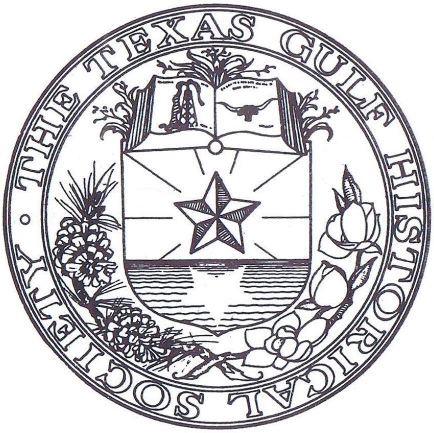
THE TEXAS GULF HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL RECORD

The Journal of the Texas Gulf Historical Society
and the Lamar University History Department

Volume 59 Number 1: Summer 2023

The Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record



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VOLUME 59 SUMMER 2023

THE JOURNAL OF
THE TEXAS GULF HISTORICAL SOCIETY &
THE LAMAR UNIVERSITY HISTORY DEPARTMENT

The Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record

A JOURNAL DEVOTED TO THE HISTORY OF SOUTHEAST TEXAS AND THE GULF COAST

Volume 59: Summer 2023

EDITOR
Jimmy L. Bryan Jr.

COVER IMAGE:

Detail of Port Arthur on September 28, 2017, after Hurricane Harvey. Photo by David Goldman, Associated Press.

The Texas Gulf Historical
and Biographical Record
(ISSN 0563-2897)
Published annually by the
Texas Gulf Historical Society and
The History Department
of Lamar University
PO Box 7525, Beaumont, TX 77726

Subscription Rates:
Individual members: $20
Family members: $35
Institutional members: $25
Lifetime members: $500

Thank you Lamar University Literary Press
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Indexed online by EBSCO
America: History and Life

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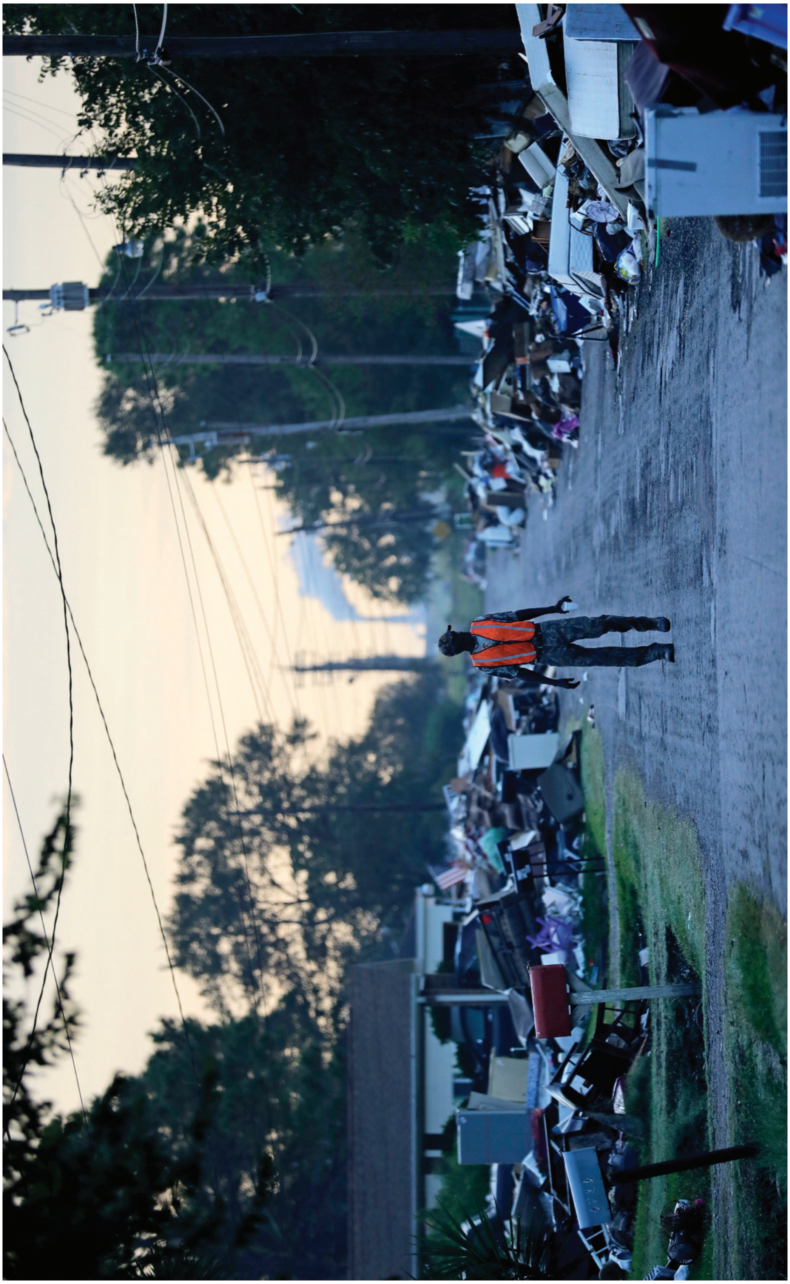
EDITOR'S NOTE

JIMMY L. BRYAN JR.

On November 5, 2022, community leaders, business owners, educators, scholars, and other concerned people met at the Extreme Weather and Inequality conference at Lamar University. Organized by Ancient to the Future and hosted by the Center for History and Culture of Southeast Texas and the Upper Gulf Coast, the meeting tackled the history, economic and social inequality, African American and Latinx inequality, extreme weather, and future of the region.

With a generous contribution from Ancient to the Future and the cooperation of the Texas Gulf Historical Society, this special issue of *The Record* contains the complete proceedings of the conference. Katherine Hoerth permitted us to reprint the poem "Flare Stack Eden" from her collection *Flare Stacks in Full Bloom* (2022) which captures well the themes discussed at the conference. Kate Williams, Abdul Alkalimat, and Dave Williams of Ancient to the Future provide an introductory overview. Each section includes the presentations from the panelists and the discussions that followed. The editors lightly revised the transcripts to preserve the colloquial and often frank conversations of the day. The Websites Referenced section provides links to many of the images, charts, and other data not included in this volume. Ancient to the Future will provide a digital version of this special issue at their website (page 187).

The Record thanks Theresa Ener with the Lamar University Literary Press and Rachel Guthrie of Southern Maine Community College for their technical and logistical expertise.



Port Arthur on September 28, 2017, after Hurricane Harvey. AP Photo / David Goldman.

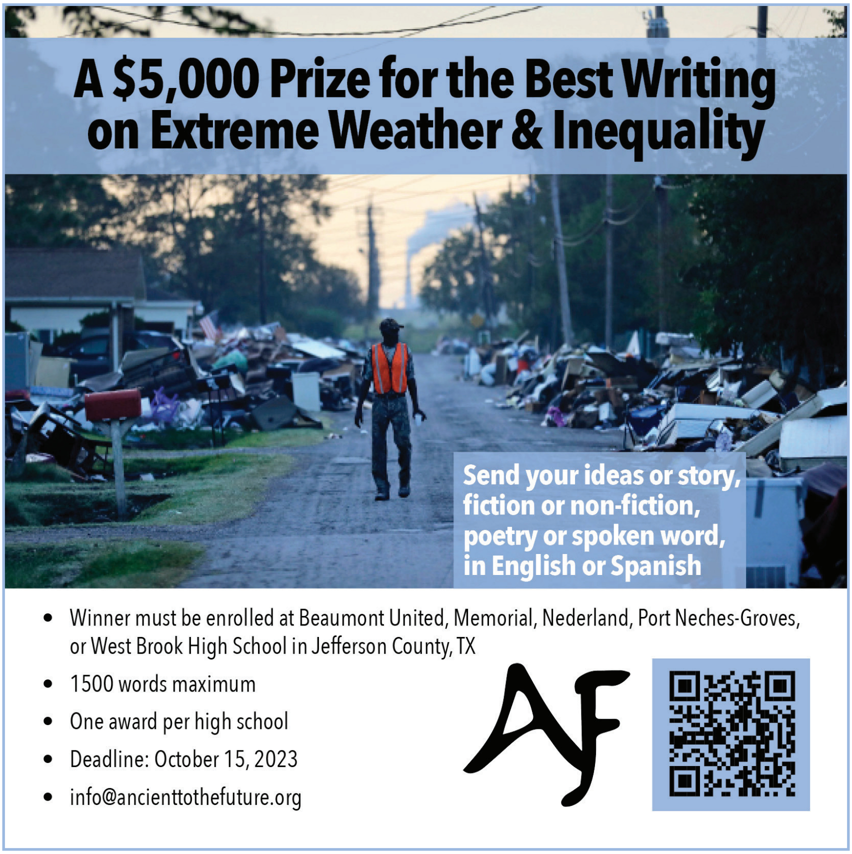
Flare Stack Eden

Katherine Hoerth

You smell it like a snake, from miles away—
this Eden made of benzene, naphthalene
and gasoline. The smokestack garden never
rests. It works through day and night, like any
forest does. It turns the blood of earth
into the fuel that makes it sing this dusk
chorus of whistles, bells, and whooshing flame.
You look up, imagining these towers
as tupelo trees that scrape the sky.
All around you, pipelines form a labyrinth,
meandering like streams for endless miles.

The whistle blows like Bachman's sparrow's song,
beckons your return as you slip on
your work boots once again to toil through
the nightshift, promising a world of green.
Suddenly, a flare stack blooms as quickly
as a burst of evening primrose, fills
the sky with something almost beautiful
in vibrant hues of gold and cherry red.
Standing at the gate in awe, you breathe,
tasting the awful cost of paradise.

Katherine Hoerth has published four volumes of poetry. This poem is reprinted with her permission from the latest, *Flare Stacks in Full Bloom*. She works at Lamar University as assistant professor of creative writing and editor-in-chief of the Lamar University Literary Press.



A $5,000 Prize for the Best Writing on Extreme Weather & Inequality

Send your ideas or story, fiction or non-fiction, poetry or spoken word, in English or Spanish

- Winner must be enrolled at Beaumont United, Memorial, Nederland, Port Neches-Groves, or West Brook High School in Jefferson County, TX
- 1500 words maximum
- One award per high school
- Deadline: October 15, 2023
- info@ancienttothefuture.org

http://ancienttothefuture.org

Extreme Weather and Inequality

What's It All About?

Kate Williams, Abdul Alkalimat, and Dave Williams

In Spring 2023, ExxonMobil completed the BLADE expansion of its Beaumont refinery, more than doubling its capacity. Coverage in the *Houston Chronicle* offers three salient details.[1] One, ExxonMobil in Beaumont and Motiva in Port Arthur now constitute the two biggest oil refineries in North America. Two, the expansion cost two billion dollars and has created only fifty permanent jobs. And three, based on industry analysis, "Exxon's Beaumont plant is likely the last major US refinery project." This assessment comes as ocean temperatures, particularly in the Gulf of Mexico, are breaking historic records, and our economy and society are turning away from oil and gas and towards electric cars and such.

At the same time the City of Beaumont and the Beaumont Chamber of Commerce are beginning work on a strategic economic plan for the city. This issue of *The Record* is a contribution to that work in that both the physical environment (extreme weather) and the social (inequality) are the basis for Beaumont's future. The high school writing prize (see page 188) and the planned November 4, 2023, follow-up to the meeting documented in this issue will generate useful ideas as well.

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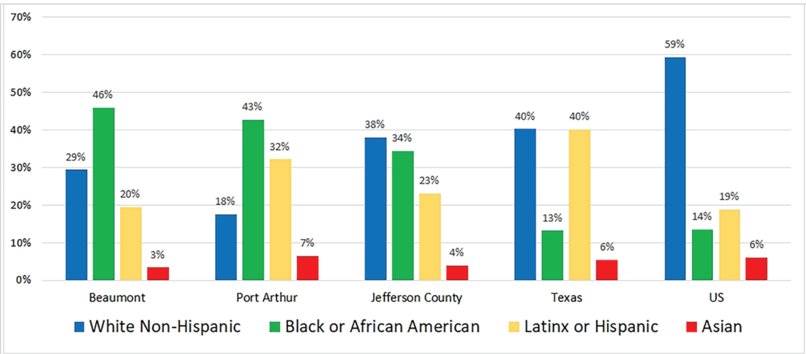
[1] Beaumont Light Atmospheric Distillation Expansion (BLADE). Amanda Drane, "Exxon launches $2B refinery expansion, making the Beaumont site a behemoth," *Houston Chronicle*, March 17, 2023; Barbara Powell and Chunzi Xu, "Exxon's Beaumont plant is likely the last major US refinery project," *Houston Chronicle*, March 16, 2023. For links to these articles, see Websites Referenced page 185.

On November 5, 2022, at Lamar University, twenty-four speakers and an audience of two hundred people gathered to reflect on Extreme Weather and Inequality. The five panels concluded with Q&A discussion. Highlights were published in the March 3, 2023, *Beaumont Enterprise*, and the video is online (see Websites Referenced page 185 for link). This issue of *The Record* is the most complete written account of that day.

We gathered in Lamar's top venue: the eighth floor of the Mary and John Gray Library. Its panoramic views show the campus, and the county, and the wide sky. Also on view is the ExxonMobil refinery and chemical plant just across South Martin Luther King Jr. Parkway. Almost everyone present knew this landscape well, working or living near the county's many refineries.

Our host was the the Center for History and Culture of Southeast Texas and the Upper Gulf Coast. We organizers were mostly returnees: Dave Williams was raised in Beaumont and Austin. His grandfather built the family home at 2505 Grand Avenue with wood from his job: a sawmill later a lumber yard. Kate Williams was raised on summer visits to Beaumont. Abdul Alkalimat had only ever gotten as close as Houston. But all three of us (and other family members who joined in) wanted to tackle what we were used to calling the climate crisis, as well the persistent and violent inequality that had only gotten more visible with Trayvon Martin, George Floyd, and many others. Beaumont, Port Arthur, the county keep the nation gassed up and more, but who ever listens to Jefferson Countians? We gravitated around the idea that with our nation's honchos not making much headway, maybe conversations among ordinary and thoughtful people in Southeast Texas could point up some ways forward. The day of discussion that fills this issue says the answer to that is "Yes."

When we started to research Beaumont, we learned that the term "extreme weather" would enable more conversations than "climate change." We adjusted. We learned that Beaumont is in the vanguard nationwide as it becomes more diverse with respect to ethnicity. At forty-nine percent



	Beaumont	Port Arthur	Jefferson County	Texas	US
Population	113,000	56,000	254,000	30 million	333 million
Median household income	$49,765	$42,933	$53,613	$67,321	$69,021
People in poverty	21%	26%	19%	14%	11%

Data is from US Census 2017-2021 American Community Survey, omitting people reporting more than one race. Median household income means that half of households are below this number and half above. The official poverty level varies with household size and is $27,750 for a family of four.

African American, Beaumont is the Blackest large city in Texas.[2] With another twenty percent Latino and three percent Asian, it is majority-minority. European-Americans are just twenty-nine percent of the city's population, down from sixty-seven percent in 1970. Latinos are rising at eighteen percent, up from two percent in 1970.

Beaumont (twenty percent of the county's population) and Port Arthur (ten percent) are the two urban concentrations. The two cities and the entire county face very much the same circumstances, although "fence line communities" (next door to petrochemical plants) are even more challenged. More frequent and more ferocious storms. Floods from above as well as from the rising sea. Higher poverty rates, lower incomes, lower rates of educational attainment, and health insurance coverage than either Texas or the nation.

---

[2] Beaumont's population is forty-nine percent African American or African American in combination with some other race. Omitting those who report more than one race lowers that to forty-six percent.

Extreme weather hits Jefferson County with fierce inequality. The *Beaumont Examiner* quoted project director Phil Stallman explaining that ExxonMobil brought in eighty thousand truckloads of dirt to raise a new portion of its site seven feet higher in order to withstand future floods. Meanwhile, a *Houston Chronicle* investigation found that the state of Texas sent Harvey disaster funds to inland counties. Zero dollars came to Jefferson County, even though the county withstood a national record of sixty inches of rain during that one storm. Now almost six years later, blue tarps still cover houses that need new roofs. A surprisingly small percent of households in the county has flood insurance.

The idea of Jefferson County as a sacrifice zone is more real than ever, with industrial pollution and extreme weather putting life at risk and making the area uninhabitable—all while 250,000 people call it home. Even though the Age of Petroleum is ending, here in one of its birthplaces, the refineries, chemical plants, and related industries are hard at it. In the Gulf, acres of federal waters have just been newly leased for oil drilling.

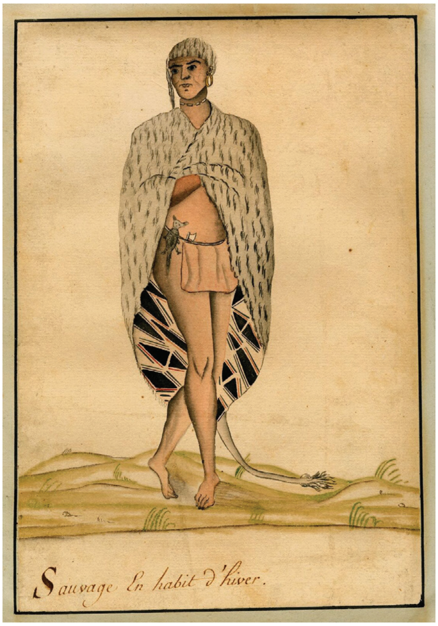
Frank talk—practicing democracy—is bound to turn up problems as well as solutions. Just putting issues on the table is a crucial first step. At the end of the day last November 5, there was a show of hands: Would you like to see another day like this one? The overwhelming answer was "Yes." A second day is in the planning stages for November 4, 2023. A writing prize (deadline October 15, 2023) is designed to attract high school student writing about the issues. This introduction offers highlights of the problems and the solutions that surfaced that day in 2022. Please read further into everyone's remarks—including the Q and A sessions that ended each panel—to learn more. Of course, sometimes the Q and A ended with questions that still need answers.

After warm welcomes from Provost Dann Brown, Mayor Pro Tem Chris Durio, Ancient to the Future president Dave Williams, and Center for History and Culture director Jimmy Bryan, the discussion turned to history, then economic and social inequality, then African American and Latinx inequality, then extreme weather, and finally, the future.

History

Every locale brings its own history and culture to bear on current issues. The first panel started here, as did the printed program itself, with this acknowledgement:

> The Center for History and Culture acknowledges that Lamar University is located on the traditional territory of the Atakapa-Ishak Nation, and we recognize that the region our university serves includes the homelands of the Akokisa, Bidai, Karankawa, Alabama-Coushatta, and other nations. We further acknowledge that, as president of the Republic of Texas, Mirabeau B. Lamar, the namesake of our university, oversaw the forced removal of Caddo, Cherokee, Comanche, Delaware, Kickapoo, Shawnee, and other peoples from their homes. We affirm and respect tribal sovereignty in this land and in all territories.


Sauvage En habit d'hiver.

A man believed to be Atakapa, in winter. Painted in 1735 by Alexandre de Batz. Image courtesy of Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University.

The first speaker was Alex Perez (Strong Wind), a Karankawa descendant from Galveston. He spoke about the devastating impact of European colonization but also about how the first people in what became Jefferson County worked with and lived through extreme change. He visualized the oil pipelines in the Gulf as so many huge straws, which when they rupture will make the BP spill look like spilled milk. As he said, "Things have happened. It's our response that matters."

As part of her reflections on pre-Civil War Jefferson County, Judy Linsley told the story of the mixed-race slaveholding Ashworth family. At one point they had the most cattle of any family in the county. In 1840, a special Ashworth Law allowed them to stay in Texas at a time when free Blacks were denied entry—but by the 1850s, vigilantes forced them to leave with next to nothing. After Emancipation, jobs in the rising lumber industry attracted freed slaves as well as white people. It was Beaumont's first economic boom.

David Willard detailed the history of his family as an example of the persistence and success Black people found in industrial-age Jefferson County. According to oral history, the family patriarch was enslaved on a plantation located at Eleventh and Calder in Beaumont. Another descendant served on otherwise white juries and joined with other community leaders to educate people on Black history. As a student at Howard University, David's father was part of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* landmark case integrating US public schools. He returned to Beaumont to win local integration cases. The solemnity of a 1925 Juneteenth march down Magnolia Street that was captured on film in 1925 and shared among the November 5 participants alludes to both victories and defeats.

Jim Sanderson drew a picture of the land of "Pine, Petroleum, and Pentecostals," quoting from one of his novels. He observed the rootedness of people in Jefferson County; nobody wants to leave, or if they do, they return—despite the punishing summers and storms. He also mentioned the poet Katherine Hoerth, whose work opens this volume (page 7).

The discussion after these talks sharpened the issues. One topic was the room we were in. Called the Spindletop Room, it is lined with portraits of big financial donors to the university. Every person on the wall is "white non-Hispanic," as the US Census puts it. What does this say about the place of others in the university? Could the non-financial donors be shown as well, to give all credit, and represent the actual demographics of Lamar and the area?

Another topic was land grants. One person explained how for a time European immigrants could get acreage according to household size—

This is a still from one of Solomon Sir Jones's films. In 1925, he recorded more than two minutes of a long parade down Beaumont's Magnolia Street marking the conclusion of the twentieth annual Sunday School Congress that met in the city that year. See Websites Referenced (page 185) for a link. Beinecke Library, Yale University.

and the number of enslaved persons they owned. Not only were Native Americans hounded off the land by this time, neither they nor any African Americans could get the grants. All of this fed economic inequality, the next topic of the day.

Economic and Social Inequality

This panel heard from a trade unionist, a longtime homeless services provider, and two small businesspeople. How are these large sectors of the local population doing and what is holding them back?

Jeff Darby pointed out that Nederland and Groves include the two most unionized zip codes in Texas—and they voted eighty-five percent for Trump in 2020. In his view, the only way forward for unions is to focus on economics. He also put forward three problems and solutions. One, ExxonMobil is a company that pays taxes on its 264 properties in Jefferson County with appraised values as low as $375, or one percent of the fair market value—why not reappraise and make companies pay their fair share? Two, drug tests keep people from working who have smoked a joint six months ago while there's no test for going into work drunk—can we find a way to hire people who prefer marijuana? And three, oil and plastic are everywhere in our economy at this point—but how about admitting that the internal combustion engine is going obsolete, and embracing "all of the above" when it comes to energy sources?

Paula O'Neal pointed out that with automation there are no jobs for people without qualifications. Rampant automation and "you can do it online" have stolen those jobs. Meanwhile—speaking to those present—all of us are rich. In other words, we can meet our basic needs. Disasters—a hurricane or a car that won't start—are an inconvenience for these rich people. But the economically poor live disaster-filled lives every day. In her view, until we start thinking about what's good for everyone, all of us, we'll never resolve the problems that we face.

Two speakers, Fred Vernon and Barbara Wilson, each related their struggles to become entrepreneurs. Fred was told he wasn't eligible for training but found another training program down the road that accepted him. Once trained, he was overlooked for a welding job until he insisted he was indeed job-ready. He sees how white the industry's union membership is, and hears the explanation given: not enough qualified people. He suggests teaching them so that they can join the union. He credits mentoring for making him the transportation entrepreneur he is today.

Likewise, Barbara Wilson missed opportunities because she had few insiders schooling her, but she listened to those who did. She credits their example for contributing to her success running a large antiques business and several community arts projects. Mentoring and information sharing are needed to have a chance for government assistance as well as market opportunities.

In discussion after these talks, two points in particular came up. One was the need to hold companies accountable when they commit to hiring local. Likewise, hold politicians accountable—or vote them out—when they sign but don't enforce those agreements. Another point was that graduates of industrial or construction apprenticeship programs typically pay less for their training than students paying college tuition.

African American and Latinx Inequality

Jesse Garcia is not an immigrant himself but a sociologist who studies immigration. He sums up the native-born response to immigrants in two phrases: "Why are you here?" and "You don't belong." But twenty-two percent, or fifty-six thousand, of Jefferson Countians are Hispanic. The unauthorized population is thirteen thousand. Latino immigrants on their part bring traditional courtesy and a high awareness of status differences. Vulnerable immigrants often do not know about disaster support they are entitled to, or have language barriers, or fear of deportation. He calls for education and understanding to bridge these gaps.

Vernon Durden's father didn't let his children ride the segregated busses so that they would not be subject to second-class treatment. Today outmigration from the cities means new neighborhoods are built up higher, causing more flooding in older, often Blacker neighborhoods. His mantra, "Saying you're not a racist is not the same as being anti-racist," was repeated by others through the day. He pointed to several areas of life in the city that demonstrate that Black people are being excluded and marginalized from full citizenship. He called for more conversations to overcome the ignorance and fear that feeds racism.

Michael Cooper, President of the NAACP, also spoke on this panel, but asked that his comments not be reproduced in print.

John Beard from the panel on Extreme Weather had to leave early that day to participate in the current round of climate meetings in Egypt—COP27—so he moved to this panel.[3] Speaking for the Black and Brown majority in Port Arthur as well as others, he declared, "We refuse to be sacrificed. Disaster funds will continue to be diverted elsewhere unless we speak up." He listed all the local officials who declined to even sign a letter of complaint, which he was glad to sign.

Observations after these presenters were many: One, if you can't speak Spanish, you can certainly be friendly to Spanish speakers in the community. Two, shine a light on what's being decided in the community by attending official meetings where your issues or your community is under discussion. Three, the *Beaumont Enterprise* was urged to extend its coverage to communities not seen in its pages and thanked for bringing its staff to participate fully in the day.

Extreme Weather

Margot Gage Witvliet related her reactions as it sank in that she had moved her family to a cancer belt, where the air often smelled like rotten eggs. For one, she developed a course on environmental justice, and her students started making scientific discoveries. They found that air monitors were often inoperable. They documented that over four years Charlton Pollard elementary students were breathing through seventy-five air emission events. (She wonders if the school should be moved.) Her students also learned that Southeast Texans by and large do think climate change is happening. She further observed that the county's health bus doesn't stop in Beaumont, the location of the largest concentration of people and poverty. She asks, "Couldn't they easily change their route?"

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[3] Twenty-seventh Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27) met in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt..

Chanelle Stigger brought the latest weather and climate analysis from the National Weather Service. With a treasure trove of charts and photographs, she retold the stories of hurricanes Ike, Harvey and Imelda. She compared temperatures and rain for 1991-2020 to earlier periods to demonstrate that the region is getting hotter and wetter. That heat and moisture is feeding more frequent, more damaging storms.

Ellen Buchanan brought a lifetime of experience caring for and explaining nature in Southeast Texas. Extreme weather causes destruction in part from water not being able to flow in more gradually or easily, and for this, Jefferson County and surrounding areas need wetlands and floodplains. The floodplains built up with houses are just going to lead to water in those houses. In her words, "booming and flooding" is the pattern now—local governments allowing development where they shouldn't. Drainage ditches and civil-engineered systems cannot do it all. As she said, "Work with nature, not against it. Tap into public funds that are available to do that."

Chris Jones represents a fence line community in Beaumont that sees extreme floods as well as extreme toxic hazards from petrochemicals. He explained that drainage systems are actually moving storm water into his neighborhood from elsewhere. He also called out agencies that misuse FEMA funds ("money funnels," in his words), and local officials who send funds back or otherwise leave money on the table that could help people. People in his neighborhood still have blue tarps covering their roofs that were damaged in 2007 by Hurricane Ike. Demographics (poor and Black) and topography (ditches and elevation which changes as new developments are built up high) make for a poisonous brew.

Hilton Kelley shared lessons from his twenty-plus years of organizing against toxins in Port Arthur. He provided a long view. After the Civil War, he observes, Black people were forced to settle in the marshiest areas. Then by the 1930s, the petrochemical industry began hiding their toxic by-product emissions by claiming "trade secrets." Now with bigger hurricanes and higher floodwaters, the companies say, "Y'all just need to move." But who has the resources for that? Funds aren't getting to these survivor communities.

The first comment came from Strong Wind, who volunteered to teach people how to repair roofs. Meteorologist Jonathan Brazzell offered a link to better flood maps than the old FEMA ones that people still rely on, and described his campaign to stop allowing developers in his town variances that allow them to build, sell, and run (see page 186). Liv Haselbach at Lamar invited everyone to her monthly meetings on flood coordination. Others said we have to be adamant and relentless at pressuring politicians, or else vote them out.

The Future

Bryan Gross joined the panel after ExxonMobil warned his union president into withdrawing from the event. He spoke to that, saying union members need a seat at the table. With most of his three thousand members being climate deniers, he called for more education.

