that if needed, he would donate his own private land to this worthy cause—seventy-seven acres in Vado, New Mexico—so as to not jeopardize the desperately needed financing from the federal government.<sup>25</sup>

Nixon ultimately persuaded a number of prominent individuals to serve on the hospital board. William Pickens was Field Secretary of the NAACP, George S. Schuyler was a well-known conservative commentator and *Pittsburgh Courier* columnist, and New York City resident; Emory D. Williams was a long-time Nixon friend and NAACP Las Cruces chapter president; Arthur Q. Shirley, a physician from San Angelo, Texas; Henry J. Mason, hometown Nixon friend and Wiley College classmate; and Le Roy W. Washington, long-time Nixon friend

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Nixon, Kenney was the son of former African captives, who graduated from medical school in 1901. He worked at Tuskegee Institute for twenty-two years, see Gamble, *Making a Place for Ourselves*, 41-2.

<sup>24</sup> Lawrence A. Nixon to Kendall Emerson, National Tuberculosis Association, 12 December 1933, copy of original letter found in N/MFP.

<sup>25</sup> Frederick C. Knollenberg, El Paso Attorney, to Lawrence A. Nixon, 28 August 1934, copy of original letter found in N/MFP.

and NAACP El Paso chapter president.<sup>26</sup> All of the board members were African Americans. Based on previous communication, it is obvious that Nixon had sought out support and board participation from prominent whites, yet apparently Nixon could not find anyone of proper stature among white professionals in El Paso, who would agree to serve. There were in El Paso certainly numerous white bank presidents, mining and railroad executives, military officers, political elites, attorneys, accountants, and medical professionals who could have served on the hospital's board of directors and made important contributions with their skill sets and contacts. Surely, although no proof exists, Nixon must have attempted to get at least one local prominent white person. Some can argue, however, that by Nixon having an all-Black Board he was breaking away from traditional practices of having rich all-white boards chairing Black institutions.<sup>27</sup> No matter what the original intent, the fact is Nixon did want and tried to secure white Board members, but simply could not get them.

Because of the scale of his project, the National Tuberculosis Association did not agree to endorse Nixon's effort. The association of Black physicians, the National Medical Association, also did not support Nixon's plans, citing what was regarded as an unfavorable location and distance for most Blacks. Still other organizations did not contribute the seed or start-up money necessary to launch his project. Thus, without national or major institutional backing, it was not surprising that on June 11, 1935 Nixon received the disappointing news from Horatio B. Hackett, Assistant Administrator of the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, that his application for that agency's funds had been denied. Hackett wrote:

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<sup>26</sup> "Nationally Known Group To Seek Government Funds: Project Calls For Millions," by Ishmael Flory, c.March-June 1934, newspaper clipping from unknown newspaper, found in N/MFP.

<sup>27</sup> Vanessa N. Gamble, *Making a Place for Ourselves: The Black Hospital Movement, 1920-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 22.

After a careful review our examiners have concluded that approval of the above-entitled application for a loan with which to finance the construction of a tubercular hospital could not be recommended. It is the opinion of our Legal Division that the applicant is not a public body and since this project is not a hospital which is partially financed from public funds, this application cannot be included in the comprehensive plan as required under Section 202(e) of the National Industrial Act. In these circumstances, I regret to inform you that this application has been finally disapproved.<sup>28</sup>

In spite of this rejection, Nixon remained committed to the proposition of bringing improved medical facilities to African Americans in El Paso and the Southwest, and even nationally. Although this particular effort ended in failure, his commitment to the project, the arguments he brought to bear to support it and his vision of it, tell us a great deal about Nixon's racial politics. He was not static, nor dogmatic in his thinking on the issue of race. At the national level, the debate within the African American community on the issue of integration versus separation raged on throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Nixon may have believed philosophically in the goal of integrated health care facilities, but at this point he made clear that he wanted a Black hospital to serve Black patients which tells us that he recognized that although integrating current white hospitals would probably be the preference, the fact was that integration was a slow process. The health improvement and advancement of Black people "could not afford to wait for integration's eventual development," because the cost would be literally the deaths of Blacks.<sup>29</sup> Nixon was acutely aware that Black people needed immediate medical attention from Black physicians and nurses, who could care for them with dignity, respect and in a culturally sensitive manner. Nixon wanted a hospital that was "so attractive, so cheerful and so well equipped, that there would be no question that those of them [Black patients] needing

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<sup>28</sup> Horatio B. Hackett, Assistant Administrator at the Federal Emergency Administration of Public Works, to Lawrence A. Nixon, 11 June 1935, docket no. 6556, copy of original letter found in N/MFP.

<sup>29</sup> Gamble, *Making a Place for Ourselves*, xvi.

treatment and having sufficient funds, avail themselves of an opportunity they have *never* had before.”<sup>30</sup>

Even though Nixon was a lifetime member of the NAACP, had the unofficial backing for the hospital of NAACP National Secretary, James Weldon Johnson, and had the organization’s Field Secretary, William Pickens on the hospital’s Board of Directors, Nixon was in direct opposition to the organization’s official position on this vital issue of integration versus separatism. By this point, civil rights activists were increasingly leery of continuing to support the establishment of all-Black institutions and were now much more focused on forcing white America to integrate mainstream institutions. The NAACP considered the mere existence of all-Black hospitals as a tacit acknowledgment of the legitimacy of Jim Crow, segregation, and the entire edifice of racial oppression. The premier national civil rights organization argued that Black hospitals “hindered efforts at integration because they provided white hospitals with excuses to continue their discriminatory practices.”<sup>31</sup> Nixon’s political positions and activism make it clear that he did not believe in segregation. He witnessed the segregation and exclusion of Black Texans in the Democratic primary so he challenged it. He did, however, believe in Black people having access to services, rights and privileges. He attended segregated private schools all his life, so he witnessed the power of Black institutions and the value of Black-run organizations. He knew Black institutions were transformational in the sense of giving Black people both pride in themselves and hope for the future of the race. Nixon’s determination in his nine-year campaign demonstrates his commitment to Black people, Black institutions, and Black organizational building. For the NMA, they were “fully cognizant of the danger inherent in any

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<sup>30</sup> Lawrence A. Nixon to Kendall Emerson, National Tuberculosis Association, 12 December 1933, copy of original letter found in N/MFP. Emphasis not in original letter.

<sup>31</sup> Gamble, *Making a Place for Ourselves*, 61.

segregated proposition,” but it believed it had more to offer “than loud mouthed preachment against segregation in the abstract.” This was in fact precisely the position that the NMA took relative to the NAACP.<sup>32</sup>

Nixon did not want the establishment of a hospital as an act of self-aggrandizement or his personal enrichment. His demeanor and style was such where he did not crave attention or was overly outspoken. He also did not practice medicine to increase his income, status or to obtain material possessions. Drusilla Nixon recalled her husband saying, “we have all the things we need and some of the things we want.” He applied this philosophy in a practical way by charging his patients very little. Some white doctors would tell him “you ought to go up on your prices. If you’d go up on your prices you would make just as much money as you do now but you’d work less.” Nixon’s response was one expected from an individual who entered the field of medicine for humanitarian purposes: “now if everybody gouges these people [medical patients], they’ll never have anything.” In his fifty-three years of practicing medicine in El Paso, “the most he ever charged was \$2 for an office call and \$4 for a house call.”<sup>33</sup> It was this level of commitment to his patients that pushed Nixon to seek an all-Black hospital.

Nixon did not have hospital privileges because hospitals in El Paso only allowed doctors who were members of the local medical society to have hospital privileges. He was not a member of the El Paso County Medical Society because of that organization’s policy of no Blacks allowed. This racist policy agitated Nixon, who used it as another reason to not raise his prices, “why should I go up on my prices when they don’t allow me to belong to the [El Paso]

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 102-3.

<sup>33</sup> Drusilla Nixon, “Interview no. 194,” page 20.



County Medical Society?”<sup>34</sup> It appears that Nixon kept his prices low, thus attracting more clients for himself versus following the advice of his white counterparts who encouraged him to raise his prices. He clearly must have saw his defiance as a way to protest their segregated policy. Along with the local medical society being segregated, so too were the local hospitals, such as William Beaumont General Hospital, which strictly and proudly enforced Jim Crow.<sup>35</sup> When Nixon had a patient that needed to be hospitalized, he had to seek the assistance of white doctors such as Branwell Fanning Stevens, who would admit Nixon’s patients into Hotel Dieu under their own names and allowed Nixon to continue treating them.<sup>36</sup> Nixon’s patients included African Americans, but his practice was “almost entirely Mexican.” Nixon also had some Anglo patients, along with other ethnicities and his wife—Drusilla, remembered that “it was the United Nations in his office. He had quite a few Philippinos.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Southern Conference for Human Welfare**

Lawrence Nixon, and his wife Drusilla, joined the Southern Conference for Human Welfare (SCHW) as charter members of the El Paso chapter in 1945. They also served on the organization’s executive committee, which would lead three years later to their names being linked on the front pages of El Paso’s newspapers as being connected to an organization which was now defined as having Communist ties.<sup>38</sup> This in turn led to questions about Nixon’s own

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> “Negroes, Whites Segregated Here,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 29 June 1937, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Barbara Funkhouser, *The Caregivers: El Paso’s Medical History, 1898-1998* (El Paso: Sundance Press, 1999), 243; and Bryson, *Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon and the White Primary*, 27.

<sup>37</sup> Drusilla Nixon, “Interview no. 194,” page 20.

<sup>38</sup> “Is Southern Conference For Human Welfare a Red Front?” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 22 January 22 1948, 1. The most recent definitive work on the SCHW is Linda Reed, *Simple Decency and Common Sense: The Southern Conference Movement, 1938-1963* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

patriotism, his loyalty to the United States and even his belief in democracy itself. Prior to the organization's demise in 1948, as a member of the local El Paso SCHW, Lawrence Nixon was part of an organization that involved numerous prominent and well-known liberals, including Mary McLeod Bethune, Virginia Durr, Aubrey Williams, Walter White, Frank P. Graham, Lillian Smith, Lucy Randolph Mason, and James A. Dombrowski. Nixon's and his wife's involvement in the SCHW makes it clear that by the late 1940s, he held a political worldview that was at least left-liberal if not out-right progressive. What follows is a brief description of the SCHW, some of its activities in El Paso, and its ultimate demise.

The SCHW had its formal beginnings in 1938 when a group of white southern liberals convened a meeting in Birmingham, Alabama to discuss the wretched state of affairs in the region. The group mostly concerned itself with civil liberties, civil rights, and equal protection under the law. Clark Foreman—advisor on the Economic Status of the Negro in the Office of the Secretary of the Interior under Secretary Harold L. Ikes within the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration—initially gave the idea to FDR to produce a document “enumerating the South’s major economic problems” as a “call to battle against the feudal oligarchy that was killing New Deal reforms and keeping the region in paupery.” Ironically, Nixon had written Clark Foreman at George Schuyler’s urging to seek an endorsement and advice on establishing The Douglass Tuberculosis Hospital. President Roosevelt initially saw this “white paper” as a refreshing document by Southern scholars, for Southerners, and most importantly about the South’s problems—seemingly divorced from the broader hot-button issues of institutional racism, white-skinned privilege, union organizing, or land reform.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> John Egerton, *Speak Now Against The Day: The Generation Before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 180. George S. Schuyler to Lawrence A. Nixon, 20 February 1934, copy of original letter found in N/MFP.

From the beginning, the SCHW, like most white organizations committed to social justice, was conflicted over the race issue, and this was particularly true of such organizations in the South. So it was hardly surprising that the SCHW inherited the ambiguous racial attitudes common to most Southerners. The SCHW expressed sympathy for the oppression that African Americans experienced as a consequence of Jim Crow and racial violence. The organization broke with regional practice by advocating integrated meetings, admitting Blacks in its executive councils, and working for the abolition of the poll tax. These gestures, at best, were at a minimum, a symbolic indirect demand for partial integration of Blacks into Southern political life. As one scholar noted, however, “here its integrationist tendencies ended.” The contradictions were obvious but unsurprising. The SCHW supported separate and equally-funded schools and playgrounds, and accepted segregation in housing, public accommodations, and in hiring practices. Before World War-II, the SCHW “did not attack segregation where it was strong—and it was strong nearly everywhere.”<sup>40</sup> Still, the organization was one of the few in the South that offered any serious resistance to the racist status quo. Moreover, as we have seen with his various activities and commitments, Nixon supported Black collaboration with whites to achieve progress for the Black community.

Thus, Lawrence Nixon joined the SCHW for the “betterment of the [El Paso] community.” Nixon recalled that many of the SCHW El Paso charter members were young people who were attracted to Dr. Frank P. Graham, the well known southern liberal who was the honorary SCHW president and served as president of the University of North Carolina at Chapel

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas A. Krueger, *And Promises To Keep: The Southern Conference For Human Welfare, 1938-1948* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967), 148.

Hill from 1930 to 1949.<sup>41</sup> Drusilla Nixon rejected the idea that the El Paso SCHW was “communist-dominated,” but instead she viewed the politics of the organization as being “liberal.” Drusilla had been a member of the YWCA since she was a fourteen years-old youngster in Toledo, Ohio. She recalled in particular how much she valued that longstanding relationship with the YWCA and that she certainly would not have jeopardized it by joining an organization linked to communists.<sup>42</sup> In the political climate of the 1940s and 50s, activities related to racial justice were deemed communist, particularly if they challenged the racial status quo.

The SCHW’s El Paso chapter sponsored events which tried to create dialogue between the city’s two main ethnic groups, Mexican Americans and Anglos. At these events the organization’s ideas and platform were distributed, as well as its official positions and goals were clearly stated for the public to see. The El Paso SCHW opposed and successfully prevented the deportation of Humberto Selix, a Nicaraguan labor organizer for the International Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers.<sup>43</sup> In addition, the El Paso SCHW sponsored the November 1947 visit of Idaho U.S. Senator Glen H. Taylor for him to speak on the “vital issues of the

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<sup>41</sup> Hail, “Is Southern Conference For Human Welfare a Red Front?” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 22 January 1948, 1. Eventually, because of his ties with the SCHW, Frank P. Graham would also be branded as a Communist, yet he refused to renounce his association with the SCHW, see Warren Ashby, *Frank Porter Graham: A Southern Liberal* (Winston-Salem: J.F. Blair, 1980); Julian M. Pleasants and Augustus M. Burns, *Frank Porter Graham and the 1950 Senate Race in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990); James Clotfelter, *Frank Porter Graham: Service to North Carolina and the Nation* (Greensboro: North Carolina Service Project, 1993); John Ehle and Charles Kuralt, *Dr. Frank: Life with Frank Porter Graham* (Chapel Hill: Franklin Street Books, 1993); and John Wilson, Charles Kuralt, and Martin Clark, producer and director, *Dr. Frank the Life and Times of Frank Porter Graham* documentary (Research Triangle Park: North Carolina Public Television, 1994).

<sup>42</sup> Hail, “Is Southern Conference For Human Welfare a Red Front?” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 22 January 1948, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas A. Krueger, *And Promises To Keep: The Southern Conference For Human Welfare, 1938-1948* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967), 146-47; and Ann Fagan Ginger and David Christiano, eds., *The Cold War Against Labor: An Anthology* (Berkeley: Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute, 1987), 592-600.

day.”<sup>44</sup> In his El Paso talk, Taylor asserted that the United States was “dangerously close” to becoming a military dictatorship and that the military was in charge of the nation’s foreign policy agenda. Taylor also denounced the Marshall Plan as an attempt to buy allies for a war with Russia. “If we want peace, our foreign policy should be to make friends with Russia” Taylor told his El Paso audience, which likely included both Lawrence A. Nixon and his wife Drusilla.<sup>45</sup> The following year after his talk in El Paso, Taylor was the vice presidential candidate on the Progressive party ticket.<sup>46</sup>

Despite the good deeds and work of the SCHW was engaged in El Paso, the local newspaper published a 1,400-word front page article in January 1948, which smeared the El Paso SCHW with the “red” label for its ties to the national leadership. Officers of the El Paso chapter of the SCHW denied that the national organization was “Communist dominated or subversive.” In a June 1947 report, however, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAAC) claimed that the national SCHW was a “deviously camouflaged Communists-front organization” and that “communist themselves claim SCHW as their own.” After these allegations were made public, the El Paso YWCA quickly disavowed its association with the El Paso SCHW. The board of directors met and formally declared that the El Paso SCHW was no longer welcomed at their facility, at 315 East Franklin Street, which SCHW had been using for its regular monthly meetings.<sup>47</sup> The YWCA board based its decision solely on the 1947 findings of the House Un-

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<sup>44</sup> “Discussion of ‘Vital Issues Of The Day,’” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 31 October 1947, 25.

<sup>45</sup> “Senator Taylor Flies to New York,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 3 November 1947, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Frank R. Peterson, *Prophet without Honor: Glen H. Taylor and the Fight for American Liberalism* (University Press of Kentucky, 1974); and Stephen J. Sable, “Glen H. Taylor: A Political Biography” (Ph.D. diss., University of Maine, 1971).