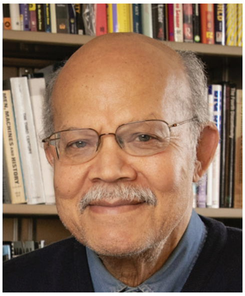
Jimmy Bryan took us into film history to show how many Hollywood movies repeat the lie that humanity can save itself with space travel and terraforming other planets. He pointed out that the task of cleaning up our own planet is way easier.

Kaitlin Bain recounted how at least one survivor of Harvey was accused of misuse of FEMA funds for buying some clothes and basic furnishings after losing everything. Only sustained campaigning by the *Beaumont Enterprise* partially resolved her case. What about everyone else caught in that technicality? She pointed out that Jefferson County is undertaking the largest coastal restoration project in the nation and concluded with a warning: Don't keep calling us resilient! We can do that ourselves. Death and destruction from storms is not okay. Something's gotta give.

Dave Williams offered three bits of evidence for the coming end of the Age of Petroleum: California is banning the sale of hydrocarbon-powered cars after 2035. China's car sales are already twenty-five percent electric. One-half of all crude oil becomes diesel or gasoline. What's the future of Jefferson County when nobody wants half what it's refining?

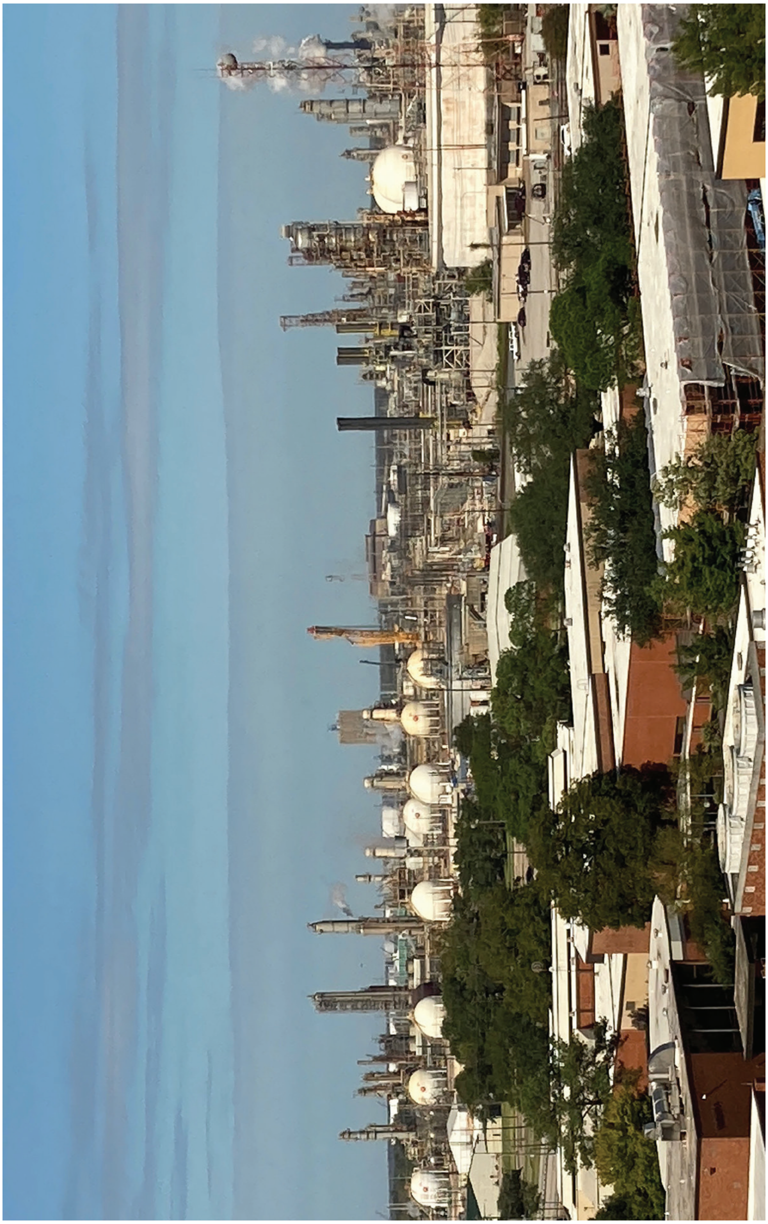
Numerous comments echoed this from Vernon Durden: "What will replace energy in Beaumont? It's got to come from something we don't know about today, but an educated person, an educated community, will come up with something … You've got to bring students who will be able to cope and figure out the future." In closing, Judy Linsley, past director of the Center for History and Culture and vice-president of the Texas Gulf Historical Society, said, "This was an incredible gathering. I had no idea it would be like this. It's just been wonderful. As small as we are, just think what we can do when we get a little bigger, and I would love to see this grow and continue." Within a few weeks, the idea of a young people's writing prize on these topics had solidified. And a second gathering is planned for November 4, 2023. Encourage those young people to write (see page 8) and join us!

Kate Williams directs the Ancient to the Future Project, a small think tank founded in 2022. A descendant of Beaumonters, she is on the faculty at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.



Abdul Alkalimat (Gerald McWorter) is a lifetime scholar-activist and a founder of the field of Black Studies. A professor emeritus from the University of Illinois, he is helping launch Ancient to the Future.

Dave Williams was born in Beaumont and grew up here and in Austin. After following his uncle into the oil industry, he worked in investment management for forty years. He attended Beaumont High School and is president of the Ancient to the Future Project.



View of the ExxonMobil refinery from the eigth floor of the Mary and John Gray Library, Lamar University, Beaumont, Texas. November 5, 2022. Ancient to the Future.

Conference Welcome

The Most Pertinent Topics

Dann Brown

As I considered today's conversation, I thought a lot about place in space and time. I can't imagine many more pertinent topics to Southeast Texas than developing a conversation on such an important theme: Extreme Weather and Inequality. Southeast Texans have experienced so much, and the frequency of these challenging disasters feels as if it has increased since Hurricane Rita in 2005. I was living in Kingsville, Texas, at the time. As it's been described to me, the entire eighth floor we're on now was devastated by Hurricane Rita. The carpet was pulled from the floor, the ceiling tiles were gone, the windows were shattered, all during that terrible storm that impacted Beaumont and Southeast Texas.

This summer my staff and I in the provost's office had an experience similar to many of us in the room today. One of my staff, one of my senior staff is actually from Lake Charles, so continues to live with the recovery from Hurricane Laura now, two years since that storm happened, and we discussed this just this morning.

It took so long for his home to be rebuilt, for it to be renovated as it needed to be, but that was from a position of affluence and influence that he was able to achieve that goal. He had the luxury, at some level, of continuing employment. He had insurance. He had all of those pieces, and so I'm thinking of all those who don't, of all those who struggle to overcome these difficult challenges.

My staff and I sat through the summer, as many of us do in Southeast Texas, watching weather apps on our phones and watching the Weather Channel, which I can actually watch live from my desk and we do that all the time hoping, hoping, hoping, that Beaumont, Port Arthur, Jefferson County in the southeast part of the state will be spared. And then we, often times, would come together at the end of the day and think about for a moment, wow, this one's gonna miss us. That's good news. And then we'd stop and realize that when that one missed us, someone else was going to be impacted.

Most important, we were having continuing meetings of our incident command team in preparation for what would become Hurricane Ian. And we were preparing at that point for additional meetings on what we would do as a campus if that storm had not turned. And so, I find myself thinking this morning not only of Southeast Texas, but of Western Florida, in the area around Tampa Bay, Saint Petersburg, down south to Fort Myers. We knew our good fortune meant we had once again avoided a very dangerous and difficult situation but were sad that our happiness in some ways seem to reflect an inappropriate attitude toward the struggles of others.

I want to thank you for being here. My wife and I moved here in 2020 with our son—he's nineteen years old. We have lived within a coastal county now twice in our lives. The first time was in Kleberg County in South Texas, where we actually evacuated the campus in preparation for Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita, both times breathing a sigh of relief and then knowing what transpired elsewhere. I don't know—and I'm going to say something, I don't mean to be too dark and too pessimistic—but the holiday season is difficult for those who are struggling in so many ways. And we have so much to be thankful for. But on a day like today, I'm thankful for people like you, who are coming together for this important conversation, who are going to be sharing experiences, sharing reflections, thinking about what it's going to take so that we're better prepared for the next storm, the next natural disaster, and so that we're better prepared and our colleagues around the nation are better prepared for any natural disaster or storm no matter what it may be. Thank you all for being with us on a kind of gloomy Saturday morning—the sun is going to come out later today, we hope, but I cannot thank you enough for being a part of this conversation.

Dann Brown is Lamar University's Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs.

We in Beaumont Have Become Experts

CHRIS DURIO

I'm glad that I'm here this morning. And I want to read this welcoming letter:

Good morning on behalf of the city of Beaumont. I would like to welcome all of you to our city and this important event. I want to thank Dr. Kate Williams for the invitation to speak this morning and for the work that she and others have put into organizing this valuable day of discussion on extreme weather and inequality. Unfortunately, we in Beaumont have become experts in extreme weather. From recent hurricanes and tropical storms including Imelda, Harvey, Ike, and Rita and the Uri winter storm event to extreme heat and flooding, we are quite familiar with extreme weather in Southeast Texas.

The City of Beaumont emergency management does an outstanding job of preparing for and responding to these extreme weather situations. Beaumont has become known to other cities as a city experienced and skilled in handling weather emergencies. And on behalf of Mayor Robin Mouton and the members of the City Council, I want to welcome each and every one of you to this event. We are honored that you chose Beaumont to host this event. For those of you who reside in this area, I'm pleased that you are in attendance today. For those of you who are visiting from other cities, please know how happy we are to have you as our guests. I hope this event is a success and again, welcome to the city of Beaumont and have a great day and a great conference.

Chris Durio served as a firefighter for thirty-one years and today serves as Ward 4 city councilperson and Mayor Pro Tem for the City of Beaumont. He graduated from Hebert High School.

Conversations Can Lead to Solutions

Dave Williams

Thank you and good morning. I am a founder of the Ancient to the Future project. Think of us as an activist think tank. A think tank in terms of trying to identify problems of the future and search for solutions or answers or partial solutions to those problems. Activist in the sense of bringing together people of similar interests and hoping that a conversation among interested parties will reveal or lead to some of these solutions to problems. We chose Beaumont as our first project for Ancient to the Future, not because of our family ties to the city, but because we viewed Beaumont as being representative of other places that face possibly similar problems and that if we could find solutions that maybe fit the moment, they could be applicable elsewhere. So, I'll add my definition of one of the problems that faces Beaumont. I'd ask you to think about twenty-five years from now and try to answer the question: Can Beaumont avoid becoming today's West Virginia coal town? I think that's the issue that I see. Thank you.

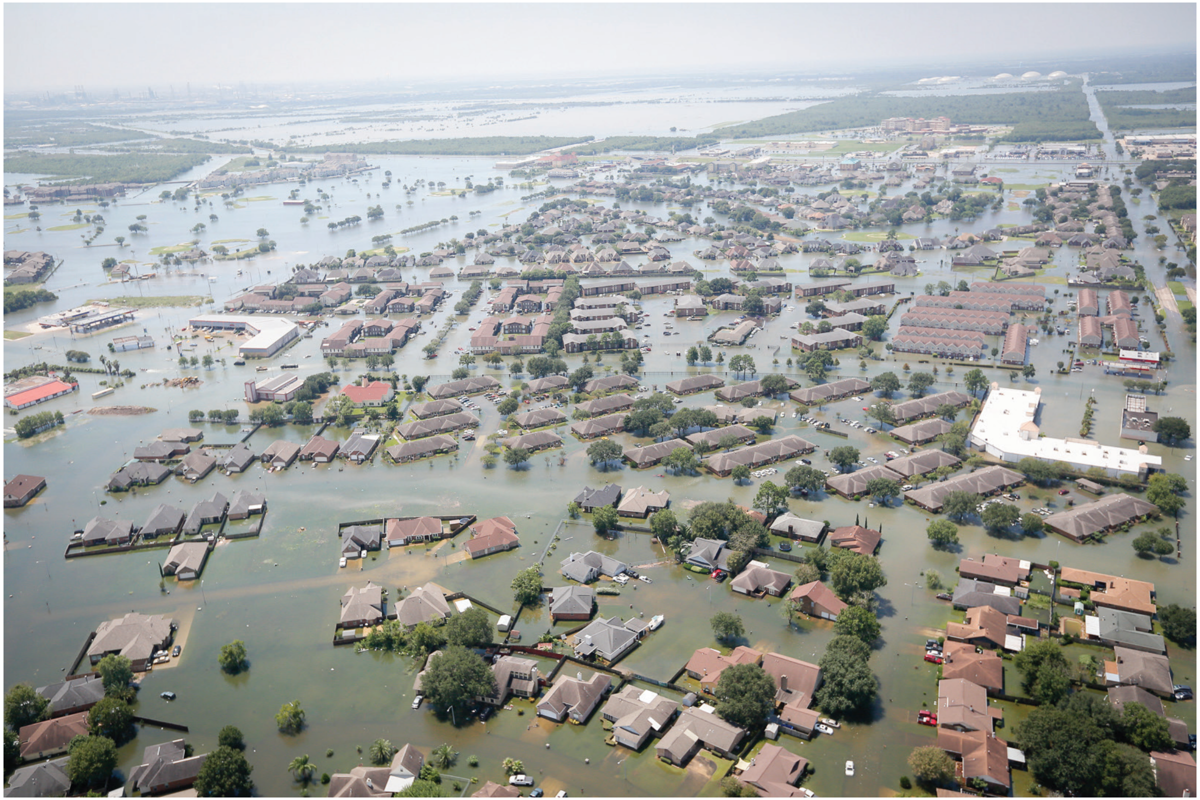
Dave Williams was born in Beaumont and grew up here and in Austin. After following his uncle into the oil industry, he worked in investment management for forty years. He attended Beaumont High School and is president of the Ancient to the Future Project.

Appreciate the Legwork for This Important Discusion

JIMMY L. BRYAN JR.

We are happy to host this event and to welcome you to this day of discussion. Before I turn it over to our first panel, I do want to thank especially Kate Williams and Abdul Alkalimat for putting together this program. They have really done the legwork. Most of you have already met with them, and we are happy to host this important program. So, let's adjourn the welcome. Thank you for coming out this morning.

Jimmy L. Bryan Jr. is professor of history and director of the Center for History and Culture of Southeast Texas and the Upper Gulf Coast at Lamar University. He is the editor of *The Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record*. Most recently, he is the author of *The American Elsewhere: Adventure and Manliness in the Age of Expansion* (2017) and editor of the anthology *Inventing Destiny: Cultural Explorations of US Expansion* (2019).



View of Port Arthur, Texas, after Hurricane Harvey. August 31, 2017. Staff Sgt. Daniel J. Martinez, Air National Guard

HISTORY

Na ūspami pīl wana ak tal kēâmî ūpāt bûdâmâ wal awa ūtchî: *Things Have Happened, It's Our Response that Matters*

ALEX PEREZ / STRONG WIND

Nayi emnata Wo'ol Ba'h. Na Englič emnata Alexander Joseph. Na ūspami pīl wana ak tal kēâmî ūpāt bûdâmâ wal awa ūtchî. What I just said was this: My name is Alexander Joseph. My Karankawa name, Wo'ol Ba'h, means Strong Wind. My ancestors lived here on this land long before any of you, any of the people of the world came here, your ancestors.

These words of my ancestors haven't been spoken on this land in a very, very long time. So, if we want to speak about the history of this land, it's appropriate to start from, not the beginning, but at least as far as recorded history. We have a tendency to look at our world and even ourselves from a very narrow lens. And so, I'm here, perhaps, to help widen that lens. There are going to be some things that we're going to agree upon and some things that I will obviously, as you might find, I have a different perspective.

I was a child here. I'm from Galveston Island. My grandmother's people are from the coast of Texas all the way down to Corpus Christi and even further south. There was a time period where we were chased out of this land. First it was with the Spanish, and the Spanish for the most part didn't have the resources to really extinguish us the way that the Americans and the Anglos did, the Europeans from this side.

But—so our history was such a way that the population grew in around us. So, after the war between the Americans and Spain—or Mexico—the Americans started acquiring land here, first through Spanish land grants and this kind of thing. When America acquired California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, those territories, then it was open season. And perhaps even some of you in the audience acquired land through those means during that period, I don't know. These were our ancestral lands where we migrated seasonally for different harvesting of foods and whatnot. Well, those lands became ranches, and we could no longer go there. We didn't understand what private property was, even the concept of land ownership. We thought: How ludicrous that is, to think that you can actually own the land that was created by the Creator?

See, it's a foreign concept—a very foreign concept—the idea of actually owning land, to own people. The only thing that in native philosophy, if I can—and I can only speak for myself, I can't speak for everyone, just like anyone who can't speak for everyone in their own group, whatever group that is—this idea of ownership of anything outside of your own body—is foreign to me. Everything is temporary: this life, the clothes you wear, the house, this building; everything is temporary. So, understanding how—but we build things, we have a tendency to build things with the idea that it's going to be permanent. But there's nothing that's permanent. Even cultures come and go. Nations are built upon and then they decline and then others come along, so forth and so on. I'm standing here as a direct representation of that.

But the human condition is to keep pushing on and to keep growing and that's one thing, that if I can, if there's one thing that I repeat quite a bit is that I always look to nature for the answers of almost everything. What does nature say? Nature always tells us. It always shows us, displays to us, to keep growing, right? So, human beings, we have ideas and then we build upon those ideas—and sometimes to our own fault. Of course, it's hard to speak of things in such general terms, make such generalizations. But, if I can offer one other perspective from my understandings and observations of the world, is that there are cycles of time. Everything has its time. Cycles of nature, time, celestial events: There's always these cycles. So, if I can help broaden this lens to help see further outside of ourselves and see things from a fuller perspective, I hope I can do that, through our conversation and whatnot.

Of course, there are things that have happened in the past of every culture. It's our responses to those things that's important And, you know, if we're going to be able to truly build—bridges between people and with our planet—we're going to have to use—again, observing from nature—we're given two ears and one mouth. So, there's a reason for that—so that we listen more than we speak. And I think that's just a very important thing to remember. I mean we're talking about people's experiences, cultural experiences, the effects of our living condition, and what I mean by that, from a wider perspective, is the effects of our environment of our world.

If there's one thing that we might agree upon about the effects of human construction and industry—if I could tie this all in—that the oil industry, let's say, just for example, it's the biggest one. My main concern, environmentally speaking and in conjunction with industry, is that the oil rigs off the coasts of the world—we're talking about a giant, okay, this industry is a giant—and cycles of time. There have been multiple time periods where the earth itself does change. We call her Changing Woman because she's always in a state of change. My concern about the oil rigs off the coast is that when, and it could be tomorrow, it could be five hundred years, it could be two thousand years, eventually the earth is going to roll. And I don't mean spin on its axis. I mean it's going to shift its axis. There's nothing anybody can do about it, I'm sorry to say, except adapt, just like nature does. It always adapts to change. My concern is that with industry, oil in particular, that when this eventually occurs and all of these straws are put in the ocean with no foresight, and those things rupture, and that oil is dispersed all over, it's going to make the BP spill look like spilled milk. So, like I said, there's things that we'll agree upon and there's things that we won't. But I guess that's pretty much my time, right? So, thanks for having me.

Alexander Joseph Perez / Wo'ol Ba'h (Strong Wind) is a council member and cultural and spiritual advisor for the Karankawa Kadla tribe. He wrote the book *Karankawa Kadla/Mixed Tongue* (2021).

Enslaved Persons and Freed Men and Women Came with the First European Settlers

JUDY LINSLEY

Coincidentally, extreme weather begins the story of the colonial period in the history of this part of Texas. In 1528, the Spanish explorer Cabeza de Vaca was shipwrecked on the Texas coast in a storm and, years later, he wrote up his adventures living among the Native Americans.

During the era of Spanish exploration, the Beaumont area was occupied by a group who called themselves Ishak. Other Native American groups gave them the name Atakapas, which means "man eater," because of their ritualistic cannibalism.

A Spanish priest wrote disapprovingly: "They neglect the cultivation of their fertile lands…and live from the game which abounds in their forests." It wasn't true that they were lazy. It was that the fertile land and the water provided them their needs without having to plant crops. They lived along the coast in the summer and along the Neches River in the winter. It was their homeland, but like other Native Americans, they had no concept of ownership.

That concept underwent dramatic change with the arrival of Europeans. Without acknowledging Native American occupation, Spain claimed Texas for itself, further assuming the right to grant ownership to individuals.

Without gold, however, Texas didn't hold much interest for Spain until the French threatened encroachment in the eighteenth century. In 1756, to guard Texas's eastern border, the Spanish built the mission and presidio of El Orcoquisac on the Trinity River; the road from Goliad to El Orcoquisac continued eastward along an ancient Native American route to cross the Neches River near Beaumont. The mission was soon abandoned but the road became the Atascosito Trail—the future road connecting Beaumont to points east and west. Even so, Southeast Texas remained sparsely settled under Spanish rule.

Jumping forward some years, when the still-young United States bought the Louisiana Territory in 1803, the US and Spain created an informal Neutral Ground agreement: The US would stay East of Arroyo Hondo and Spain would stay west of the Sabine River. This gap became a lawless no man's land for fugitives from justice; the resultant self-reliance and dislike of authority expanded over Southeast Texas and became a way of life, even after the Adams-Onis Treaty set the permanent border at the Sabine River in 1819.

By the 1820s when the earliest Anglo settlers came to the Beaumont area along the Atascosito Trail, the small Ishak communities were gone, probably due mostly to disease. The Ishak left large shell middens—mounds of shells from shellfish, a staple of their diet—on both banks of the Neches River near what is now Port Neches. By then, other Native American groups were moving into Texas as they were forced from their homelands in the eastern US. One of these became the Alabama and Coushatta settlement to the north of Beaumont.

In 1821, the privateer Jean Laffite was evicted from his Galveston Island settlement by the US military. Many of the refugees from his disbanded community settled in the Sabine-Neches area, adding not only to the cultural mix but possibly the general feeling of independence from the law.

In that same year, Mexico became independent from Spain and wanted settlers to populate its remote state of Coahuila y Texas. Under Mexico's plan, empresarios settled large tracts of land with settlers, mostly from the US. Many of them intended to have cotton plantations and brought enslaved people with them for that purpose. Mexico officially banned slavery but couldn't enforce the law in Texas. Early Anglo settlers sidestepped it with creative designations of indentured servitude or service lasting ninety-nine years, providing no way of achieving freedom.

To create an unpopulated buffer between Texas and the United States, Mexico prohibited settlement within sixty miles of the Louisiana border, which included what is now Beaumont. Those who came here in the 1820s in defiance of the ban settled without law or government, just as settlers had done in the Neutral Ground. They couldn't obtain title to their lands until after 1829, when the ban was relaxed, and Lorenzo de Zavala became the empresario for this area. Noah Tevis, Beaumont's first Anglo settler, came in 1824 but didn't receive his title until 1834.

Zavala's sponsorship allowed other settlers to come, and when the Texas Revolution began in 1835, Beaumont consisted of twelve homes and ninety citizens. The following spring Santa Anna's army was headed east, pursuing Sam Houston. They never reached Beaumont, but Texans fleeing ahead of them did (the event was called the Runaway Scrape), ending up on the west bank of the flooded Neches River, waiting to get to Sabine Lake and safety in the US via boat. The Texan victory at San Jacinto on April 21, 1836, ended the Revolution and though some kept going east, back to the United States, others returned to their Texas homes.

Post-Revolution Beaumont settled down to town building, grading roads and licensing ferries. It grew, being at the crossroads of the Neches River and the Atascosito or Opelousas Trail, at a conjunction of natural resources: coastal saltgrass prairies, pine woods, Big Thicket, and fresh water. The downside was mosquitos and disease—malaria, yellow fever. Joseph Pulsifer, a city boy from Massachusetts, wrote his sister of a view "than which there can be no more beautiful in the world," but later, after a severe bout of tonsillitis, admitted that the climate probably wasn't as healthy as he initially believed.

Early white settlers were stockmen, farmers, or tanners, who counted their wealth principally in cattle and land, especially land. Land ownership, whether acquired from Spain, Mexico, or the Republic of Texas, became a source of power to be passed down through generations.

Beaumont's climate and soil didn't support large cotton plantations like those in the Red River or Fort Bend areas. Joseph Grigsby, using enslaved people, tried at Grigsby's Bluff (now Port Neches), but it wasn't a success. The enslaved population of Jefferson County remained relatively small: household or businesses workers or hands on small farms. Yet even early settlers with no enslaved people tended to support the system.

Even the wealthiest free settlers still lived a frontier existence. Supplies came from Galveston or New Orleans and were sent by shallow-draft vessels to settlements up the Neches and Angelina rivers. Those places in turn sent down corn, hides, and an occasional cotton bale from a small patch. Early Beaumont industries were cowhides and handmade cypress shingles.

Race relations were complicated, even before Emancipation. The Ashworth family is a case in point. At one time Jefferson County's largest stockholders, they are listed as Mulattos (mixed-race) in census records. Though the Texas Republic denied entry to free Black persons, Congress passed a special law in 1840, known as the Ashworth Law, allowing them to remain if they had been in Texas before the Texas Revolution. The law didn't bring social acceptance, however; when Electa Jane, daughter of Beaumont merchant and tanner John Jay French, eloped with an Ashworth family member, French disowned her. Later, in the 1850s, an Ashworth relative was hanged for the murder of a deputy sheriff; resultant vigilante violence against the family caused most of them to leave and/or lose their property.

In 1845 Texas joined the United States. The townsite was still only partially cleared with dirt streets and log buildings. A visiting *Galveston Week-*

ly News reporter, at first "woefully disappointed as to the appearance of the town," later commended Beaumonters for their remarkable "politeness and civility" and stayed for three and a half years.

In 1860, the population of Beaumont stood at 1,100. Steam power—boats and sawmills—had come to Beaumont in the 1850s. Machine-sawn lumber slowly replaced logs or hand-sawn lumber, though the "dog-trot" architectural style remained popular. Steamboats brought in more and better goods from the outside. Two railroads ran through town, built by gangs of enslaved persons. Beaumont had a newspaper, *The Beaumont Banner.*

The Civil War began in 1861. Beaumonters voted 141 to twelve to secede and young white males rushed to enlist. Beaumont was spared invasion twice: in 1862 by yellow fever which prevented Union gunboat crews from coming ashore at Sabine Pass, and in 1863 when a small southern force at Sabine Pass prevented invasion of Texas by northern forces. The victory kept Southeast Texas from suffering complete economic devastation.

The war ended in 1865, soldiers returned home, and Beaumont and the rest of the South picked up the pieces. White Beaumonter William A. Fletcher, who in 1861 had rushed to join the Confederate Army, wrote, "I gathered up father's old carpenter tools and went on a job at a dollar and a half per day, about one hundred feet from the place where I left off work." He later became a leader in Southeast Texas lumber industry.

On June 19, 1865, enslaved Texans were told they were emancipated, and they had to start completely from scratch. African American Woodson Pipkin had been the valet and bodyguard of John Fletcher Pipkin, a lay Methodist minister from Beaumont. John Pipkin had taught Woodson to read and write, and Woodson, also a minister, started the first school for African Americans in Beaumont.

Compared with much of the Deep South, the post-war economy in Beaumont rebounded quickly with a new industry: a lumber boom, courtesy of the vast long-leaf yellow pine forests in East Texas. The trees were harvested and milled, and with the return of the railroads in the 1870s, exported to the world. Beaumont became a lumber boom town in the economy of the New South.

Emancipated African Americans came from plantations and farms in upper East Texas to work in Beaumont sawmills, increasing the local Black population by 285 percent between 1860 and 1880. By 1880, African Americans made up forty-five percent of Beaumont's population, the majority living in segregated neighborhoods they established near the mills.

Historian **Judith W. Linsley** was formerly on the staff at the McFaddin-Ward House Museum and director of Lamar's Center for History and Culture of Southeast Texas and the Upper Gulf Coast. Among her publications are *Giant under the Hill: A History of the Spindletop Oil Discovery* (2002) and *Charlton-Pollard: The Story of a Neighborhood* (2022).

Family and Community Persist in Struggle and Achievements

David Willard

I'm going to talk to you a little bit about my family history; last name is Willard, as I said. And I'm going to try and make a connection between the growth and development of my family here in Beaumont and how that intersected with the development of the African American community here in Beaumont. I'm going to show you. I always think that visuals help. So, I brought a couple of little show and tells here that hopefully will add to the story.[1]

In 1860, Riley Willard was a slave here in Beaumont, and from my records and some of the documents that I brought with me today, there was a plantation called the Old Calder Plantation. I've not been able to find any real sort of documentation or pictures or anything of that nature, so something tells me that it might have been fairly small. But Riley Willard was a slave on this plantation, and he married a woman by the name of Margaret Rannell on the plantation on August 8, 1860, and that's how the Willard family began. And what I have here is the marriage license of the two of them in 1860. From that marriage, eight children were born, the first of which was Elmo Willard the first.

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[1] Visuals unavailable for this volume of *The Record.*

Elmo Willard the first seemed to be an extremely industrious man. His father passed away not too long after he was born; I think he was about the age of ten or so when his dad passed away. He had seven other brothers and sisters and he went to work. He was born a slave himself, as were most of his brothers and sisters, but he set out to try to provide for his mother and provide for his brothers and sisters. He rode horses in races and won quite often—from what I understand. He worked at the old Long and Company shingle mill—Judy, I think you talked about the shingle business here in Beaumont—he worked there—that was sort of his steady line of work. And when he was not working at the mill, he began learning the trade of barbering and shortly thereafter after opened a barbershop here in Beaumont, one of the first Black-owned businesses here in Beaumont. His brothers and sisters sort of followed in his footsteps. They became somewhat successful themselves. His sister Zellie Willard actually was the head cook at Spindletop when the oil gusher came in, and so through her associations with Spindletop, getting to know many of the wildcatters out there, they actually managed to purchase a great deal of land here in Beaumont—large portions of Forsythe Street, large areas of the North End, even areas out here at Lamar—pooling their resources. Elmo Willard started the Elmo Willard Addition—subdivided his land for newly freed people—housing for them to live and start to put down roots and raise families and things of that nature.

He became successful enough to where he was being noticed by both sides, both Black and white. Remarkably—some of this I've learned over the years, and I really can't believe how some of this actually traversed, when you look at the history of African Americans in this country and look at the development of my family here in Beaumont—he actually sat on juries. He was so respected here in Beaumont by both Black and white that he was asked to sit on jury trials, which meant that—I guess, I couldn't find the actual cases—he might have been sitting on a jury that involved white Caucasians here in Beaumont, which was absolutely unheard of for an African American to be able to do something like that.

He built the first brick home by an African American here in Beaumont, Texas. That was so celebrated, for its time, that legend has it—a neighbor who has lived on Gladys Street all of her life and knew my family very well and is still alive today and still living in the same house that she was raised in, her name is Lula Seymour, told me—that as a child the building of this house was so celebrated by the African American community here in Beaumont that they would actually pack picnic lunches and come and sit across the street as it was being built, and this home became sort of communal accomplishment on the part of African Americans here in Beaumont, newly freed slaves. That house still stands today; it's a local historical landmark home. It is the home that I currently reside in with my wife, moved in about twelve or thirteen years ago. My great aunt Marguerite Willard, Elmo Sr's daughter, inherited the home when I was a child, and we would spend Christmases there and have Christmas dinner there on just about every Christmas when I was growing up as a kid. I also have a picture of that home, but I know my time is limited.

Elmo the first's sister Zellie, who was the main cook out at Spindletop, had children, one of which was P.H. Willard—Pritchard Hydal Willard—and Pritchard Hydal Willard became as well-known in Beaumont here as Elmo Sr did. And so, there were two strands of the family: There was the P.H. side of the family and there was the Elmo Willard side of the family.

At one time Atlanta Life Insurance Company was the largest Black-owned business in the United States, and as they continued to expand from Atlanta and move across the country insuring African Americans, they looked for representatives in communities that could start branches of Atlanta Life Insurance. And so, as they were moving southward, they started asking around and were told that P.H. Willard was the person, and the Willard family were the people that they needed to contact and be in touch with. P.H. started Atlanta Life Insurance Company here in Beaumont. It was housed on Forsythe Street, almost right next door to Willard and Willard Funeral Home, which was the first Black-owned mortuary business here in Beaumont, was started by my grandfather and his brother Joseph Willard, and they were the sons of Elmo Sr. It was Elmo Willard Jr and his brother Joseph who started Willard and Willard on Forsythe Street. A few doors down was the Atlanta Life Insurance Building that P.H. and my family raised the money to actually build the building that the Atlanta Life Insurance Company was housed. That building still stands; it's now owned by the Catholic diocese here in Beaumont and is now there—I can't remember exactly, I think it's some sort of office structure for the Catholic diocese here in Beaumont [790 Forsythe St.]. And we sold that structure and that land to the diocese back about—my mother and I did—about twenty years ago.

So, the family continued to sort of prosper. The funeral home business—as I have jotted down my notes here in almost every facet of life, civilized life that you can think of—the Willard family played a part. So, housing with the Elmo Willard Addition and building homes for African Americans out of slavery; businesses, the mortuary business, the insurance business; politics; civil rights; philanthropy. A booklet was published in 1936 by the South Texas State Fair when the fair was coming here to Beaumont. A group of African Americans in the city—my great grandfather and others, the Wallace family, the Price family, the Sprott family, many of these old African American families here in Beaumont—got together and wanted to have a Negro Department, as they called it back then. They raised money, formed committees, and actually created a structure for African Americans to go to on Colored Day—there was one day of the week that they could attend the fair and it was known as Colored Day then. People could go and see the achievements of African Americans throughout the United States in the Negro Exhibit Hall here in Beaumont. They raised money for this; they had committees, several committees, put together a program for the South Texas State Fair so those that came in could see the achievements and learn about African American history. And this is 1936, this is soon after Carter G. Woodson is talking about African American History Week. This kind of stuff just blows my mind. It was going on here in Beaumont and they were actually involved in this and weren't really getting, seems like, a lot of major pushback for these initiatives that they were doing.

Religion: Saint Paul A.M.E. (African Methodist Episcopal) Church is the oldest African American congregation here in Beaumont. It's now about 150 years old, still in existence, still, still thriving today. My great grandfather the first Elmo Riley Willard, my great grandmother Sarah Adams Willard, and many others in the African American community banded together to create this congregation here in Beaumont. The A.M.E. church is the church started by freed African Americans coming out of bondage in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It moved across the country, so it became known as sort of the Black church. And they wanted a congregation here in Beaumont to represent these interests here and sort of pooled their resources together, built the church. All of these aspects also coincided with the development of the African American community here in Beaumont as it continued to sort of progress and move forward also out of slavery.

And then of course we get to my dad, who many of you knew well and his story. My father was Elmo the third, Elmo Willard the third. He went off to Fisk University and then from there he went to Howard University Law School, Howard University under Mordecai Johnson, who was the first African American president of Howard University, and Charles Hamilton Houston, who started the law school at Howard, had designed the law school to attack and dismantle segregation in the United States through legal means.

My father started there in 1951 for that sole purpose. He graduated in 1954, the same year as *Brown v. Board of Education*. He worked on that case as a student, as a third-year student in law school, working with Thurgood Marshall and James Nabrit and all of the other lawyers who won that case and made segregation illegal here in the United States. He returned home; Theodore Johns was already here. He had graduated a year before in the law school at Howard and returned to Beaumont and started a law firm, a law practice here. My father returned in 1954 and joined with Theodore Johns to start a law practice, joined together and helped to bring about the end of segregation here in Beaumont.

I brought a document that my father wrote in his own words, his own handwriting, sort of explaining all that they did, all of the different cases that they tried all of the different cases that they won, to sort of dismantle this system of oppression that was here in this area and in the United States. And he moves into, at the end of the document that he wrote, something that we don't normally focus on.

We know about the parks, Tyrrell Park, we know about the libraries here, we know about the schools, all those things that they brought about legal manner. We know about Lamar University, which they actually filed suit on and desegregated, and we know about the trials and tribulations that went on for the end of segregation here at Lamar. But what he goes into some other detail about in this document, he talks about how they turned to the economic issues here in Beaumont and how they attacked and dismantled that through the law, filing suit against Gulf States, filing suit against the refineries and the corporations here in Beaumont. You had African American men who were qualified to do senior-level jobs but were actually being held to sweeping up and cleaning up at these refineries and some of these major businesses and industries here in Beaumont. So, once they had dismantled public institutions here in Beaumont, they went after the economic institutions here in Beaumont. And they won all of those cases as well, helping to set up and create a middle class here in the African American community that still exists and thrives to this day.

So, it's a big, big story and it continues to amaze me, the more I research and the more I read about what they were able to accomplish and what they did as sort of a unified family and also as a unified African American community here. It's a story that needs to be broadcast on a regular and consistent basis. Young kids need to know about this. They need to be aware of this history in this community and not just African American young kids, but white Caucasian and Latino and Asian and Native American kids growing up need to know this history. I'm proud to be a part of it. I'm the sole custodian of it.

I do have a cousin of mine, the Durden family that I did not get into. My grandfather married Faye Durden. She was his first wife. The Durden family is another old and long family here in Beaumont and, it has a deep history.

David Willard is an educator, author, editor and community servant who currently works as Middle School Dean of Students at All Saints Episcopal School. In 2019, Dr. Willard was also elected Commissioner At-Large for the Port of Beaumont.

Land of the Three Ps: Pine, Petroleum and Pentacostals

Jim Sanderson

I'm a little intimidated, because these people all know things and a lot of you know stuff and got facts. I lie. So, I guess my purpose is to tell you how I lie and maybe refer to some other liars. I'm not the only one. Lisa Sandlin has a very good novel, *The Do-Right*, set in 1973 Beaumont, and all of these issues are in this novel because it's covering Hank Aaron's breaking of Babe Ruth's record and the local reaction to that. My colleague Gretchen Johnson has a novel called *Single in Southeast Texas*, and that's about trying to get a date in Southeast Texas and the horror and tragedy of that and that's also available.

And my current project is an "as-told-to," and so I'm being told Carl Parker's memoir. And I don't know if you know Carl Parker, but the building just next to Lamar's library here is named for him. We just finished this, and of course, it's his memory, and as I told Carl, "Well, funny is better than true." So, this is his working through what he recalls. Memory is always bittersweet, sometimes sweet and sometimes bitter. So, that bittersweetness affects what Carl told me. And I guess his connection to this panel and maybe what I'm supposed to be talking about is that what got Carl was post-union Beaumont. That's when he lost the election and the ground shifted up underneath him. That election was in 1994 when the unions had lost their control or influence over voters.

William Dean Howells, an old nineteenth-century critic, said that the realist writer should get after the truth. And he said if he gets the truth, even if it's ugly, it's beautiful. So, what he's doing is twisting "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" from John Keats's "Ode to a Grecian Urn" all up and around in circles. And then Henry James stole from his brother Will James—and William and Henry James are not to be confused with Frank and Jesse James, two different sets of boys—so Henry stole William's "stream of consciousness." William had said that what we call experience is nothing more than a set of impressions that we gather. Henry said that what the writer does is to take this impression and this impression and this one and put them together in a new impression based on old impressions. And so, I think that fits kinda maybe why I'm here.

The chief thing that colored Beaumont for me was that I came here from Odessa, Texas, and basically if you draw a line from Lubbock to just north of Beaumont, I tried to write about stuff south of that line … and have gotten pretty much of it. But anyway, I came here from Odessa, and what impressed me was, first off, the diversity that you all just heard about Beaumont. So, there's layers and layers of diverseness and people and attitudes. Odessa was basically not even a town until 1923.

And everybody in Odessa was not from Odessa and wanted to be some place other than Odessa. In Beaumont, no one seemed to leave. No one wanted to leave, which kind of surprised me. Then I compared my hometown San Antonio, which you could trace back to 1718. So there's a lot more layers of people and attitudes.

The second thing that impressed me here was the land, the environment. When I got here, I was really spooked by shade. You put your hand in it like that [extends hand and arm forward] and it changes color. Pull it out and it's normal again. And then there were all these plants sucking up my air and crowding me, and I felt like a dismounted Comanche. I couldn't see them coming, you know, what was I going to do? And I didn't know how to act, and I came up with the line that in West Texas there's stuff that can kill you; in East Texas there's stuff make you wish you were dead.

And then the way people talk and react to that talk. An example that sticks in my mind: I asked Earlene, who was giving me a beer, "Earlene, how did you get to Odessa?" "Husband mean to me. Hit him in the head with the shovel, come to Odessa." Now that is a stern, very western, delivery; it is as though words are precious, and you don't use them but on occasion. You ask a Beaumont Earlene, and the response is more Southern, it's Blanche Dubois. It goes on and on and on, and we hear about the husband and the shovel and everybody else involved. And so, it's a more histrionic reaction. And you can hear that in the way that people talk.

Another sort of difference is God and the Gods of the two places. A.C. Green said of West Texas that it was Church of Christ and Baptist because like the land, if you didn't do the right thing, if you didn't do it in a certain way, you would be dead. And so you needed a strict, commanding, tough God who has strictures and rules, and you obey these rules. And I think I saw that. Here in Southeast Texas, I think God is Pentecostal. If you go out into the forest, if you see the swamp gas, if you see that darkness, if you look at stuff, if you look outside of the fog and the haze, you look at these—flares, they're spooky stuff. You hear voices. Things are talking to you. A former student of mine who was raised Pentecostal said that her mother told her that, on the high wires passing over the house, the devil was dancing at night and that sometimes they spark from that dance. Well, that's gonna make you a little spooked.

With that let me get to another source. Another friend of mine, Katie Hoerth—a national figure, a poet. She's here at Lamar, and her latest volume of poetry is *Flare Stacks in Full Bloom* (2022). The title poem has Katie driving home from work, and she sees those flares going off and it's comforting. And she comes home to that, leaves in the morning, and sees them releasing that smell. And we should recall that these are the Port Neches flare stacks that blew and sent debris into Katie's and other's yards. And so suddenly, this thing that's sort of fond becomes threatening.

And maybe I will read just a few things from a novel about Beaumont [Sanderson, *Nothing to Lose* (2014)]. The narrator is a grouch:

> The good thing about Beaumont in September is that it isn't Beaumont in August. September is mostly hot and muggy with air so thick you almost have to shove it up your nose with your thumb. August makes you wish you were dead, makes you forget what it's like to wear a clean, dry shirt, makes you believe that the true son of God is Willis Carrier, the man who invented practical air conditioning. July is just as bad. June, May, September, and October are just miserable, not unbearable.

He has other things to say:

> I live in a land of three Ps: pine, petroleum, and Pentecostals …
>
> The old-growth pines are long gone, but the symmetrically planted new pines, gifts from the timber industry, have thick vines, wild strawberries and onion plants, poison and other ivies, tallow weed trees growing in between them and clogging their space and sucking up at their oxygen, just as the new pine were once the trash trees for the old growth trees. The evolution of trash …
>
> All that twisting intertwined choking growth is without order or symmetry. What guides this growth is an almost unnatural,

> almost unhealthy, certainly destructive yearning for life and domination. So all the flora in the area tries to smother all rivals; everything not connected to a plant's far-reaching roots is an enemy. Most of this flora ought to have the dignity to just give up, let go, and die.
>
> The people aren't much better.

Thank you.

Jim Sanderson has published eight novels and more than eighty short stories, essays, and scholarly articles. For a living, he is a Professor in the English and Modern Languages Department at Lamar University, outgoing department chair, and incoming Artist in Residence.

History: Discussion

Vernon Durden: I was listening to the history from the three historians, and I like to see how you tie the omissions. I didn't hear anything about Sam Houston in the land grants, and I did also want to hear how you feel the spinning of the earth that's going to change and what the results would be. And I especially want to speak to some of the things that Mr. David Willard was talking about in Beaumont, how our history in Beaumont has left out such an important part of that history of the contributions of the Willard family and how the early history of the land grants and all didn't even include that contribution. You all may take any of that, any of you.

Abdul Alkalimat: First of all, thank you for such an engaging set of presentations. It's impossible to say everything about history. Therefore, we select. And so, I want to ask the question: What few things should everyone know about the history of Beaumont? In other words, I'm asking you to select something that you think captures the meaning of Beaumont.

Judy Linsley: Vernon, what was your question about Sam Houston and the land grants?

Vernon Durden: I understand that there was a lot of land that was given to people and Sam Houston parceled it out.

Judy Linsley: I'm not familiar with that specific thing. Of course, it's been a while since I taught Texas history. I think I taught you American history, didn't I? But anyway, it's been a while. I do know that Sam Houston objected to—there were some early, a lot of early land grants given, maybe even before the republic was really stabilized, and he said that they shouldn't do that until things were a little more settled, and the surveys could be, you know, proven a little better because he said, "I think this is going to cause litigation for generations to come." And of course, he was absolutely correct about that. That's become a way of life among a lot of Texans is: Let's go out and see what land we can litigate, and maybe we can get some of it, but I don't know specifically what you're talking about, I'm sorry. If you can give me a little more detail, I might be able to, but there were land grants and people could claim them. I do know that, you know, you had to be able to prove head of household and you got a certain amount for that. You got a certain amount for each child you brought in, and I guess a wife and then you got extra for each enslaved person you brought in, which of course made it much more profitable for people who were bringing in a number of enslaved people. They could get more land. I think it was fifty acres per person and that was one incentive for people to bring in the enslaved people and to make sure they hung onto them, so.

Alex Perez: If I can speak frankly, we are, the people that we're referring to were European Americans, okay? So—and I'm not one to speak divisive between people—I like to—but history's history. And history's brutal. It's very raw. You know, from the native perspective and from the African American perspective, these opportunities weren't—we had to fight, a lot of us lost everything. Speaking for myself—and I'll get to, the land grant obviously ties in—it took 150 years for me to be born to actually resurrect our languages. Our languages have been dead for over 150 years. So that was around the time where a lot of European Americans had already ‘acquired’ free land, and so these land grants were not just open to everyone, as we know. I mean, you know, I don’t like to sugarcoat things. So, you know, and here it is, all this time later, my ancestors are in boxes in universities. When there’s land that’s cleared to build a building, perhaps even this one—no offense—but it’s hard, we’re hard pressed, we don’t even have the avenues to go to, to get back our ancestors and put them back in the ground where they belong, okay? We don’t even have an acre of land for that purpose. I hope you don’t mind me being a little passionate, because this is, is, my main driving force that has me do this work. You have no idea—there’s generational traumas that have been passed down from one to the next. So, if we’re gonna, if we want to talk about—reconciling the past, give some of it up. Give some of the gain up. It’s hard for me to reserve my calm in a lot of cases in regards to this kind of thing. You know, to a lot of people these remains are just bones. We don’t look at it that way. These are grandmothers, our grandfathers, our great uncles, and our great grandmothers. These are our relatives that are sitting in these boxes. I’m sorry, I don’t mean to go off into a tangent, take up too much time.

Audience member: In what way is a more nuanced understanding of history vital in understanding the natural environment and how to make more informed choices about how we connect to the land around us?

David Willard: I’ll try to address Vernon’s question. I guess it kind of dovetails into the question from Massachusetts as well. I’m reminded of the saying that history is recorded by the victors, and I think that that is an apt saying as to why this country, maybe this area, wherever we happen to be, don’t know a full spectrum of the history of the area that they’re in or of this country. In many respects, those who are in quote unquote the minority are still trying to gain their victories and even some of the victories that have been gained over the years are now being receded, taken back. So that lends itself to things being, you know, washed away, forgotten, not talked about, not discussed, and I think that’s a large spectrum. Honestly, to be truthful with you, sometimes I look around, if it weren’t for me being back here in Beaumont for the last fifteen years or so, I don't know how much of my father's history or the Willard history would be known, maybe, as it is today. There's been some articles in the newspaper, some stories on the TV, and things of that nature since I've been back here, but there should be other spokespersons for that community of people here in Beaumont and what's been accomplished over the decades. And I always say that even though I'm speaking from the singular, the Willard family, the Durden family, the Adams family, that's my blood history—this was a communal effort on the part of African Americans in this area. There are many other families who played a role in getting us to where we are.

I don't really know what the Spindletop Society is, this room that we're in now, but if you just kind of look around in this room at all of these majestic portraits that are on the wall, they're telling a story. If you walk into this room and look at these portraits, this is what you're getting about Lamar University and its history and its people who are, are, you know, have made a contribution to this place. There's nobody looks like me up on that wall, and I know a lot of those people up on the wall. But there's nobody that looks like Vernon [Durden] or Chris [Jones] or Michael Cooper or me or you [turns to Alex Perez] or anybody else up on this wall. Like I said, I don't know what the Spindletop Society is, I don't know how you get up on this wall, get your picture on these walls, but the representation on these walls is pretty select. If you were to take a look around.

So anyhow, I'm not somebody—oh, I also want to acknowledge one—couple other things. I'm not somebody, you know, I—people tend to look at me and see that I kind of cross divisions in terms of how I move in and out of communities here in Beaumont since I've been back. So, I'm not someone who's trying to come in and be divisive. But I do speak the truth.

Audience member: Yes, you do.

David Willard: And I do speak honestly about what I know and what I observe. And so, this to me, where we are today, kind of speaks volumes of history and how it's represented to the larger community here in Beaumont and elsewhere. You can walk into a lot of Spindletop Society rooms and see things just like this, you know, surrounding you. So, think of a Native American kid. Think of an Asian kid. Think of an East Indian kid. Think of an African American kid who comes into this room: What do they see? And what does this room tell them about their history, about their place in history, about their place in this university? It speaks volumes.

I do want to acknowledge Mr. [Robert] Robertson, who's here, and I did not—I saw him and did not mention him earlier. He wrote a wonderful book several years ago called *Fair Ways* (2005), which talks about the first desegregation case that my dad and Johns tried and won, the desegregation of Tyrrell Park and golfers who wanted to play in Tyrrell Park. So, I did want to acknowledge him and the contribution that he's made to this story and to this history. My family appreciated it, and everybody else who participated in that appreciated it also.

Community is the word that I think of. Beaumont, more than any other place that I've ever lived, and I've lived in a bunch of places in the United States of America, even a couple of places over overseas. This is a community in all of its facets, both negative and positive. You can scratch the surface, here in Beaumont—I think I mentioned to, this, you [Abdul Alkalimat] and Kate [Williams] when we were talking one time—and almost everyone in this town is connected in some way or another, either through blood, through relationships: Judy Linsley, that I'm sitting next to here and her sister Ellen Rienstra, families go way, way back. You know, my cousin is here. It's just—I've never been in a place that is so tied, where all of the citizens of the place are so tied with one another in multiple strands and in multiple ways. And so that that's the one word that I would think about when I think about Beaumont, Texas, and Southeast Texas, the history of it, and I think Jim [Sanderson] said people don't seem to leave here for whatever reasons, or if they do leave, they get pulled back like I did.

Vernon Durden: I just want to say this, Strong Wind, I did see your passion, I appreciate the way you try to hold it together, but I can tell there are deep wounds when you look at history and see how you have been omitted and not appreciated. And this is, this conversation that we're opening about history, I want to commend Kate for bringing us to the forefront of the discussion, because we really have to understand how we got here, and just for your information, on the wall, it was about the money and if you got the money you could get on the wall, but I really appreciate the fact that you all on this panel have given more than money and have sacrificed more than money for Beaumont to be where it is. Thank you.

Alex Perez: If I can just add to, I think Abdul, you mentioned about, you asked about the meaning of Beaumont. No, I'm not from here; I'm from Galveston, and so we reflect a lot of the same kind of history where, when I was a kid, you know, we, everybody knew my grandfathers. They were—my grandfathers were fighters, they were warriors in their own right of their time. But it is; it's all about community. It really is. All of us share, you know, we're at a time now where we can actually have a talk, where we could all be in the same room, nobody's pitting against each other, right? Nobody's perceived you know, whatever, we're not warring, so we're in a civil society, finally, that we can actually sit and have these conversations. Some of it's going to get uncomfortable.

Audience member: Yeah.

Alex Perez: And that's okay. But, you know, what I've learned in my life is that through those times of that kind of uneasiness is where growth happens, so allow it to process, you know. I'm not gonna be arriving at anybody's home saying, "Give me $50,000 right now," you know what I mean, so that's not happening. We're just having a conversation, talking about things that that affect us all, because what's interesting to me is that now everybody's looking at, you know, and I don't mean to, you know, to mean, but now we're all affected by weather, so now we're going to come together, okay? Buildings, you know, from storms or whatever, okay, and then I understand, you know, there's plenty of resources—to address things.

I drove around Beaumont, and I said, "You know, all these buildings, historic buildings, they could be fixed up. There's money." So, you know, a building is blown down by—my childhood home was demolished to make way for, my childhood home in Galveston, Texas, Eight Mile Road on the West End, where my ancestors come from—one of the regions—those homes that were down there, they were all demolished to make way for vacation homes for the rich. So what way are we going here? And if we expect that the people who have profited, let's say, industry—Exxon and all these kind of industries we expect—they're the ones holding the pot, and they're going to come forward as time goes on. They're gonna say, "Oh, we have these renewable energies, it's going"—not to make fun of anyone, okay, but I'm speaking frankly—were those same people, the same families, the same moneys, the same banks, because if you want to get down to it, governments don't rule the world. Goldman Sachs rules the world. So, and I'm sorry, that's going to shake a few people up, I know. People need to be shaken up.

So, what does it mean—someone asked me, in Allen, Texas, they asked me: "What does it mean to be Karankawa?" And I was like, you know, I don't know how to answer that, you know, so I rephrased the question: What does it mean to be a human being? That's all I'm trying to do, personally, is just to be a better human being. All these different ways that we talk about things, we divide, it's just by our language; we're just all human beings, let's just talk about that. What does it mean to be a human being living in this planet and shared space of this existence, shares space, and how do we go about actually doing all this? We build community, and we tell the truth. We can sugarcoat it all day long, and then, we keep doing the same process. But if we tell the truth and then we can be humble—that's one of the first things that I've learned from my spiritual teachers, is to always maintain a sense of humility. But in this society where it's reinforced, over and over and over again, of this egotism, and this is reinforced, media, reinforced in music, it's reinforced in movies. We wonder why there's all that shooting.

Gayla Young (audience member): Hi, I'm Gayla Young and I'm a resident in Beaumont, Texas. My question—and thank you guys for being here and opening up a space for this kind of conversation to take place—and one of the questions that I have, as it relates to history, because—you're right on it, these are the conversations that need to take place for, I think, the healing to take place, where the communities could come together and you know grow and thrive. So, my question is: What do you think—to the panel—what do you think we can do as a community to collectively begin these conversations beyond this space here that would facilitate the conversations and the healing that needs to take place for us to thrive even greater than where we are? Well, we're not thriving, really, but you know, and then also to the point that Mr. Diller is your name? Willard? Okay, you're right about the Beaumont thing. I'm not from Beaumont, but my family is, and we're from San Francisco, but my grandparents on both sides were from here and so my grandmother did run away from here, but I end up coming back. So, there is something very, very historical and very powerful that I think that takes place in this community, where there is a sense of identity that even if, you know, previous generations like, "I'm getting out of here," someone comes back and maybe it's to do some of that healing that has to take place that that generation was not able to complete and facilitate. So that's my question.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY

Hiring Local and Paying Property Taxes: Companies Must Be Held Accountable

JEFF DARBY

The Sabine Area Central Labor Council consists of every AFL-CIO-affiliated union in six counties in Southeast Texas and Chambers and Liberty counties east of the Trinity River can affiliate with the Sabine Area Central Labor Council. As president of the CLC, that means I get to run the meetings. I don't get to tell the United Steelworkers union what to do. I can't tell the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers what to do. If you have a problem with the Plumbers' local, I will turn you over to their business manager Wayne Lord in Pasadena. But I am the "head cat herder" when it comes to our meetings on the first Wednesday of the month. I have a really good group and one of my brothers, Bryan Gross, is going to be on a panel later on today.

I'm back here at Lamar University. I graduated here in 1988 with a degree in History and a minor in French, which got me ready for the world of unemployment. And then the guy I interviewed with after I found the job posting at the Galloway Business College in July of 1989 was the

District Director for the US Department of Labor (DOL) in Houston. He said, "You know, I believe in hiring 'unwed liberal arts majors', because I was a government major with a history minor," so he hired me as a Wage and Hour Investigator on October 10, 1989, and in twelve weeks I'm retiring from that role.