<sup>47</sup> Hail, “Is Southern Conference For Human Welfare a Red Front?” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 22 January 1948, *El Paso Herald-Post*, 22 January 1948, 1. House Committee on Un-American Activities, 80<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session,

American Activities Committee report, which branded the national SCHW as “subversive.”<sup>48</sup> The El Paso SCHW shot back, claiming that the decision of the YWCA’s Board was “undemocratic.” Also, Regina Boyd, the executive secretary of the El Paso SCHW Chapter, emphasized that the claims of the HUAAC were baseless and that there was “no proof” of Communist ties. Referring to a list of names of SCHW officials and members in the HUAAC report, the El Paso SCHW further stated that “even if the 62 names” of those who HUAAC claimed were “all Communist,” it was difficult “to see how the small number from a total group of well over 25,000 could warrant the labeling of the organization as communist dominated.” Only one of the sixty-two people on the list was “asserted to be a member of the Communist Party,” yet “he is not a member of the Southern Conference for Human Welfare.”<sup>49</sup>

Molly Shapiro, a close family friend of the Nixons and prominent El Paso Jewish activist and treasurer of the El Paso SCHW, was certain that the organization was not a Communist front or that it had been involved in so-called subversive activities. Shapiro stated that the “YWCA has been nice to us, they are lovely women. I’m sure they’re very much ashamed of the Board’s action.” The SCHW, according to Shapiro, was “organized to help the underdog, to fight discrimination against minority races. My husband and I were charter members when the El Paso Chapter was formed three years ago. If the organization were Communistic we never would

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*Report on the Southern Conference for Human Welfare* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1947), 1; “Civic Club Members Invited To Meeting,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 14 November 1946, 12.

<sup>48</sup> Hail, “Is Southern Conference For Human Welfare a Red Front?” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 22 January 1948, 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

have joined.”<sup>50</sup> By November 1948, the combination of internal struggles, financial woes, and public attacks took its toll and the SCHW board officially suspended its operations.<sup>51</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Regardless the racial indignities experienced in El Paso, Lawrence Nixon continued to serve the medical needs to all within the community, without any bitterness, anger, or malice toward none. Although he was not successful in obtaining the government-funded financing for the hospital, he continued forward with his medical practice, civil rights activism, and optimism. Near the end of 1935, he married Drusilla Nixon, his second wife, and the rest of the decade they would spend focusing on raising their three daughters. Regardless of the traditional or classical “progressives” of the 1880s to the 1920s wanted to create a better America, undoubtedly that America did not include healthy, longer living Black people. As the Progressive Era was coming to close, Nixon was left wondering why there were no backers, no supporters, and no financiers for the Douglass Tuberculosis Hospital. He was a progressive in an un-progressive era.

For those brief three years, 1945-1948, Lawrence Nixon, along with his wife Drusilla Nixon, were members of the SCHW, during which they participated in group meetings, prevented the unjust deportation of Humberto Selix, were active in voter registration, lobbied for the abolition of the poll tax, organized the visits of guest speakers such as the liberal Idaho Senator Glen H. Taylor, and publicized the effects of segregation and discrimination in the South. The SCHW El Paso chapter kept issues of equality and the promise of the American ideal before the city and its international surrounding region years before the major legislative

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Linda Reed, *Simple Decency and Common Sense: The Southern Conference Movement, 1938-1963* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 128.

breakthroughs for civil rights of the 1960s. His name was well known locally as a prominent physician, a political activist in trying to gain the right of Blacks to vote in the Texas Democratic primary, and as a community activist in trying to secure a pool for Blacks at Washington Park. By lending his name to the El Paso SCHW, Lawrence Nixon helped legitimate their efforts, promote their progressive agenda, accentuate their liberal credentials, and to accomplish the goals it had set for itself El Paso, however, as the rest of the nation, was not ready for his worldview. He, yet again, was a progressive in an un-progressive era.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Linda Reed, "Southern Conference Movement: The Southern Conference For Human Welfare and The Southern Conference Educational Fund," in Maurine H. Beasley, Holly C. Shulman, and Henry R. Beasley, eds., *The Eleanor Roosevelt Encyclopedia* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 487. Elaine Bear, chairman of El Paso SCHW poll tax committee was active in "getting eligible citizenry to vote in elections" and implementing a "city-wide plan of action" that prevented the "duplication of efforts by interested groups," see "Civic Club Members Invited To Meeting," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 14 November 1946, 12.



## CHAPTER 6 – DRUSILLA E. NIXON: AN ILLUSTRIOUS LIFE

“My marriage was such a good marriage and I was so happy.”<sup>1</sup>

-Drusilla E. Nixon in describing her 31-year marriage to Lawrence A. Nixon

Drusilla Nixon, Lawrence Nixon’s second wife, led a fascinating life in her own right. She was fearless and not at all troubled about breaking away from the conventional norms of her day. From the time she graduated high school in 1917 to the year she married Lawrence Nixon in 1935, she had lived in at least ten different cities. It seems that she had carefully chosen her marriage partners to compliment her own energy-level, love of life, and service to others. It is interesting to note that Drusilla Nixon married three times, in each case to a prominent African American man who was substantially older than she was. It may not have been unusual for women at that time to marry older men, but what was unusual was a Black woman who refused to allow the conservatism of the Victorian age—whose vestiges were still pronounced—to restrict her movement and worldview. Instead, Drusilla left an indelible mark on the people and communities she encountered. This chapter will focus on the life of Drusilla E. Nixon, the details of her first two marriages, the life of her first daughter, and the various activities Drusilla was involved, including the 1962 passage of El Paso’s City Ordinance.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Drusilla Nixon, “Interview no. 194,” page 1.

<sup>2</sup> As the Industrial Revolution pushed forward, it “made and unmade the lives and fortunes of struggling workers, middle-class clerks, the nouveau riche as well as down-at-the-heels landed gentry,” which allowed Victorian values of “refinement” and “manners” to establish “a social hierarchy offering some sense of stability.” For many Black women, “Victorian ideals provided one escape route” from the stigma of slavery, the myth of promiscuity, and the chaos of racial violence, see James West Davidson, *They Say: Ida B. Wells and the Reconstruction of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 192. On marriage patterns during the first three decades of the twentieth century, see Christina Simmons, *Making Marriage Modern: Women's Sexuality from the Progressive Era to World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Between 1917 and 1935, Drusilla E. (Tandy) Nixon lived in Toledo, Ohio (1899-1918, 1920, 1935); Atlanta, Georgia (1918-19); Raleigh, North Carolina (1919); Knoxville, Tennessee (1920-1922); Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (mid to late 1920s), Tucson, Prescott, and Phoenix, Arizona (1931-32); Hollywood, California (1933), San Antonio, Texas (1934), and El Paso, Texas (1929-30, and 1935-1989).

She was born Drusilla Elizabeth Tandy in July of 1899 to Maud Tandy and John Clifford Tandy in Toledo, Ohio. Her father had been born in 1866 in Kentucky to parents who were also from Kentucky. John Tandy's mother was Martha Tandy and he had two siblings, one of whom was his daughter's namesake. Maud Tandy, Drusilla Tandy's mother, was born in 1877 in Michigan to parents who also had Kentucky roots. At the turn of the century, Drusilla Tandy was living with her parents and three year old sister in Toledo. A census enumerator described the family as mulatto. In 1898, the Toledo City Directory notes that her father, John, was working with the Toledo Police Station as a janitor. He would continue in this occupation for at least twenty-two years. In 1898 the household also included John's brother, a porter with the Clay Tailoring Company.<sup>3</sup>

Drusilla Tandy attended Waite High School where she was the only Black student in her class. She wrote for the school magazine, was elected class novelist, and was the violinist and concertmaster in its orchestra.<sup>4</sup> In later years, her musical talents gained her to win first-place in a national contest for composers.<sup>5</sup> Upon graduation from Waite High in June 1917, Drusilla Tandy had hoped to continue her musical training at Oberlin College, but did not have the

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<sup>3</sup> *Tenth Census of the United States*, Schedule 1, City of Lexington (1<sup>st</sup> Ward), Fayette County, Kentucky, enumerated on 8 June 1880 by W.W. Boyd, Series T9, Roll 412, Page 257 Subpage A, Line 20-23; *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Schedule 1-Population, City of Toledo (8<sup>th</sup> Ward), Lucas County, Ohio, enumerated on 1 June 1900, Series T623, Roll 1297, Page 206 Subpage B, Line 90-3; *R.L. Polk's 1898 City Directory for Toledo, Ohio* (Detroit: Ralph Lane Polk and Company, 1898), 24 and 1290; *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Adams Township, Lucas County, Ohio, enumerated on 17 and 18 January 1920 by May A. McTigas, Series T625, Roll 1407, Page 9 Subpage A and B, Line 49-53; and Drusilla Nixon, "Interview no. 194," page 1. For a more detailed account of the Tandy family and the Maud Grant (Drusilla Nixon's mother) family, including their pedigree and prominence, going back two to three generations, see Drusilla Nixon, "Interview no. 194," page 1-4.

<sup>4</sup> Drusilla Nixon, "Interview no. 194," page 25-6. Strangely, in this interview Drusilla Nixon recalls attending and graduating from a Eastside High School in Toledo, yet her high school diploma reflects Waite High School. Morrison R. Waite High School was named in honor of the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court who held the office between 1874 until his death in 1888. Construction of the school began in 1910 and was completed by 1914, about the time when Drusilla Tandy would have been a sophomore.

<sup>5</sup> "Mrs. Nixon To Be Feted By Phyllis Wheatley Club," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 26 September 1975, 21.

finances to attend the prominent private liberal arts college that was located just ninety miles east of her home.<sup>6</sup> During her many years in El Paso Drusilla used her musical talents to educate Black children. Frances Hills recalled how Drusilla Nixon had a major influence on her, “she [Drusilla] taught me music. My mother would not get off at the same time I got out of school, so I walked over to Mrs. Nixon’s house for my music lesson. We would talk about everything. She would tell me about a lot of things. She was a wonderful person.”<sup>7</sup> Instead of going to Oberlin College, Drusilla attended the University of Toledo before the school temporarily closed due to the worldwide influenza outbreak of 1918.<sup>8</sup>

It was at this time that Drusilla was offered a job with the American Missionary Association in Georgia. There she was assigned to the exclusive and elitist First Congregational Church in Atlanta, the largest of the Black Congregational Churches within the state.<sup>9</sup> The Church was led by Henry Hugh Proctor, a Yale Divinity School educated ordained minister and one of the leading African Americans in Atlanta. Well known as a powerful public speaker, Reverend Proctor visited Toledo, Ohio in October 1917 at the request of local Black ministers and gave numerous talks at different churches on racism, patriotism, World War I, and Black troops in the Army.<sup>10</sup> Drusilla Tandy may have been present to hear Proctor speak at any of his

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<sup>6</sup> Drusilla Nixon, “Interview no. 194,” page 25-6.

<sup>7</sup> Dailey, *Wheresoever My People Chance to Dwell*, 97. Drusilla Nixon often played the violin obligato for Douglass High School and the El Paso Council of Church Women, see “Mrs. Bradford Hardie photo caption,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 8 May 1943, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Drusilla Nixon, “Interview no. 194,” page 1. Frank R. Hickerson, “A History of the University of Toledo” (PhD diss., University of Cincinnati, 1941).

<sup>9</sup> Drusilla Nixon, “Interview no. 194,” page 1; Grant, *The Way it was in The South*, 270.

<sup>10</sup> Le Roy T. Williams, “Black Toledo: Afro-Americans in Toledo, Ohio, 1890-1930” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toledo, 1977), 209.

engagements within the city. If they indeed met at this particular time, it's probable that it was Proctor who offered her the employment opportunity in Atlanta.

Drusilla did not remain in Atlanta long, however. By January 1920, she was living with her family again in Toledo.<sup>11</sup> In the 1920 census, the Tandy family is still described as mulatto. The family had moved to Adams Township in Toledo, Ohio and now included, Drusilla's sister. Edna Tandy, then a twenty-three years-old elevator operator for a jewelry store. Drusilla, a twenty-year-old shipping clerk for an electrical shop; and a younger brother Clifford who had been born in 1910.<sup>12</sup>

Later in 1920, Drusilla Tandy moved to Knoxville, Tennessee to marry thirty-one year old Webster L. Porter, and they established a residence on College Street, within walking distance of Knoxville College.<sup>13</sup> Porter was the editor of the *East Tennessee News*, and is described in the 1920 census as a Black man.<sup>14</sup> He had previously been married and divorced

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<sup>11</sup> Jack Salzman, David L. Smith, Cornel West, eds., "Henry Hugh Proctor," *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*, volume 4 (New York: Simon and Schuster Macmillan, 1996), 2226. Proctor was friends with W.E.B. Du Bois since their undergraduate days at Fisk University, where they both graduated in 1888.

<sup>12</sup> *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Adams Township, Lucas County, Ohio, enumerated on 17 and 18 January 1920 by May A. McTigas, Series T625, Roll 1407, Page 9 Subpage A and B, Line 49-53; and Drusilla Nixon, "Interview no. 194," page 1.

<sup>13</sup> Knox County Public Library (East Tennessee History Center, 601 S. Gay Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Knoxville, Tennessee), License no. 1628, Book 15, Page 176, see <[http://knoxrooms.sirsi.net/rooms/portal/media-type/html/language/en/country/US/user/anon/page/22187\\_Marriage\\_Index](http://knoxrooms.sirsi.net/rooms/portal/media-type/html/language/en/country/US/user/anon/page/22187_Marriage_Index)> (accessed 27 March 2010). They were married November 16, 1920. "You Can't Fit a Square Peg in a Round Hole Our Correspondent Declares," *Advocate* (Kansas City, Kansas), 25 March 1921, 1. The *Advocate* correspondent writes that Drusilla Tandy is "one of the most refined, cultured educated young women" and that when Webster L. Porter "won her heart she was doing social service work in Raleigh, N.C., but he met her in Atlanta, Ga., where she was also doing some work." Knoxville College is the primary institution of higher learning for Blacks in East Tennessee. Located in Knoxville, this HBCU was established in 1875 by the United Presbyterian Church. The main campus of Knoxville College is on 39 acres north of downtown, in the city's Mechanicsville district, see Robert J. Booker, *And There was Light!: The 120-year History of Knoxville College, Knoxville Tennessee, 1875-1995* (Virginia Beach: Donning Company, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920—Population*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of Knoxville (3<sup>rd</sup> Ward, 1<sup>st</sup> Civil District), Knox County, Tennessee, enumerated on 3 and 5 January 1920 by Charles L. Rusk, Series T625, Roll 1749, Page 49 Subpage B, Line 76. The *East Tennessee News* existed for nearly forty years, 1908 to the mid-1940s, see Robert J. Booker, *Two Hundred Years of Black Culture in Knoxville, Tennessee, 1791-1991* (Virginia Beach: Donning Company, 1993), 122 and 166.

from Lillian J. Porter; and had a child together, John Carson Porter. Divorce records indicate that Webster originally filed against Lillian J. Porter on 23 January 1918, but this filing was dismissed on 3 September 1918. He filed for divorce again on 30 June 1920 and it was finalized on 15 September 1920, two months before he married Drusilla.<sup>15</sup> For reasons that are not altogether clear, Webster Porter harshly criticized the NAACP in general, and the work and leaders of the local Knoxville NAACP chapter in particular.<sup>16</sup> Of course, at this time, Lawrence Nixon was already an active member of the NAACP and had become a life member by the time he first met his future wife in 1929.<sup>17</sup> Although Webster Porter criticized the Association, he apparently failed to convince his sister-in-law, because by 1925 Edna Tandy, Drusilla's older sister, was already an active member of the NAACP.<sup>18</sup>

Webster Porter was a somewhat controversial figure in the Knoxville Black community, both for his politics and because of his alleged criminal assault of a young Black girl prior to marrying Drusilla Tandy. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, he used his newspaper as a vehicle to carry on a successful campaign to discredit the local NAACP, categorizing the reformist civil rights group together with "radical foreign organizations" such as the Association of the Soviet Union, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Order of Garveyism. Porter was one of the most outspoken

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<sup>15</sup> Lillian J. and Webster L. Porter were married in Elk Park, North Carolina in 1912. Their son, John Carson Porter, was born c1914. It was not uncommon then nor is it rare now that people never file for divorce until they are interested in remarrying and then go through the process of getting legally separated, see Eric S. Head, e-mail message to Will Guzmán, 30 March 2010. Eric Head is an Archives Assistant with the Knox County Archives, 500 W. Church Avenue, Knoxville, TN 37902-2505.

<sup>16</sup> Lester C. Lamon, *Black Tennesseans, 1900-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 269.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from James Weldon Johnson to Lawrence A. Nixon, 11 June 1928, congratulating and thanking Nixon for becoming a Life Member of the NAACP, see original letter in Dailey, "I'm Building Me A Home," 57.

<sup>18</sup> Bryson, *Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon and the White Primary*, 76. The Toledo branch of the NAACP, in which Edna Tandy was a member of, was very active in their local fight against Jim Crow, see Williams, "Black Toledo," 211-35; and William W. Giffin, *African Americans and the Color Line in Ohio, 1915-1930* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005), 161-62 and 169-70.

Black critics of the NAACP in all of Tennessee. He did support the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC) however, which was an organization created from the “After-War Work” of the YMCA in the South. The CIC started in Atlanta, Georgia and became formally established in Tennessee by 1920. It hoped to create opportunities for dialogue between Black and white leaders, yet it only accepted conservative Blacks as spokesmen, including Webster Porter who “enjoyed this conferred status immensely.”<sup>19</sup>

Drusilla Tandy gave birth to her daughter, Dorothy Marion Louise Porter, in Knoxville on February 7, 1922, but within three months the newlyweds filed for a divorce. This initial divorce filing was dismissed, yet re-filed and formally finalized two years later in October 1924.<sup>20</sup> As we have seen, Webster Porter was known to be volatile and at times become violent with women. In the divorce records, he had been accused of beating both Drusilla and his first wife, Lillian, while they were pregnant. After their initial separation, Drusilla Porter moved with her infant daughter, Dorothy Porter, back to Toledo, Ohio.<sup>21</sup>

It is not clear when Drusilla moved from Toledo to Philadelphia or when she married and separated from Ernest Ten Eyck Attwell, but she had his name at the time of the 1930 El Paso

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<sup>19</sup> Lester C. Lamon, *Black Tennesseans, 1900-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), 55, 249, 258, and 269-70.

<sup>20</sup> The first divorce filing between Drusilla E. Tandy and Webster L. Porter was made in May 1922. This filing was dismissed on 30 June 1922. A second divorce filing was made on 1 May 1924 and was approved on 21 October 1924, see Eric S. Head, e-mail message to Will Guzmán, 30 March 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Eric S. Head, e-mail message to Will Guzmán, 30 March 2010. According to historian Robert J. Booker, “Webster was locally prominent but he elicited strong reactions from the community, you either hated him or loved him, there was no middle ground.” In addition, Webster Porter “had been married several times and likely had several illegitimate children.” And finally, Webster asserts in the divorce filing against Drusilla that by marrying him, *her* status had been raised within the “Colored” community, see *Ibid.* In 1932, Webster Porter was designated as an alternate delegate, representing Knoxville, to the Republican National Convention in Chicago, see “Tennessee G.O.P. Backs Prohibition Law And President Hoover” *Kingsport Times* (Kingsport, Tennessee), 11 May 1932, 1 and 6; and “State Delegates, With Alternates, Move On Chicago,” *Kingsport Times*, 12 June 1932, 1.

census and upon her marriage to Lawrence Nixon in 1935.<sup>22</sup> Ernest T. Attwell was born in New York City in 1877.<sup>23</sup> His father was an Afro-Barbadian minister born in 1840 and his mother, born in 1843 in Pennsylvania, was of mixed background, her mother a Black woman from Virginia and her father a white immigrant from Scotland.<sup>24</sup>

Ernest Attwell was educated in New York City and after serving for two years as Chief Clerk and Stenographer in the business office of Tuskegee Institute, he became assistant to Booker T. Washington's private secretary, Emmett J. Scott. From 1907 until after Washington's death, Attwell was the Tuskegee Business Agent and a member of the school's executive council. Washington trusted Attwell's discretion and at times sent him on confidential missions unrelated to the Tuskegee Institute.<sup>25</sup> He also served as president of the Alabama Negro Business League, while employed as Tuskegee's purchasing agent.<sup>26</sup> In 1918, Attwell was an organizer for the African American division within the American Relief Administration, which was led by Herbert Hoover.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso, El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 10 April 1930 by Margaret E. Bowden, Series T626, Roll 2328, Page 11, Line 15-17; and Marriage Certificate issued by Pastor Le Roy White, Thursday, November 14, 1935, City of Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico, see N/MFP.

<sup>23</sup> *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Schedule 1-Population, City of New York, Borough of Brooklyn (10<sup>th</sup> Ward), Kings County, Ohio, enumerated on 1 June 1900 by Walter J. Cacciola, Series T623, Roll 1049, Page 185 Subpage B, Line 94.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*; and *Tenth Census of the United States*, Schedule 1, City of New York (15<sup>th</sup> Ward), New York County, New York, enumerated on 3 June 1880, Series T9, Roll 874, Page 531 Subpage B, Line 37-41.

<sup>25</sup> Harlan and Smock, *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, 8:339. For Attwell's obituary, see "E.T. Attwell Dead; Social Worker, 70" *New York Times*, 7 August 1949, 60.

<sup>26</sup> "A Cheery Greeting to Negro Visitors: More than 1,000 Representative Citizens Turned Out," *Advocate* (Kansas City, Kansas), 18 August 1916, 2.

<sup>27</sup> During World War I, Herbert Hoover led or worked with a variety of entities designed to conserve and distribute food here in this country and abroad. These organizations included the Committee for Relief in Belgium (CRB), United States Food Administration, Supreme Economic Council, American Relief Administration, and the Quaker-led American Friends Service Committee, see George H. Nash, *The Life of Herbert Hoover: Master of*

After World War I, Attwell became Director of the Bureau of Colored Work for Community Service Incorporated, which was headquartered in Philadelphia.<sup>28</sup> He was also president of the Negro National Life of Tuskegee, an insurance company whose vice president included such notables as Booker T. Washington, Jr., and medical director John A. Kenny.<sup>29</sup> Although it is not known when their marriage collapsed resulting in separation, Drusilla E. Attwell formally filed for divorce from Ernest T. Attwell in Ciudad, Juárez on November 5, 1935, ten days before marrying Lawrence A. Nixon.<sup>30</sup>

The circumstances surrounding Drusilla's initial meeting with Lawrence Nixon involved his introduction to Edna Tandy, Drusilla's sister, during the 1925 Sixteenth Annual NAACP Conference in Denver, Colorado. Nixon was a delegate representing the El Paso NAACP branch. When Drusilla (Tandy) Attwell fell ill in 1929 with a severe asthma attack, her physician suggested she temporarily move to a dry climate area of the country such as Tucson, El Paso, or Phoenix. Upon hearing of the doctor's advice from Drusilla, Edna thought of the physician she met in Denver four years earlier and recalled Lawrence Nixon living in El Paso.

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*Emergencies, 1917-1918* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996); and William E. Leuchtenburg, *Herbert Hoover* (New York: Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> Madeline G. Allison, "The Horizon," *Crisis* vol. 24, no. 4 (August 1922): 174; "Development of Recreational Program," *Savannah Tribune*, 23 March 1922, 2; "\$25,000 Community Center Dedicated at Middleton," *Plaindealer*, 29 May 1925, 1; Monroe N. Work, ed., *Negro Year Book: An Annual Encyclopedia of the Negro, 1921-1922* (Tuskegee: Negro Year Book Publishing Company, 1922), 413 and 449; "Training School for Colored Workers," *The Southern Workman* vol. 51, no. 6 (June 1922): 255; Earnest T. Attwell, "Experience of the War in Organizing Recreation for Colored Soldiers and Citizens and Its Application to Peace Time" *National Conference of Social Work* (1920): 331-3.

<sup>29</sup> *The Insurance Year Book, 1916-1917, Life, Casualty and Miscellaneous*, Forty-Fourth Annual Issue (New York: The Spectator Company, 1916), 460. Booker T. Washington, Jr. was the second child, first son, born to the influential and famous Booker Taliaferro Washington, founder of Tuskegee Institute.

<sup>30</sup> Divorce decree issued by Judge Ignacio Gutierrez Zamora and Secretary Esteban Briones Martinez, 5 November 1935, Sra. Drusilla Tandy Attwell against Sr. Ernest T. Attwell, Civil Court, Trial No. I678/935, Bravos District, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México. Original certified copy found in N/MFP.



She wrote him asking if he could recommend a place for her sister to stay in El Paso for a brief period while she recovered from her illness.<sup>31</sup>

Nixon wrote back to Edna and suggested that Drusilla stay with one of his patients, Georgia Stull. She was a fifty year-old African American widow employed as a housemaid in a private home and lived with her thirty-five year-old nephew, Melvin Bills, who was employed as a porter for a local wholesaler.<sup>32</sup> Stull attended Second Baptist Church and was a member of the El Paso Phyllis Wheatley Club, an organization that Drusilla herself would later join.<sup>33</sup> Born out of the Black Women's Club Movement of the 1890s, Phyllis Wheatley Clubs were established throughout the nation and named in honor of the poet who had been an African captive and rose to prominence after writing poetry so eloquently that she became the first published Black woman in the United States. Phyllis Wheatley Clubs provided a safe space for Black women to exert their leadership skills, a forum to share their ideas, and an arena to celebrate their accomplishments as they engaged in improving Black communities and "uplifting the Race" through a variety of programs that included seeking donations and fundraising for the poor, the elderly, youths, and the sick.<sup>34</sup> Second Baptist Church, established in El Paso in the 1880s, was the same church that Booker T. Washington spoke at during his visit to El Paso nearly twenty years earlier in September 1911. Drusilla Attwell arrived in October 1929, just days prior to the

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<sup>31</sup> Bryson, *Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon and the White Primary*, 76. Bryson incorrectly notes the year for the Sixteenth Annual NAACP Conference in Denver as being 1929 instead of 1925.

<sup>32</sup> *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso, El Paso County, Texas, enumerated on 10 April 1930 by Margaret E. Bowden, Series T626, Roll 2328, Page 11, Line 15-7. Drusilla Attwell is listed in this census as an unemployed thirty year-old boarder.

<sup>33</sup> Drusilla Nixon, "Interview no. 194," page 5 and 9.

<sup>34</sup> Adrienne Lash Jones, "Phyllis (Phillis) Wheatley Clubs and Homes," in Darlene Clark Hine, ed., *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, vol. 2 M-Z (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1993), 920-3.

stock market crash, and stayed with Stull and Bills for about eighteen months. Lawrence Nixon was Drusilla Attwell's physician during her initial tenure in El Paso.<sup>35</sup>

Drusilla then moved back East and shortly after made her way through El Paso again when she was taking a trip to California. She had a thirty-minute layover in Kansas City where she sent a telegram to her doctor stating, "I'm passing through El Paso at midnight and would love to see somebody. Tell somebody to come down to the station." Nixon received the telegram and gladly obliged the request with his own late-hour presence. When the train arrived, Drusilla recalled years later, "I went down and stood on the platform and talked to him, and when I went to get back on the train he handed me a box of candy. When I got back in the train and I opened the box of candy, his picture was on top of it. So that started the romance."<sup>36</sup>

After courting each other for a couple of years, Drusilla and Lawrence were married on November 14, 1935 in Las Cruces, New Mexico by Le Roy White, Lawrence Nixon's longtime friend who had arrived with him from Cameron in 1910. Some of the guests that were in attendance at the Nixon wedding included: Edward L. Melton and Elma L. Melton; Reverend and Mrs. D.L. Terrell; Mrs. Callie White (Le Roy White's wife); Dr. and Mrs. Emerson M. Williams; Dr. M. Clayton Donnell and Annie Donnell; Mr. and Mrs. J. Protho; Mr. and Mrs. Williams; Claudios D.A. Bush and Anita R. Bush; Edward L. Melton and Elma Edwards, James

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<sup>35</sup> Drusilla Nixon, "Interview no. 194," page 6.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., page 5-6. In this 1975 interview, Drusilla Nixon does not mention living in California for a short period, yet in a 1933 letter addressed to Drusilla Tandy Attwell, from Lawrence A. Nixon, he writes the following address: "Mrs. D.T. Attwell, 1307 Talmadge Street, Hollywood, Calif." This address is in a residential neighborhood whose immediate boundaries include W. Sunset Blvd. to its west, Fountain Avenue to its south, Sunset Drive to its north, and Bates Avenue to its east; all within walking distance to the famous Grauman's Egyptian Theatre on Hollywood Boulevard. Edna McIver, Drusilla and Lawrence Nixon's seventy-one year-old daughter, corroborated this in a telephone interview in her recollection that Drusilla Nixon did indeed live in California, although did not know the exact years or length of time. Edna McIver recalled that Drusilla was employed as an assistant for a white writer. For the Hollywood address, see letter in the N/MFP. Edna McIver telephone interview with the author was conducted 5p.m. EST, 27 March 2010.

A. Green, Blanche Grundy, Ruth Parks, and Charles H. Caviness.<sup>37</sup> Jennie V. Nixon, Lawrence's mother, had died eleven months earlier on December 25, 1934.<sup>38</sup>

Dorothy M.L. Porter was about thirteen years-old when her mother married Lawrence Nixon and they moved into Nixon's home-office at 2029 Myrtle Avenue. Eighteen months after getting married the Nixons had their first child together, Drusilla Ann Nixon, who was born with Down Syndrome on April 19, 1937. Less than two years later, at the ages of 56 and 40, Lawrence and Drusilla had their second child, Edna Angela Nixon, who was born January 18, 1939.<sup>39</sup> Dorothy Porter began attending Douglass High School when she moved to El Paso, graduating in 1938.<sup>40</sup> She then attended Talladega College in Alabama.<sup>41</sup> Encouraged by one of her professors at Talladega, who had graduated from Yale, Dorothy continued her graduate studies in nursing at Yale University. In 1946, along with her classmate Eloise Collier, Dorothy became the first African American to receive a Master of Nursing degree from the school.<sup>42</sup> She also studied pre-medicine at the University of Toledo and special education at the University of Texas at El Paso.

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<sup>37</sup> Marriage License, Lawrence A. Nixon (Groom) and Drusilla Attwell (Bride), County Clerk F.C. Lopez, Record Book No. 24, Page 1532, Las Cruces, Doña Ana County, New Mexico, Thursday, 14 November 1935. Original found in N/MFP.

<sup>38</sup> Alfaretta S. Walker's summary of the Nixon family history found within the LAWFP.

<sup>39</sup> El Paso County Clerk, Birth Records, see <<http://www.epcounty.com/clerk/birthsearch.asp>>.

<sup>40</sup> Campbell, *The Development of Negro Education in El Paso*, 25. Members of her graduating class at Douglass included: Elizabeth Berry, Leon Curry, Avis Hancock, Fred Hughes, Marguerite Owens, Lois Parish, Elizabeth Russell, Juanita Scott, Clarence Taylor, Thurman Taylor, Le Roy Washington, Jr. (his father was longtime president of the local NAACP), Minnie Watkins, Erma Lee White, and Oscar Wright.

<sup>41</sup> Drusilla Nixon, "Interview no. 194," page 6.

<sup>42</sup> "The American Negro In College, 1945-1946," *Crisis* vol. 53, no. 8 (August 1946): 241-42; Drusilla Nixon, "Interview no. 194," page 7. Talladega College is a small private liberal arts college located in Talladega, Alabama that was founded in 1869, making it Alabama's oldest HBCU, see Maxine D. Jones and Joe M. Richardson, *Talladega College: The First Century* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1990).

From 1965 to 1970 Dorothy taught nursing at Hotel Dieu School of Nursing in El Paso and was active in various organizations including first vice-president of District One Texas Nurses Association, which named her Nurse of the Year in 1969. She was also on the steering committee for the El Paso Junior College, a member of the subcommittee on housing of the Mayor's Council for Social Action, member of the subcommittee on Continual Education of the Council of Practice of the Texas Nurses Association and charter member of Eta Pi Omega graduate chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha.<sup>43</sup> In the early 1950s, she married Myron Davis, after they met in New York City where she had been employed for a brief time, they later moved together to Knoxville, Tennessee. Tragically, her career in nursing and as a community leader was cut short when she, her husband, three of her children and other relatives were killed in a car accident in California in 1970. The lone survivor was fourteen year-old Myron I. Davis who would be raised by his Aunt Edna (Nixon) McIver, Lawrence Nixon's third daughter.<sup>44</sup>

Drusilla Nixon was a member of the Phyllis Wheatley Club in El Paso for over forty-years, and at one time served as its president. In 1935, she organized the Black Girl Reserves of the YWCA in El Paso, which emphasized service, spirit, health, and knowledge.<sup>45</sup> Then in 1941,

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<sup>43</sup> "Tragedy Strikes Vacation Bound Family From El Paso," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 20 August 1970, 9. Those who perished (and their ages) included: Dorothy (Porter) Davis (48), her husband Myron Davis (50), their daughters: Drusilla E. Davis (13); Edna A. Davis (11), and Patricia A. Davis (10), all of El Paso; along with Dorothy (Porter) Davis' uncle, Clifford Tandy (61), Clifford Tandy's grandchildren, Jimmy Cottrill (15) and Jon-Jomo Scott (19), and their mom, Barbara Scott (38), all of Toledo, OH.

<sup>44</sup> California Highway patrolman John Dorn called the scene of the auto accident "a real holocaust," which was a "blazing inferno that reduced the bus to a charred hulk." The force of the explosion blew out all of the windows of the converted school bus. A motorcycle strapped to the rear of the vehicle blocked the emergency exit, preventing those within to use that escape route, see "Bus Explosion Kills Three," *Redlands Daily Facts* (Redlands, California), 19 August 1970, 1; "Converted School Bus Traveler Is Fire-Death Trap," *The Newark Advocate* (Newark, Ohio), 19 August 1970, 40; "Converted Bus Burns; Six Killed," *The Press-Courier* (Oxnard, California), 20 August 1970, 1; "Bus Travel Home Explodes, Becomes Death Trap For 6," *The Lima News* (Lima, Ohio), 20 August 1970, 1; "Propane Blast On Camper Bus Kills 6," *Portsmouth Times* (Portsmouth, Ohio), 20 August 1970, 1; "Tragedy Strikes Vacation Bound Family From El Paso," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 20 August 1970, 1 and 9; "Explosion Claims 8<sup>th</sup> Victim," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 3 September 1970, 37.

<sup>45</sup> Winegarten, *Black Texas Women*, 298; Jacqueline M. Moore, *Leading the Race: The Transformation of the Black Elite in the Nation's Capital, 1880-1920* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 174; and

Drusilla Nixon opened her home to African American servicemen, leading to the establishment of a United Service Organizations (USO) in El Paso.<sup>46</sup> During World War II USOs provided much needed recreational activities to all members of the military. Drusilla also was the first Black woman in El Paso to serve on the YWCA board, after having been a general member of the organization as a youth since the age of fourteen. In 1955, she represented the El Paso YWCA as a delegate to the organization's Centennial Celebration in New York City.<sup>47</sup> She was also involved as vice president of the Church Women United, a 1945 charter member of the El Paso Southern Conference for Human Welfare, a member of the city's Mental Health Board, and the El Paso Council of Churches. She also served as choir director at St. James Myrtle United Methodist Church where she was active in the United Methodist Women. And finally, Drusilla Nixon co-chaired the El Paso Parks and Recreation department of the mayor's committee.<sup>48</sup> For all her activism, she remained elegantly soft-spoken, but firm, not hesitant in speaking forcefully when needed. One Anglo detractor in El Paso recalled that "Mrs. Nixon came to our church.