I have stood up for the working people of Southeast Texas for thirty-three years—and I say Houston as Southeast Texas since my first eight months with DOL was over there. On July 1, 1990, I became an Investigator at the Beaumont Field Office, and I've never left, except that most of my Department of Labor career has been as a national and local regional union representative for the employees of the US Department of Labor, and if you think going up against an oil refinery is hard, Bryan, try to go up against the US government. They're never wrong; just ask them. And I don't care who the political leadership is. It's the career bureaucratic manager. If you can learn how to, any of you in here that are voting American US citizen taxpayers, you know, swear the oath to the Constitution like I did thirty-three years ago, you need to keep those career managers accountable, not just the political leadership. You need to make sure that they keep the bureaucratic managers copasetic. I'm not speaking on behalf of the US Department of Labor, thank God, I'm speaking on behalf of the Sabine Area Central Labor Council and speaking on behalf of me. I was born in Port Arthur, and I've never lived more than seven miles from where I was born. I'm like a lot of y'all—well, except that eight months [that] I lived in the Houston area, but I was back here every weekend anyway. I had met my wife here and her family was from here like mine was; I was a senior here, and she was a freshman. But all jokes aside we're still married after thirty-four years.

But Kate [Williams] and Abdul [Alkalimat] asked me to come here not to relate all my wonderful academic and labor union triumphs—I've had a few, and I've lost a few—winning's better—but to try to relate what do unions mean in Southeast Texas?

But the era of straight-ticket Democratic Party and union collaboration in Jefferson County is gone. The 1994 election destroyed that. And in spite of what former Speaker of the House Tip O'Neill might have said, "All politics is local." It is not. In the day of the twenty-four-hour news cycle all politics is national. We're now seeing it. I live in Nederland—the highest union density in the entire state of Texas. The AFL-CIO looks at union density by zip code; 77627 has more union members percentage-wise than any other zip code in the state of Texas. And I would argue the Southern US. The rate is almost twenty percent, number two is Groves, 77619. And these two cities voted eighty-five percent for Donald Trump. As union leaders, we have to be cognizant of that. We're not going to change people's minds because for thirty years they have heard talk radio, their favorite channel, websites, et cetera, et cetera. We're not going to change that. All we can do is try to smooth off the rough edges, maybe, and concentrate on economics.

Because the most ultraconservative of our union membership—and I'm not criticizing them, I'm just pointing it out for you, so you understand—the Yellow Dog Democrat days among the white working class in Southeast Texas is gone for now. So, let's not bemoan that. Let's recognize the facts as they are. I'm a facts-oriented person, I'm an investigator. I don't give a rat's behind about "what should be." You know, I think it's great what should be, and I'm a historian—I loved the history panel by the way this morning—but what are we doing economically? Because the only color that the world really looks at is green: money. We sell our labor. If you've ever worked for a paycheck, you're a working person.

And what kind of economic inequalities do we face here in Southeast Texas? My job as a Wage and Hour Investigator was to make sure you are paid properly, minimum wage and overtime. I investigated companies that weren't paying the minimum wage. I thought this was going to be an easy job. Everybody knows how to pay overtime, everybody knows the minimum wage, it'll be great to sit around on my rear end all day, right? In reality, being an investigator is a hard job, even here in Southeast Texas.

Are trade unions respected here? I think they still are. You'll hear a lot of people go, "Oh unions are all, you know, corrupt and run by people with vowels at the end of their last name and they're very serious people from Philadelphia or New York." But no, that's not the labor movement in Southeast Texas. We have a very diverse leadership among our labor unions in Southeast Texas. In fact, the retired president of the USW [United Steelworkers] local in Beaumont and the secretary-treasurer are both African American people. They retired right after the lockout ended, and brother Bryan Gross could tell you more about that. We have diverse leadership. We have people that are trying to do their best, but are we respected? Overall, I think we are.

And when we talk to political leadership, I don't care what their party label is. The CLC is not an arm of the Democratic party. I hope to not burst too many bubbles. But at the local level we have to talk to them all. I can't, as an AFL-CIO Central Labor Council president, get involved in who we endorse for president of the United States. I can look at who we endorse for state representative. If you really want to look at the government that has the most day-to-day control or impact on you, look at your property tax statement you just paid: school board, city, county commissioner, drainage district, navigation district, any other special districts. Know those people. Once you know those people and have influence there, then you can work your way up to state representative, state senator. Then you can work your way up to US representative or US senator. Let's not get so bogged down into way up there. And again, keep an eye on those career managers.

Do the people in Beaumont pay fair taxes? How many of you have ever gone to the Jefferson County Appraisal District website, JCAD.org? I would challenge you to go there. When you go there, if you go on your phone—it's I think an easier website to use than on a laptop or desktop computer—just type in ExxonMobil. Humor yourself. And find all the pieces of property they own in Beaumont: appraised value $4500, $2380, $1068, $375. These are appraised values, okay? And one of the pieces of property they own is in the Willard Addition.

By the way, there are 264 properties ExxonMobil owns in Jefferson County. Just take your time and just randomly pull up stuff.

During the lockout, I wrote an article for *The Examiner,* and I said that one of groups of people I represent at the US Department of Labor is the economists with the Bureau of Labor Statistics. They say that every dollar paid in wages is turned over nine times in a local economy. That's why it's so bad for all of these out-of-state contractors to come into Jefferson and Orange counties, because they're not spending much of that money here. They're shipping it back home. Now don't get me wrong. My daddy was on strike many times when I was a little kid. He had to work in Lima, Ohio, or Louisville, Kentucky, or Corpus Christi or wherever, and I'm glad he sent the money home to mama and my sister and me. But these people in Jefferson and Orange counties are working tax-abated jobs where their employer promised to have eighty percent of the people from Jefferson, Orange, Hardin counties. These requirements are not enforced.

We're looking at stupidity in the war on drugs, whole groups of people for generations now have become unemployable because the companies are going to look at your hair follicles and see if you took a toke of a joint sixty days ago, like the THC drug in marijuana is going to randomly go up to your brain after two months and it's like *Reefer Madness* (1936), the film that came out in the thirties, versus "Oh Boudreaux there, he drank half a case of beer last night and he's here kind of you know something." I'm not picking on Cajun people, I'm half Cajun and I'm half Southern white, so that makes me either coon neck or a red ass, you figure out which one it is. But we laugh at the people sometimes that come to work you know kind of drunk, yet we're going to look at people, "Oh you smoked a joint when you went on that trip to Colorado a month ago, we're going to have to fire you." Unemployable in good-paying jobs in Southeast Texas—versus, let's figure out what is really important. No, I am not advocating for drunk people or high people to work around heavy machinery and bombs. These are controlled explosions at these refineries and chemical plants. I'm not going to badmouth the industry. But you know thousands of products are made here in Southeast Texas because of the oil and chemical industry: your cell phone, the plastics, the rubber, your synthetic fibers that you might be wearing, the gasoline you burned to get here, the electricity that's generated, most of it is generated from natural gas, okay? It's a fact of life. We can't solve all of those problems today. Should we look at alternate sources of energy? Of course. I believe in an all-of-the-above approach. And let's face the fact: The internal combustion engine is 150-year-old technology, so it's probably on the downward slope, but we're still going to need diesel for as long as we can see right now, jet fuel for as long as we can see.

But take a look at the JCAD.org, take a look and see if ExxonMobil, see if Total, Indorama, what are they paying? We found in that lockout last year that ExxonMobil, some of their pieces of property are evaluated at one percent of the fair market value. And I'm not making this stuff up. It is on the JCAD.org website. And one of y'all was talking earlier about the community here: My second cousin's wife is the director of the Jefferson County Appraisal District. You can't swing a dead cat without hitting one of my relatives around here.

But I'm going to be around all day, I'll be on the panel, and I appreciate the opportunity to be here with y'all today, and Lamar's playing this afternoon, so: LU! Thank you.

Jeff Darby is a lifelong resident of Jefferson County with thirty-three years' experience enforcing labor laws in Southeast Texas. For the past twenty-five years, he has also been an officer in many labor organizations, notably President of the Sabine Area Central Labor Council (SACLC).

Let's Do What's Good for All of Us

Paula O'Neal

We are getting ready to experience your first nobody. I'm not sure exactly why I was asked to be here, because I'm going to be here solely from personal experience. I am not an academic, I am not affiliated with a particular entity that we're considering today. I am just an everyday person that has a compassion for helping people.

When Abdul asked me: "What would you expect to get out of our meeting today?" I thought about it a minute, and I thought, "Well, wouldn't it be wonderful if those that are here as well as those that may be listening and those that our lives may touch will begin to think outside the box?" It's only natural that we approach problems and situations from personal experience and take our personal situation to that particular situation, but no resolution is going to be found as long as all of us do that, until we can think outside of the box and put ourselves in other people's situations. Until then there will never be what undoubtedly is beginning to be a word that will soon be extinct—compromise—and working together.

As I was thinking about coming and visiting with you all today, I thought of a situation that I experienced not long after I became the director of Some Other Place, which for those of you that do not know is a faith-based mission here in Beaumont that serves people who are in need. And this gentleman had come to us, approaching us for assistance, and we were talking and needless to say his story was very sad. And I stupidly, and I do know that stupid is a dirty word, but stupidly I said to him, "I know how you feel." And he very, very politely said, "No ma'am, you don't know how I feel. You are not a black man who has had to reach out to strangers to take care of my family."

I need you to know that in my over forty years with Some Other Place and never have said that again, because there is no way for any of us to know—I don't know how you feel. I don't know how any of you feel here. All I know is how I feel, and until I'm willing to overlook that and let you into my perspective, we will never find answers to the problems that we face.

I've looked over the agenda. I was fortunate enough to get it early, and needless to say I'm not going to enter into the taxes situation nor am I going to talk about trade unions, because those are two things that—I do know that as a taxpayer I do pay taxes—but I really don't know a whole lot about those two entities, but I am going to talk about the difference between being rich and being poor. Most of us think about rich as the Trumps—I hate to mention that name—the Gettys, the guy that just bought YouTube or Twitter or whatever, you know, we think of that as wealth. Well, I'm here to tell you that that is not the true definition of wealth. Wealth is those who are economically secure.

You, you, most of us sitting in this room, are wealthy in the eyes of most, because we have everything that meets our basic needs. I'll never forget, as I was a young college graduate from Lamar University; back then it was a little college of technology, with my government and history major. When I graduated, I went to work for the Welfare Department and I'll never forget, going into the homes—back then we made home visits—and going into the homes of the people who were on government assistance and in just about every home that I went into there was a color TV—remember them, the big ones with the consoles, and, you know, it was a big piece of furniture?

And I would ask some of the people that I would visit with: "How are you paying for the TV?" Well, of course there was a particular company in this town that still is here, that, you know, if you pay five dollars a month, ten dollars a month you end up paying, probably back in those days, ten times the price of the piece of equipment that they were enjoying. But the thing that bothered me the most was when I would question them about that, they would respond to me, "Don't you have a color TV?"

And as a recent college graduate on a very limited budget, I didn't have a color TV. My husband and I had one those little ones that you put on a cart, and you pull it into the kitchen when you were in the kitchen and then you went into the bedroom with it when it was nighttime. But they believed what they saw on TV. They thought that everybody was rich.

In dealing with the people that I've dealt with, they are only economically poor. They are not all poor people. They are just in situations, in many instances through no fault of their own, because of their circumstance.

Whenever Kate and Abdul approached me about doing this, I have to truthfully admit to you that I didn't have a full understanding of exactly what we were going to be discussing today. I knew about the inequality, and I thought about inequality: How in the world can you ever resolve inequality? It's a given. By accident of birth, we come into this world on different levels. By accident of family, we come into this—I tell people all the time, you know, "The apple didn't fall far from the tree," and it doesn't in most instances.

I noticed in the program it talks about the basis of economic life is human labor. Lot of people don't have the opportunity for employment. Look around you at the jobs that have been taken away. But technology—in fact, I get angry at myself every time I step into WalMart and self-check—because you know I'm taking away a job. I can remember when you used to go to the service station and people pumped your gas for you. I remember when you went into a restaurant you didn't have to get your own drink. You know, now when I go to the bank, I get so angry when they say, "Miss O'Neal, you can do that online."

I don't want to do it online. I want a human being. And so unfortunately—maybe I am getting a little bit into labor—but unfortunately, with the way things are now, the jobs that most people—not your highly educated, not your highly trained—but most average people—there are no jobs There's not anything that you can do in this day and time without having some type of talent, degree, whatever.

And so, we find that so many of the people, that I dealt with at Some Other Place, that were just not able to find employment. It wasn't if they didn't want to work. And then you talked about—oh, I am getting into a little bit about labor—you talk about wages; does it not bother you that the person that provides the hamburger that you get at McDonald's can't live on the wages that they make? But then you look at their financial statement, the financial statement of McDonald's and, you know, whoopity doo dah.

I got so upset about the gas prices, you know, I mean the fact that we're paying—and I'm blessed, we're rich, remember we're the rich people because we have the money to pay for the gas—but I look at the fact that there are people—had a home health lady that did home health services that said that she had to quit her job and draw unemployment—and that her company allowed her to do that—because she couldn't afford the gasoline to make the home visits that she had to make to do her job.

But then you look at the profits—and I'm not an economist, and so I don't know why it happens this way—but you look at the profits that ExxonMobil and these big companies—and I'm not knocking them. My father worked for an oil company, and like they say, it put bread and milk and all of that on the table, and I would never knock them. But we've got to get out of thinking how it affects me.

I told this story, and Abdul told me I could use it today. Many of you that are from this area, the name "Ben Rogers," his painting, his portrait is up here in the middle over there. I used to use this, whenever Mr. Ben was alive and when I would speak, and I would say, "What was good for Mr. Rogers was good for the man who slept on the park bench outside the Julie Rogers Theater, and what was good for the man that slept on the bench outside the Julie Rogers Theater—which by the way was named after Miss Julie, Mr. Ben's wife—is good for Ben Rogers."

Until we get to the point where we can stop and think about, "Is what I'm doing, is how I'm voting, is how I'm spending my time, my money, and my talents, are they truly benefiting everybody? Or is it just benefiting me?" I will tell you the personal story and in fact I will apologize, because I am going to have to leave: My house flooded.

I had a leak, and the mitigation people are to be there again this afternoon. Anyway, but I thought about disaster, inequality and disaster, tying the two together. And I thought about the fact that having all that equipment in my house and having to rip up floors and possibly pull out cabinets and replace the hot water heater—was an inconvenience. It wasn't a disaster. It was an inconvenience for me, because I'm one of those rich people, I had a little money in the bank, I had insurance, and so I'm okay.

But what happens to the person that's not one of the rich people, and their house floods, whether it's a disaster such as a hurricane, whether it's a leaky faucet, no matter what. What about them? They don't have that safety net, that security that most of us sitting in this room have. Whenever the hurricanes come, mostly—they cause fear for all of us. But mostly, for most of us, it's just an inconvenience. We've got to evacuate, where are we gonna go? We've got to get gas in the car. We find a place. We have that safety net. We have insurance if something happens. The poor don't have that.

And I found in working at Some Other Place the poor live disaster-filled lives every day: a sick child, a broken refrigerator, a car that won't start, you know, not enough hours at work to pay the rent. Those are disasters that they live with all the time. And until those of us that are 'rich,' which includes you and me, believe it or not, until we start thinking about what's good for them, we'll never resolve the problems and everything that our country faces, that our city faces. We are blessed.

They've mentioned the pictures on the wall. We're blessed in a very generous community. Now motivation for their generosity, I won't get into, but there are really wonderful people of all races, of all nationalities, of all classes in life that support Lamar University, that support Some Other Place, that support places that help people. But giving money is the easy part.

And until we are willing to sacrifice ourselves, possibly, and to possibly compromise, to try to understand what it's like for those of us that are different from each other. Everything inside is the same.

I don't know, I've never looked inside my body or anybody else's, but I would imagine you don't tell the color or the class of a heart or kidney or the blood that runs through our veins. We're all in this together. And until everybody realizes that nothing, nothing will be resolved, and we will continue to make messes and have messes to clean up. Think outside the box.

Paula O'Neal is a native Beaumonter and Texan who directed Some Other Place for forty years and volunteered at Calder Baptist Church and across the community, earning many special recognitions.

Information Sharing and Mentorship Will Create More Qualified Folks

FRED VERNON

I am Fred Vernon. I'm the founder and CEO of KLV Ventures. KLV Ventures is a transportation logistics company: We haul small parcel mail and have eighteen wheelers, and we deliver about six to ten million packages a year. And here at KLV between its affiliates, we employ anywhere from 120 to two hundred W-2 employees, men and women. They go out on the front lines every single day, and I'm very grateful for everything that they do. Thank you.

And I want to share what it was like for me as an African American, someone that grew up in a home that was below the poverty line, excuse me, below the median income here in Southeast Texas: four brothers and sisters and of course a mother and father. The median household income in the area is about forty-eight thousand dollars and then per capita is about twenty-seven thousand dollars annually. I can tell you my parents probably made anywhere from thirty-eight to forty thousand dollars and that's with a family of four. So it creates challenges, right? However, some of those challenges that I faced, and I was able to overcome were varied, but I can tell you one of them, one thing that was not in my way was the ability to raise the money to start the business. That was not one of the primary challenges that I faced. That was not one of the things that I feel, not having the funds was not one thing that I feel that could have precluded me from being successful.

However, the two things that I did have … an inequality against my counterparts, noncolored counterparts, was access to information and access to mentorship. I feel had I had those, in an equal portion to that in my counterparts, I could have been much more successful at a much more rapid rate, and many of—others in this community, who could have been, you know, inventors or who could have been business owners or presidents or senators—had they had access to the proper information and access to the proper mentorship, they could have been much more successful, but we won't know. However, we do have an opportunity to get it right—now that we're here.

Now I want to define what it means to have access to information. Access to information means number one: Folks not assuming that "everybody already knows that," and we'll talk a little bit more about how in my life there's a lot of stuff that everybody "should have known," should have known, but I didn't know. And it's not just me; it was all of us. We didn't know. And right now, it's still going on: We still don't know. So at every opportunity, I try to discuss it.

Number two: Defining of mentorship. I like this one. Mentorship means taking someone who is not qualified, by the traditional standard, and helping them become qualified. Because we hear, we hear a lot about how, "We looked for folks to employ and bring in, but nobody can pass a drug test. No one's qualified. No one had the education level. So, we couldn't, we had to go, we couldn't meet the diversity quotas." We've gotta move past all that. It's called mentorship. So, find someone who's not qualified and make them qualify and then watch them grow. That's called mentorship.

So, access to mentorship and access to information: Had I had those two, had the other people that looked like me, the other African Americans had access to those, we could have many more successes in this country.

So, I want to share with you some examples from my story on how the difference between rich and poor was made up, okay, by having those accesses. Okay, so my story started, my journey to entrepreneurship and becoming who I am started in 2006. It was May of 2006, couple of weeks from graduation, and I remember walking down Williams Avenue—and my house was the last house on the right, white home—and I get there, and I see a note flowing in the wind. And as I get closer, I pull it off the door and I noticed it was a foreclosure notice. Okay, couple of weeks away from graduation.

So, I had to make a decision: Was I going to go to college, was I going to go to the military, or was I gonna stay and get involved in industry and help my family continue to maintain their home? For me it was simple: join industry, make money, help my family. And oddly enough no one in my family had ever went to college so that wasn't even an option on the table. When I tell you nobody even knew how to apply for college, FAFSA [Free Application for Federal Student Aid], that was all foreign. We didn't know, okay.

So shortly thereafter I would become a welder. Learned how to weld; failed the SAT miserable when I did attempt it. When I started welding, I took about a year, two years, off from school, saved up some cash, worked at the Motiva Expansion Project out here, and I saved up some money, and I was able to afford my first semester in college at Tyler Junior College.

The only reason I went to college is because my brother—he's my younger brother—enrolled in Texas State, got a full-ride scholarship in football, and I said, he wasn't gonna be the first one in the family graduate from college. So, the competitive nature in myself: I decided I was gonna enroll in college. I was gonna beat him to the punch. This is after taking a year off from school. And I enrolled in Tyler Junior College, ran out of money, had about ten thousand dollars saved up, ran out of that money and end up moving back home to Port Arthur.

At that point I needed to get a job. I learned how to weld—while in high school I was part of a program for welders, okay? I learned how to get the basics of welding, okay? Well, I needed a job when I got back. And nobody was hiring, nobody was hiring, So I was like, well, okay, I gotta upgrade my education. I got to upgrade my skills, right? At that point I can only weld two pieces of metal flat together: It's called a structural weld, okay? But they were only hiring for pipe welders.

At that time, I was about nineteen, twenty years old. So, I went up here to the local—I forget what it was then—the pipe fitters local, but it's now Local 211 out of Houston. I went there, and I was immediately denied. And I mean literally within two minutes of me walking in. What the causes were? I had to do all these tests—again, information I did not have. And he said, "Oh no, you can't do it. I can tell you right now because you're twenty or XYZ, you can't, you gotta go."

Alright, no worries, I didn't take no for an answer. I kept looking—found a small welding school down the road, and they did teach me, and they did allow me to weld. And it took me a couple of months. I got my pipe welding certification—I still got the burns on my arms. Obsession! And I became a pipe welder, and that's why I got on the Motiva Expansion Project there as a pipe welder.

When I got there, we had an orientation class. I was the only—there's not a whole lot of African American welders, I can tell you that. And so, while I'm sitting there in the orientation class, and the foreman comes in, and they're taking the numbers from the class they're orienting, and they are supposed to have two welders, two pipe welders, and then they got a couple helpers.

Well, he comes in and he says, "Hey, where are the, we're supposed to have another welder here," and they are going crazy trying to find the other welder, and we're all sitting right there, and so finally I heard them talking, and I said, "Sir, I'm the other welder." He looks at me; he's like, "No way, no way." And I said, "Yes sir, I am." He said, "You know they're gonna x-ray your welds, right?" I said, "Yes sir, I'm aware." "So okay, well, we gotta welder." We went on to work. So anyway, again overlooked, overlooked, because one reason or another.

Nonetheless, I kept pushing, and anyway, I ended up working through that. I ended up going on to PricewaterhouseCoopers, resigning, and I founded a company because I found out that you could buy a FedEx route, a bread route or a Dorito route while I was on an internship with that man on that picture there all the way to the back [points at a picture in the room], Bart Simmons.

And he actually put me on an airplane for the first time. I was twenty-two years old—that was almost twelve years ago—it was my first time on an airplane. And I saw what entrepreneurship could be. I saw for the first time what could be within one man's jurisdiction and that left a big impression on me. While I was out there, I went to lunch with a gentleman and he told me I could buy a bread route, a FedEx route, or a Dorito route and do not depend on corporate America at PricewaterhouseCoopers as your sole source of income. Information, information: It was assumed that people knew that.

Well, I would come back home. We were attending church Wednesday night, and there's a gentleman named Brother Bobby. It was after I completed my internship in 2011. There was a gentleman named Brother Bobby, and he told me how to buy a FedEx route, and I bought my first FedEx route for fifty-two thousand dollars.

How did I learn how to raise the money to do that? Here in college, here in college. And the only reason I continued my journey of education: After I left Tyler, I enrolled in Lamar Port Arthur. The only reason I finished at Lamar Port Arthur—enrolled in Lamar University—is because there was a gentleman by the name of Kyle Boudreaux who walks in class one day and says, "If you stop here, your educational endeavors, at the high school level, I'll see you at McDonald's when I'm getting my daughter a Happy Meal. And if you finish your two-year degree here at Lamar State at Port Arthur, I'll see you at the kiosk in the middle of the mall when I'm getting my batteries changed in my watch."

And I went, "Oh no, sir, I don't want to be that guy." So, it wasn't true, but that had an impact on a twenty-year-old young man. But again, information, the prodding, the pushing, mentorship, information, things that we take for granted that everybody knows.

And so, he pushed me and I enrolled here. I was fortunate enough to run into Dr. Ann Watkins, who said, "Fred, you need to change your major from economics and finance to accounting. And by the way have you considered a master's degree?" And I was like, "No, ma'am, no ma'am, and no ma'am." "Okay," she says, "but I can help you pay for school." Because at that point, I was working at Jefferson County, a mentorship, Xena Stephens helped get me on at the sheriff's department. And they worked on my class schedule, so I would work in the evening times, go to school in the morning times. Mentorship.

So anyway, I took advantage of the opportunity. Dr. Ann Watkins, she was able to persuade me by saying she could help me pay for school. I said, "Yes ma'am, yes ma'am, yes ma'am." Oh, so, I would end up pushing myself to achieve and obtained a master's degree, when the standardized test told me I was incapable of taking that, okay?

That standardized test told me I wasn't qualified, but because Dr. Ann Watkins or Xena Stephens or Vernon Durden, okay, David Willard, came and said, "Hey, we're gonna help you get there." And they pulled me up, okay, and tributes to many others.

So anyway, that's an example of how access to information impacted my life and access to mentorship. Just really quickly: I ended up going to work for one of the top firms in the world in PricewaterhouseCooper's. Not only that, I got into a very, very rare or strict segment of their transaction services in PricewaterhouseCoopers, where I was working with folks from Harvard, Rice University, a lot brighter than I was.

But that was because of a gentleman named Todd Hoffman who I met on the eighth floor of the library, back there on the left side of the room [points at a picture in the room]. He showed me how to shine my shoes, showed me how to dress, okay, but mentorship: assuming everybody knows you should shine your shoes. No, we don't. Take advantage of the opportunity to mentor somebody when you can, okay?

And just moving on: I learned how to grow my business and bring it up, get involved in civic things. Bart Simmons has been a mentor [points at picture in the room] and taught me; that man right there [points at picture in the room], Wayne Reaud, got involved in my life a couple of years ago, started teaching me business, how to handle some of the problems that I was facing as a business owner because I didn't know who else to talk to about it, because there were too many zeros behind my problems. Didn't understand it, okay, twenty-eight, twenty-nine years old. It takes mentorship.

Moving on. Lastly, I want to make this comment—I promise I'll get back to the unions. But after a while, after I grew my business with Amazon and FedEx, I started buying up real estate, started buying homes here. And I bought several homes. And most recently, a couple of years ago the property taxes jumped up for everybody—everybody except for ExxonMobil, apparently—and it hurts. However, I went out, to maintain the problems that I had with my real estate. I joined Local 68 as a plumber, again because I had information, so I wasn't going to do it the same way I did it back then. But I accessed information. I enrolled in plumbing school to maintain my homes, and I bought a plumbing company to do that.

Here's a quick story: While I was there in that class, there were two African Americans, and it was about twenty, anywhere from fifteen to twenty-five local union folks, white folks, okay? And literally like my first week in class a guy in the front of the classroom yells out a racial slur to somebody else walking, literally walking in. Again, I don't mean to ruffle anybody's feathers, but I'm gonna tell my story, I'm gonna speak my truth. That's what happened. And now my very good friend, who was the teacher at that time, jumped on that guy's behind and chewed him out and said, "That's not what we're about."

But I can tell you right now: The unions as it stands right now, it's not diversified nearly enough. Hey, there may not be qualified folks—but guess what? We learned about a little word called "mentorship." People who are not ready, grab them by the hand and pull them up and give them opportunity. If they're gonna fail, let them fail out. But other than that, give them a shot. Mentor them. Teach them.

And I want to say this in closing: that America is not a bad country. This is a phenomenal country, and this is the best country. But we've got to do better to move it forward and—the past is in the past, okay, but we've got to grow, we've got to heal, we've gotta process. But we don't burn it down, we reform it. We rebuild it into what it can be, okay? Access to information and mentorship. Thank you.

Fred R. Vernon II is the founder and CEO of KLV Ventures Inc., a transportation and logistics company that specializes in mid- to last-mile delivery, transporting industrial applications and parcel mail. Among his many civic activities, he established a Lamar University endowment in honor of his mother.

Learn from Others, Make Your To-do List, Live by It

Barbara Wilson

Good morning, I'm Barbara Wilson. I am not from Beaumont. I'm from Miami, Florida. I've been here ten years. I own the BAW Resale downtown. I have the largest resale store in Southeast Texas. I've lived in multiple places. I think I've been close to having the largest resale store everywhere. Remember when I came here, Mr. Weinbaum gave me my first, you know, large access to space. They since have asked me if I was interested in moving into the Baptist Church downtown across from the library, and I'd share it with them. If you'll get me in that building, you'd never get me out.

But I want to tell you a little bit about myself. I'm a single mother; I was raised by a single mom. I have five brothers; I'm the only girl. I would say that I've always said, maybe I was, I don't know if I was really lucky. I think about what Fred was saying, when he talked about having access, different access to resources.