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Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-1946* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007). The Girl Reserve Movement had one of the largest memberships of girls' clubs in the United States, with a membership of 325,000 in 1934. It offered progressive education to supplement the public school, seeking to promote democratic participation in 'community, national, and international life,' creativity, character, cooperation, self-reliance, and morality. African and Native Americans, and Latinas also participated, albeit segregated in the South, in the Girl Reserves, see Elisabeth Lasch-Quinn, *Black Neighbors: Race and the Limits of Reform in the American Settlement House Movement, 1890-1945* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1993), 185-6 n.66.

<sup>46</sup> Winegarten, *Black Texas Women*, 301. Also, see Nina Mjagkil, "The Negro Service Committee and African-American Soldiers," in Andrew E. Kersten and Kriste Lindenmeyer, eds., *Politics and Progress: American Society and the State since 1865* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2001), 45-54.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph A. Chatman, *The Lone Star State Medical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Association History* (Lubbock: Chatman, 1959), 36. Drusilla Nixon died May 10, 1991, see Barbara Funkhouser, *The Caregivers: El Paso's Medical History, 1898-1998* (El Paso: Sundance Press, 1999), 244.

<sup>48</sup> "Mrs. Nixon To Be Feted By Phyllis Wheatley Club," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 26 September 1975, 21; "Is Southern Conference For Human Welfare A Red Front?" *El Paso Herald-Post*, 22 January 1948, 1 and 17; and "Church Women Plan Program," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 10 April 1943, 5.

She was much more bitter than he [Lawrence A. Nixon]. Her husband was very quiet, and she was the agitator in the family. She really blasted us out the morning she spoke at our church.”<sup>49</sup>

### **1962 Ordinance**

“We are living in the midst of perhaps the greatest revolution within human experience. Nothing, no nation, will be as it was when the peace comes. There is no such thing as the status quo.”<sup>50</sup>

- Osceola McKaine, a South Carolina NAACP organizer

The ending of World War II had a profound impact on the United States economic, political, and social relations. It was at this critical juncture in the country’s history that African Americans and their demands for equality had far-reaching consequences. Black civil rights accelerated under the banner of the “Double V” campaign, a movement first promoted by the *Pittsburgh Courier*.<sup>51</sup> “Double V” advocates combined the fight against fascism abroad with the struggle for racial equality and full democracy at home.<sup>52</sup> Civil Rights advocates in the United States did not overlook the international relevancy and importance of World War II as the above quote indicates. Following World War II, anything that spoiled the image of American democracy was seen as encouraging communism, threatening world peace, and aiding Soviet aspirations to dominate the globe. One example of this image being undermined was the country’s racial norms and customs. This included sympathizers and members of the Ku Klux

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<sup>49</sup> Virginia Green, “Interview No. 794,” conducted by Charlotte Ivy, audio taped interview—no transcription available, c.1980s, Charles Leland Sonnichsen Special Collections, University of Texas at El Paso.

<sup>50</sup> Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 29.

<sup>51</sup> Bunie, *Robert L. Vann of the Pittsburgh Courier*; Simmons, *The African American Press*, 43-50; Patrick S. Washburn, *A Question of Sedition: The Federal Government's Investigation of the Black Press During World War II* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 54, 100, and 223; and Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006), 21-2.

<sup>52</sup> Patrick Scott Washburn, *The African American Newspaper: Voice of Freedom* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2006).

Klan, who at times beat and killed African Americans, and other segregationists who denied Blacks voting rights through poll taxes and literacy tests. Racial hatred and discrimination exposed the disparity of the U.S. government's efforts to present its form of democracy as an untarnished case for the world to emulate, and the cruel reality that the country was not democratic.

Internationally, many independence movements and decolonization efforts in Africa were gaining momentum during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Between 1951 and 1962 no less than thirty-four nations on the continent declared their autonomy. One reason for this surge was directly due to World War II. The rhetoric of European nations claiming "self-determination" for states in their continent that were conquered by Hitler, yet denying self-rule for colonial Africa was obviously contradictory. Two forces were equally at work: African conviction for economic stability, social mobility, and political sovereignty was timed at a moment when imperial powers were weakened (financially, politically, morally, and militarily) due to WW-II.<sup>53</sup>

One hundred years before Chief Justice Warren declared that racial segregation in public schools "is a denial of the equal protection of the law," another chief justice declared that Negroes had no rights which a white man must respect. Thus in a century this nation has taken mighty steps along Freedom Road and raised the hopes of mankind, black, yellow, and white.... But we must go further and insist that great as is this victory, many and long steps along Freedom Road lie ahead.<sup>54</sup> -W.E.B. Du Bois, 1954

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<sup>53</sup> For information on African liberation, Cold War politics, and the United States see David D. Newsom, *The Imperial Mantle: The United States, Decolonization, and the Third World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Frank Furedi, *Colonial Wars and the Politics of Third World Nationalism* (London and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994); and Thomas J. Noer, *Cold War and Black Liberation: the United States and White Rule in Africa, 1948-1968* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1985).

<sup>54</sup> *National Guardian*, 31 May 31 1954, in David S. Cecelski, *Along Freedom Road: Hyde County, North Carolina, and the Fate of Black Schools in the South* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 1; and Herbert Aptheker, ed., *Newspaper Columns*, vol. 1 (White Plains: Kraus-Thomson Organization, 1986), 930.

In 1948, President Harry S. Truman's executive order 9981 desegregated the armed forces of the United States. Although this order was slow to be implemented, and did not apply to the National Guard or Reserves, it was a significant gesture on behalf of Black America.<sup>55</sup> This action would be one of many in a series of civil rights concessions between the 1940s and 1960s that would signify the beginning of the end for those staunch segregationists and Jim Crow promoters. On May 17, 1954, the monumental *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka* was ruled in favor of Brown, desegregating public schools throughout the entire country. Not surprisingly the first White Citizens Council was established in Mississippi that same year.<sup>56</sup> This was followed by *Brown II* in 1955, which the Warren Court instructed lower courts to require the defendants to make "a prompt and reasonable start toward full compliance" in implementing the previous year's mandate. Also in 1955, segregation on interstate travel was banned, as well as the beginning of the Montgomery bus boycott in December.<sup>57</sup> That following year, in 1956, southern segregationist governors, senators, and other politicians came together to sign *The Southern Manifesto*.<sup>58</sup> This document would let the world know that the racist status quo was not going down without a fight. As Alabama Governor George C. Wallace proudly

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<sup>55</sup> A detailed account of military desegregation is in Sherie Mershon and Steven L. Schlossman, *Foxholes and Color Lines: Desegregating the United States Armed Forces* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998). Truman's famous executive order was actually preempted by General John C.H. Lee's Army directive, issued on December 26, 1944—during the worst days of the Battle of the Bulge—which requested African American volunteers to be integrated into white combat units, an appeal which clearly marked the end for Jim Crow practices in the army, see Philip A. Klinkner and Rogers M. Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 189-90.

<sup>56</sup> Yasuhiro Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: Civil Rights and States' Rights* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 146; and Alabama Governor, *Inaugural Addresses and Programs*, SP194, Alabama Department of Archives and History, <[http://www.archives.state.al.us/govs\\_list/inauguralspeech.h tml](http://www.archives.state.al.us/govs_list/inauguralspeech.h tml)> (accessed 13 October 2010).

<sup>57</sup> Joanne Grant, ed., *Black Protest: History, Documents, and Analyses: 1619 to the Present* (New York: Fawcett Premier, 1991), 284-9 and 318-23.

<sup>58</sup> The entire text of *The Southern Manifesto* can be found in Grant, *Black Protest*, 268-72.



exclaimed—during his 1963 inaugural address—in a defiant Southern drawl: “Segregation now, segregation tomorrow, and segregation forever!”<sup>59</sup>

Internationally, the 1957 independence of the West African nation of Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah instilled a sense of pride into Africans throughout the Diaspora. The Ghanaians not only struck a blow to British imperial power, but also to global white supremacy, domination, and control. That same year would also be an important one for the Civil Rights movement in the United States. Not only would the drama at Little Rock Central High School unfold, but also President Eisenhower would sign the first Civil Rights Act since 1875, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) would be created.<sup>60</sup> This was soon followed by the 1960 Sit-In-Movement by college students attending the historically Black North Carolina A&T University.<sup>61</sup> This student-led initiative spread to other cities throughout the country including Marshall, Texas and Lawrence Nixon’s alma mater, Wiley College.<sup>62</sup> In addition,

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<sup>59</sup> Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>60</sup> A personal account from the Black students who experienced the horrors at Little Rock Central High can be found in Ira Wilmer Counts, Will D. Campbell, Ernest Dumas, and Robert S. McCord, *A Life is More than a Moment: The Desegregation of Little Rock's Central High* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999). On Eisenhower’s Civil Rights Act, see Grant, *Black Protest*, 382. A history of the SCLC is in Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

<sup>61</sup> A historical chronicle of the 1960 sit-in at the Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina is found in Miles Wolff, *Lunch at the Five and Ten: The Greensboro Sit-Ins, a Contemporary History*, revised and expanded edition (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1990).

<sup>62</sup> For example, students at Bishop and Wiley Colleges (both located in Lawrence Nixon’s hometown of Marshall) were one of the first in Texas to engage in sit-ins during the early 1960s. Using Gandhi’s technique of nonviolent civil disobedience that was espoused by Wiley graduate James Farmer in the early 1940s, Wiley and Bishop students R.J. Peabody, Donald J. Guinyard, Mark R. Hannon, Jr., and six other students along with Dr. Doxey A. Wilkerson of Bishop unsuccessfully attempted to receive service at the F. W. Woolworth Company’s lunch counter in Marshall, and days later nearly a hundred Texas Rangers would order fire hoses on dozens of students from both schools when they took over the Harrison County Courthouse. Bishop fired Wilkerson for his involvement in the protest, see “Negro Group Seeks Service in Marshall” *Abilene Reporter-News* 27 March 1960, 2; “Marshall Tense As Fire Hoses Used on Negroes” *Del Rio News-Herald*, 31 March 1960, 1; Raymond Holbrook, “Marshall, Armed Camp, Expects New Troubles: March of Negro Students Feared” *Big Spring Daily Herald*, 1 April 1960, 1; “Bold Sit-Ins in Marshall” *Observer* vol. 51 (1 April 1960); “From Chapel to Dousing” *Observer* vol. 52 (8 April 1960); and Betty Swales, “Local Café Integration Demanded in 7 Days” *Texan* vol. 59 (2 April 1960).

1960 saw not only John F. Kennedy's election as president, but it was also the year that the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was formed, the Civil Rights Act became law, and numerous (11) African nations gained their independence.<sup>63</sup> The range and scope of the above-mentioned events not only impacted officials and their decisions within world government bodies globally, and the federal and state governments of the United States, but also influenced everyday people at the local level, including communities such as El Paso.

In the Southwest, there were other cities who addressed the issue of race prior to El Paso. The election of Henry B. Gonzalez to San Antonio's city council in 1953-1956 was instrumental in the "successful passage of an ordinance desegregating all city owned public facilities."<sup>64</sup> El Paso quietly integrated their city departments under Mayor Raymond L. Telles' administration, 1957-1961.<sup>65</sup> The city of Houston had, in 1960, silently integrated seventy lunch counters in department stores, drugstores, and supermarkets during the last week of August. This occurred nearly two years before El Paso would allow African Americans to eat at downtown lunch counters, cafes, and restaurants. One of the unique things about Houston's integration was that it transpired under the assurances from the local press that there would be no coverage of the event.

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On Wilkerson's life, see Maceo C. Dailey, Jr. and Ernest D. Washington, "The Evolution of Doxey A. Wilkerson, 1935-45," *Freedomways* vol. 3, no. 1 (Fall 1985): 101-15. On the ultimate integration of higher education in Texas at the behest of African Americans see, Amilcar Shabazz, *Advancing Democracy: African Americans and the Struggle for Access and Equity in Higher Education in Texas* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2004).

<sup>63</sup> An analysis of John F. Kennedy and his civil rights agenda is in Garth E. Pauley, *The Modern Presidency and Civil Rights: Rhetoric on Race from Roosevelt to Nixon* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001). On SNCC, see Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). On African independence movements and the United States, see Scott Lucas, "The United States and the Decolonization of Black Africa, 1945-1963," in David Ryan and Victor Pungong, eds., *The United States and Decolonization: Power and Freedom* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

<sup>64</sup> Rodolfo Rosales, *The Illusion of Inclusion: The Untold Political Story of San Antonio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 71; and Ronnie Dugger, "Gonzalez of San Antonio: Part III," *Texas Observer* vol. 72, no. 9 (May 9, 1980): 15-24.

<sup>65</sup> Mario T. García, *The Making of a Mexican American Mayor: Raymond L. Telles of El Paso*, *Southwestern Studies* no. 105 (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1998), 109.

The suppression of the city's media outlets was no accident, but by design. For Houston's political and financial power cadre, their concern was how to avoid embarrassment and bloodshed in order to maintain the city's image as a prospering, progressive southern city "ripe for investment and international trade." John T. Jones, publisher of the *Houston Chronicle*, "felt that it was necessary to suppress the news to accomplish integration without violence" giving credence to an old banker's adage: "When peace reigns, interest runs."<sup>66</sup>

Additionally, unlike El Paso's ordinance, integration in Houston interestingly came to pass without local or state legislation. Moreover, months prior to August 1960, another Jim Crow barrier had fallen. On May 21 Houston's public library, city buses, and Jespersen Stadium had calmly integrated without fanfare.<sup>67</sup> William P. Steven, editor-in-chief of the *Houston Chronicle*, spoke with honesty when he stated, "integration is an essential fact in the demonstration of democracy...it is necessary for the full development of the economy...and it is the only way to make our foreign policy mean anything in a world of mostly dark skins."<sup>68</sup> On April 1, 1962, without much fanfare and without any local press coverage, convention hotels in downtown Houston dropped their policy of segregation.<sup>69</sup> Nine days later, Colt Stadium

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas R. Cole, *No Color is My Kind: The Life of Eldrewey Stearns and the Integration of Houston* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997), 44 and 56; William H. Kellar, *Make Haste Slowly: Moderates, Conservatives, and School Desegregation in Houston* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 117; F. Kenneth Jensen, "The Houston Sit-In Movement of 1960-61," in Howard Beeth and Cary D. Wintz, eds., *Black Dixie: Afro-Texan History and Culture in Houston* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1992); David Perman, producer and director, *The Strange Demise of Jim Crow: How Houston Desegregated Its Public Accommodations, 1959-1963* 60 min. documentary (Galveston: Institute for the Medical Humanities, University of Texas-Medical Branch, 1997).

<sup>67</sup> Cole, *No Color is My Kind*, 53.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>69</sup> Perman, *The Strange Demise of Jim Crow*.

followed suit.<sup>70</sup> Although Houston's downtown lunch counters and convention hotels had opened their facilities to Blacks, their restaurants and movie theaters remained segregated.<sup>71</sup>

Austin, the state capital, held on to segregation practices a bit longer, until it was forced to acquiesce in desegregation by the national Civil Rights legislation of 1964. In the aftermath Austin activists helped "draft a fair housing ordinance in 1968, which was passed by the City Council, but overturned in a referendum. It was not until 1977 that the city adopted the ordinance for good."<sup>72</sup> Prior to this activity, civil rights advocates in Austin attempted to get the city council's attention in hopes of convincing them for the need of a Human Relations Commission. The council eventually did approve the establishment of "the Austin Human Relations Commission," but not before five NAACP members protested in around-the-clock sessions at City Hall.<sup>73</sup>

In Albuquerque, New Mexico, integration came sooner than any other city in Texas. Using a Portland, Oregon anti-discrimination ordinance as a model, the Albuquerque Civil Rights Ordinance was passed on February 15, 1952—over ten years before El Paso's.<sup>74</sup> Soon afterward in 1955, the New Mexico State legislature implemented a state statute resembling

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. At this time Colt Stadium was a ballpark free of official racial discrimination on the playing field, in seating arrangements, restrooms, press facilities, and employment, as well as the exclusive Fast Draw Club. Many in Houston were proud to have integrated this particular public facility without external pressure or white backlash.

<sup>71</sup> Cole, *No Color is My Kind*, 93.

<sup>72</sup> *Austin American Statesman*, 7 November 2001.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 2 April 1994. During the regular weekly council session on April 2, 1964 (exactly three months prior to President Lyndon B. Johnson's signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law), NAACP members gave speeches and read passages from various books continuously for nearly two-weeks, filibustering the council's regular agenda. On May 13, the city council finally established the Austin Human Relations Commission, naming Volma Overton as a founding member.

<sup>74</sup> George Long, "How Albuquerque Got Its Civil Rights Ordinance" *Crisis* 60, no. 11 (November 1953): 524.

Albuquerque's city ordinance—nine years before the national 1964 Civil Rights Act was passed by the U.S. Congress.<sup>75</sup> This in a state where Latinas/os and Native Americans outnumber all other groups, including whites and African Americans.<sup>76</sup> When compared to other western cities such as Albuquerque, El Paso lagged far behind in being sensitive to the plight of African Americans. Even in comparison to other southern/southwestern cities such as San Antonio and Houston, for that time period, El Paso's civil rights agenda lagged.

You let me work in your homes. I stay with your children weeks at a time, sometimes they know me better than their own mother. I even sleep in your house. You know that my color doesn't rub off on your sheets. And I can't eat in your restaurants. Why? What are you afraid of? What are you afraid of? -Anonymous Black woman in Texas<sup>77</sup>

As he aged, naturally Lawrence Nixon became less active in the community; however Drusilla Nixon, who was sixteen years younger than Lawrence, remained engaged in community affairs. This was particularly evident in her involvement in the city's formal integration vis-à-vis the 1962 El Paso City Ordinance.<sup>78</sup> When El Paso City Council alderman Bert Williams initially proposed the anti-discrimination ordinance on June 7, 1962, it was not the first time that the city dealt with the issue of discrimination and segregation within its jurisdiction.<sup>79</sup> The most immediate recent example was when in 1957, El Paso elected Raymond L. Telles, Jr., "the first

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<sup>75</sup> Thomas Lark, ed., *History of Hope: The African American Experience in New Mexico* (Albuquerque: Albuquerque Museum, 1996), 6.

<sup>76</sup> Richard Stephenson, "Race in the Cactus State" *Crisis* 61, no. 4 (April 1954): 198-99.

<sup>77</sup> *Daily Texan*, 23 October 1963, in Winegarten, *Black Texas Women, A Sourcebook*, 211.

<sup>78</sup> Drusilla E. Nixon, "Interview no. 194," page 13-4.

<sup>79</sup> "Council Okays Integration," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 7 June 1962, 1 and 2.

American of Mexican descent to be elected mayor of a major southwestern city this century.”<sup>80</sup> Under the Telles administration, Mexican Americans joined the ranks of the police and fire departments in larger numbers than in previous years.<sup>81</sup> When asked to speculate as to the reason for such dismal figures in a city whose majority populace were Mexican Americans, the white fire chief responded that his men slept all in one room and “how could we expect white boys to sleep with Mexicans?”<sup>82</sup>

In addition, Telles also confronted discrimination in public facilities that impacted African Americans. El Paso’s premier cinema, the Plaza Theater, sold tickets to African Americans but relegated their presence to the back rows of the balcony area. Telles met with the Plaza’s management, informing them that such customs would no longer be tolerated and if they persisted the city was prepared to take legal action against these business practices. Telles noted that “the procedure of discrimination against blacks,” at the Plaza Theatre, “was immediately stopped.”<sup>83</sup> These two acts by Telles, set the tone for things to come to advance this issue, but it would be several years before the actual integration city ordinance would surface.

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<sup>80</sup> García, *The Making of a Mexican American Mayor*, 1.

<sup>81</sup> According to historian Mario Garcia, “Lawyer Albert Amendáriz remembers Telles’ concern about discrimination in city jobs when he took office. The new mayor believed he could not openly attack this process without jeopardizing his administration. Instead, he appointed men such as Alfonso Kennard and Amendáriz to the civil service commission and asked them to investigate the matter and institute changes. Amendáriz quickly discovered that both the police and fire departments refused to accept qualified Mexican Americans and that the commission sanctioned such discrimination. Only a handful of them in either department had been approved and only under exceptional circumstances. Armendáriz’s investigation and revelations forced the commission to adopt new hiring procedures that led to the appointment of Mexican American policemen and firemen. Armendáriz notes that Telles never claimed credit for this breakthrough. It was not in his nature to boast of such things. Nevertheless, his quiet leadership integrated city departments...That’s the reason that we have a Mexican American Chief of Police today,” Armendáriz concluded in 1982, “this is a product of Raymond Telles” see García, *The Making of a Mexican American Mayor*, 108-9.

<sup>82</sup> García, *The Making of a Mexican American Mayor*, 109. Historian Oscar J. Martínez estimates that Mexican Americans in El Paso, during the 1950s and 1960s—the time period that Telles rose to power, were at least fifty percent or more of the city’s population. Oscar J. Martínez, *The Chicanos of El Paso: An Assessment of Progress*, Southwestern Studies, monograph no. 59 (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1980), 6.

<sup>83</sup> García, *The Making of a Mexican American Mayor*, 110.

During the 1960s the Black population of El Paso grew substantially from 5,891 (2.1% of the overall population) in 1960 to 7,441 (2.3% of the overall population) in 1970—a nearly twenty-one percent increase in ten years.<sup>84</sup> At the time of the ordinance, El Paso had over 126,000 Chicanas/os, with their numbers increasing to nearly 185,000 by 1970. The total city population stood at 276,687 in 1960 and 322,269 by 1970.<sup>85</sup> Asians and Native Americans demographics indicate their presence in El Paso were not as high as African Americans.<sup>86</sup>

The 1962 Anti-Discrimination Ordinance had its origins when in late 1961 or early 1962 a group of UTEP African American undergraduate students approached the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) of El Paso during one of its regular meetings. According to Albert Schwartz, chairman of the local group since the end of World War II, “a couple of black students had approached ADL and had made their concerns known [regarding racial discrimination] to the organization, during one of our meetings.”<sup>87</sup> Soon after, Schwartz and the ADL decided to get involved and take action on behalf of these students.<sup>88</sup> In a videotaped interview, Schwartz recalled:

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<sup>84</sup> *United States Census Population: 1960* vol. 1, United States Bureau of the Census, Characteristics of the Population, Part A, Number of Inhabitants (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1961), 45-671; and *United States Census Population: 1970* vol. 1, United States Bureau of the Census, Characteristics of the Population, Part A, Number of Inhabitants, Section 2—Missouri–Wyoming, Puerto Rico, and Outlying Areas (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1972), 45-1267.

<sup>85</sup> Martínez, *The Chicanos of El Paso*, 6.

<sup>86</sup> For population figures on the Chinese and other Asians in El Paso, consult Nancy Farrar, *The Chinese in El Paso*, Southwestern Studies, monograph no. 33 (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1972), 44.

<sup>87</sup> Albert Schwartz interview, conducted by Danika Rose, 15 September 1997, video-tape cassette found in the office of the African American Studies Department at the University of Texas at El Paso, Liberal Arts Building, room # 401; “El Paso Passes Anti-Bias Law,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 July 1962, 6.

<sup>88</sup> Albert Schwartz was the great nephew of Adolph Schwartz and son of Maurice Schwartz. Since the turn-of-the-century, the Schwartz family has been instrumental in El Paso’s growth—founders of the *Popular*, a family-owned department store. For a detailed account of the Schwartz’s family, see *El Paso Times*, 24 October 1999; and Floyd S. Fierman, *The Schwartz Family of El Paso: The Story of a Pioneer Jewish Family in the Southwest*, Southwestern Studies, monograph no. 61 (El Paso: Texas Western Press, 1980).

We listened to the young people and decided they were right. That we should dig into this and find out a little bit more about what could be done to change things. And so eventually we did, but it didn't happen overnight. It took a lot of work, and a lot of good people. And eventually, long before the U.S. government decided that there would be integration, we were able to successfully integrate El Paso.<sup>89</sup>

Schwartz and others soon formed an ad-hoc council, which included Drusilla Nixon, that later became called the Citizens' Committee on Human Relations.<sup>90</sup> According to Obra Lee Malone, a long-time African American resident of El Paso, Blacks were "concerned about the racial situation in our city." Malone added, "you would see the signs around that say, 'we reserve the right to refuse service to anyone,' we really knew what that meant was 'No Blacks allowed!'" According to Malone, "the ordinance touched upon three matters: restaurants, movie theaters, and motels/hotels." One reason for this is because the Citizens' Committee on Human Relations, of which Malone too was a member, "concluded that the best way to get this ordinance done," was in a manner that would be "as quietly and with as little publicity as possible." This was the same tactic employed in Houston's integration activities. "I think our approach, that is, 'don't widely advertise it,' turned out to be justified because it got passed without a whole lot pre-passage publicity."<sup>91</sup> Other Blacks involved in this endeavor included Robin E.L. Washington, who in 1961 helped create the El Paso Community Association, a group of African Americans who fought for integration in El Paso schools and other public facilities.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Albert Schwartz interview, conducted by Denika Rose, 15 September 1997. Tape is located within the African American Studies Department at University of Texas—El Paso.

<sup>90</sup> Julian V. Horwitz to Travis White, 12 May 1962. Julian V. Horwitz was a private attorney who was assisting Travis White, El Paso's city attorney, in researching the legality "on the power of a municipality to adopt local ordinances designed to prohibit discrimination in places of public accommodation." At the bottom of the letter, Horwitz carbon copied or courtesy copied to "Co-Chairmen & Liaison Officer of the Citizens' Committee on Human Relations."

<sup>91</sup> Obra Lee Malone interview, conducted by Charlotte Ivy in El Paso, Texas, 16 June 1987.

<sup>92</sup> *El Paso Times*, 1 February 1994. Robin E.L. Washington was also a former major in the Army and past President of Black El Paso Democrats.



Blacks in El Paso “could attend drive-in movies but not downtown theaters, eat at drive-in restaurants but not in hotels.”<sup>93</sup>

Ordinance 2698 applied to restaurants, hotels and motels, and to places of public entertainment. It excluded bars, boarding houses, and private clubs and other areas of entertainment.<sup>94</sup> The Council passed the ordinance Thursday June 14, 1962 by unanimous vote. Days later, Joe Newman, member of the Northeast Democratic Club, had prepared a petition to put the anti-discrimination ordinance to a public referendum. The petition required fifteen percent of the city’s qualified voters and a copy of the petition was kept at the AAA Vacuum Shop on Dyer Street. Newman’s motive was “to let the people have a voice,” and he “welcomed any help.”<sup>95</sup> R.A. Ramey had joined Joe Newman to create a formal committee to officially take a position against the ordinance and prevent its passage.<sup>96</sup>

On June 19, 1962, Mayor Ralph E. Seitsinger vetoed, on the last day possible, the anti-discrimination ordinance.<sup>97</sup> A three-fourths majority of the four alderman was required to override the mayor’s veto. It was the first time in more than a decade that an El Paso mayor had used his veto power.<sup>98</sup> Seitsinger said he had received an equal number of letters and phone calls supporting and opposing adoption of the ordinance.<sup>99</sup> The forty-six year-old mayor from Iowa explained that he was a “believer in integration 100 per cent, but that it should come voluntarily

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<sup>93</sup> “Integration: 100% in El Paso,” *Newsweek* vol. 60, 2 July 1962, 17; “Negroes Seek Desegregation In E.P. Theaters,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 17 August 1956, 20.

<sup>94</sup> *El Paso Times*, 20 June 1962.

<sup>95</sup> *El Paso Times*, 16 June 1962.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 June 1962.

<sup>97</sup> “Mayor Seitsinger Wants Voluntary Integration,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 20 June 1962, 1 and 11.

<sup>98</sup> “Integration: 100% in El Paso,” *Newsweek* vol. 60, 2 July 1962, 17.

<sup>99</sup> *El Paso Times*, 20 June 1962.

from the fullness of the heart and not from legislation.”<sup>100</sup> Speaking in favor of the ordinance was Alfonso Kennard, vice-president of the El Paso Chapter of the Political Association of Spanish-speaking Organizations (PASO). There were about fifty African Americans who were present at the meeting, which was held at Liberty Hall instead of the regular city chambers because of the many people in attendance, nearly 200 in all.

After Richard Cuellar, Sr. requested those in favor to stand-up, the vast majority gladly stood to show their support for the passage of the ordinance. Ed Given clearly was not pleased by this show for support. Representing the Hotel, Motel, Tourist Court Association, he angrily said, “some of these people are of my own faith and I’m ashamed of them.” “We’re ashamed of you!” said Attorney Dick Marshall in response. Marshall, who was representing the Jewish Community and the Citizens Committee on Human Relations, stated: “El Paso is 80 to 100 years behind Eastern cities in integration and 10 years behind Albuquerque and Santa Fe which are getting more conventions than we are.” John Dennis, a retired police officer, wanted the issue to be placed on the ballot during the next local general election so the voters could make the decision instead of the city council members. Irving Klister argued that Catholics were against segregation and cited the recent action by Pope John XXIII in canonizing St. Martín De Porres, an Afro-Peruvian. The Rev. Charles Burges of the Presbyterian Church of the Divine Savior read a resolution from the El Paso Council of the Churches commending the City Council’s initial vote of approval for this much-needed ordinance, and its ultimate final passage.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> “El Paso Passes Anti-Bias Law,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 July 1962, 6.

<sup>101</sup> “Integration Okayed Over Mayor’s Veto,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 21 June 1962, 1 and 2. On San Martín de Porres (1579-1639), see Carlos Parra, “San Martín de Porres,” in Kwame A. Appiah and Henry L. Gates, eds., *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African American Experience* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), 1540-41.

After two hours of deliberation, Aldermen R.R. “Buck” Rogers, Ray S. Watt, Bert Williams, the original author of the ordinance, and Ted R. Bender voted unanimously for the ordinance once again, this time overriding the Mayor’s veto.<sup>102</sup> Mayor pro tempore Ted Bender kept his promise and interrupted his vacation in California to ensure the Mayor’s veto was not the last word in the affair. Led by an unnamed Black woman in the Liberty Hall audience, nearly everyone began to sing “America.” Attorney James Hammond, representing the Texas Restaurant Association, and Attorney Abner Lipscomb, representing the Motel Owners’ Association were opposed to the ordinance because it was not broad enough and suggested instead that the ordinance should include all businesses, including barber shops, beauty parlors, and apartment houses.<sup>103</sup> Supporters of the ordinance gave the city council a standing ovation. Many of them wept openly when again it passed unanimously, including Drusilla E. Nixon, who “wept into her white-gloved hands.”<sup>104</sup> Years later, Drusilla recalled fondly,

And, oh, it was a big to-do! They had to have meetings in Liberty Hall because so many people came. Everyone talked pro and con. So finally, whoever the Mayor [Ralph Seitsinger] was said that if it passed, he would veto it. [Alderman] Ted Bender was going off on his vacation and he said, “Mr. Mayor, if you veto this I will fly back from my vacation to vote on it again.” They were to vote on it that next week. And sure enough, he vetoed it; and sure enough, Ted Bender came back! And it passed. Of course, everybody thought there was going to be a terrible rush of the people in the restaurants. We had been without restaurants for so long that it just didn’t interest us, not like that. But it was so good and it has been so wonderful to walk in a restaurant and know that you can order a meal just like anybody else.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> “El Paso Passes Anti-Bias Law,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 July 1962, 6.

<sup>103</sup> “Mayor Hints Veto Of Ordinance,” *El Paso Herald-Post*, 14 June 1962, 1 and 2. The song “America” has historically been sung by many reform groups to express their patriotism and love for the nation despite their critique of oppression and injustice by the status-quo. Some examples of reform groups have included those within the temperance movement, participants in the women’s rights movement, abolitionist, and those engaged in civil and human rights, see Robert James Branham and Stephen J. Hartnett, *Sweet Freedom’s Song: “My Country ’Tis of Thee” and Democracy in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>104</sup> “Integration: 100% in El Paso,” *Newsweek*, vol. 60, 2 July 1962, 17.

<sup>105</sup> Drusilla Nixon, “Interview no. 194,” page 13-4.

Also in attendance at this historic city council meeting was Lawrence A. Nixon's first-born, Lawrence J. Nixon. He happened to be in-town vacationing from Pittsburgh, visiting various family members, including Lawrence and Drusilla Nixon. Lawrence J. Nixon felt that the city had "taken a step in the right direction" and that although El Paso was never a racial utopia, "it was the first city to desegregate its schools after the Supreme Court [1954] ruling."<sup>106</sup> The final passage allowed El Paso to become the first city in Texas to pass such a resolution. The event made national news, claiming that El Paso "became the first entirely integrated city in Texas, the first in all the South and Southwest to come to terms with the most divisive issue of the republic."<sup>107</sup> In addition to the 1962 ordinance, El Paso would eventually pass an ordinance "providing for open access in the purchase and renting of housing."<sup>108</sup> The "integration ordinance," as it was dubbed in the local media, went in effect June 22, 1962. It provided a fine of up to \$200 for those persons or establishments who refused service in a hotel, motel, restaurant or movie to any person solely on the basis of their race, color, or religion.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> "El Paso Passes Anti-Bias Law," *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 July 1962, 6. El Paso Public Schools desegregated in the fall of 1955. The Ysleta Independent School District desegregated in the fall of 1956. The Clint School Board and the Fabens Independent School District still needed convincing to desegregate as of the summer 1956, see "Negroes Seek Desegregation In E.P. Theaters," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 17 August 1956, 20.

<sup>107</sup> "Integration: 100% in El Paso," *Newsweek* vol. 60, 2 July 1962, 17.

<sup>108</sup> Timmons, *El Paso*, 251.

<sup>109</sup> "Integration Law Goes Into Effect," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 22 June 1962, 1.

## CONCLUSION – NIXON, WESTERN HISTORY, AND THE BORDERLANDS

“Dr. Nixon will become an institution as he represents all the Negroes in Texas.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1948, Lawrence Nixon was sixty-five years old and his career as a civic leader and activist essentially came to a close. After his involvement with the Southern Conference for Human Welfare ended, he no longer engaged himself with any organization or activity dealing with social justice causes. His life was uneventful between 1948 and his death in 1966; perhaps stung by the indignity of being labeled a radical for his membership in the SCHW, he seems to have devoted himself to his medical practice and to his family. Many, however, had not forgotten his political and professional contributions. In 1954, the year of the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* case and nine years prior to his formal retirement from medicine, Nixon was honored as a longtime member of the Lone Star State Medical, Dental, and Pharmaceutical Association (LSSMDPA). Sol White, a LSSMDPA member and Beaumont, Texas African American doctor, helped host the organization’s annual convention in Beaumont for Black physicians, dentists, and pharmacists from across the state. On June 9-10 the association honored a number of Black doctors who had practiced for more than forty years, including Lawrence A. Nixon, G.P.A. Ford of Houston, Arthur Q. Shirley of San Antonio; and Peter G. Byrd and E.S. Craven of Beaumont.<sup>2</sup> Certainly for Black medical professionals in Texas during this period, given the pervasive racism and economic hardship that they faced, the mere fact of having been active for more than forty years was an achievement. Nixon’s achievements,

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<sup>1</sup> Unnamed individual, hand-written notes found within the Lawrence A. Nixon Papers, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, National Archives, Austin, Texas, Box 2 (1924-1933), “Legal Documents. Notes, Correspondences, Clippings,” document no. 771.