I was picked out of a class—I think because I was probably one of the only kids that probably stayed in the seat—and so you know there was an art program, like a magnet program, and I was chosen with a few other kids to go and audition for that program. I think in the sixth grade. I don't think I could draw any better than any other sixth-grade child. I was asked to go and audition; I auditioned, and I got into that program. So, from the seventh grade through, actually through my, you know, graduating from college, I've always been in the arts.

But we were put into a magnet program. So therefore, we didn't go to school, you know, in our neighborhoods. So, I was bussed to a magnet program from the seventh grade through the twelfth grade. The same teachers that we started with, when I got to the twelfth grade and also in college, some of those same teachers who started that program, you know, migrated along with the program and helped it to excel.

So, they have a school called the La Guardia School of Arts in New York; we had the New World School of Arts, equivalent to that in Miami. I was one of the first graduating classes from that school. They eventually had a program through the University of Florida, where they would have a graduate program. And so, I was also a graduate from that program. So, I graduated from the University of Florida.

But I say that to say: I think that just being picked out of that sixth-grade class, you know, gave me access to that program, access to those professors and teachers. When I went back to go to school, to go back to college—I think I was about thirty years old. And when I went back to the school—again, it was through the University of Florida—when I went in there, the lady said, "You know, Barbara you've been out of school for a while, you don't have a portfolio. Go ahead and pay for your one semester and then bring your portfolio back and then we'll look at what you have and then we'll see what we can do to help you with some money."

So, I did that. I did my semester. I paid for my own classes, came back and she looked at what I presented, and she says, "Okay, we're gonna give you a partial scholarship." And I looked at that partial scholarship and I said, "I don't have any money. I've moved out of my house, moved in with my mother; I have no money." She took that paper, tore it up, gave me a full scholarship to go to the University of Florida.

And so throughout, I've always looked at little things like that and just said, you know, "Well, you know that opportunity that I had: had so many other people had that same opportunity, maybe their things would be differently."

I was sharing with Kate about resources: My mother sat on a wealth of information and nothing in her told her to give that information to her children. Now she was headstrong, and she did everything, she ran everything, but I was the only one, the only girl, so I was the only one that didn't want her doing anything for me. But when I did want information or was trying to figure out what I was doing, I was working for a guy that was twenty-three years old. And I was at that time thirty-something years old with two kids, and I remember having an accident, trying to get to this job, and he says, "Barbara, why don't you just buy a new car?" And I'm thinking, if I could buy a new car don't you think I'd buy a new car? You think I'd drive here breaking down every day?

So, I go home and I tell my mom, "This man's telling me, 'Why don't you just go and buy a car?'" and he's twenty-something years old, and I'm thirty-something. And she says, "Oh yeah, just go call the credit union. They'll give you a car. You know, if you make thirty thousand dollars, they'll give you thirty thousand dollars." And I'm thinking, she's sitting here and watching me go through this, I mean—nothing in her tells her?

So, I'm driving up here to this job, the car breaks down—no, I get in an accident. And then I said, "I just can't drive here anymore. It's just too far." This guy is twenty-something years old, and he says, "Why don't you just buy a house?" I call my mother: "This man is telling me to buy a house." She says, "Oh, yeah, call this number." I called this number. I put a one thousand dollar bid down on this home, I think I had to come to the closing with five hundred dollars. And I bought a home.

But again, I'm living in a house with my mother. I'm fifty-two now, and I remember just a couple of months ago saying something to my aunt and my mom and said, "My mother has never talked to me about my menstrual cycle or that." And my aunt looks at me and says, "Our mother never talked to us."

So, when we talk about, again talking about differential access to resources, it's like we sit, sometimes we have the information, but we just don't know how to give that information. I was even listening to Paula [O'Neal] talking, you know—and she's talking about nobody, she is a somebody, she's right across the street from me—and just even some of the things that she was sharing and then just how much we have to give to each other.

You know, when I came here, I saw that twenty-one thousand square feet of space on the side of Mr. Weinbaum's building. And I was taught by one of my professors, he always told me, he said, "Barbara, make a list of what it is that you want to accomplish. Make a list of what it's going to take to accomplish that." And he says, "Start checking it off." And I've always lived by that. And so, all my accomplishments, that's how I accomplished them.

So, when I came here, now you want me to talk about taxes, oh my gosh, okay, so when I came here, that building that I'm in right now, it was listed at 450 [thousand dollars]. Well, where I'm from that's nothing; your house costs that. So, I thought I'd get that building, went, started trying to do financials to get my stuff together so I can get the building. Needless to say, I didn't qualify when I went to my local bank.

So, it went down to 250. So, when it got down to 250, I'm thinking, well that's attainable. I go back to the bank. Of course, I get denied. And a gentleman from, the vice president of Parker Lumber, Chris Miller, bought the building, him and one of the Broussards for seventy-five thousand dollars at auction, okay. So, someone told me about them buying that building for seventy-five thousand dollars. So I went over there to look at the building, they put up one of the buildings up for rent.

I went over there, and I looked at it and I said, "Man, you know, the building that they were trying to rent me was nowhere near the space that I could, that I wanted to use," and so I shared with him, "I have been trying to buy these buildings for years." So, he comes and texts me and he says, Barbara, you want to make a bid on the main building? which I did, I gave him a bid. They owner financed it. I bought the main building, initially. Since then, I bought the buildings next door.

Well in the end I end up financing the building for 510 [thousand dollars]. Well, then they turn around, I went from paying taxes of seven hundred dollars, from when they had it, to, it went up to, I think last year. I paid eight thousand dollars in taxes. And then I just got a bill this year: It's gonna be twelve thousand dollars in taxes. So, it went from them owning it, paying a little bit of nothing, and then for me owning it, it's now, I'm at twelve thousand dollars.

And so apparently, it's not based off of what the building is worth—I mean I don't know, because the assessed value, they say they based it off of what I actually paid for it. So, I was looking at that as inequality; I never even thought about that until they shared that.

One other thing that I wanted to share was: I have a daughter, three kids: My daughter, she—when we originally moved here, we moved to Nederland, and I taught in Orange, was teaching school when I first moved here. But I've since quit the job, because when I got there and they hired me professionally, they paid you once a month, and I said, "Well I wouldn't have gas money to get here. If I take all that money and pay all my bills, I won't make it." And so therefore, I had to decide whether to continue teaching or to go back to being the junk lady, and I've always been known as that, and so I therefore, quit my job, went back to reselling items.

Well then when I moved to Beaumont—because Nederland, nobody was coming over there to purchase anything—I moved to Beaumont, and originally, I left my daughter in school in Nederland. Eventually, I brought her to Beaumont to go to school, wasn't satisfied with that, and so I took her out, and I home schooled her. Well then I went to go put her back in public school, and I remember trying to—I live in Old Town, and so I'm on the board of Old Town, and I remember we had a meeting and they were saying if you don't get down there and complain about where they're going to draw those lines, the value of your homes are going to go down. Your kids are gonna have to go to school on the other side, and I'm thinking, well, I live on the other side of Calder, that's my section I mean. What about my kids? What about, you know?

So, I remember my neighbor saying, "Barbara, don't fight to put your daughter in school over there at Westbrook." He said, "Leave your daughter in school over on the other side," he says, "because what happens is the kids in the private schools, they take their kids out of school, put them in the West End, they take all the scholarships from those children. If you leave your daughter where she's at, she'll excel, from the top of her class. And then she'll…" which, had I not known that that's exactly what happened. She went to Beaumont United, graduated top of her class, got a full scholarship to go to Howard University. And so again, just access to different resources.

So, it is attainable. We just need to "pass it on" was another thing that I wrote down. Everything that you all are sharing today, I'm still learning you know but we need to pass it on. We need to not hold on to it. And I was really encouraged, just by the way Fred [Vernon] pointed to those pictures on the wall and the majority of those people, a lot of them have been my successes as well.

I think about Mr. Weinbaum, I think about, again, when he said find people that are doing what you want to do and figure out how they did it. Every person I meet, the first thing I ask them is "What do you do for a living?" And I look at their life, and I find out what these people are doing and just knowing that the fact that we're right here together, it's attainable. And so, I just want to thank you again for this time. Thank you for welcoming me to this town, because a lot of people have been really supportive of my business. And thank you Kate and Abdul for bringing us here. Thank you.

BAW stands for **Barbara Azalia Wilson** as well as Beaumont Antique Warehouse. Wilson is the owner of one of the largest antique shops in Southeast Texas. Originally from Miami, Wilson moved to Texas in 2012. She graduated from the University of Florida and taught art for twenty years.

Economic and Social Inequality: Discussion

David Willard: Okay, yeah, I have one quick question for the panel, because you represent a pretty broad spectrum in terms of economic viability. So if you had to sort of narrow it down, we've got jobs through the union, we've got two representatives of entrepreneurship, we've got nonprofit, you know, Some Other Place is a thriving nonprofit here in our community—what avenue or avenues in order to decrease that inequality that we see here in these communities, what avenues would you want to suggest or think are the best places to help do that in terms of your own personal perspectives?

Liv Haselbach (audience member): Hi, my name is Liv Jeff. I just want to ask you: In your leadership there, you said was very diverse. Does anyone look like me?

Jeff Darby: Yes.

Liv Haselbach (audience member): A lot of women?

Jeff Darby: The constituent unions elect the delegates to go to the meetings. So, we have them, the delegates come who are elected. Yeah, we had a young man come a while back who said, "We need more Latinos here." I said, "Those unions, those constituent unions need to send them

Audience member: I promote diversity, and I find I'm in a very nondiverse occupation for gender.

Gayla Young (audience member): Hi, I'm Gayla Young again. But my question was, and I kind of think Mr. Willard kind of touched on it, but as it relates to diversity in our communities and inequality, what do you think that we can do to bridge that gap? I know like, just, I was living in the South End area and I know the difference just in appearance between the South End and the West End, so what are those things that you feel as a community, as a city, that the importance of bringing that awareness of those "differences," and what can we do to hold people accountable to make sure that those differences don't exist no more, and both sides look like the same side? Did that make sense? Okay.

Abdul Alkalimat: The new inequality that we are facing is a permanent unemployment or increased sections of the population, because of the way in which the new technologies are replacing the demand for human labor. So, there are, for example, construction workers jobs on the refineries in the thousands only to create a hundred jobs. So, I'm wondering: When we think about the future, how do we take into consideration this new unemployment that's not cyclical but permanent.

Jeff Darby: Yeah, I'll start off. Irony can be ironic. Starting over thirty years ago, I began, I was being invited into high schools to, the teachers would say, "Okay, you high school seniors think that graduation in May is the end of it all. No, it's just the beginning," and the irony that I was alluding to is yesterday and the day before yesterday I was at one of those same high schools giving the same spiel that I did thirty years ago, and I asked those kids, how many of your parents were here in Nederland High School in 1992? Several hands went up and I said, "Well it's a good thing I'm going to be retiring, because it's time for me to retire. I'm too old for this." But the four things I gave them, and this has been my spiel for thirty years: Number one, you can go to college. You got a state-supported university seven minutes from Nederland High School to here, okay? It is state supported; it is going to have—it ain't cheap; God, look at what my dad had to pay 1984 to '88 for me to come to school here versus now, oh God, and I just got through paying for three daughters to come to Lamar, okay? The final one graduated in 2020. But that's one option. "How many of you though are tired of school?" A bunch of hands went up: honest kids. Hey, that's great, no problem there, and I gave them the example of the IBEW, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, their apprenticeship program, what those kids can start doing in June, and they are begging for workers. The IBEW, the plumbers, the pipefitters, all of the apprenticeship programs are begging for people to come there. And they're not saying, "Young people," although mainly it's going to be younger people trying to get into a trade. I mean, there's people around my age that are even trying to—teachers see what the apprenticeships are paying, they're like, I'm gonna quit as a teacher and go become an apprentice electrician. But and I said, "How much do you think it will cost you for the five-year apprenticeship program?" I had, the kids were, you know, kids don't know, but they were giving honest guesses: ten thousand. That's an honest guess: twenty thousand. I said, "Eight hundred dollars, eight hundred dollars for five years and you're earning approximately two hundred thousand dollars during those five years. And then you get that journeymen card, you can travel anywhere in the country or there's gonna be ten to fifteen years' worth of work right here, okay?

Now if those two things don't sound good, do what brother Fred here did and start a business. You got an idea for a service or product, and you can get that access to information, that access to, I'm going to start using that spiel, access to mentorship: That is an honest way to get your feet into the economy. And if those three things don't sound good, join the military. They'll teach you to get up on time, teach how to shine your shoes or your boots and so on and so forth. But if you don't, I guarantee you, kids, in twenty years—well not these, these are the ones from the early nineties, in twenty years you're going to come to my office and say, "Well, Mr. Darby, I didn't follow your advice. I didn't get paid from my latest minimum wage job." By the way, minimum wage has been stuck at $7.25 an hour since July 24, 2009, the longest such lag time since the Fair Labor Standards Act that became law in October of 1938.

As far as the diversity of the labor movement here in the area, I was beginning to answer the question of a few minutes ago, as far as those who come to Sabine Area Central Labor Council, I can encourage a diverse group of delegates. It is up to those individual locals to elect delegates, to have people run for a delegate to become elected, because I just can't go to the plumbers and say, "You need to send me one white female, two

African American men," okay? I can't do that: democratic elections. But I highly encourage, as the father of three daughters, highly encourage ladies to get active in whatever groups they are in, it's a union, it's the PTA, whatever they're in, become active and become a leader there. And as far as other economic inequalities, you're just not going to get it on a high school diploma anymore.

And Abdul's question about construction jobs: Automation has been a fact for over hundred years, and there are thousands of construction jobs for a project that will have fifty permanent jobs. But let's not forget those one thousand construction jobs might be for several years. And construction jobs are very nomadic: They may not stay here, they may go somewhere else, but they're based here in Southeast Texas. But as long as we keep getting work, ten, fifteen years now for work in the area for construction, we're gonna have the construction jobs, and you're just not having, we're not having, in my grandfather's day, and I'll close with this, my father's father worked at Gulf Oil Refinery in Port Arthur. In 1961 he retired. That is now Valero and Texaco is now Motiva and my son-in-law works in Motiva, so, you know, cycle. Each of those refineries employed seven thousand people. There was no automation at all. But now what had seven thousand people then have one thousand permanent employees and maybe five contract jobs. It's just the nature of it. But the construction work is going to be pretty dadgum good employment while those people are working out there and we just need to diversify our economy around here, too. Thank you.

Fred Vernon: Yes sir, we're gonna do one question at a time, from the three, or do we tackle all of them? Okay, so the first question that I recorded was: how to fix the inequalities that currently exist? Throughout our region, number one is, the way we fix that is we have to have, private businesses, unions, and municipalities have to have defined mentorship programs. Defined mentorship programs: be intentional about hiring people or pulling into the fold people who are not qualified that have the the intangible work ethic. They have the desire; they have the passion. Give them a shot. Yes, they may not be qualified, because they've been void of so much for so long. Pull somebody up who's not qualified, have a defined mentorship program, private businesses, unions, and municipalities. Next: Parents—African American parents, white parents, whoever—you have to facilitate a culture of learning education at your house.

Audience member: Yes, sir.

Fred Vernon: Don't let them watch all these cartoons and all this stuff.

Audience member: Yes, sir.

Fred Vernon: As soon as they become of age, get them involved. Start talking to them about the opportunities and the things that you obtained in your lifetime; give that to them as soon as they are able to understand and comprehend. The sooner you get it to them, the more they can process and then before you know it, they're gonna pass you up—and that's the goal. You want your children to pass you up, okay? Lastly, we need to make sure that as individuals, Black, white, Hispanic, all of us, Indians, we need to make sure that we are practicing all these things in our own life and making sure that when we're within our business and institutions, make sure we're pushing for those mentorship programs while we're there.

One of the other questions I liked was about accountability: How do we hold these organizations accountable for instituting these ideas and programs once they are instituted? Number one, you can vote. That's number one: You do it with your vote. Number two, call it out on social media. Number three, organize workshops like we're doing right now. Get it out there, hold them accountable. If there's a participant in the community, whether it's a business organization or union, whatnot, you call it out, you talk about it, you publish it, put it out there. Nobody likes being embarrassed these days. And again, if somebody is ashamed of their action, an organization is ashamed of their actions, well dadgum, you shouldn't have done it, okay? And so that's how you hold them accountable. And then also hold your elected officials accountable—

Audience member: Yes, sir.

Fred Vernon: With industry partners in the community. These tax abatements that are being given, as we see, these tax abatements that are being given, talk to your elected officials and say it's not good enough, a good faith try. We're done with that. We need a defined mentorship program. Either you've met the quota, or you didn't. How many people did you pull in of color, of race, of sex, how many did you pull into mentor, people that were not qualified? That's what we're talking about. We're not those who are qualified. Give me the unqualified ones and let's develop them and make them qualify. That's what we need to have. That's what we need to be holding our elected officials' feet to the fire, as far as executing on that standard.

And lastly, technology is replacing individuals and creating uncyclical unemployment. What's the plan for that? We have to start training our future generations in jobs that are going to be necessary in the future: coding, programming, you know, research and development, PhDs. The people that are going to be—because technology is going to put the, with the onset of artificial intelligence and quantum computing, things are gonna change so fast. We're gonna need people who dedicate themselves to research and studying. Push for PhDs. There's gonna be jobs there. Push for our children to get into programming. It was welding for me; might have been something else in industrial life for my father, his father before him. For us it's coding, programming. Push for our kids to get involved in that and that's how you hedge against the unemployment that's coming, that's going to hit this country very soon.

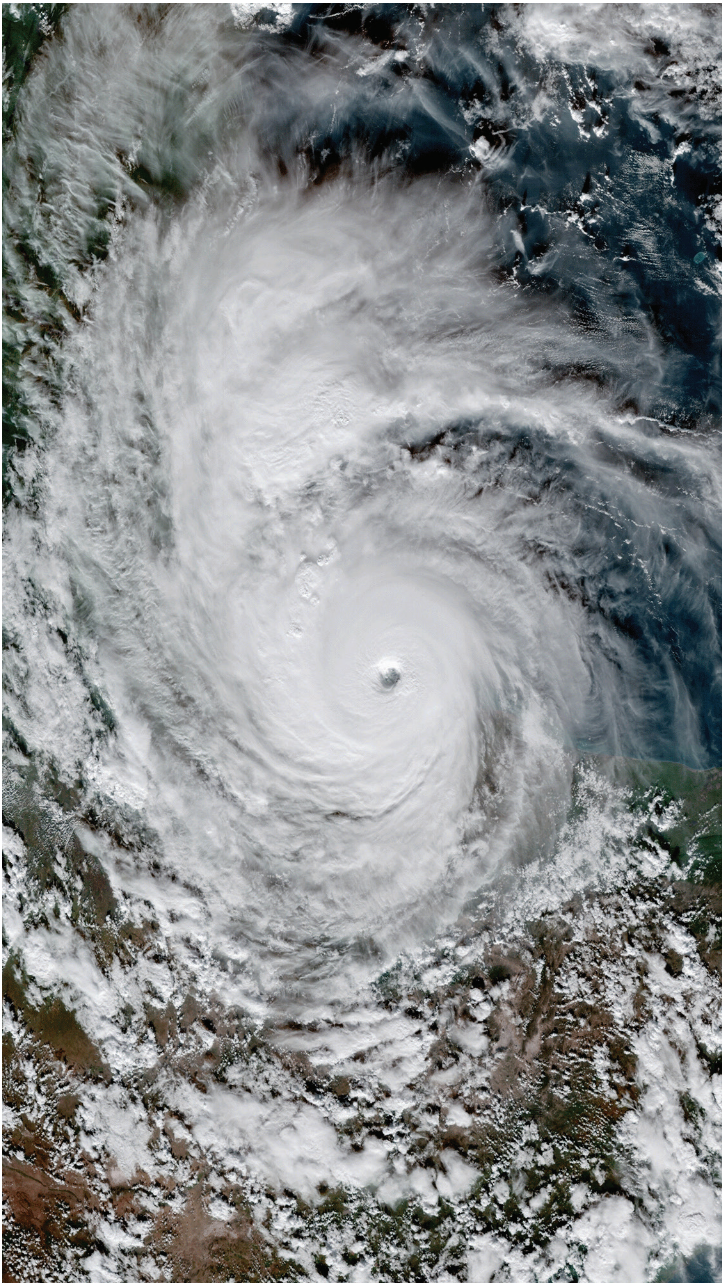
Paula O'Neal: Well, I think they've pretty well covered it, but I will say one thing. I think not much has been mentioned about education, and I was gonna say our educational system is so archaic that it's not preparing kids for the future You shouldn't be out talking to seniors about what they're gonna do. You know that the decisions need to be worked on earlier. We set kids up for failure. Not every child wants to go to college or is qualified to go to college, needs to go to college. But we need—I'm paying a plumber right now with my leak, let me tell you, there's something to be said for being a plumber. You know, I think we have all kind of gotten 'uppity,' you know, that if you don't have the BA, MA, MD, or

PhD, although I do think we do need those, you know, behind your name that you're not 'worthy,' but plumbers, electricians; I always said, "Who is the most important person in society? Who is the person that we could not get along with for very long uh in our society? And it's not our president. it's not that, it's our garbage man. What would we do if we had no men—or women—to pick up our garbage? And look at the garbage truck now, used to be three people, now it's one. You know, so I mean the jobs we need to prepare kids and we need parents involved with their kids. I go to West Brook functions, and it breaks my heart when there's not enough parents at some of them for each child to have one parent there. And I know that it's difficult, you know, with the working and blah blah blah, but anyway, but parents have got to be involved. We cannot depend on the education, I mean on public education, private education to educate our kids. It takes, I hate to say it, but it takes a village, it takes all of us. And mentorship, mentorship, mentorship: I agree with you wholeheartedly and part of that I Have a Dream program that Regina [Rogers] has anyway and working with those young people to expose them. They're bright, they're intelligent, they're going to succeed, but they get that exposure to more of life than they would normally otherwise get. So, I wholeheartedly agree with you there.

Barbara Wilson: I'm gonna just quickly piggyback on the fact of education. I think that is our big, big, you know, thing there. I went back to school; my degree is in graphic design. I had no knowledge of that computer thing that was going on in there. But I did everything hands-on. But when I went back to that program, those kids who were already in that school: I had three years to graduate. I left there in three years. They were still there, struggling, trying to make it to that point. You know, as a teacher, I taught school for over ten years, you'll have teachers taken the test two or three times to get a teaching certificate, you know, so they're lacking the education. I couldn't do that computer, but I could do everything by hand, scan it in the computer, print it out, and I was done. I won every single program, any kind of contest or anything that school had and those three years: I won every single one of them. You know, and those kids lack the education: They couldn't pass the test to get in the upper grad program to go through the University of Florida, you know, and even now when I taught here in west Orange, they weren't teaching the kids computers. So, you're doing these kids a disservice.

Audience member: Right.

Barbara Wilson: These kids are making more money than you and I are making on their phone, you know, and they'll ask me how to spell something, and you're on a phone: Google it, you know, teach them to use the resources that they have. You know, I mean these kids are gone. I mean, the kids were telling me, they said, "Miss, miss, are you on Instagram?" What the heck is an Instagram? You know, I got sixteen thousand followers, I could post something online and sell it like that. You know, but we all have to, it's a full circle. But if the education—my mother was not at home, my mother was at work—I learned something at school. These kids come home, and they don't even know what's on that piece of paper. And I don't either. I don't know what that is. Never seen it before. But education is where we're lacking.



Captured by the GOES-16 satellite on August 25, 2017 at 23:00 UTC, this image shows Hurricane Harvey as it reaches peak intensity of Category 4 with maximum sustained winds of 130 mph. Description and photograh from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

AFRICAN AMERICAN AND LATINX INEQUALITY

Buenas Tardes, Bienvenido: Don't Ask "Why Are You Here?" Combat Fear with Understanding

JESSE GARCIA

How are you all today? Good afternoon, buenas tardes, thank you for joining us. Bienvenidos. My name is Dr. Jesus Garcia. I'm here at Lamar University. I teach in the Department of Sociology, Social Work, and Criminal Justice. Obviously, I'm not used to public speaking and managing devices to amplify our voices. So, what I will do is—I've prepared a little written statement to talk about and keep my statements focused, because there's so much to talk about when you speak of Latinos and the immigration experience. I am not an immigrant myself, by the way, but that is one of the areas that I study.

So, to begin: As explained by David Montejano in his book *Anglos and Mexicans in Texas, 1836 to 1986* (1987), the social place of Mexicans and Mexican Americans and Latinos in general has been historically set and characterized by devaluating and pejorative descriptions of identity and social place. Basically, all it has summed up to is: "Why are you here?" and "You don't belong." For many reasons. These stories, these characterizations begin during the time of Texas independence and through the war of 1848, and they linger and persist. And in today's context and the current tenor, the general descriptions that are used to characterize and socially place Mexican Americans and Latinos in general are shaped by crisis-responsive immigration policies, media-intensified ideologies of xenophobia, ethnocentrism, and most certainly perceived notions of historically established entitlement by members of the mainstream—or the majority group.

The sense of entitlements among native-born non-Hispanics stem from beliefs in white supremacy, protective and defensive nationalism, and here recently Netflix crime series, popular fiction books such as *American Dirt* (2020 by Jeanine Cummins), and inevitably these are all reflections of alarmist descriptions made by academics such as Samuel Huntington in 2004 through his book *Who are We? The Challenges to Americans' National Identity*.

Any of the rhetoric that he spilled out at the time is what forms the foundation for any type of characterization in terms of the social place of Latinos in general here in the United States. These ideas, these tropes, these ideologies—they promote conscious, unconscious biases and more importantly, the emotional responses. They're almost visceral for many, for many native-born American citizens. And of course, these sources shape the public mind and of course that becomes how we know and treat them. Inevitably the questions are: "Where are you from? How long has your family has been here?" and those are the quintessential questions that every Latino has answered or has been asked to answer when ascribed a sense of social place.

So, to give you some description of the Latino population here in Jefferson County—this comes from, out of the American Community Survey and as well as the census reports that are done every ten years. So, we have white non-Hispanic about thirty-nine percent in Jefferson County, Black or African American non-Hispanic at thirty-three percent, white Hispanic fifteen percent—of which the American Community Survey estimates twenty-three percent of them live in poverty. There are Asian non-Hispanic 3.79 percent, and Hispanic plus one other ethnic identity or racial identity three percent. In the Golden Triangle and coastal areas of East Texas, roughly one in ten respondents according to the survey said they were born outside the United States.

How does that break down? I mean, you know, we're talking percentages, numbers. To give you some numbers to contextualize the population, a survey in 2018 by the Migration Policy Institute of San Francisco, California, determined that in Jefferson County in particular, it estimates the unauthorized population at around thirteen thousand individuals, nine thousand—sixty-six percent—coming from Mexico, from the states of Guerrero, Michoacan, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosi, and Tamaulipas, to give you, just kind of look at the center of Mexico that runs from South Texas all the way to the West Coast. So, it's just like a swath across the nation of Mexico. About two thousand individuals come from Central American countries. The survey did not specify which ones, but in terms of interviews that I conducted in the community, Nicaragua and El Salvador for the most part.

Most are younger than fifty-four. This is important. Why? Because it implies that they are all of working age. Seven thousand or about fifty-four percent are employed; five thousand are not in the labor force formally. Of course, they do odd jobs. They do seasonal work, mostly under the table, what we would describe as the underground economy. But they are here. They take care of our children. They mow our lawns. They fix our plumbing and our roofs. So, three thousand of them are working construction, others in seasonal labor and odd jobs when opportunities come up. Five thousand of them reside with at least one US citizen under the under the age of nineteen years. Seven thousand of them functionally speak English daily, and five thousand of them have no English skills whatsoever at the time of the survey.

So for the most part, just to give you an idea of how many Latinos are here, right, undocumented—we can talk about the documented, you know, the American citizens, but in relation to the extreme weather events that we have, it's a little bit different, because they as citizens are entitled to some of the protections, excuse me, to some of the benefits and assistance that, for example, FEMA puts out for some. Whether they do or not, it's an option.

On a day-to-day basis hardworking immigrant Hispanics are culturally very status conscious, right? To give you some context of when we interact with Hispanics here in Beaumont, you notice, there's cultural differences more than anything else. For immigrant Latinos, they're very—in their culture, people are very status conscious, so at any time that they perceive that someone is above them in status—whether it's a public servant, law enforcement, an educator or even their employer—they still operate under that ranking system, so they do not challenge very much. They do not question the authority of whoever they perceive as above them.