<sup>2</sup> Robert J. Robertson, *Fair Ways: How Six Black Golfers Won Civil Rights in Beaumont, Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005), 36-37 and 190 n.18.

however, went substantially beyond his important work as a physician. Locally, in the state and nationally, he was a civic activist, a civil rights pioneer, and a health care innovator. Nixon became a member of the American Geriatrics Society in October of 1959, however, formally ends his medical practice in July 1963.<sup>3</sup> After the public announcement of his retirement, the El Paso National Bank's Dick Landsheft wrote Nixon, thanking him for his many years of service to the community and congratulating him on his retirement.<sup>4</sup>

### **An Untimely Ending**

Less than three years after his retirement in 1963, Nixon died abruptly in a tragic auto accident on Interstate 10 in El Paso. The car that Nixon was driving was side-swiped by a speeding vehicle as Nixon was attempting to merge into traffic from the entry ramp. Upon impact Nixon's car was overturned and his neck was broken. Other passengers in the car with Nixon included his wife Drusilla, and their daughter Drusilla Ann Nixon. Nixon was immediately hospitalized, never to recover from his injuries. In his last days he found himself in terrible agony and begged his visiting daughter, Edna (Nixon) McIver and her husband, physician William James McIver, to "get a gun and shoot me!" Sadly, within a week after the accident, Lawrence Aaron Nixon died on March 6, 1966.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "El Pasoan Ends Medical Career," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 24 July 1963, 6; American Geriatrics Society Certificate, 19 October 1959, in N/MFP.

<sup>4</sup> Dick Landsheft to Lawrence A. Nixon, 30 July 1963, in N/MFP.

<sup>5</sup> "Youth Thrown From Scooter, Injured," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 1 March 1966, 20; Edna (Nixon) McIver, telephone interview with the author, 13 April 2010; El Paso County Clerk, Lawrence Aaron Nixon Death Certificate, reel no. 0017 and frame no. 0246, reel no. 0508 and frame no. 1781; "Dr. Nixon of *Nixon v. Herndon*," *Crisis* vol. 73, no. 7 (August-September 1966): 378-79; "Nixon," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 7 March 1966, 21; and "Nixon," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 8 March 1966, 21. Lawrence Nixon's interment was in Concordia Cemetery in El Paso, see "Obsequies for Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon," 9 March 1966, in N/MFP.

Nixon was survived by his wife, Drusilla, and his three daughters and one son: Dorothy (Porter) Davis, Edna (Nixon) McIver, and Drusilla Ann Nixon, and Lawrence J. Nixon, Jr. He had ten grandchildren at the time of his death. Funeral services were held on March 9<sup>th</sup> led by Rev. Albert S. Pitts of the Methodist Church on Myrtle Avenue, where Nixon was a longtime active member and supporter. Active pallbearers at the services included Fred Hughes, Silverio Zambrano, Police Captain Fred Ward, L. W. Mathis, Ira Waters, and Sam Calvert. Honorary pallbearers were Alonzo Bogan, Clint Huling, Rudolph W. López, Dr. Madison Clayton Donnell, B.L. Boyd, Dr. Branwell Fanning Stevens, Antonio A. Arredondo, and William M. Sublett.<sup>6</sup>

### **Race in El Paso**

Antonio A. Arredondo's status as an honorary pallbearer is telling in the sense that it is one of the few documented instances of Nixon's relationship with the Mexican American community. Arredondo rented Nixon's Myrtle Avenue location where he owned and managed the Prescription Depot Drug Store. Originally from Indé, Durango, México, Arredondo arrived to El Paso in November 1909, prior to the Mexican Revolution and by the late 1930s he had opened his own pharmacy which served the community for over thirty years. Despite Nixon's medical patients being mostly Mexican/Mexican American, it is surprising that there has not been more documented instances of their presence in Nixon's long and storied life. Nixon eagerly embraced Mexican and Mexican American culture. For many decades Nixon lived in a working-class neighborhood that was heavily populated by Mexican and Mexican Americans. He learned to write and speak Spanish, as did Drusilla and their children; not only for social survival and economic expediency, but for a genuine respect of the language. He vacationed in

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<sup>6</sup> "Nixon," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 7 March 1966, 21; and "Nixon," *El Paso Herald-Post*, 8 March 1966, 21. Banks Funeral Home, 3331 Alameda Avenue, handled Lawrence A. Nixon's funeral arrangements.

México City with his family and frequented Juárez regularly to enjoy the integrated atmosphere and cultural vibrancy. Nevertheless, the invisibility of Mexican and Mexican Americans cannot be easily be explained.

The relationship between African Americans and Mexican Americans in El Paso goes back to the mid-nineteenth century. Both groups have been instrumental in the social and economic development of the city. Each group has experienced the crass and subtle institutional racism of El Paso's ruling Anglo elite. Mexican Americans, as well as Black El Pasoans, were exploited, underpaid, and restricted to the most menial labor. Unlike African Americans, however, some Mexican Americans with light-skin and non-indigenous features were often deemed legally white by Anglos. This racial dynamic allowed some Mexican Americans in El Paso more socioeconomic mobility than Blacks.<sup>7</sup> Some Blacks resented this fact because they felt that their dark-skin permanently relegated them to an inferior status, while Mexican Americans could at least in some cases move into white society. Secondly, this allowed upwardly mobile Mexican Americans to not see the utility of building coalitions with African Americans since some within their group were receiving the fruits of assimilation. Stated differently, they had no vested personal or group interest in building multi-racial and multi-cultural coalitions with Blacks in order to demand more civil and human rights.

When Nixon arrived in El Paso in January 1910 as a "subaltern figure," he may have seen in El Paso an "unresolved character of the region" which allowed him to articulate his own "alternative vision of the borderlands."<sup>8</sup> El Paso's geographic location, its close proximity to the

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew C. Whitaker, *Race Work: The Rise of Civil Rights in the Urban West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 152.

<sup>8</sup> Karl Jacoby, "Between North and South: The Alternative Borderlands of William H. Ellis and the African-American Colony of 1895," in Samuel Truett and Elliott Young, eds., *Continental Crossroads: Remapping U.S.-Mexico Borderlands History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 210.



international border, “did not simply divide Mexico and the United States, rather, it created a transregional borderlands where the Mexican North and the American South collided, conflicted, fused, confused, and—for a moment at least—offered a glimpse of new alternatives.”<sup>9</sup> Many historians distinguish between the terms “frontier,” “borderlands,” and “bordered lands.” Some “see frontiers as cultural meeting grounds in which no one culture is dominant, creating some mixing and accommodation between diverse peoples.” If one’s definition of domination includes controlling most of the money, power, wealth, land, and institutions, than clearly in the case of El Paso the dominant group would be Europeans, first with the Spaniards, and most recently Anglos. If one defines “borderlands” as “places where autonomous peoples of different cultures are bound together by the presence of more than one imperial power, allowing indigenous inhabitants to play them off against each other,” than El Paso would not fit into this definition because, since 1848, there has only been one imperial power in the Big Bend area: the United States. Lastly, “when one imperial power successfully imposes boundaries, borderlands become bordered lands.” This perhaps is an apt description of what has happened in El Paso in the last 162 years, which impacted notions of race.<sup>10</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century, this alternative vision of the borderlands permitted a certain fluidity of race in El Paso and how important—because of its strategic location, and this particular moment in time, place and space—the region was “in shaping notions of race and nation in Mexico and the United States alike.”<sup>11</sup> In El Paso, as in Mexico and by extension Latin America, the notion of class, race, and one’s sense of self and others,

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<sup>9</sup> Jacoby, “Between North and South,” 231.

<sup>10</sup> Cynthia Cumfer, *Separate Peoples, One Land: The Minds of Cherokees, Blacks, and Whites on the Tennessee Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 14.

<sup>11</sup> Jacoby, “Between North and South,” 210.

including the objectified “Other” took a somewhat different form than it did elsewhere in the American South and West. Definitions of race in El Paso, as in many parts of Latin America, were shaped by many factors including class, proximity to European features, and status. These “opportunities persisted because Mexico shared with the rest of Latin America a system of race relations that embraced class as well as complexion.”<sup>12</sup> El Paso’s topology, climate, and environment, along with the historical Mexican majority allowed Anglos to relax their own rigid notions of race and become influenced by the internationalism and isolation of the region.<sup>13</sup> Class, status, and complexion played in Lawrence Nixon’s favor whether he consciously was aware of this benefit or not. Although race can influence one’s class status, class can and does racializes an individual or group.<sup>14</sup>

Living in the United States, a country where white-skinned and light-skinned privilege was the accepted norm thus helped Nixon. His racial ancestry marked him as someone whose skin tone, coupled with living in this country, held some currency. Moving to a border city such as El Paso, allowed Nixon’s skin-tone to continue or be more of an asset. The notion of class, Nixon’s worldview, sensibilities, mannerisms, education, and to a lesser degree his income, afforded him certain privileges from various people in the El Paso region including Mexican and Mexican Americans. This of course is all predicated on a racial and color hierarchy that dominated the thinking of the entire Americas which assigned Anglo-Saxon Protestants and Catholic Spaniards to the very top and all “others” below. Dark-skinned Africans, Mexican, and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>13</sup> Bruce A. Glasrud and Paul H. Carlson, eds., *Slavery to Integration: Black Americans in West Texas* (Abilene: State House Press, 2007), 22.

<sup>14</sup> Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 25.

Native Americans who refused to assimilate or incorporate European culture, were consistently relegated to the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Categorizing people into distinct racial groups is achieved both socially and through the legal system.<sup>15</sup> Laws and the legal system played an important role in the creation of Mexican Americans as a racial group. After 1848, the end of the Mexican-American War and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the central paradox was the legal construction of Mexicans as racially “white” alongside the social construction of Mexicans as non-white and as racially inferior. Historical events in the Southwest illustrate the larger process of the social construction of race, specifically how laws and the legal system fundamentally created and expressed race, racial categories, and racial dynamics as they affected Mexican Americans. These contradictory legal and social definitions coexisted, yet the legal definition of Mexicans as “white” also affected other non-white racial groups, such as African Americans, eventually helping to further entrench white supremacy in the United States. After 1848, Anglo elites in the borderlands contested and negotiated racial categories among themselves and with Mexican elites.<sup>16</sup> Often neglected, African Americans, Native Americans, and to a lesser degree Afro-Mexicans were not automatically granted U.S. citizenship after signing the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Under Texas law Afro-Mexicans had to either submit to the peculiar institution of slavery or flee to Mexico to ensure their freedom.<sup>17</sup> This was due in large measure to their Black skin. To be Black in Texas meant being a slave, despite Afro-Mexicans being “free” under Mexican rule. Native Americans in the former Mexican Texas territory were either pushed into northern

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<sup>15</sup> Martha Menchaca, *Recovering History, Constructing Race: The Indian, Black, and White Roots of Mexican Americans* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 311 n.1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 231. Beginning in 1840, to avoid being deported from Texas, Afro-Mexicans had to prove they were free—never had been slaves—under Spanish and Mexican rule.

Mexico or displaced onto a reservation outside of Texas. There were two groups that were exceptions: the Tiwa of Ysleta (in El Paso) and the Alabama-Coushatta of northeastern Texas who both had formal governments, yet they too were denied U.S. citizenship, thus becoming further racialized alongside Afro-Mexicans.<sup>18</sup>

As one scholar stated, the “history of Mexican Americans in the Southwest is thus more than the history of their “becoming” Mexican American or Hispanic; for many, especially those of the middle class, it is also the history of their becoming white.”<sup>19</sup> Infused in this argument is the historical use of Blacks as the oppressed category against which to measure status and progress in the climb up the social ladder of whiteness and mainstream culture. African Americans have historically served, “the less than covert function of defining whites as the ‘true’ Americans.” In El Paso, Mexican Americans’ path to whiteness did not necessarily mean giving up Mexican or Mexican American culture per se, but at times “becoming wedded to the notion that people of African descent were culturally and biologically inferior to whites” and that “only when the lesson of racial estrangement is learned is assimilation complete.”<sup>20</sup>

Stated differently:

Since blackness is reviled in the United States, why would an immigrant, of whatever skin color, want to associate with those who are racially oppressed, particularly when the transit into the United States promises the dream of gold and glory? The immigrant seeks a form of vertical assimilation, to climb from the lowest, darkest echelon on the stepladder of tyranny into the bright whiteness. In U.S. history the Irish, Italians, Jews, and—in small steps with some hesitations on the part of white

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 229-230.

<sup>19</sup> Neil Foley, “Becoming Hispanic: Mexican Americans and the Faustian Pact with Whiteness,” in Victor J. Guerra, ed., *Reflexionces: New Directions in Mexican American Studies* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 53.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 63.

America—Asians and Latinos have all tried to barter their varied cultural worlds for the privileges of whiteness.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately at times, opportunities to build multiracial, multicultural coalitions around commonalities such as economic exploitation and political exclusion revert into scenes of balkanization and hostility among and within historically oppressed groups including Mexican/Mexican American and African Americans. Thus, racial animosity becomes the dominant theme when two ethnic groups are forced to confront each other, versus memories of historical cooperation, such as Nixon opposing and successfully preventing the deportation of Nicaraguan-born Humberto Selix while a member of the SCHW. There is no doubt that many people would rather focus on the division and animosity versus the cooperation and respect between and within ethnic groups. During the period Nixon lived and worked in El Paso, primarily the first half of the twentieth century, various people of color forged successful efforts to express their solidarity with one another, albeit however minor. Nevertheless, “these early voices are few and far between, and their social effects lie almost entirely in the language of solidarity they have left for us rather than its practice,” however, “true moments of alliance if not large-scale movements did occur.”<sup>22</sup>

This cooperation on an individual level existed despite the negative effects of capitalism.<sup>23</sup> When we see race in binaries it limits our “understanding of what happens when more than two racialized groups” compete, and “race and class hierarchies” are viewed “as

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<sup>21</sup> Vijay Prashad, *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), x.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 78-9, 119, and 177 n.38. For examples of cooperation between Mexican/Mexican Americans and African Americans, see Zaragosa Vargas, “Challenges to Solidarity: The Mexican American Fight for Social and Economic Justice, 1946-1963” in Robbie Lieberman and Clarence Lang, eds., *Anticommunism and the African American Freedom Movement: Another Side of the Story* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 189-228.

<sup>23</sup> The Chicano movement helped bring about an increase in cooperation between African American and Chicano activists. However, collaboration was primarily limited to individual, not group, efforts to build coalitions, see Whitaker, *Race Work*, 272.

neatly corresponding or symmetrical,” thus “racializing discourses and practices are derived from or mask other, more fundamental underlying structures such as the class relationship between capital and labor.”<sup>24</sup> Mexicans were desired as laborers by the railroads, mining industries, and large-scale agribusinesses of El Paso, yet rejected by the nation’s xenophobia based on an ever more exclusive definition of whiteness.<sup>25</sup> Under this rejection lay the attempt to cast Mexican immigrants (and by extension Mexican Americans) as being dark, diseased, docile, and filthy juxtaposed against the national ideal prototype of being white, healthy, rugged, strong, and clean.<sup>26</sup> Additionally, one cannot ignore issues of working class mores and middle class aspirations among El Paso’s poor whites in relation to their views of ethnic Mexicans. For a variety of reasons wages were somewhat depressed in El Paso, thus forcing poor whites to feel racially insecure because they often failed to achieve the economic status required for respectability.

Also, working class whites in El Paso insisted on their whiteness despite the economic and racial pressure of federal and state laws that favored the weakening of unions, the strengthening of corporate agribusiness interests, the monopolies of railroads, the low priority of a porous border that encouraged illegal goods and undocumented workers, the expansion of mining interests, mechanization, Mexican labor, and competition from upwardly mobile Mexican Americans’ claims to whiteness.<sup>27</sup> Despite these factors, poor whites still yearned for a nostalgic past that allowed them “to enjoy the social, psychological, and economic advantage of being

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<sup>24</sup> Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines*, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Stern, “Buildings, Boundaries, and Blood,” 64.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>27</sup> Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 203.

white.”<sup>28</sup> Part of the advantage included higher wages when compared to wages earned by Mexican and Mexican American workers due to the dual occupational structure and the dual wage system that developed in El Paso due to racism and privileges of whiteness.<sup>29</sup>

This yearning by whites turned into resentment as seen in the following letter by an El Paso Anglo to the *Crisis* monthly magazine, the official organ of the NAACP:

I am a white man with no predilection for alarmist or sob stuff, but I am ashamed, shocked, and horrified at the monstrosities committed by my own race in the name of “white supremacy.” I never let a remark from friends or acquaintances about “putting the nigger in his place,” go unchallenged. But the point that strikes me so forcibly about the attitude of the fire brand Southerner is its silly inconsistency, its evident insincerity. He professes a repulsion for the black, yet Negroes shave him, cook his meals and nurse his children. He rants about the sacred purity of womanhood, but shows no respect for Negro women and forgets his boasted “chivalry” where they are concerned. They profess here in the south that the Negro isn’t fit to vote; the real objection is that Negro suffrage would be intelligent enough to crumble the “Solid South,” where an insignificant minority control all elections. In El Paso, the dirtiest Mexican peon ignorant, primitive and speaking an alien tongue, goes unrestrained in his way, in the street cars, the theatres, the public library; while a Negro, intelligent perhaps, native, English speaking, is never allowed to forget that he is one of “America’s Subject Race.” I cannot believe the great body of Americans can long remain callous to mob law, lynchings, disfranchisement and southern feudalism. Herein is the greatest field of conquest for iconoclasts, reformers and social workers in America. Let American efforts for world betterment begin at home. -Fred DeArmond, El Paso, Texas<sup>30</sup>

Fred De Armond, an Anglo originally from Missouri, had no qualms about writing in sympathetic terms about the plight of Black people so as to express his empathy with them, and disgust at white racism. At the same time, De Armond felt very comfortable in derogatorily

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>29</sup> Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology and Identity, 1930-1960* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 177.

<sup>30</sup> “The Outer Pocket,” *Crisis* vol. 22, no. 4 (August 1921): 174. In the 1930 El Paso census, Frederick Francis De Armond is listed as a thirty-six year-old white male who lived with his wife and son at 3913 Montana Street and employed as a Sales Manager with a Laundry. His wife, Maud De Armond is listed as a Booker Keeper at a book store. De Armond was born in Missouri in 1893, graduated from Seymour High School in 1911, and Springfield Missouri Business College. Besides the laundry business, he worked as a bank clerk and insurance salesman, later becoming editor of the trade journal, *The Laundryman* in New York, 1935-1938, see *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930—Population Schedule*, Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, City of El Paso (Justice Precinct 1), El Paso County, Texas enumerated on 11 April 1930, Series T626, Roll 2328, Page 65 Subpage B, Line 90-2; and Roscoe C. D’Armand, *DeArmond Families of America* (Knoxville: Family Record Society, 1954), 186.

describing the numerically dominant group of El Paso when he states, “the dirtiest Mexican peon ignorant, primitive and speaking an alien tongue,” who “goes unrestrained in his way, in the street cars, the theatres, the public library.” There is a certain amount of venom and angst that is expressed by De Armond toward Mexican and Mexican Americans. Additionally, the argument can be made that this defense of Black people by an Anglo can only occur in a city like El Paso, somewhere far removed from the deep South which too often restricted liberal whites in their ability to challenge the racial status quo.

For non-Blacks in El Paso, race and institutional racism might have required that they buy “into the notion of American blacks as the real aliens.”<sup>31</sup> Although generally this may be true, the borderlands forces this notion to be fraught with contradictions. The fact is that African Americans in El Paso such as Nixon have had a small semblance of privilege—particularly middle class education and status—due to language and some cultural similarities with Anglos resulting in small numbers of African Americans having an economic, social, and political advantage over newly arrived and working-class dark-skinned Mexicans.<sup>32</sup> Historically, this has created some tension between non-white groups in the borderlands. African Americans, however, being the “real aliens” in the sense of their perceived inability to fully embrace whiteness, and by extension American-ness and citizenship is an apt metaphor. This has allowed ‘Other’ groups to mainstream themselves at a faster rate than African Americans, if not completely altogether becoming ‘white’ such as the Irish, Jews, Italians, and some light-skinned Mexican Americans.

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<sup>31</sup> Foley, “Becoming Hispanic,” 54.

<sup>32</sup> Many Southern African American and whites “had grown up together in the same towns, shared much of southern culture, whether on cotton farms or in Baptist churches,” and they also shared “the experience of being displaced from their farms by Mexican immigrants whose language, religion, and customs differed from those of both blacks and whites,” see Foley, “Partly Colored or Other White,” 127.



The unresolved character of the borderlands allowed for opportunities and limitations for all ethnic groups.<sup>33</sup> For Mexican Americans in the Southwest ‘vertical assimilation,’ entailed knowing that building alliances with Native and African Americans was futile, not because it was impossible, but it was not in their best interest.<sup>34</sup>

As the African and Mexican American middle classes grew in El Paso, each group made substantial economic and social progress. Their failure, however, to “unite in the struggle to conquer common problems, and their traditional tendency to dislike each other and to see each other as rivals, proved debilitating.”<sup>35</sup> This disunity “profoundly affected their relationship throughout the remainder of the twentieth century.” As one noted historian stated, “seemingly content to fight a war against white supremacy and inequality on two fronts [grassroots activism and legally through the courts and legislature], both groups sacrificed a measure of their collective social, political, and economic capital at the altar of cultural defensiveness, ideological conflict, and avarice.”<sup>36</sup>

### **Nixon’s Impact**

Locally, the name Lawrence A. Nixon is revered by many in the community who remember him personally or know of him through the press and community lore. El Paso has

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<sup>33</sup> Blacks in the Southwest were not as privileged as they should have been, despite their small numbers, middle class attainment, and politically nonthreatening status. For example, in 1856, African American William Ashworth was a wealthy Texan who was worth at least \$30,000. He lost it all after he and his family were forced to flee abruptly because of his nephew’s abusive language toward a local White man, which was an obvious violation of the law and the racial etiquette of the day. Obviously, “wealth did not protect the Ashworths; on the contrary, their prosperity became a source of envy and resentment,” see Menchaca, *Recovering History, Constructing Race*, 232-233.

<sup>34</sup> Prashad, *Everybody was Kung Fu Fighting*, p. x.

<sup>35</sup> Bradford Luckingham, quote found in Whitaker, *Race Work*, 273.

<sup>36</sup> Whitaker, *Race Work*, 16.

celebrated Nixon's memory by naming a street and an elementary school after him. He is one of the handful of figures people can point to as a prominent African American who left an indelible mark on the borderlands. Elsewhere in Texas, however, he is scarcely remembered. In his hometown of Marshall and at his alma mater, Wiley College, there is no presence or memory of Nixon whatsoever. Wiley has an area in the center of campus specifically dedicated to honor prominent graduates and faculty. The four-foot high granite blocks memorializes Professors Diana B. McNeil Pierson; Melvin B. Tolson, Sr.; Andrew Polk Watson, Sr.; Oliver Cromwell Cox; and graduates Herman Marion Sweatt and James L. Farmer, Jr. Also, on the grounds of the school is a historical marker honoring James L. Farmer, Sr. There is no sign of Nixon, clearly one of their most famous graduates. This is an example of the historical neglect of Nixon's contributions have received over time. Statewide and national literature lacks Nixon's contribution to the Civil Rights Movement.

The particular, if not unique, racial climate in El Paso, and by extension the borderlands, permitted Nixon to take a proactive stance and engage in a heightened level of activism. Nixon understood that the borderlands or the Southwest's "more fluid race relations created a vacuum for a more confrontational" Black leadership style or assertiveness. His "ability to be more audacious in his activism, without the threat of mass acts of violent retribution" against El Paso's Black community, allowed him to be comfortable resisting in ways that were perhaps "uniquely western."<sup>37</sup> Paradoxically, while perhaps Nixon's journey into the Southwest contributes to the "concept of western openness and freedom which aided black American achievement."<sup>38</sup> It is conceivable that the "frontier, with its attractive land and its spirit of ruthless freedom, may

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<sup>37</sup> Whitaker, *Race Work*, 154.

<sup>38</sup> Bruce A. Glasrud and Paul H. Carlson, eds., *Slavery to Integration: Black Americans in West Texas* (Abilene: State House Press, 2007), 22.

actually have encouraged the westward march” of various systems of oppression such as the institution of slavery, Jim Crow, discrimination, and racial violence.<sup>39</sup>

Upon close examination of the life of Lawrence Nixon, one finds how perseverance, strong character, and courage, coupled with a desire to succeed and engage in community activism made a significant difference in the lives of countless people within and beyond the borderlands. His public life from the early to mid 1900s had a positive impact on the physical health of African Americans and Mexican Americans, as well as the state of Black politics for an entire State and region. Lawrence Nixon’s contribution to the history of this nation, state, and especially El Paso, serves as an inspiration to the importance of being an activist in the confrontation of complex, longstanding issues that directly affect the well being of all of the nation’s citizenry.

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<sup>39</sup> Franklin and Moss, *From Slavery to Freedom*, 120.

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## APPENDIX

### 1906 Medical Graduates at Meharry Medical College of Walden University<sup>1</sup>

<u>Last Name</u>	<u>First Name</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>First Name</u>	<u>State</u>
Adams	C. A.	TX	Larry	William	MS
Antoine	George W.	TX	Lucas	Leonard	MS
Barnett	Edward E.	TN	Lundy	J. W.	GA
Baskette	J. M. T.	MO	Mason	J. A.	TX
Boddie	William Fisher	GA	Maxwell	J. A.	SC
Boykin	William R.	AL	Moore	A. R.	NC
Brewer	George M.	FL	Moten	P. S.	TX
Bugg	George W.	TN	Nelson	J. E.	KY
Coleman	Mattie E.H. (w)	OK	Nesbitt	E. E.	TN
Cowan	Walter F.	AR	Newman	A. C.	MS
Craigen	Edward (v)	AR	<b>Nixon</b>	<b>Lawrence Aaron</b>	<b>TX</b>
Derrick	W. W.	AL	Penny	O. H.	MO
Elliot	T. H.	TN	Polk	S. W.	MS
Evans	G. M.	PA	Prince	O. A.	FL
Fields	R. S. (sa)	TN	Pugh	J. H.	MS
Ford	Noel Bertram	KS	Robey	J. H.	MS
Flournoy	Stacy F.	TX	Sams	Luetta T. (w, se)	GA
Gathings	Prentiss S.	MS	Smith	Benjamin F.	TX
Grant	Sadie L. (w)	MI	Smith	J. E.	MO
Hampton	C. W.	OH	Spencer	T. B.	TN
Haywood	W. L.	TX	Shoals	A. H.	OK
Hill	J. William	MS	Scott	J. L.	AR
Holmes	Callie Corillian (w)	MS	Stinson	L. H. H.	GA
Hopkins	James A.	WV	Taylor	A. G.	MO
Howell	George A.	Guyana	Thompson	J. R.	KS
Hunter	A. L.	TX	Tucker	J. C.	MO
Jackson	J. L.	SC	Turner	H. A.	TN
Johnson	A. H. (p)	LA	Turner	N. F.	AL
Johnson	H. E.	MO	Walker	E. Alexander (t)	KS
Johnson	J. L.	MS	Watkins	J.H.	MS
Jones	E. J.	SC	Wilson	H. C.	SC
Johnson	R.L.	TN	White	W. H.	TX
Kelley	A. A. (vp)	MS	Walker	J. E.	MS
Lane	H. W.	TN	Washington	W. M.	AL
Laine	Joseph F.	KY			

<sup>1</sup> N/MFP. Dean(d); President(p); Salutatorian(sa); Secretary(se); Treasurer(t); Valedictorian(v); Vice President(vp); Woman(w).

### 1906 Pharmaceutical Graduates at Meharry Medical College of Walden University

<u>Last Name</u>	<u>First Name</u>		<u>State</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>First Name</u>		<u>State</u>
Cardwell	E. J.		NC	Miles	Neil		AR
Hampton	Zenobia L.	(w)	MS	Thompson	Pearl L.	(w, t)	GA
Heffron	F. S.	(se)	GA	Wilhite	C. A.	(vp)	AL
Marble	Harriet B.	(w)	MS	Wilson	William K.	(v)	TN
McKay	F. H.	(p)	IL				

### 1906 Dental Graduates at Meharry Medical College of Walden University

<u>Last Name</u>	<u>First Name</u>		<u>State</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>First Name</u>		<u>State</u>
Berryman	J. L.		KY	McClain	T. E.	(v)	TN
Braswell	J. A.		GA	Miller	H. C.		TN
Davis	C. A.	(t)	TN	Pughsley	D. F.	(vp)	GA
Edwards	S. L.		SC	Ramsey	J. M. G.		VA
Hunte	F.S.		Guyana	Reed, Jr.	W.B.		TN
Johnson	R. J.		GA	Strickland	Joseph S.		GA
Kalow	W. G.	(p)	LA	Shivery	George Richard		GA
Lytes	T.P.	(se)	AR				

### 1906 Faculty at Meharry Medical College of Walden University

<u>Last Name</u>	<u>First Name</u>	<u>Degree</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>First Name</u>	<u>Degree</u>
Baker	W.R.	M.D. <sup>2</sup>	Moore	T.P.	Ph.C.
Baskette	W.H.	M.D.	Neil	D.R.	M.D.
Boyd	R.F.	A.M., M.D., D.D.S.	Noel	H.T.	M.D., D.D.S.
Bandy	G.H.	M.D.	Patterson	W.	A.M.
Burrus	P.R.	A.M., M.D.	Reed	W.A.	A.B., M.D.
Caruthers	S.S.	A.M., M.D.	Roman	Charles V.	M.D.
Hadley	C.D.	A.B., M.D.	Sevier	W.	M.D., Ph.G.
Hale	John Henry	M.D.	Singleton	J.B.	D.D.S.
Holman	J.H.	M.D.	Stewart	F.A.	A.M., M.D.
Hubbard	G.W. (d)	M.D.	Townsend	A.M.	A.B., M.D.
Kumler	John A. (p)	D.D.	Vorhess	R.H.	D.D.S.
Lester	J.A.	A.B., M.D.	Williams	Daniel Hale	M.D.
McBroom	A.H.	A.B., M.D.	Wilson	J.T.	M.D.
McMillan	J.A.	A.M., M.D.			

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<sup>2</sup> M.D.= Medicinæ Doctor or teacher of medicine; A.M.=Artium Magister or a predoctoral graduate degree in the liberal arts; D.D.S.=Doctor of Dental Surgery; A.B.=Artium Baccalaureus or Bachelor of Arts; Ph.G.=Pharmacopeia Germanice or Graduate in Pharmacy; Ph.C.=Pharmaceutical Chemist, see Gabriel G. Adeleye, ed., *World Dictionary of Foreign Expressions: A Resource for Readers and Writers* (Wauconda: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1999), 38 and 235; and E.C. Le Roy Miller, ed., *The American Illustrated Medical Dictionary*, 9<sup>th</sup> edition (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders Company, 1917), 10, 13, 281, 581, 755, and 758.

State of Texas: The Board of Medical Examiners  
Dallas, Texas June 12-14, 1906<sup>3</sup>

Number of Subjects Examined in:	12	Written Examination:	Yes
Total Number of Questions:	146	Total Number examined:	144
Percentage Required to Pass:	75%	Number Passed:	102
Oral Examination:	No	Number Failed:	42

Applicants who passed:

<u>Name</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>School of Graduation</u>	<u>Year of Graduation</u>	<u>Previous Location</u>
Adams, George E.	87.8	University of Virginia	1904	Fort Worth
Allison, Bruce	83.6	University of Texas	1906	San Antonio
Best, E.E.	81.11	Grad Rap Medical College	1903	Cameron
Brooks, P.F.	75	Louisville Medical College	1904	Wylie
Black, J.H.	85.4	Southwest Medical College and Atlanta Physicians & Surgeons	.....	Dallas
Beall, F.C.	87.4	John Hopkins	1996	Saginaw
Baugh, Verner I.	78.8	Baylor University	3 yrs	Bono
Bettison, D.L.	88.8	Baylor University	1906	Dallas
Beyer, A.J.	80.3	Memphis Hospital Medical College	1906	Walhalla
Buchan, A.P.	76.5	University of Texas Tulane University	2yrs .....	Huntsville
Brandenberger, M.B.	84	University of Texas	1906	Hilda
Barnett, H.N.	75	Ft. Worth Medical College & Vanderbilt	.....	Cleburne
Booth, S.P.	77	University of Tennessee	1906	Yoakum
Convington, G.W.	80.3	Ft. Worth University	1906	Aspermont
Chatten, E.A.	81	University of Louisville	1891	San Antonio
Cosby, V.B.	79.4	Southwest Medical College & Gate City	2 yrs	Canton
Cantrell, Ira J.	93.4	Washington University	1906	Ratcliff
Cate, C.C.	81.4	Vanderbilt University	1905	Kopperl
Crane, J.R.	88.2	University of Texas	3 yrs	Pirtle
Chaffin, J.B.	80.3	University Texas	1906	Galveston
Clarke, Jno E.	80.3	Physicians & Surgeons College of Chicago	1903-6	Dallas
Converse, E.V.	80.6	Rush Medical College	1902	Palestine
Donaldson, J.M.	81.5	Physicians & Surgeons College of St. Louis	1906	Honey Grove
Davis, J.S.	85	Tulane University	3 yrs	Blooming Grove
Davis, J.D.	87.1	University of Texas	3 yrs	San Antonio
Dickey, W.C.	82.3	University of Texas	1906	Middleton
Dull, J.R.	81	Memphis Hospital Medical College	1906	Rising Star
Dingle, William P.	84.4	Ft. Worth University	3 yrs	Moran

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<sup>3</sup> "Report of the Examination Held by the Board of Medicine Examiners at their Meeting in Dallas, Texas" *The Texas Medical News* (August 1906): 527-29; and "Report of Examination for Licenses to Practice Medicine" *Texas State Journal of Medicine* (September 1906): 141.