This is different. I mean, for Americans, we interpret that type of behavior as passive and weak. And that becomes part of the characterizations that are attached to the historical foundations of those identities, right? They were a conquered people; they were a dislocated people. They were sloven, lazy, refused to work. We know, although, that that's not true. One hardworking group of people in the United States is Latinos and Mexicans in particular. That dynamic in terms of interaction is typically not recognized by American citizens, so that's what creates and sustains that pejorative perception that we have of them. We constantly look down upon them, because they're not from here, they don't speak English, whatever the case may be.

So, a lack of cultural awareness: Language barriers often create communications gaps that keep interactions just to the basic and the necessary. We do not engage them socially; we do not invite them to our houses. When we ask them if they speak English and they don't know how to answer, we do not take the time to try to teach them English or communicate with them, we dismiss them. That's who they are, they're not from here, they don't belong here, they're not even trying to become part of us. But whether we realize it or not, they are part of us, right? They are in our communities; they provide many valuable services.

So, this type of ranking status consciousness during interaction is not common among Mexican Americans. Why? Most of them—we have grown up here. We are practiced in the social etiquette of Americans. We understand that when as Americans we speak very direct: "Hey you, what time is it? Where are we going?" In Spanish it's quite different: "Hey, good afternoon, how are you doing? I'm sorry to intrude upon you or ask you, but do you know what time it is?" You know, that's, that's pleasant, right?

We know as Americans; in English it's very direct—I'm not going to call it brutish, but it's very direct relative to the way we speak Spanish, and Spanish speakers pick up on this, right? So, when we interact with them, many times they don't look at us. We think they're weak. No, you're intimidating them and because they perceive that person is ranked up higher in terms of status in that particular interaction that is part of it. We misinterpret it as weakness.

So structurally in professional environments, immigrants and nonimmigrant Latinos in professional environments also perceive subtle, not so subtle, conscious and unconscious biases, and instances of inequality in the work environment and the public and community as well. They may also, as individuals, may be discouraged from questioning or confronting such instances of pejorative interactions at the risk of being labeled as an uncooperative team player, or worse: an angry minority.

But we're not here to talk about the people who can defend themselves, who are entitled to much of the assistance that we have here during times of crisis. We are here to talk about those who deal with the most inequality—the undocumented, the noncitizens—and they are aware of this. They are aware of their tenuous position, that any moment, anybody—doesn't have to be a person of authority—could just call the authorities upon them, and because of the prevalent attitudes in the United States, that is what drives their fear.

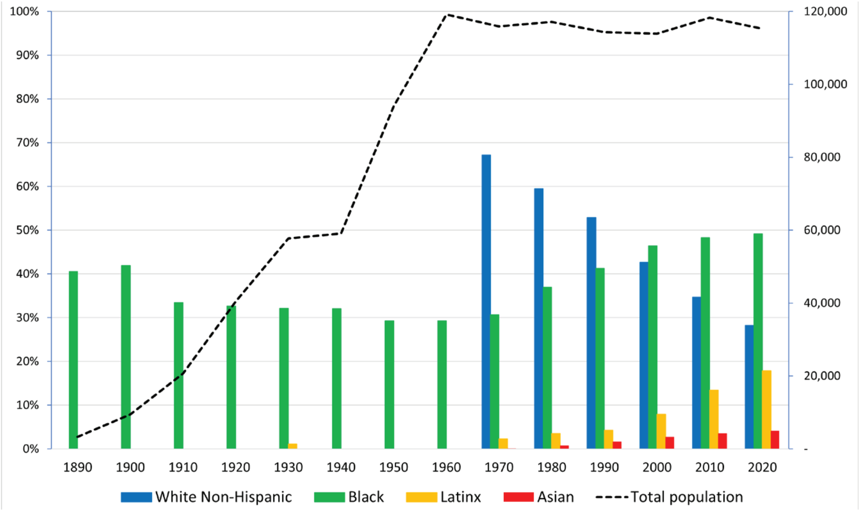
This becomes important when they try to cope with disasters of any kind or a crisis of any kind. For a variety of reasons, immigrants both legal and undocumented are a bit mistrustful of approaching FEMA or any other governmental agency. Many times, the language barrier prevents them from utilizing the assistances available to them as noncitizens. The lack of social ties and networks to provide them information as to where to look for assistance. And many fear basically drawing attention to their own or someone else's legal status. As such, immigrants may be more vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters and their aftermath compared to those who were born in the United States.

Immigrants, especially in a time of crisis, always must consider the degree of risk that comes from reaching out for assistance. Imaginably, the undocumented may consider that FEMA, as a government agency, has the authority to enforce immigration policy. Whether they are consciously aware of the connection or not, FEMA does fall under the umbrella authority of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), as does the immigration and customs enforcement and border patrol and border protection agencies. Well, so whether they're aware of it or not, they make that connection. They are intimidated. They will not proceed.

But in recent events of extreme weather, such as Hurricane Harvey in 2017, the Red Cross and DHS announced that immigration enforcement would not be carried out at relief and assistance centers such as food banks nor at evacuation and shelter sites. These efforts were now post-event, to try to lessen the concerns of deportation among the noncriminal undocumented population in East Texas in their time of need.

Individuals do not have to be legal residents to receive FEMA individual assistance. If the adult is responsible for a child with them who is a US citizen or qualified alien, persons may apply for individual assistance on that child's behalf and potentially be eligible to receive individual assistance such as short-term noncash emergency aid. According to the survey conducted in 2018 by the Kaiser Foundation, immigrants are particularly vulnerable to employment and income disruptions as a result of extreme weather events, compared to their native-born counterparts, including more tenuous financial and social circumstances, poor access to healthcare, no home or health insurance, and limited social support networks. Overall, the survey suggests that extreme weather events in general exacerbated some of the challenges of undocumented residency, as immigrants who were more likely than other Texans to experience job-related income loss as a result of extreme weather events. I think my time is up so I will stop here. And hopefully you will have questions; I'll give you all some more information.

Dr. Jesus "Jesse" Garcia (Ph.D., Texas A&M) is an assistant professor of Sociology at Lamar University.



Beaumont, Texas, 1890-2020, from the Decennial US Census. Black and Asian for 2000 and after includes people reporting more than one race.

Saying "I'm Not a Racist" Is Not the Same as Being Anti-Racist

VERNON DURDEN

I live in the country, little place called China. I was really impressed by Strong Wind's comments, when he said, "Pay attention to nature." Out there, we have cows, and we have birds riding on the cow's back. When the cow walks, it disturbs the land, a bug will fly. The bird eats the bug. Interdependence: They've learned to live together. When you drive down the street right now and when you must stop at a red light, a bird would come between the cars and eat stuff that's thrown out. And some kind of way it knows when the light changes, and it flies away where it doesn't get killed. We're killing each other every day, because of hate and inequality. The gentleman just spoke about extreme weather and farming and all of the undocumented. Our economy is really based on those laborers who are coming across and providing service at a rate that we can actually have produce and products that otherwise would be so expensive if we didn't have that labor: interdependence.

My dad was a grocery store owner, and we lived in the community. And the city bus stopped at the store. My dad would not allow us to ride the bus, because in those days, there was a sign and you had to sit behind that sign, so another race could sit in front, so he would not allow us to subject ourselves to second-rate existence.

You look at the title: It says, "Extreme Weather and Inequality." FEMA hired me because of extreme weather. When people would be displaced, homes destroyed, FEMA—Federal Emergency Management Agency—would come in with funds to help families and groups of people—and I was an agent, and I saw within FEMA how they would restrict funds to certain zip codes, because it identified certain races of people, and hold the money back.

And Fred [Vernon] talked about having vital information earlier: Other people came with information, how to get money, and actually built businesses and improved those businesses with a zero-interest rate, not having to pay it back over months and years at a time, and found a way through the system to make it, even with extreme weather. And we still have the African American community with blue tarps on their houses today. That's inequality. That's injustice.

We think about how extreme weather, inequality fits together. That's how. They talked about voting earlier, the very people you are voting into office are passing laws—to hurt the very people who they're supposed to be helping. I was at a table today, and they were talking about a person spending two hundred million dollars to get elected. They walk in wearing tennis shoes when they go into those offices. They have three-thousand-dollars suits in a year or two and alligator shoes while their constituents out there are still suffering.

And like Paula O'Neal said—and she brought me to tears. I told her that she brought me to tears. It's when she said, "You know, I'm up here, I'm the first nobody up here," but she is not the nobody. She said she told the man, "I know how you feel." She said he told her, "No you don't." So, we don't know how those people feel. And I've heard before and time and time again a person may not know how or remember what you told them, but they remember how you made them feel. So, when you give them a meal, Paula, you make them feel good, and they remember that.

We have businesses employing people—but don't confused employment with empowerment. Yes, they're working, but they have no decision-making abilities to change what's happening. They get the memo; they don't write the memo. They're getting the memo. I have friends of persuasion, not my color, and they say, "I'm not a racist." But what they don't realize is saying, "I'm not a racist," is not the same as saying, "I'm anti-racist." Saying, "I'm not a racist," does not make you an anti-racist.

We're talking about inequality. So, my dad wouldn't let me ride the bus, because he didn't want me to subject myself to second-rate status. He gave us all three-part names. None of my siblings have a nickname. Three-part names: I'm Vernon George Durden, my sister's Etta Yvonne Durden, my other brother's Wilfred Earl Durden. Donald James Durden. Vanessa Renee Durden. One day a man came in the store and—paying money—"Hey, sonny, I need yuh—" "Excuse me, my son's name is Vernon, said my father. You refer to him by his name, or you don't refer to him at all."

He wasn't apologizing for that, so I learned the poem in the fifth grade:

> A good name in man and woman
> Is the immediate jewel of their souls
> He who steals my purse steals trash; 'twas something, nothing
>
> And has been a slave to thousands
> But who robs from me my good name
> Takes that from me that which not enriches him
> But makes me poor indeed[1]

We are a race of people, a proud race of people, Black people, African American people. You've called us everything, but we've given more to this country than anybody that walked the face of the earth, and we've been lied to, and there's been more promises broken. I still don't have my forty acres and a mule. It was promised to us; people laugh at it.

But I asked a question earlier about the land grant, about how people was given land to—and they're not making any more land, folks—they were given land, and that way, their kids could get a start, and the families could get a start. They could raise cattle. They could raise crops, whatever, and make a way for themselves, get some riches.

David Willard talked about his dad, who was an attorney. He built a house in a modest neighborhood and stayed in that home. And his mother stayed in that home. His mother was a teacher. He could have left the neighborhood, he could have gone, but like Paula said, "What do you do to help those who can't do for themselves?" They worked to integrate this very institution we're in today. He stayed in the neighborhood. He worked with people who couldn't pay two or three thousand dollars for a case, because he knew what they needed to have done and how to help them.

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[1] See Iago's speech in Shakespeare's *Othello* (ca. 1603), Act 3, Scene 3, derived from Thomas North's *The Dial of Princes* (1557), a translation of Antonio de Guevara's *El relox de principes* (1529).

So, we talk about weather and inequality. Today we all are somewhat afraid to talk about what's happening in DC, in the presidential races. I'm not because that's what we do. And Michael Cooper's gonna come on later, he's gonna be a whole lot tougher than me on this conversation, but we're electing people who are passing laws to hurt us. We're electing people who are trying to take back everything that people have died for: the vote.

I took a certification to be a poll watcher, because the very right to vote is being threatened by people who want to go in and intimidate folks when they're going to vote. Now there's a new group called Poll Watchers that gotta go in and make sure that someone doesn't come in there with a gun, intimidate somebody. You can't even give water to a person in line to vote! We aren't tamping back this inequality and prejudice.

So extreme weather comes, and the city founders and city people know what's going to have to happen. So, they're going to start building new neighborhoods in other areas. So, what do they do, they start selling property and other people start buying it and they start bringing in the dirt and building it up—because water has to flow downhill. So, since they have to expand Beaumont and move the neighborhoods away from the older neighborhoods albeit higher elevation, they got new areas—but they're bringing in dirt, building it up. So, what was used to be high is now low. So, the water is coming back to us—and our neighborhoods.

That's how extreme weather is affecting inequality.

So, what do we do? Someone talked about JCAD, Jefferson County Appraisal District. I used to work for them. I stopped working for them because people were coming in, getting reduction in taxes—they didn't deserve it but they had the information. And the people who were not coming in, who didn't have money, didn't have the information—were still paying the higher taxes.

Now, I'm not going to fight ExxonMobil or Mobil; I retired from there. But I will tell you this: I reported them twice, because they didn't want to promote me. I was forced to secure outside counsel.

So, what can we do? We were at the table and the conversation came up: "Where do we go from here?" Where we go is [to] continue to have a conversation, because at the table I was at—I'm seventy-four—there was probably five or six people under thirty. And what I'm very thankful for is that those five or six people who were there will have conversations with the new information they have. And this type of stuff will be shared exponentially, because the five would tell five, which become twenty-five, which become—you know how that works. So, there will be answers; it's going to come from other people. This is a start.

Vernon Durden retired from ExxonMobil after thirty-three years of service. He is today President/CEO of Training & Diversified Development, LLC, consulting. His many civic contributions include 100 Black Men of Greater Beaumont, 100 Black Men of America, and Lamar Foundation board trustee, as well as mentoring many other people.

Government Disaster Funds Sent Elsewhere: "We Refuse to Be Sacrificed"

JOHN BEARD

Extreme weather and inequality is a real concern of mine, being from south county, being from Port Arthur, born and raised there. Also, like one of my fellow panelists, I am an alumnus of ExxonMobil, but I'm not as complimentary as he, because now I'm in a bit of a different space.

When you know better, you do better. And we've seen the inequalities and the inequities, and we've also seen what's happening regarding climate change and what's happening here in Southeast Texas, and they, ExxonMobil, are a major contributor. And we must speak truth to power and call the thing what it is, so I'm honored to be here and speak before you.

A little brief on me: and once again, born and raised in Port Arthur, Texas. I am the founder and CEO of the Port Arthur Community Action Network, an environmental, social justice, and community development organization which I founded right after Harvey because of the inequities and injustices I saw.

As a former member of Port Arthur City Council from 2003 to 2012, I witnessed Hurricane Rita in '05, Ike in '08, Gilbert, Humberto, and—as a regular citizen in 2017—Harvey. And I saw a very consistent pattern in the way funds were distributed to help the people that needed help most. A study that was done showed that of all the cities in Southeast Texas that were adversely affected, next to Houston, Port Arthur was the most extremely, severely affected. Why? Because of the disparity of people who are, number one, economically disadvantaged, which is two-thirds of the city's population of fifty-seven thousand, with at poverty rate that approaches between twenty-seven, almost thirty percent. And because of those factors and the fact of where we are located on the Gulf Coast, the impact was magnified and much greater.

But let's fast forward to just very recently, because it was discovered in the second round of Harvey funding that neither Houston nor Southeast Texas received any money. $1.2 billion—none of that money came here. We were excluded. And that was done intentionally by the State of Texas, by the General Land Office (GLO).

So, what do we do in those situations? You know, Brother [Michael] Cooper said it just a minute ago. We have to be active and involved. We must be heard and seen and take the necessary measures to do the things to hold people accountable who are in these spaces and make these decisions.

But we still ain't got $1.2 billion. So, what happened? I was contacted by some friends of mine that work in the environmental justice space. And they asked me, Texas Housers asked would I be willing to sign on to a letter of complaint to HUD? And I said, "Is pig pork? Most certainly I'm going to do that." Because of the fact and reasons that I related to them about those other storms. You know, Port Arthur has been impacted in seventeen years by five major hurricanes and at least an equal number of smaller ones.

So yes, we're in the belly of the beast. We're in the focus and the locus of what's going on, not only in terms of climate change but also in terms of the environmental and industrial pollution, and I must give you a footnote here that my organization's just recently been a recipient of a substantial grant from the federal government, US EPA, to put in more air monitors to monitor air quality in and around impacted communities near the major refineries in our city.

So, we continue to do the work and we continue to impact things that impact our communities, because one of the things we say, and I see, I know sister Glenda knows this well back there: Nothing about us without us. We must be at the table. We must be seen and heard.

So, of all of our elected officials, none of them did anything. But this little organization in Southeast Texas—that was called on by someone out of Houston to join five other organizations in the Houston area—decided to write this letter of complaint. And what I wrote was based on the fact of the inequity of how money was distributed, starting from Rita all the way to now; starting with the fact that HUD—the federal government—allowed the State of Texas to use criteria that did not match the specifications from HUD that they were given.

They were told that seventy percent of those funds were to go to low-to-moderate-income communities, but you know what our friends did that we elected, that sat at the table? They decided to do it like a crap shoot. Well, I heard this, because the gentleman from Regional Planning came before Port Arthur City Council, and said, "Well you know what was unique about all this: What did we all have in common?" "Well, everybody got water. It rained on everybody." Sure enough, it did rain. "So, I'll tell you what: You get some money, and you get some money and you get some"—like Oprah, you get a car, you get a car. Well, everybody gets some money, but that's not the way it was supposed to be distributed.

Because here's what happened. And if you live there, I'm sorry to pinpoint you, but the truth shall set you free, and it's what's real, it's factual. Bevil Oaks, a city just north of Beaumont, a lot smaller than Port Arthur, received more money per capita than Port Arthur did. Bevil Oaks' economic statistics are as follows: average income in Bevil Oaks, $77,000; average income in Port Arthur, $35,000; average home value in Bevil Oaks, $145-150,000; average home value in Port Arthur, $60,000. Yet Bevil Oaks got more money per capita than Port Arthur did, who, next to Houston, was the most severely impacted by Harvey. That is disparity.

And when you look at the fact that Port Arthur is largely a city—as was read earlier by Mr. [Jesse] Garcia—largely made up of people of color. And I'm remiss if I don't say this too—we ask about African American and Latinx inequality, but I must give homage to my brothers and sisters who are the original people here, because we all on occupied territory, and we need to give them their credit, because they suffer too, but they don't get seen or heard. But they're working on that just as we are.

But once again that inequity and that disparity of spending caused this letter to be sent to HUD, and in response, HUD sent the GLO a letter, and they sent us a letter saying, "Of all the things you claimed, we checked them out and they are true."

Now, the county judge didn't do that. But I am not saying this because he's running for reelection. Mayors in our various cities didn't send a letter. City councils in our various cities did not send the letter—a simple letter. But a little old community-based organization made up of folk like yourselves and people who are just everyday folk got together, sent a letter, signed onto it and froze that money—$1.2 billion, y'all. But we didn't just freeze that money to where the state couldn't get it, we also said that because you, the federal government, have allowed this to continue for all those years, you no longer have the right or reason to send them any more money. Deal with us directly; let us do it.

So, part of getting rid of this inequality means that we have to be educated, we have to know about the issues, and we have to apply ourselves in such a way that we deconstruct systemic racism where it is, at its root. And that is in how we are represented by people, whether they look like us or not. Hold their feet to the fire, make them accountable, and when they're not accountable vote them out of the office or remove them by any means necessary.

So, to fight that inequality we have to be engaged, active, and involved. We must know the issues. We must be concerned enough to care, and then we must also reach out and touch somebody else, because everybody in this room influences somebody. There's somebody watching you, maybe right here in this very room. But you make a difference. And without you nothing can be done.

I said I wasn't going to make this quote, but I'm going to do it anyway, because it's substantial and it's about someone we've been reading in the news lately, our good dear friend and brother Kanye West, and even sometimes, in the midst of our tomfoolery a grain of truth can come out. And Kanye said this, he said, "I'm about to hit the Ye button," that means he's about to do something stupid. He said, "I may say something wrong, but it would be wrong if I didn't say nothing. Imagine if I didn't say something: Wouldn't nobody say nothing."

So, when you're in these spaces, get into good trouble. Speak up for that which you know is right and true, because that way, we hold their feet to the fire and hold them accountable. Don't be afraid to speak up, because you're speaking up may trigger someone else to stand up and speak up too, and another, and another, until that crescendo of voices becomes so loud that those bastions of inequality and inequity and injustice can no longer stand. What happened at the battle of Jericho? They blew the horns, right, and what came tumbling down? [*Audience member*: Walls!]

That's right! Okay, well if we're going to tear those walls down, we must get involved, get active, and speak out and pursue what we know is just and true. So, my challenge to you is: If we're going to address this, regardless of the community, we got to get in good trouble. We've got to speak up. And we got to say enough and no more; "We refuse to be sacrificed" is what we say in Port Arthur.

And I'm about to leave later this afternoon, so excuse me if I won't be able to stay the full length of time. But I'm going to COP27 in Egypt. The World's UN conference on climate change, and then later this month I'll be going to South America to participate in creating a treaty on plastics. Because now our petrochemical brothers want to shift what they're doing from petrochemical in fossil fuels, now that we know the age of fossil fuels is coming to an end, to get into plastics. They're trying to get ahead of the curve, but it's all bad, if you really know what it is, it's all bad. So once again, thank you for this time and this moment—but get involved, get in good trouble, speak up and let's address these problems and inequities. Because if we don't, then the people that are hurt worst are going to continue to be sacrificed and they're going to get a fraction of the benefits they should have. Once again, thank you.

John Beard Jr. worked in the oil industry for twenty-eight years and is the founder, chairman, and CEO of Port Arthur Community Action Network fighting for protections in an area with refineries, export terminals, petrochemical plants, and cancer.

African American and Latinx Inequality: Discussion

Jeff Darby: Gentlemen, thank you all very much. I appreciate that. It was very good. I said this morning that for thirty-three years I have been hamstrung as a federal official. You know, there's certain things you can and cannot say. I mean, your previous employer, Exxon-Mobil, you, of course you can't—you can sue them and everything, but you can't get out in public and say, "Yeah those are dirty no-good SOBs, blah blah blah," even though they very well could be. But listen, on January 27th the only employer I'm going to have is an outfit called J.P. Darby Services, LLC, and I'm J.P. Darby. So, if I don't like the guy, I can yell at him in the mirror every day. But I want to work with y'all on different things. Dr. [Jesse] Garcia, I spent thirty-three years, a lot of my job was helping out undocumented workers, migrant workers, you know, seasonal agricultural workers all over East Texas. Yeah, it's not just in the Valley that they have agricultural workers. People planting pine trees in East Texas: That is migrant agricultural work. I've busted slave rings up there, okay? I ain't bragging—it ain't bragging if you've done it, right, but I want to work with every last one of you in your different things. I mean, we're not always gonna agree on everything, but that's okay. We're grown folk; we can figure it out. And we're all here in the Golden Triangle, so please—and everybody that spoke this morning, those who can be speaking later today—please let's keep this alive. And y'all, too. Thank you.

Olivia Malick (audience member): I'm Olivia Malick with the *Beaumont Enterprise*. But my question was actually for Dr. Garcia: You know, obviously our main job, if you will, is communicating, but not all of us or really any of us know Spanish. And so, I think, you know, for me I always want to connect with that audience, we want to connect with our community members, and sometimes it's intimidating to know where to start, you know. Should I enroll in adult Spanish classes? I want to be able to communicate with that community as well. So, if you have any, like, tips on ways for us to reach out and communicate with those audiences.

Audience member: Hi, John. Remember me? We spent five hours together to do a good tour of all the ditches in Port Arthur, didn't we? Anyway, I need, please, for you to tell us about the EPA grant with the air quality stuff and before you leave, because we are also bringing in that huge Department of Energy grant for sniffers in the air and on the ground in the area, so please get in contact with me. Thank you.

Audience member: I wanted to say, I used to be your student [Dr. Garcia]. So, thank you for providing education and it's, you know, it keeps living on. But my question is: What can we do as a community—Hi, John Beard—to get our community members, like vulnerable people, I do a lot of work with vulnerable people, so what suggestions do you have that can echo the real sentiments and the work and things that needs to be done to get them aware in the most vulnerable communities, because we do have barriers, such as immigration; some people need the help, but they're scared, you know. So, collectively, what can we do to, you know, get this information to them? And I believe that once we educate, then the education will empower them on their own and they'll get active. So, that's my question.

Audience member: It was very interesting to listen the discussion. So, I am physicist. So, I just right now submitted paper, and it's very difficult to publish. So, [it] was discovered that someone also worked on that, and he is very influential, and it looks like we have found error, but no one wants [to go] against that person, so—but it's not easy, but right now I work up to rewrite that paper so it will be polite and it will be well presented. So, my question about Spanish culture. So, I was in Spain and many friends, very nice, very beautiful people, and what I was also told that this—very kind language, my children speak Spanish, I don't, and what I was told, some American scientists visited Mexico and then they ask local people, "Is Mexico City in that direction?" And local people, they don't want to say something discouraging, as they say "No, you are wrong. The Mexico City is an opposite direction." So, they say, "Yes, yes." Once you think it is in that direction, it is yes, in that direction. So, I just want to know: Is that true or just exaggeration?

Barbara Wilson: Thank you for such a powerful message to start. But I mean, I just want to know how do we participate, but not only that, how do we work together? I moved here from Florida, and my son had a really bad accident. And they wanted to railroad him and charge him for vehicle homicide, and, you know, and it was an accident. Well, years later come to find out that someone else pulled in front of him. And anyone knows that anybody that's in ongoing traffic, you know, the person pulling in is the problem. But it was a—long story short, everybody here kept telling me, "Have him," you know, "take the plea. You're not—." I said, "No, we're gonna go to court." Why would you not? You know, and they threw it out, but it's like, but so many people locally kept saying, "Take a plea," and it seems like that's the standard here is to take a plea. But how do we, you know, as a community, you know, work together to help one another with those kind of situations. My son had me, you know, but there's so many other people here and, you know, adults, children, whatever, that just don't have, you know, that connection or knowledge.

Jesse Garcia: Sure. Okay, thank you for your questions, by the way; I appreciate them and it just, it still provides food for thought as well. No, I don't have all the answers—oh, sorry, I do not have all the answers, but I will try to respond to your questions appropriately. So how do we reach out without the Spanish language? Simple: a smile. That's all it is. Their children speak English, right? They go to school in the United States so they can intermediate, but more than anything else: Don't treat them like invisible people. That's what it boils down to. Many of them feel and express and express life underground, life anonymous, life invisible, so recognize them.

In terms of how do we deal without Spanish skills? Just friendly, you know; Tejas, we're the friendly people, remember? Or at least that's what we learned in Texas history, but, you know, something that fundamental, right? We just reaching out to someone like a human being.

How do we represent vulnerable communities? I don't have an answer for that, but I can only say: You reach out to them as human beings. They are people too. They do have the anxieties, the insecurities, the doubts that we all experience in one and another and we should all know or understand that. Communicating those, lack of security, those senses that we experience is the first step towards humanizing them, empathizing them and then finding out what we can do to help. We have a tendency when we help people, we approach them with "This is what I can do for you." No, that's self-serving. You ask them: "What can I do for you? How can I help you?" That's what it boils down to. That would be my general suggestion.

In terms of Spanish and the way that people respond, it's still trying to be helpful. One, it's like when somebody mispronounces the word in English, what do we do? We pronounce it properly towards them and then we let them continue. It's much the same way. It's just their way of, hey, you know, don't make a fool of yourself down the road by asking the wrong questions or pronouncing it in the, you know, in the wrong way. This is how you ask and now you know how to get to the capital, right? So those are not answers that you, we do not have answers. Those are just suggestions: being a civilized human being.

Audience member: Those with compromised immune systems that are not able to get out in the community and physically help: Is there anything those people can do to contribute in either bringing awareness to the inequalities or to be part of the solution?

Vernon Durden: No habla español. No, there are some questions asked about the Spanish community. Hopefully you [turns to Jesse Garcia] addressed that the best you could. I don't have that answer, but about getting involved in the community, we have several community meetings each week. One is the City Council meeting. The other is the Commissioners Court. You need to go to those meetings, and they have a period where you can speak out and ask questions. Those persons who are with the City Council and Commissioners Court, you elect those folks. They also have telephone numbers and websites, I mean email addresses; if you don't see them there or can't get to the meeting, write them an email or call them on their phone, because your question, your concern, is what drives the City Council and the Commissioners Court to address and have funds and put on the agenda. Now if it doesn't get addressed there, Michael Cooper is going to tell you that there's one civil rights organization in the United States—I'm gonna leave that to him. Become a member of these organizations. There are fraternal organizations, there are Top Ladies of Distinction, there are Golden Triangle Links, there's sororities, all of these organizations are supposed to be helping to enhance the community. And they have programs or agendas to address the community—that's why they exist. So, you're not in it alone; there are organizations out there, who may not be doing what they're supposed to be doing, because no one is pushing them or asking them. So, expect the same from your commissioners and all these organizations, these community organizations that you: It's where you can find your answers.