<u>Name</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>School of Graduation</u>	<u>Year of Graduation</u>	<u>Previous Location</u>
Duringer, W.C.	85.8	Ft. Worth University	3 yrs	Fort Worth
Eblert, J.M.	84.3	Tulane University	1905	Kingsbury
Eckhardt, H.U.	86.6	University of Tennessee	1906	Yorktown
Edwards, J.A.	76.1	Physicians & Surgeons Chicago / Baylor	1906	Chicago
Flynn, J.G.	81.9	University of Texas	3 yrs	Hico
Gibbs, E.W.	77.	Baylor Medical / Barnes Medical	3yrs	Roddy
Goolsby, E.	79.3	University of Texas	1906	Direct
Griffin, H.E.	81.2	University of Tulane and University of Texas	3 yrs	Kosse
Gist, R.D.	87.4	University of Texas	1906	Amarillo
Griffin, S.R.	90.5	University of Texas	1906	Galveston
Gallaway, A.H. Jr.	83	Ft. Worth University	1906	Laneville
Gordon, E.S.	86	Southwestern University	1906	Dallas
Hargis, W.H.	79.8	Hospital Medical College, Louisville	3yrs	San Antonio
Halliday, Margaret	89.5	University of Texas	1906	Austin
Hoeflieh, C.W.	77.4	Tulane University	1906	Houston
Hale, J.F.	79.9	University of Texas	1903-06	
		University of Pennsylvania	1905	Hico
Hall, G.T.	90.8	University of Texas	1906	Big Springs
Hunter, A.L.	76.3	Meharry Medical College	1906	Hearne
Huey, W.B.	79	Rush Medical College	1903	El Campo
Hudson, E.S.	86.3	University of Texas	1906	Runge
Irwin, W.S.	77	University of Tennessee	1906	Beeville
Jackson, Charles A.	87.7	Physicians & Surgeons College of Chicago	1906	Houston
Kohoe, Henry	80	Baylor University	1906	Dallas
Kleberg, Walter	82.6	University of Texas	1906	Galveston
Kahn, I.S.	78.3	Harvard Medical School	1903	Dallas
Lane, Laura	79.9	University of Colorado	1904	Palestine
Largen, Douglas	85.4	Vanderbilt University	1906	San Antonio
Lowry, D.L.	86.1	Tulane University	1906	Richmond
Loneless, J.C.	88.1	University of Texas	1906	Hillsboro
Lawrence, O.V.	78.8	University of Texas	3yrs	Arlington
Ligoe, A.R.	78.3	Northwestern University	1904	Hillsboro
Loose, T.O.	81.5	Starling Medical College	1896	Pasadena
Laurence, E.L.	84.1	University of Nashville	3yrs	Beaukiss
Markham, L.W.	81.1	Tulane University	3yrs	Longview
Meyer, H.J.	81.5	Tulane Medical College	1906	Ellinger
Milton, Solon.	81.2	Ft. Worth University	3yrs	Fort Worth
Meason, J.M.	82.1	Maryland Medical College	1905	Bono
Morrow, J.R.	84.1	Ft. Worth University and Jefferson Medical College (Philadelphia, PA)	3yrs	Caddo Mills
McCauley, E.R.	75	Ft. Worth University and Southwestern University	3yrs	Moody

<u>Name</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>School of Graduation</u>	<u>Year of Graduation</u>	<u>Previous Location</u>
Nash, A.W.	83.8	Vanderbilt University	1906	Dallas
Nash, O.O.	81.4	Louisville Medical College and Washington University	3yrs	Mart
Nipper, W.W.	79.5	Louisville Medical College and Tulane University	3yrs	Uvalde
Nesbit, J.H.	84.6	Baltimore Medical College	1906	Honey Grove
<b>Nixon, Lawrence A.</b>	<b>76.3</b>	<b>Meharry Medical College</b>	<b>1906</b>	<b>Marshall</b>
O'Brien, Minnie C.	88.1	Women's Medical College, Philadelphia, PA	1906	Dublin
Pomer, H.L.	83.9	Rush Medical College 1888 Willamette University (Salem, Oregon)	1906	Archer City
Paschal, J.G.	83.5	Baylor University	1906	Gainesville
Rhu, Herman	75.4	Western Reserve Medical College	1906	Llano
Sory, William H.	75	Tulane University	1906	Jacksonville
Saunders, R.F.	80.1	Ft. Worth University	1906	Fort Worth
Sneed, W.N. Jr.	79	Tulane University	1906	Fairfield
Sneed, J.E.	77	Tulane University	1906	Fairfield
Smith, A.A.	76.1	Ft. Worth University	1906	Munday
Sheffield, J.H.	83.3	Memphis Hospital Medical College	1906	Fred
Speed, H.K.	81	University of Texas	1906	Galveston
Smart, G.P.	75	Baylor University	1906	Dallas
Shannon, J.P.	75.4	Maryland Medical College	1905	Burleson
Sharp, William S.	77	1 <sup>st</sup> Session: Louisville Medical College 2-3: Tulane University	...	Ratcliff
Shiners, J.P.	75.4	Tulane University	1906	Woodville
Turner, C.A.	75	Dallas Medical College	1905	Breckenridge
Taylor, E.B.	80.2	Ft. Worth University	1906	Manor
Telteston, J.G.	83.4	Tulane University	3yrs	Palmer
Thomas, W.S.	87.7	University of Texas	1905	Houston
Tenley, O.S.	79.7	University of Texas University of Tennessee	3yrs	Greenville
Thomas, George T.	82.5	University of Texas and Ft. Worth University	3yrs	Fort Worth
Windham, J.H.	77.3	Ft. Worth University	2yrs.	Shelbyville
White, W.H.	75	Meharry Medical College	1906	Bastrop
White, William T.	77.3	Tulane University	1906	Dallas
Warren, C.D.	77.8	Baylor University	1905	Houston
Williams, W.C.	77.8	University of Tennessee	1905	Kingsbury
White, E.S.	84.5	Memphis Hospital Medical College	1905	San Antonio
Whigham, William E.	78.4	University of South/ University of Dallas	2yrs	Flat
Wilson, S.G.	78	Tulane University	1906	Boyce
Weaver, S.R.	73	Vanderbilt University	3yrs	Sherman

State of Texas: The Board of Medical Examiners

The Following Applicants Failed Medical Exam taken in Dallas, Texas on June 12 – 14, 1906:

<u>No.</u>	<u>College</u>	<u>Year of Grad</u>	<u>%</u>
1.	University of Nashville	3yrs	72.7
2.	Meharry Medical College	4yrs	67
3.	Indiana College	1904	72.4
4.	Hospital College of Medicine, Louisville, Kentucky	3yrs	68.7
5.	Kentucky School of Medicine	1895	65.5
6.	San-Louis Potosi, Mexico	1905	64.9
7.	Atlanta Medical and University of Texas	10 months	45.2
8.	Physicians and Surgeons College	1906	53.6
9.	St. Louis University	1906	73
10.	Gate City (Texarkana, TX) & Bell Medical College (Dallas, TX)	1904	26.6
11.	University of the South (Sewanee, TN) & Baylor University	3 yrs	63.7
12.	Kentucky School of Medicine and Ft. Worth University	3yrs	69
13.	Baylor University and Sewanee	3yrs	57.3
14.	Memphis Hospital Medical College	1906	70.6
15.	Gonzales Medical School, Mexico	1892	48.4
16.	University of Arkansas	1901	64.5
17.	University of Nashville	1900	69.4
18.	University of Tennessee	1904	65.8
19.	University of Little Rock, Arkansas	2yrs	35.9
20.	Southwestern Medical College	3yrs	69
21.	Vanderbilt University	1889	61.5
22.	University of Illinois	1905	71.7
23.	University of Louisville	1905	71.7
24.	Meharry Medical College	1905	72.5
25.	Memphis Hospital Medical College	1906	68
26.	Baylor University & St. Louis University	3yrs	70.3
27.	Barnes University	2 course	59.4
28.	Meharry Medical College	1906	63.3
29.	St. Louis University	1906	67.6
30.	St. Louis College of Physicians & Surgeons	1898	68.1
31.	College of Physicians & Surgeons, Dallas, Texas	1906	58.9
32.	Vanderbilt University	1906	67.2
33.	Western Reserve Medical College	1883	69.9
34.	College of Physicians and Surgeons, Dallas, Texas	1906	60.1
35.	Chattanooga Medical College	1901	61.9
36.	Tulane University	3yrs	69.4
37.	Dallas Medical College and Southwestern University	3.5 yrs	57.2
38.	Meharry Medical College	1905	63.5
39.	Memphis Hospital Medical College	1905	59.7
40.	Kentucky University and Forth Worth University	3yrs	62.01
41.	Meharry Medical College	1905	61.3
42.	Memphis Hospital Medical College	3yrs	73.2

# 1923 Membership List of the El Paso NAACP Branch

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Address</u>		<u>Payment</u>
Mr. A. Fields	July 21	3401 Alameda Ave.	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. H. Nelson	July 25	407 S. Willow St.	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. James A. Odom	Aug. 22	312 Tornillo	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. Sam Sulcer	Aug. 23	3300 Alamogordo	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. William B. Gray	April 23	108 N. Stanton	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mrs. W. Sanders	July 16	416 S. Campbell	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Miss A. Cole	Aug. 17	407 S. Willow	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. F. Longway	Aug. 18	2029 Bassett	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. Joseph H. Sims	Aug. 19	2024 Olive	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. R. Edmonson	Aug. 19	1913 Magoffin	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mrs. R. O. Boston	Aug. 19	3117 Manzana	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. Joe Bailey	Aug. 26	407 S. Willow	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. Chas. Edwards	Aug. 26	1913 Magoffin	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. David Ward	Aug. 18	2015 Madera	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. Henry Neil	Aug. 18	407 S. Willow	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. R. Hodge	Aug. 19	407 S. Willow	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mrs. Clara Thomas	Aug. 26	117 Anthony	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Miss Bessie Hall	Aug. 26	802 E. Missouri	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. J. H. Donnell	Aug. 19	515 S. Mesa	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. J. H. Jackson	Aug. 19	221 Texas	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. C. Wilkerson	Aug. 19	221 Texas	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mrs. W. A. Crawford	Aug. 19	3304 Manzana	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. E. O. Ware	Aug. 18	2016 Central	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. R. E. Lee	May 19	513 Park	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. A. B. Stevens	May 19	3421 Manzana	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. G. W. Thomas	May 19	418 Willow	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. C. Richardson	May 19	1906 Magoffin	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. W. Davis	May 19	4201 Durango	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. L. Burton	May 19	712 N. Oregon	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. S. Watkins	May 21	601 Dallas	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mrs. G. W. Thomas	May 23	418 Willow	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mrs. Willie Moore	May 8	4115 Trowbridge	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Miss Viola Bailey	May 12	407 S. Willow	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mrs. S. Bailey	May 12	407 S. Willow	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. C. Wade	May 12	407 S. Willow	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. J. H. Coffield	May 12	407 S. Willow	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. F. Check	May 12	2908 Alameda	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. L. W. Walker	May 19	2923 San Antonio	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. C. C. Moore	July 1	3100 Rivera	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mrs. Salina A. Moore	July 1	3100 Rivera	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Miss Louise Moore	July 1	3100 Rivera	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. Louis Laskin	Aug. 14	Globe Department Store	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. David Gray	Aug. 16	405 S. Virginia	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. Louis Brown Jr.	Aug. 16	106 S. Campbell	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. George Sears	Aug. 20	103 N. Stanton	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mr. J. White	Aug. 23	Box 1583	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Atty. Frederick Knollenberg	Aug. 23	310 Caples Bldg.	El Paso, TX	\$1.00
Mrs. E. B. Williams	Aug. 26	3311 Manzana	El Paso, TX	\$1.00

# 1923 Membership List of the El Paso NAACP Branch<sup>4</sup>

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Payment</u>
Mrs. Annie Doolen-Williams	Aug. 20	Box 228	Las Cruces, NM\$1.00
Mr. Jasper B. Williams	August 14	513 Park	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. Jerry B. Baldwin	May 6	2918 Frutas	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mrs. J. B. Baldwin	May 6	2918 Frutas	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Rev. M. P. Parish	May 6	160 Estrella	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Miss Vera Sturges	May 31	216.5 E. San Antonio	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. M. Roberts	July 11	3505 E. San Antonio	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. Le Roy White	Aug. 5	3219 Madera	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Dr. Lawrence A. Nixon	May 6	411 S. Oregon	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. R. S. Crain	May 6	2009 Olive	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mrs. George Cheatam	May 6	101 S. Cotton Avenue	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. William M. Sublett	May 6	3223 Rivera Avenue	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. Le Roy W. Washington	Aug. 27	3939 Alameda	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mrs. Viola E. Washington	Aug. 27	3939 Alameda	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. W. L. Townsend	Aug. 26	n/a	Clint, TX \$1.00
Mrs. J. M. McHenry	April 23	221 Texas	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. I. C. Bowels	April 25	519 Tornillo	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mrs. I. C. Bowels	April 25	519 Tornillo	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. J. M. Goodwin	April 27	417 W. Overland	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mrs. J. M. Goodwin	April 27	417 W. Overland	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. E. W. Thomas	May 8	519 Tornillo	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mrs. C. M. Washington	May 3	519 S. Oregon	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mrs. Emma Scott	May 3	500 S. Oregon	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. Albert R. Spiller	May 6	1110 E. Second	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. E. Ford	May 6	607 Tornillo	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mrs. Cecelia Long	May 13	510 N. St. Vrain	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. Isiah [ <i>sic</i> ] N. Nash	Aug. 27	2925 Madera	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mrs. Rosa Nash	Aug. 27	2925 Madera	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mrs. Ara Sims	Aug. 27	415 San Marcial	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. Edward P. Sampson	Aug. 27	710 S. St. Vrain	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mrs. Maud E. Sampson	Aug. 27	710 S. St. Vrain	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. Frank Forte	May 6	605 Tornillo	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. J. B. Moore	Aug. 27	R.F.D. Box 43-D	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. S. M. Collins	Aug. 27	406 Hill Street	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mrs. Beatrice Collins	Aug. 27	406 Hill Street	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mrs. H. H. Cotton	Aug. 27	420 S. Luna	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mr. Claudios D. A. Bush	Aug. 27	311 S. St. Vrain	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mrs. Anita Bush	Aug. 27	311 S. St. Vrain	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Prof. William M. Coleman	Aug. 27	518 Tornillo	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mrs. Emma Coleman	Aug. 27	518 Tornillo	El Paso, TX \$1.00
Mrs. Annie J. Berry	Aug. 27	411 S. Kansas	El Paso, TX \$1.00

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<sup>4</sup> "Memberships of the El Paso Branch," Jerry B. Baldwin, El Paso Branch Secretary, to NAACP Secretary, 27 August 1923, *NAACP Papers*, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Part I, Branch Files: El Paso, Box G-202. Baldwin also writes, "It is desired to state that the other eleven names will be sent later."



## ETHIOPIA SPEAKS<sup>5</sup>

Lynched!  
Somewhere in the South, the "Land of the Free,"  
To a very strong branch of a dogwood tree.  
Lynched! One of my sons,—  
When the flag was in danger they answered the call  
I gave them black sons, ah! Yes, gave them all  
When you came to me.

You called them the sons of a downtrodden race,  
The Negro you said, in his place must stay,  
To be seen in your midst is deemed a disgrace,  
I remembered, oh yes, still I gave them that day  
Your flag to defend.

And knew when I sent them to your fields of battle,  
To suffer, to bleed, to be hewn down like cattle,  
Not to them be the plaudit, should victory they win,  
History scarcely records it,—too dark was their skin,  
'Twas truth I spoke in.

My sons:  
How it grieves me for I taught them, 'tis true  
That this was their country and for her to die,  
Was none less than loyal, the right thing to do,  
Brave and loyal they proved and now they ask why  
Their country ill treats them, because they are black,  
Must I take it back?  
Until in the South, the "Land of the Free,"  
They stop hanging my sons to the branch of a tree,  
Take it back till they cease to burn them alive,  
Take it back till the white man shall cease to deprive.

My sons, yes, my black sons, of rights justly won,  
'Til tortures are done?

Mary wept for tortured son, in days of yore  
Ethiopia weeps for her sons, tortured more,  
Mary forgave, 'twas her Savior son's will,  
Ethiopia forgives, but remembers still,  
And cries unto God with uplifted hands,  
"Innocent bloods bathe the lands."

Lynched!  
Somewhere in the South, the "Land of the Free,"  
To a very high branch of a very strong tree,  
Lynched! One of my sons,—  
When the flag drooped so lowly they heeded the call,  
I gave them, my black sons, Ah, yes, gave them all,  
When you came to me.

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<sup>5</sup> Bernice Love Wiggins, *Tuneful Tales*, 38-9.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Reared and educated in the working-class city of Passaic, NJ, Will Guzmán is the youngest of two, born to his piecemeal seamstress–now teacher’s aide–mother, Norma Torres, who immigrated to the United States from Santa Isabel, Puerto Rico in the 1960s. Will graduated Passaic High in 1989, entered Valencia Community College (Orlando, FL) that fall with the John P. Peterson Foundation Scholarship, and graduated with an Associate of Arts in 1995. He then transferred to Florida A&M University (FAMU) where he majored in African American Studies with a minor in Caribbean & Latin American Studies, earning a *summa cum laude* Bachelor of Science in 1997 and soon thereafter began graduate work at Florida State University with the Florida Fund for Minority Teachers Scholarship. After graduating in 1999 with his Master of Science degree in Social Science Education he immediately obtained his Florida Teacher Certification, which he used to teach middle and high school students in Gadsden and Leon counties. Will began pursuing the Ph.D. with a focus on Borderlands History, U.S. History, and the African Diaspora at the University of Texas–El Paso in the fall 2000 with the Graduate School Excellence Assistantship. He taught his first college course at UTEP entitled, UNIV-1301: *Blackness and National Identity Formation in Puerto Rico*. In 2005 Will returned to his alma mater as an adjunct instructor within the History and African American Studies Department. A year later FAMU promoted him to Visiting Assistant Professor, where he will continue to teach after earning the Ph.D. from UTEP in September 2010. Will Guzmán’s teaching and research interests include the African Diaspora in the Caribbean and Latin America, U.S. History after 1865, and racial violence in the Americas.

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Will Guzmán typed this dissertation