John Beard: Okay. First let me go back to the question that was asked by Miss Young: "How do we connect with community?" First thing you have to do is: It's not so much about connecting with them. In the work that I do in environmental justice or anything, you have to—as was suggested earlier—show people that you care about them. It's not about what I want to bring to you. It's what I can do to help you where you are, just as you mentioned about your son, and connecting with others who have that same problem we can build hope. You've got to remember: We live in a traumatized community. People of color have been traumatized from Civil War to date. Jim Crow, new Jim Crow, you name it, the trauma is there. And that trauma has created distrust intergroup and external to those groups.

Audience member: Yeah.

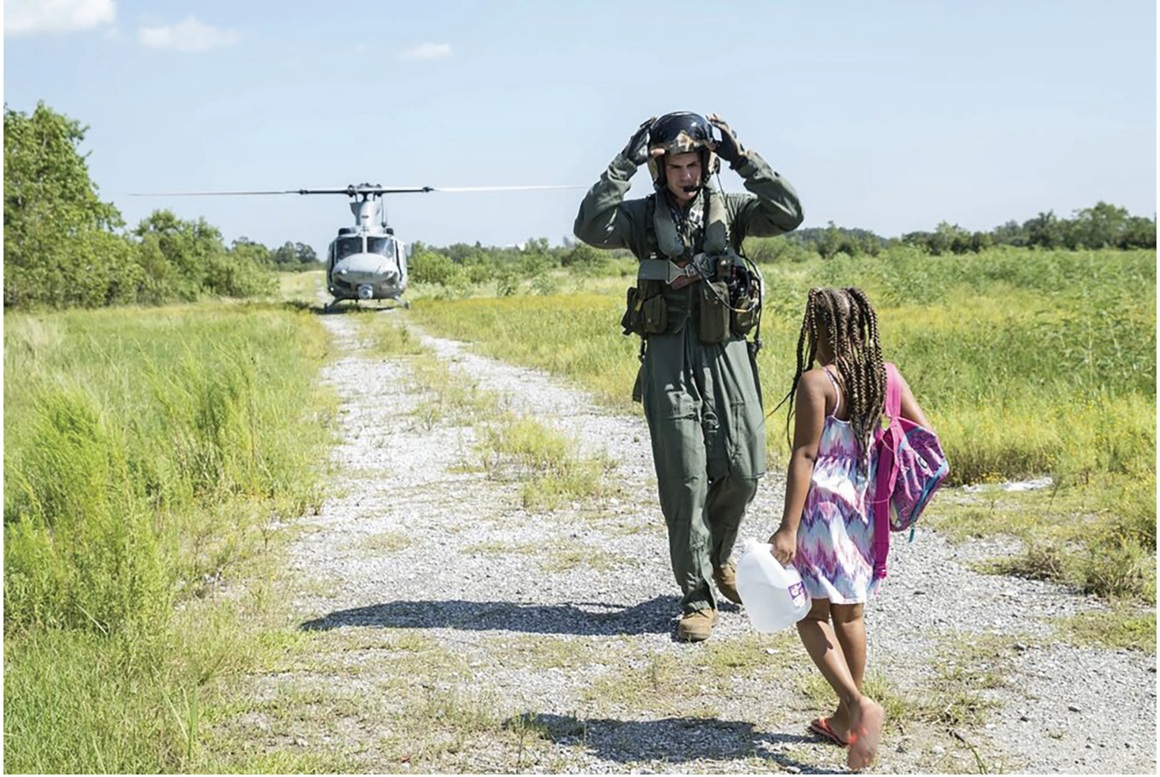
John Beard: And it manifests itself in something we just talked about: language justice, that people who don't speak the normal language don't have the means of communication, so my challenge would be to *Beaumont Enterprise* and others—and I don't know if it's there or not—but dedicate a section to some of those things and issues, just like you dedicate to sports, or to the, you know, even the, unfortunately, obituaries. But dedicate a portion of that paper several times a week to highlighting those things. Here's a question, and I don't know, but are there any Latino or Hispanic persons who are on staff, are writers? That's a problem in and of itself. You can't represent a community that ain't represented, and you can't speak to that community's issues if that community ain't there at the table.

Audience member: That's right.

John Beard: And that goes to the last thing of we how we fight back against the oppression, like you mentioned? We got to connect with each other. We've got to join hands, because this fight that we're in, it doesn't just deal with the people of color, but it lessens the glory and beauty of creation in terms of people who are not persons of color. My hurt and suffering diminishes you, whether you know it or not, because you participating in the system that is enabling it and allowing it to continue to live. And the only way that you're gonna kill it is that you have to become a member of the human race and be concerned with everyone just as much as you are concerned about yourself. And if you can't do that, then you need to take a close look and check of yourself and make an assessment in how you can be better and what you can do to contribute. Anybody can serve; all it takes is a heart full of love and the desire to make a difference.

Audience member: How do our black and brown communities help each other achieve and make their interests converge to the point to effecting change? Are these alliances happening in Beaumont?

Audience member: Are there ways for the different groups represented today to share information to achieve common goals?



Cpl. Keith Reichard, Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 773, 4th Marine Aircraft Wing, US Marine Forces Reserve, and an unidentified child during a rescue mission in the wake of Hurricane Harvey in Port Arthur, Tx. August 31, 2017. U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Kimberly Aguirre.

EXTREME WEATHER

Students Making Discoveries: SE Texans Believe in Climate Change, Small Fixes Can Start Today

MARGOT GAGE WITVLIET

This session's chair, who helped host the event as interim assistant director of the Center for History and Culture at Lamar, offered a few words before her panel began.

I am an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology. My colleague Dr. [Jesse] Garcia spoke earlier, and as far as changes from the inside, I would like to say the Department of Sociology is working really hard on that. I am the first African American woman to go up for tenure in that department; Dr. Garcia, first Latino man. We have an Asian American woman as program director. We also have a woman from Nigeria in the criminal justice section, so we're doing our best. And we are putting on social justice symposiums, we're doing all types of events to try and make change, and as you can see, our department is well represented at this event.

I'm a little bit nervous today, because I don't like to do public events, because I almost died from COVID, and I've been recovering from that now almost three years. But I'm here today because it goes on a topic that's really dear to my heart, which is the environment. I've been here six years and I started the Environmental Justice course, because one of the things that really knocked me by surprise, from moving to Beaumont is the smell, that crazy smell of rotten eggs. And so, armed with my social epidemiologist lens, I started doing research on this city. And I learned that if you live here, one of the things: It's the murder capital of Texas per capita.[1] You have an increased rate of dying by cancer, if you live here: Chances are, you're going to get cancer, you're going to know someone with cancer, and you're going to die from cancer if you stay here. We are part of the cancer belt. Increased risk of Alzheimer's, asthma, you name it: That's this area.

Some of my students have done research on this area. They've won prizes and awards; they've had their papers published. One student, Kwanita Adair, was a McNair fellow who did research on how the TCEQ (Texas Center for Environmental Equality) air monitors faired after Hurricane Harvey. She identified the TCEQ air monitors are down a lot and not just for random monitoring.[2] Another thing that we identified is the neighborhood Charlton-Pollard, which is right down the street from here, is just a stone's throw away from big industry. Those children never get a break. They have huge air emission events happening there in the past four years—almost seventy-five times during the school day—and these children go to the playground and breathe air from major industry, and they go home and breathe air from industry. Another student of mine learned that Southeast Texans believe in climate change, but they don't think climate change is impacting them, and they don't think it's impacting them enough to change their behaviors.

So that means there's a disconnect in the education, because with the increasing storms and the things that are happening here in this area, it is impacting you definitely. Dr. Stuart Wright and I collaborated on environmental justice research, where we learned that in Beaumont, we don't have a PM (particulate matter) monitor; Port Arthur does. We have two air monitors in this entire city with all this industry, and only one of them looks at multiple pollutants. The other one just looks at hydrogen sulfide only. So, we have a long way to go as far as solutions are concerned.

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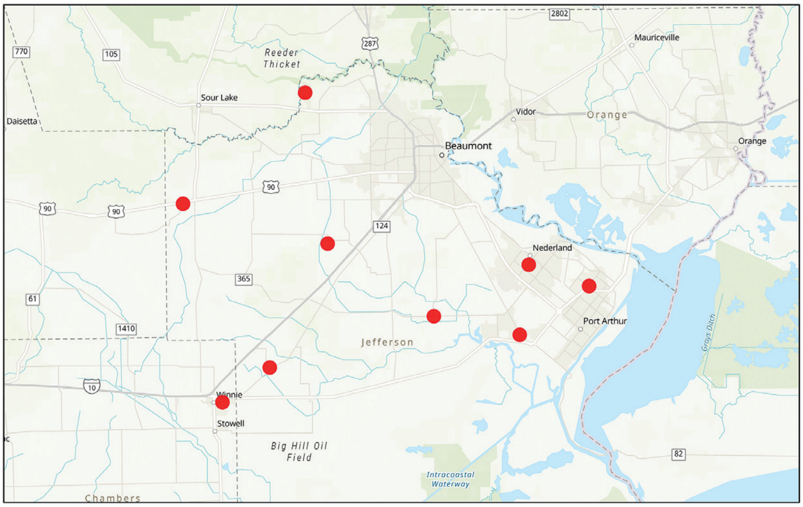
[1] CBS News calculated and ranked murder rates in US cities (>100,000 residents) using the FBI's 2019 Crime in the United States data. Beaumont was 38th highest at 16.03 per 100,000 residents. The other Texas city listed was Dallas, 42nd highest at 14.89. www.cbsnews.com.See Websites Referenced page 186 for link.

[2] Kwanita Adair, Shelly Miller, and Margot Gage Witvliet, "An Exploratory Investigation of Government Air Monitoring Data after Hurricane Harvey," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19 (May 1, 2022): 5559. See Websites Referenced page 186 for link.

I'm one of those people we spoke about earlier today who lives in Bevil Oaks. It's wonderful in Bevil Oaks, great living. One of the safest cities in this area. Once a month I see a free health bus in the church parking lot, and I think to myself, we don't need this free health bus. What I think is that Charlton-Pollard neighborhood needs that free healthcare bus in the elementary school parking lot that is right across from major industry, not the people in Bevil Oaks. I think we need to consider green zones, and I believe we need to think about bussing those children out


770
105
Reeder Thicket
287
2802
Mauriceville
Sour Lake
Daisetta
Vidor
Orange
Beaumont
Orange
90
90
90
124
Nederland
365
61
Port Arthur
1410
Jefferson
Grays Ditch
10
Winnie
Stowell
Big Hill Oil Field
Intracoastal Waterway
82
Chambers

As of April 2023, the Jefferson County Medical Mobile Unit, otherwise known as the Health Bus, provides on its Facebook page their weekly stops, shown here as red dots. The highest concentration of people—and of uninsured people—is in central Beaumont.

of Charlton-Pollard, so that they might get a bit of a break from major industry. And I believe we need to improve our air monitors in Beaumont, Texas.

And so, with that I would like to open this panel—I've just been here six years, these people have been here almost as long as I've been on this earth. These are the environmental soldiers on this panel today. I'm proud that I'm able to chair this session with them. And I'm very thankful that Kate [Williams] and Abdul [Alkalimat], the out of towners, helped bring everybody together. With that, I would like to welcome Miss Ellen Buchanan from Big Thicket National Heritage Trust.

Dr. Margot Gage Witvliet is a social epidemiologist, assistant professor in the Sociology Department, and interim assistant director of the Center for History and Culture of Southeast Texas and the Upper Gulf Coast at Lamar University.

Bulldozers and Back Hoes Built Up the Floodplains; To Avoid Flooding We Have to Work with Nature, Not against It

ELLEN BUCHANAN

I'm Ellen Buchanan, president of the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust. We're a local land trust here to protect the Big Thicket and help grow the Big Thicket. I also work with the Golden Triangle Sierra Club group, the Texas Black Bear Alliance, and work on Marysee Prairie. So, my time is spent in the outdoors, we hope. I grew up in Hardin County. I was born in Jefferson County, because you know, Hardin County, well I think we did have a hospital, but I'm very familiar with Jefferson County and of course this is where we came to shop. Went to [Texas] A&M, coached tennis after that, and then I went to work for Texas Parks and Wildlife/ State Parks, and I retired from there in 2013 after thirty-two years.

So, I've been outdoors and of the natural environment. In State Parks, the mission is to conserve the cultural and natural resources of Texas for this and future generations. So that's what I'm looking at, every day, is conserving our natural resources. And if we conserve our natural resources, then we can help our people.

I had some things written out, and then as the day has gone on, I've written a whole lot more. So, not to be discombobulated, let's see what I can kind of put together here and have it be in a straight line, maybe. I have really enjoyed the day and what I've heard. Talking about lessons from the past, and this is one of the questions that we were given: How was this area formed?

You have to look at the geology of the area, right? And then we go from the coast up to—and I consider it Big Thicket—up to highway 190, right? And so, you're going from coastal areas to the forest. And before we got here and when just the indigenous folks were here, then nature seemed to do just fine. Nature seemed to do just fine. It rained; it flooded. Who was hurt? No one. No one was hurt; that was just a part of nature. That was a part of the cycle of life that we've talked about today.

So let me tell you a little bit, since we're right here, about the Neches River. A lot of what I talk about I've studied. I've been on the land. Geraldine Watson wrote *Reflections on the Neches* (2013). She also wrote *Plant Ecology* (*Big Thicket Plant Ecology*, 2006). If you want to know about the Neches then read those two books. It'll tell you a lot because that's what Geraldine does with *Plant Ecology*. She starts with the geology and the soils. Because what plants are gonna grow depends on the soils, right?—and the climate. So, she starts you there and takes you through, and it's really good, especially for flooding, because she tells how all this was formed in the different layers and why things happen the way they do, and why we have flooding.

And then *Reflections on the Neches* is, she put in right below the dam, Dam B, and paddled herself all the way down to Beaumont. And so, she tells you about the river, and she tells you about the people. We've talked today about knowing the people, and I think John Beard said it—a lot of folks said—you've got to know what the people think. It's not what we think; it's what the people think. And Geraldine found out what the people think and then heard the stories of the old days, also, and living on the river.

The Neches River formed as a drainage pattern over alluvial deltas which were layered into the Gulf of Mexico during the five hundred thousand to two million years of the Pleistocene geological time. So quite a while ago, right? There were at least four major glacial advances during the Pleistocene Epoch. The glaciers did not reach this far south, but the changing climates and fluctuating sea levels that they caused directly influenced and created the streams and landforms of Southeast Texas.

Heavy rainfall during this time cut wide deep valleys. As climate warmed, the great ice masses began to melt. Sea level rose and the streams filled the valleys with alluvium. These filled-up valleys became the floodplains of the present rivers. Have you ever looked at a satellite map of the Neches River and seen how wide it is and the alluvial floodplain? The Neches River used to be wider than the Mississippi River.

And so, from this, from the glaciers melting, the ocean coming in, the ocean going out, all of these changes over time. But if you look at the Neches just right there at Pine Island Bayou and then all the way up—all the way up to the dam, especially on the west side of the river—it's alluvial floodplain. If you've ever been in Silsbee on [Farm to Market Road] 418, you go 418 east across the railroad track, you just go a few feet, and it goes down.

Way down. You are in the floodplain of the Neches River, and you're about two miles from the river. People don't think that—if you look again at the satellite map, Silsbee, up Farm [to Market] Road 92, then you have houses, and then there are no houses. It's because it's a floodplain. It's also owned by a timber company down there, but they own it for a reason. But that's the floodplain. But most folks don't think that. You know, we're flat here. We're flat. Anytime you go up or down in this area, look, and there'll be a creek. You're going down to a creek; you're coming back up from a creek.

Okay. As I said, ancient streams were much larger than at present, meandered about, changing course many times, and leaving behind occasional deep bends and sections of channels. The climate changed again, and the streams became smaller, cutting new lower and smaller floodplains within the older floodplain. On the new level they meandered about, again changing course many times and leaving behind bends and channels called sloughs and oxbows.[3] The older abandoned floodplains are called terraces, and they are no longer inundated when the streams are in flood. Examples of largely intact, minimally impounded southern lowland river systems: It is a rare survivor of a riverwoods, or overflow bottom once common across the southern United States, but now it's only down to about a couple of million acres.

And why is it only down to a couple of million acres? Because the floodplains have been developed. We're kind of lucky here; you know, in the in the old days, especially trying to get the Big Thicket National Preserve established—and it was established in 1974, eighty-four thousand acres—and it was a fight between the environmentalist and the timber companies. The timber companies wanted thirty-five thousand acres set aside. We ended up with eighty-four thousand, and it was just a fight, a fight, a fight. Timber companies do own most of that bottom land, and timber companies are now our friends. Timber companies are our friends; they're keeping those floodplains and trees. What the trees do for our floodplains? They infiltrate the water. They slow the water down.

What Jefferson County wants: You want us to keep that water up, you want us to keep the water in the northern parts. And so, when that water spreads out in that two-mile or even wider area up there of the floodplain, then it holds the flood waters. Those oxbows and sloughs that I just told you about, those fill up. We've taken Dr. Liv [Haselbach] on some hikes. Dr. Liv and I are both on the Neches River Flood Planning Group, and so taking folks places to show them and again. Where we start: We go to Orange County; we start high and we walk low and to see these back oxbows and lakes that when the Neches floods, it fills those up. So they're natural detention ponds right there, over time, over geological time, two million years, and this has happened. And so, off these floodplains, and you have natural detention ponds and again, those trees are going to infiltrate the water. It's natural. That's what's been going on forever.

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[3] An oxbow is a U-shaped bend in the course of a river. A slough typically means a wetland, which is land that is covered by water—salt, fresh, or somewhere in between—either seasonally or permanently. Sloughs along the edges of rivers form where the old channel of the river once flowed.

I was talking to a minute ago to Judy [Linsley] and Ellen [Rienstra], and we were talking about longleaf pine trees. I gave Judy some longleaf one time; I think her longleaf are taller than mine now. The Big Thicket National Preserve has—and this whole area has—nine different ecosystems in it, from xeric sandy lands and cactus growing to your bottomland hardwoods and cypress-tupelo swamps. Jefferson County has your marshes.

What protects Jefferson County from storm surge? Those marshes protect us from the storm surge. One of the things that we lose every day: our wetlands and our floodplains. It's not that the floodplain has left. The floodplain is still there. But we have developed in the floodplain. We're talking about Bevil Oaks. Where's Bevil Oaks built? You're living in the floodplain. You're living in the floodplain. Pinewood—same thing. It's in the floodplain. Bevil Oaks is in the floodway—so that means that's where the water goes and that's Pine Island Bayou.

Look at Pine Island Bayou: It runs from west to east. You know, you think things go north-south, which they do eventually go south. Well, Pine Island Bayou doesn't; it goes west to east and to the Neches River. So, it's a little bit different. It's an active floodplain and that used to be a forested area. So, what have we done to ourselves? We built houses—you didn't build it, you bought it, okay. So, we built houses and so that floodplain can't do the job that it used to do.

Here's one thing I'll put to you all. I'm in Silsbee; not a mile from me there's a little subdivision that went in probably in the fifties or, well, probably in the sixties, I'm gonna say, and it's a nice neighborhood. It is clean. It's off of 418 and Lee Miller Road. And above it is, north of it is a creek, and then the road goes up like this. It's like I was saying: What happens if you go up or down here? The road goes up like this. They built this subdivision in a bowl. So, it floods.

There's nothing that can be done for those folks. Silsbee is going to spend a million dollars that they got from the GLO [General Land Office] to come and dig the ditches deeper, but those people are still going to flood. So, my question to you or my deal to you that we need to do: All this money comes down—John Beard talked about it—low to moderate income. This is a low- to moderate-income area. We have other areas like this. Where do the people go? They really need to go, because they're going to continue to flood, and we can't do anything for them. I mean we just can't. You can't.

My question always is, too: Can you stop the water? We cannot stop the water. So, what do we do for these folks, that their houses are in the floodplain, and they're gonna flood again? Because that's, that's what drives me crazy, is that: What do we do?

So indigenous folks, they did not stay in the floodplain. They came into the Big Thicket and hunted. They went down to the coast and hunted and got their salt. They went back where they weren't gonna flood. I did have a story about some folks in the Neches, and before they built their home in 1884, they really looked to make sure that there were no signs of flooding and there weren't. And they flooded.

The big thing again: Every day is loss of wetlands, and I'm going to go to the refineries and all, Port Arthur LNG. All these places when they build here—then they're going to build in a wetland, and they have to mitigate that, okay. So, the mitigation can be one acre for one acre lost or could be ten acres of mitigation for each acre of wetland lost. But we still lose that wetland. What they do is they buy credits in Blue Elbow Swamp that's already a wetland. So, we're losing our wetlands, our marshes, our floodplains, our wetlands—that's what we need to protect.

There are things called nature-based projects that we can do to help. All things to help cannot be nature based, but we need to look at nature-based projects and put it back to nature instead of bulldozers and track hoes. And that can be done. And let's us go back to living with the land, instead of against the land. It gave us everything that we have. And so, let's go back to working with the land. Thank you all very much.

Ellen Buchanan retired from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department/State Parks in 2013 after thirty-two years caring for Texas cultural and natural resources. Now an activist, she serves as President of the Big Thicket Natural Heritage Trust.

New Numbers Just Out: Extreme Storms and Warmer, Wetter SE Texas Ahead

Chanelle Stigger

Chanelle refers to slides in her talk. We could not put every slide into print, but the complete slides are available with the video of her talk at the Ancient to the Future website. See appendix for links.

I feel really odd, because I think I'm the only one with a PowerPoint presentation. Everyone here is just speaking from the heart, speaking from the brain, just going at it, and I'm over here with a presentation. But I did want to mention—well, before I actually get started, my name is Chanelle Stigger. I work with the National Weather Service, Lake Charles, Louisiana. I was born in Houston, Texas, but I don't consider myself much of a Texan, because when I was two my family moved to Georgia—all across parts of Georgia: Atlanta, Georgia; Stone Mountain, Georgia; Macon, Georgia; and then when I was twelve going on thirteen, my family moved to Las Vegas, Nevada. So, I've had quite a wealth of experience of living in different places—and in different countries as well. I've lived in Japan and Cyprus.

I moved to Lake Charles, Louisiana, about four years ago. It will be my four-year anniversary actually with the National Weather Service here in December. So, I'm getting involved in this community and learning a lot more about this community as I go.

When Ellen [Buchanan] was talking about living in a floodplain, that instantly sparked me. We are building communities in these zones that will flood and these communities are going to see terrible impacts time after time after time, because that is a floodplain. That wasn't where homes were supposed to be. And the same thing with building, like, new malls or parking lots or shopping centers: We're building these areas, and we're tearing down what in the process? We're tearing down trees and natural areas to build these places. And these areas were soaking up all of this, all of this excess water.

So, now we have areas that instead of taking in the water, we have parking lots that are flooding. So we're building, and we're actually causing areas—or we have areas that are going to flood, because they are in flood zones, because they weren't built in an area that was good for development.

So, I'm going to go ahead and talk about three different events really quick, with my first event being Ike. So, with Ike, this was a storm that kind of built up and then you can kind of see the water piling up—or storm—this is our radar and you see it building up as it continues to move through.[4] We will view this loop one more time from the Lake Charles radar. This one was a tremendous storm surge event. So, with Ike, the winds helped pull all of this water into the area, and we saw serious storm surge across parts of Southeast Texas.

Going on to the next slide. So that was one of the main things with this: not only storm surge, but also heavy rain prompting more flooding, as you can see from the radar. Let me pull this up, because I also have specific numerical amounts. For example, Rainbow Bridge—which is right outside of Orange—saw 9.29 feet of storm surge. This isn't rain plus surge, this is storm surge alone. And that was the highest amount that they could record before the sensor failed. So the sensor actually failed, and we don't even know how much higher it got outside of that.

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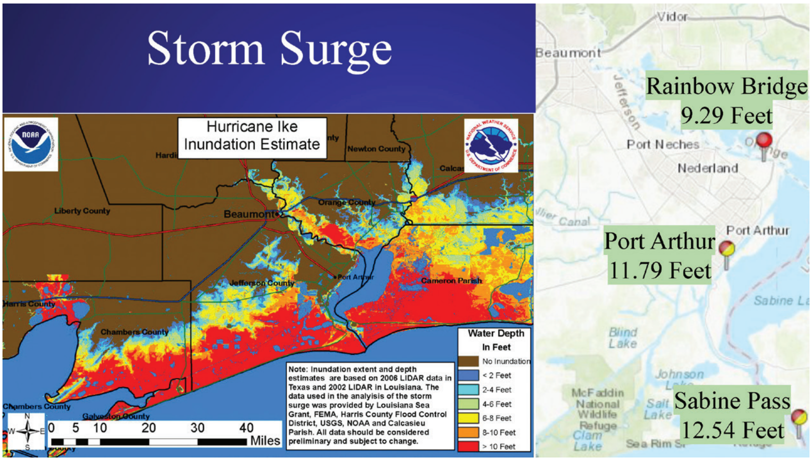
[4] For link to video see Websites Referenced page 186.


Storm Surge

Note: Inundation extent and depth estimates are based on 2006 LIDAR data in Texas and 2002 LIDAR in Louisiana. The data used in the analyisis of the storm surge was provided by Louisiana Sea Grant, FEMA, Harris County Flood Control District, USGS, NOAA and Calcasieu Parish. All data should be considered preliminary and subject to change.

Hurricane Ike
Inundation Estimate
Liberty County
Newton County
Beaumont
Orange County
Jefferson County
Port Arthur
Cameron Parish
Harris County
Chambers County
Galveston County
0 5 10 20 30 40 Miles
Water Depth In Feet
No Inundation
< 2 Feet
2-4 Feet
4-6 Feet
6-8 Feet
8-10 Feet
> 10 Feet
Vidor
Beaumont
Port Neches
Nederland
Rainbow Bridge
9.29 Feet
Port Arthur
11.79 Feet
Sabine Pass
12.54 Feet
McFaddin National Wildlife Refuge

Port Arthur, the same thing happened: 11.79 feet of storm surge and that was before the sensor failed. Same with Sabine Pass that got 12.54 feet of storm surge. And in addition to that—with Sabine Pass—that was one of the highest recorded for that gauge. So, they reached record storm surge amounts, and on top of that, they got flooding rains that caused even more problems for this community.

So, some of the pictures from Ike's aftermath. You can see some people driving through flooded areas.[5] You have people walking through flooded roads outside of Orangefield, which isn't too far from here. People on boats trying to get back to safer areas. This is actually part of Lamar University. Damage in this community right across the street.

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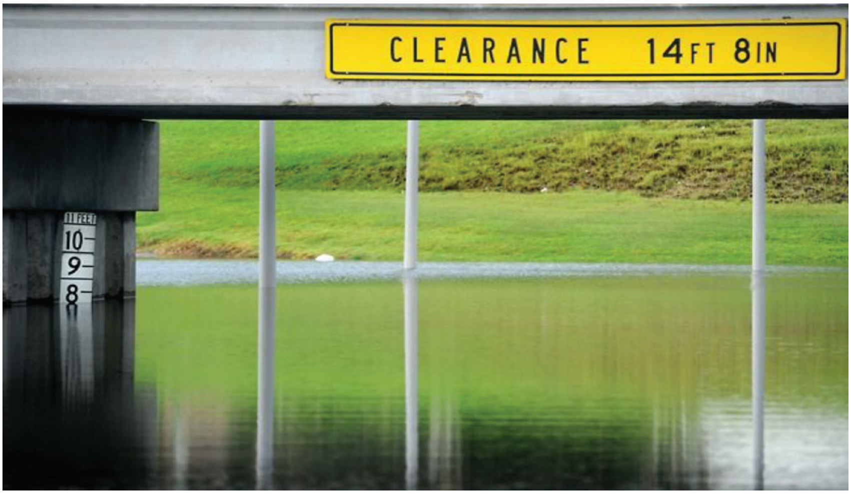
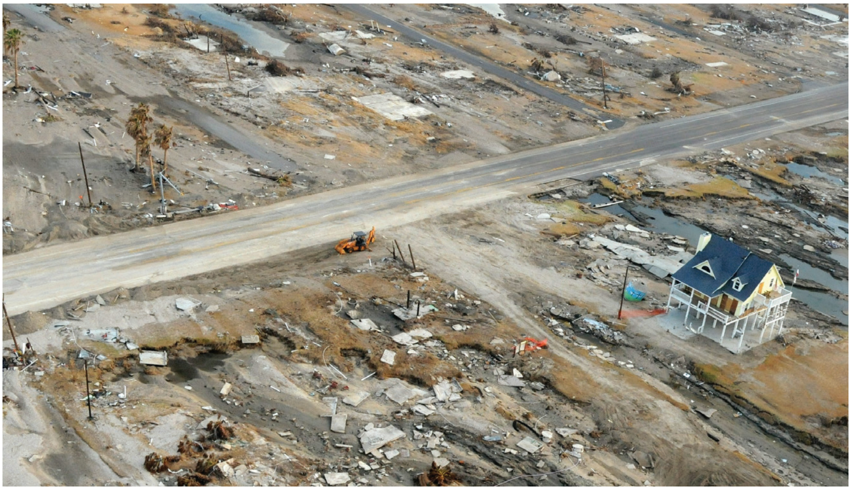
[5] Due to copyright restrictions and other concerns, this volume of *The Record* could not reproduce many of the images included in Chanelle Stigger's presentation. See Websites Referenced (pages 185-187) for links to more information.



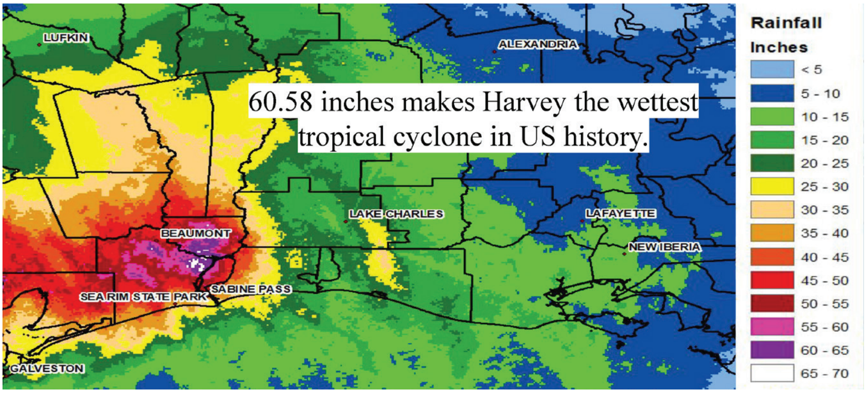
Hurricane Ike's water flooded the underpass at Park Street and College in Beaumont higher than seven feet, as this gauge indicates in September 2008. People had no way of getting out of their neighborhood for some time. Photo by Tammy McKinley. Courtesy *The Beaumont Enterprise*.



Hurricane Ike swept away every house but one for miles in Gilchrist, Texas, on Bolivar Penninsula. Photo by Jocelyn Augustino. Courtesy FEMA.

Another—I believe this is—yeah, Pine Street. Some people were walking through Pine Street, and you can see how high this water was and they're trying to tread through this. And then just seeing how high it got here. This is also somewhere near Pine Street where the water flooded the underpass beneath the highway. You can see clearly that you could not drive through something like this. The pole on the left-hand side noted that water got over seven feet.

So, the next one, and I know we've had a couple of people from before me, and some people who might actually mention it after me, talk about Harvey. And I'm so glad Harvey got brought up, and it kind of makes me happy that a lot of people are talking about it, because usually when you hear Harvey what do you hear next? Houston.


LUFKIN
ALEXANDRIA
LAKE CHARLES
LAFAYETTE
NEW IBERIA
BEAUMONT
SABINE PASS
SEA RIM STATE PARK
GALVESTON
Rainfall Inches
< 5
5 - 10
10 - 15
15 - 20
20 - 25
25 - 30
30 - 35
35 - 40
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50 - 55
55 - 60
60 - 65
65 - 70

60.58 inches makes Harvey the wettest tropical cyclone in US history.

Beaumont. Port Arthur. They had several impacts like Houston despite media coverage. So, we need to pay attention to what happened in the Beaumont-Port Arthur area. Looking at the radar loop, Harvey actually made landfall—you can't actually see the center of it—Harvey made landfall across parts of southern Texas, made a loop, came right back out into the gulf and then made landfall again.[6] But before it did that, it stalled, kind of over that area, providing significant rainfall, and with that just catastrophic flooding.

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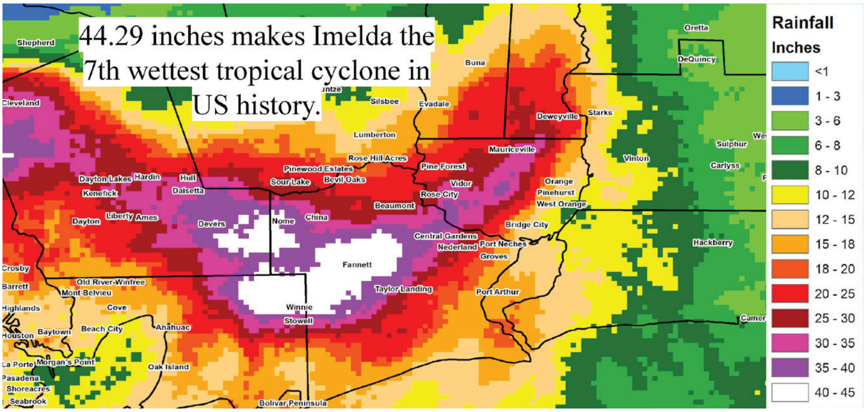
[6] For link see Websites Referenced page 186.

All of this happened in this community. With some of the heavy rainfall, we saw significant amounts across parts of the Golden Triangle, especially over in Jefferson and Orange counties. With that, it got up to recorded amounts of 60.58 inches, which makes Harvey the number-one wettest tropical cyclone in United States history, not just for the Golden Triangle, not just for Texas—in the United States.

This was a significant and historic event that happened right here in this community. Some of the photos from Harvey's aftermath: You can see a house that was completely surrounded by flood waters because of the torrential rains. You can kind of see this area: There are vehicles in flooded roads. This was closer to the coast, so its fuel mixed in. It's crude oil that's mixed in with flood waters. Another area where trucks are trying to get out to get people out of the area. This one was a Marine veteran who is actually trying to rescue horses that were stranded out there. And then you can see just closer to the coast, this is a roadway that is completely flooded. And this is over by a trailer camp park, where you can see how high the water is up to those trailers. They're covered, almost completely covered.


44.29 inches makes Imelda the 7th wettest tropical cyclone in US history.
Shepherd
Cleveland
Silsbee
Evadale
Buna
Deweyville
Starks
Oretta
DeQuincy
Lumberton
Rose Hill Acres
Pine Forest
Mauriceville
Vinton
Sulphur
Carlyss
Pinewood Estates
Sour Lake
Bevil Oaks
Vidor
Rose City
Orange
Pinehurst
West Orange
Dayton Lakes
Hardin
Hull
Daisetta
Kenefick
Beaumont
Dayton
Liberty
Ames
Devers
Nome
China
Bridge City
Central Gardens
Nederland
Port Neches
Groves
Hackberry
Fannett
Crosby
Barrett
Old River-Winfree
Mont Belvieu
Taylor Landing
Port Arthur
Highlands
Cove
Winnie
Stowell
Houston
Baytown
Beach City
Anahuac
La Porte
Morgan's Point
Pasadena
Shoreacres
Seabrook
Oak Island
Bolivar Peninsula
Rainfall
Inches
<1
1 - 3
3 - 6
6 - 8
8 - 10
10 - 12
12 - 15
15 - 18
18 - 20
20 - 25
25 - 30
30 - 35
35 - 40
40 - 45

And the last one I wanted to talk about—because it deserves a special mention—is Imelda.[7] So with Imelda, this was a tropical depression that

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7. For link see Websites Referenced page 186.

Paul England Jr. (left) helps Michael Brown (right) move bedroom furniture floating in his flooded home in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Harvey in Port Arthur, Texas. August 2017. Photo by Gerald Herbert. AP Images.

formed and stalled over Southeast Texas, and as it stalled, it kept raining. And you had—you'll see kind of as it comes in, these feeder bands—that it sat there and kept providing more and more rain in this area. We have a lot of radar loops, and if anyone wants these, I can give them to you. I'll give out my information to make sure you guys can get them.

So, with this the main thing was heavy rain and flooding. So, as you can see across parts of the area—especially Fannett, Winnie, Nome, and I can't remember, there was another one I wanted to hit on—that got significant amounts of up to forty inches of rain. The highest was 44.29, which makes it the seventh highest in US history. So just to think about it: We've had two of these US history setting events right here in this community within a short time frame.

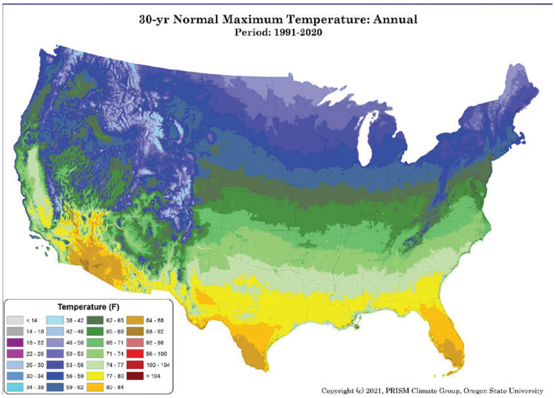
Some of the pictures from Imelda's aftermath: You have people just trying to get through flood waters, trying to get to higher ground; personnel trucks—military trucks—trying to drive through these flood waters to help out. You have a police car that was trying to—I think when I was reading the article—he was trying to get out of the area, but he couldn't get his car out and got stalled in flood waters. More cars in these areas getting stuck in flood waters. You have these places and homes; you can see in the background that are flooded because of all the rain. And then just another example of people trying to drive in these flood waters, which also as a meteorologist, I have to say is dangerous. Don't do that: Six inches of water can carry your car away, let alone forty-four. Just one more of someone's house flooded and water getting up under there.

So, now I'm switching over, and I'll talk more about climate, specifically normals or what we call "climate normals." These are calculated every decade. So, for example, the last one to come out was 2020. So, the climate normal that's out now is from 1991 to 2020. Our normals change every decade, and some of them are increasing every decade. It's important that we pay attention to what's normal for now because what's normal now is nothing in comparison to what has happened before.

So, these normals are created by observations. NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) employees and volunteers like my

The truck was part of mutual aid from the City of Pearland to Jefferson County in the aftermath of Tropical Storm Imelda when 42.63 inches of rain fell in the county. August 2019. Courtesy City of Pearland, Texas.

coworker and I, who take observations every day; that's a part of our job, to collect certain data points, for example, temperature. The normals that I'll be talking about: max temperature, min temperature, and precipitation. We collect this data, and we're quality controlling it. And then it gets sent up to what's called NCEI (National Centers for Environmental Information), and then from there, they're building these climate normals. So, for our average max temperature, this is annual across the entire year, for Southeast Texas we're looking at around seventy-seven to eighty degrees for Southeast Texas.


30-yr Normal Maximum Temperature: Annual
Period: 1991-2020
Temperature (F)
< 14
14 - 18
18 - 22
22 - 26
26 - 30
30 - 34
34 - 38
38 - 42
42 - 46
46 - 50
50 - 53
53 - 56
56 - 59
59 - 62
62 - 65
65 - 68
68 - 71
71 - 74
74 - 77
77 - 80
80 - 84
84 - 88
88 - 92
92 - 96
96 - 100
100 - 104
> 104
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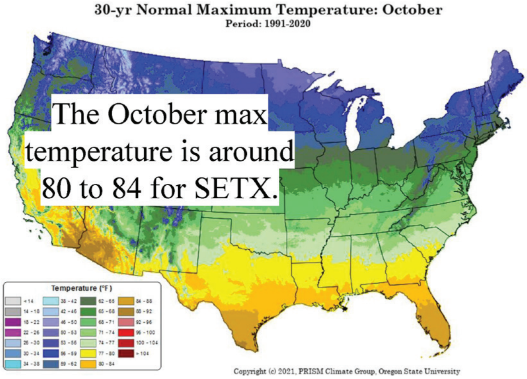
For October, our normal was about, let's see, normal temperatures, yes—there it is, is eighty to eighty-four, which, if we try to compare it to


30-yr Normal Maximum Temperature: October
Period: 1991-2020
The October max temperature is around 80 to 84 for SETX.
Temperature (°F)
< 14
14 - 18
18 - 22
22 - 26
26 - 30
30 - 34
34 - 38
38 - 42
42 - 46
46 - 50
50 - 53
53 - 56
56 - 59
59 - 62
62 - 65
65 - 68
68 - 71
71 - 74
74 - 77
77 - 80
80 - 84
84 - 88
88 - 92
92 - 96
96 - 100
100 - 104
> 104
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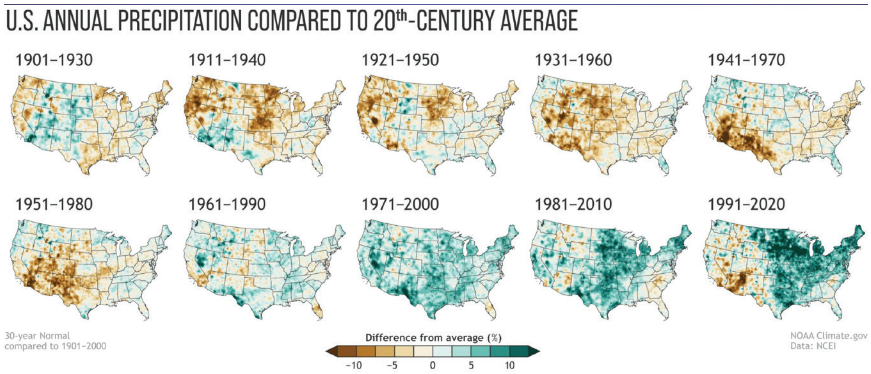
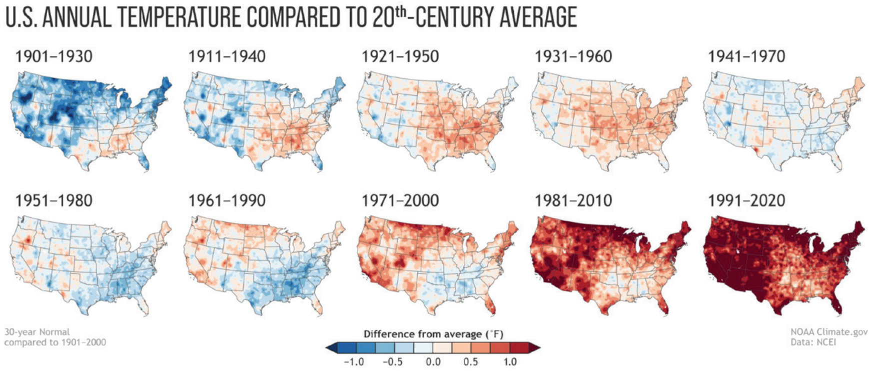


U.S. ANNUAL PRECIPITATION COMPARED TO 20th-CENTURY AVERAGE

1901–1930
1911–1940
1921–1950
1931–1960
1941–1970
1951–1980
1961–1990
1971–2000
1981–2010
1991–2020
30-year Normal compared to 1901–2000
Difference from average (%)
−10
−5
0
5
10
NOAA Climate.gov Data: NCEI

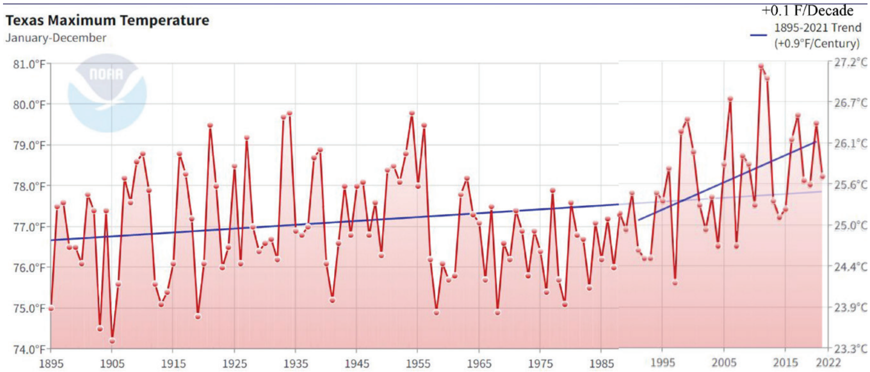


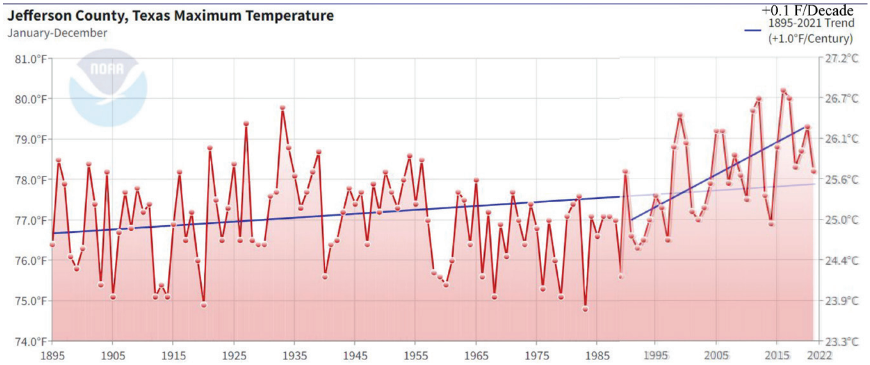
U.S. ANNUAL TEMPERATURE COMPARED TO 20th-CENTURY AVERAGE

1901–1930
1911–1940
1921–1950
1931–1960
1941–1970
1951–1980
1961–1990
1971–2000
1981–2010
1991–2020
30-year Normal compared to 1901–2000
Difference from average (°F)
−1.0
−0.5
0.0
0.5
1.0
NOAA Climate.gov Data: NCEI

the other thirty-year normals, we would have blown it out of the park. However, with our normals increasing every decade, what we have now was in range. For October in Beaumont-Port Arthur, the average temperature was 82.3, so it fits. But if we were to use prior climate data—it would have blown out of the park.

Precipitation compared to a century: What they did in this graph is they took the US normals from 1901 through 2000, and then, they compared it to normals in the twenty-first century. And as you can see in those last two graphs, look at our area, what has happened: We've seen an increase;

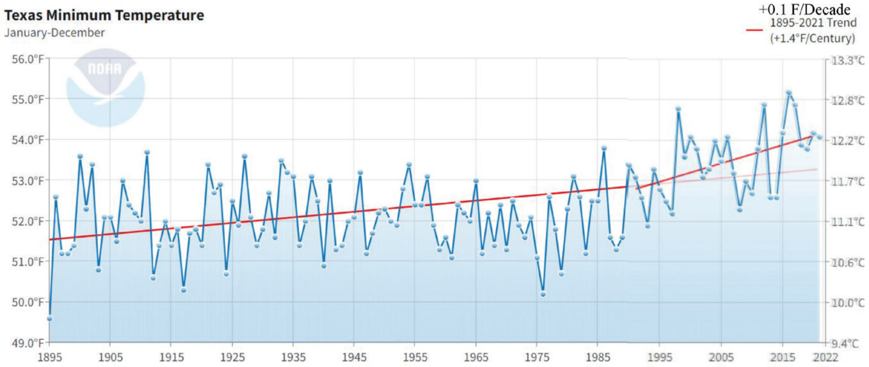


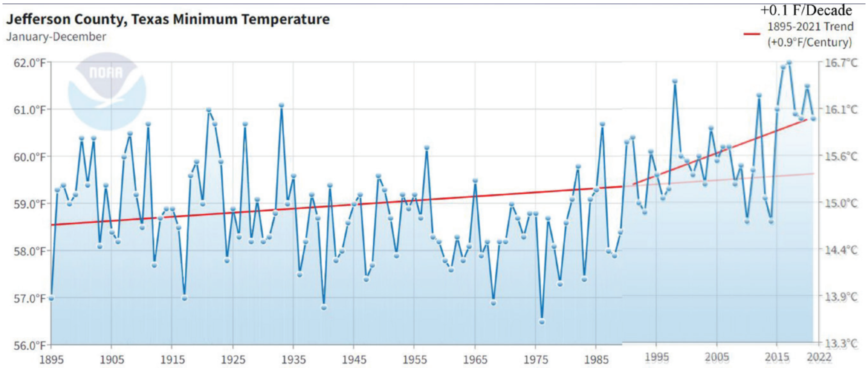


we're definitely seeing an increasing trend of water and precip in this area.

The same with temps. This is the same thing: We're comparing it from 1901 to 2000, and then, those last two are ones in the twenty-first century. You can see—and especially in that last one, closer to where we are in time wise—you can see warmer temps.

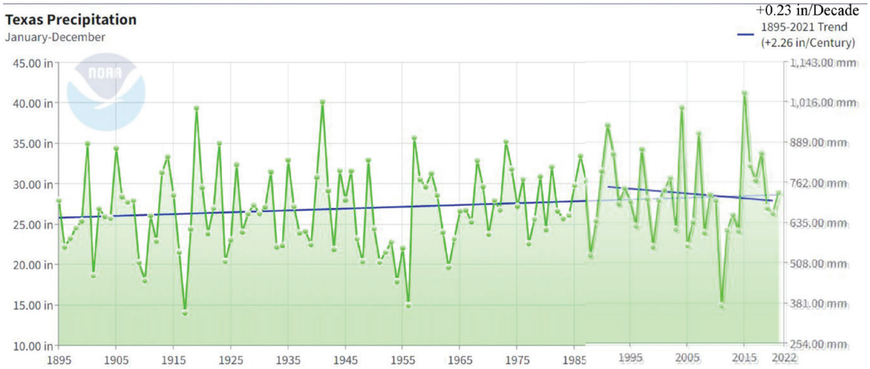
Now the State of Texas versus Jefferson County, just in general. We can see trends are a lot higher for some parts in Jefferson County, just itself. Here, is the Texas maximum temperature and this is over that 125-year

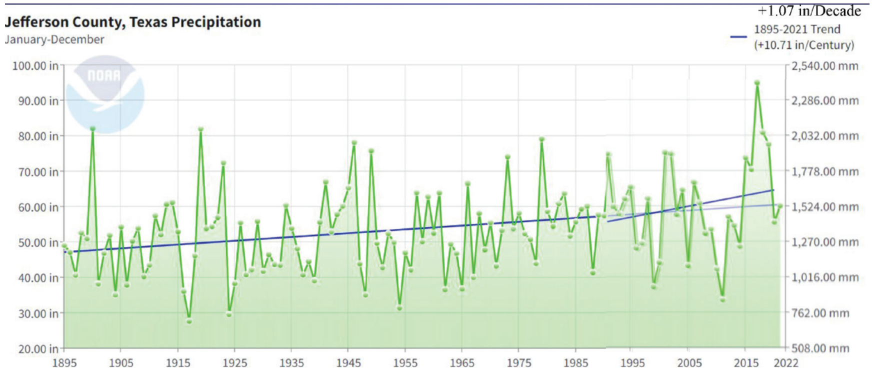




period. However, if we look just at this last climate normal, that thirty-year period: a higher increase. Same with Jefferson. This is for Jefferson over that 125-year period, and then over a thirty-year period: we're seeing an increase.

Same with minimum temperatures: You can see a higher rate, and then for Jefferson, an even steeper rate. So, we are getting a lot warmer at night. Our nighttime temperatures—and I was talking about this with my coworker [sitting off to the side]—we are becoming more tropical in this region.





And for our precipitation: This is for Texas; it actually had a decreasing trend over the last thirty years. However, for Jefferson, we're seeing an increasing trend. So in Jefferson in general, the county has seen higher precip amounts. I'll leave the rest for the questions.

Channelle Stigger works for the National Weather Service Lake Charles Office after majoring in atmospheric sciences and meteorology at North Carolina A&T State University and living in Japan. She is a primary school football official, second lieutenant in the Civil Air Patrol, and plays the alto saxophone.

Newly Elevated Areas Send Water into Old Neighborhoods, FEMA Money Goes Elsewhere

Chris Jones

Good afternoon. I will say that as the president of the Charlton-Pollard neighborhood, the neighborhood that Margot, Dr. Gage, actually referred to is the—and I have the bragging rights to say—oldest neighborhood, and specifically, the oldest black neighborhood that the city of Beaumont has to offer and to be able to carry that lineage, that history, is phenomenal. So, I definitely thank you all for allowing me to be here today, especially to represent my neighborhood because I still live there. This is a neighborhood that is, you know, a fenceline community to industry. You could actually peer out those windows, and you'll see more smokestacks, but not really my neighborhood because it's embedded in the trees, sorta kinda.

But I'm actually excited to discuss with you all some inequalities when it comes to extreme weather, and I want to specifically point out the inequalities when it comes to resources and funding. I heard earlier a lot of people mention, especially in the earlier speakers: education, advocacy, exposure. And that's one of the things I definitely would like to make known to everybody: that we learn from exposure and observation. And so, in our observation, as a graduate from BISD, I saw, you know, back in the day, Hurricane Andrew just blew wind, you know, that was it: chased leaves. As time went by, I went to the military, I come back: my flight, actually, from my ETS (Expiration-Term of Service) of service was canceled due to a storm that was, I will say, forgotten about here in Southeast Texas.

It was called Hurricane Lili. And she rained, and I want to say twelve or thirteen days, here in Beaumont—well, not just here in Beaumont, actually upriver. As Miss Ellen [Buchanan] mentioned, those places eventually flood, too. So that weather, that rain, lasted around this area for twelve days. They opened what we know as the floodgate, or the salt barrier, further up the Neches River. Well, that Neches River then began to run along Pine Street; some of these same communities that she showed before—now mind you, I ETS'd from the military in 2002.

That was then; now we have an issue where those communities—including where you live, Dr. Gage—are flooded on a consistent basis; and not only are they flooded, but some areas—especially African American areas or are known historical African American areas, especially after DD6 [Drainage District 6, which includes most of Jefferson County] and some other finagling—ended up flooding. These neighborhoods weren't flooding before. There is now canals and all kinds of other things that run through the city—and ditches, allegedly retention areas and ditches that run through the city to capture this water and keep it from encroaching into residential areas.

That's not the case anymore, especially with—like Ellen mentioned—river flooding, upper river and lower river flooding, storm surge that comes inland, different things like that. Well, those ditches are now known to inequitably move water from one side of the city to the next. And being that it was stated that, you know, one body of water runs from west to east [Pine Island Bayou], it's also known that they are pumping water on residents from west to east. This also creates the disparities where some members of our community are experiencing flooding; haven't seen flooding, do not live in a floodplain.

Again, these are 'new' floodplains, based on whomever that makes those decisions. Members of those communities do not really have the necessities to just pack up and leave or say, "Well, I live in a flood zone. So, we're gonna, you know, just take our belongings and go somewhere else;" especially if that's their homestead; especially if that's a place where they not only raise their children but were raised themselves.

And especially to see a community from the sixties, seventies, fifties even, never flood, and they're now all of a sudden you're flooding to mass extents, even higher than some of the pictures she showed with the trailers. We are used to seeing that happen, especially as young as I am. We're used to seeing that happen, over in the Fannett area as she mentioned, the lower-lying areas, you know, the cow pastures and different things like that that were historically implemented back in the day for this area.

Well now—as she mentioned, and we see—these areas are now being built on and again, and in order to make it attractive, they'll show "No flooding, no, none of that," underestimating and underreporting the weather that happens in and around those particular areas. So, it is incumbent that we, you know, learn the previous demographics of our area and topography of our area as well, so that we know where we live. That's where education and exposure comes in.

Inequalities also comes when those after the flood and all that—FEMA and other agencies, federal government, including the state—sends out funding—and again, I'm in the oldest black neighborhood—and most of that funding we do not see. Earlier I heard someone mention about blue tarps still on roofs. In my neighborhood and in the north end of Beaumont, there are some homes, some residents, that have a blue tarp from Ike. The photo that she showed you in 2007. From 2007 to 2022, some people—some residents in this area—are still living with a blue tarp on their roof. Mind you, FEMA has sent money; nonprofit organizations have received money; but members of these communities do not receive that funding, do not receive that resource.

So, that's our inequality, especially when we see Some Other Place—and I'm glad she's here—but she's not the only organization, she's not the only nonprofit organization that receives federal and state funding. And she does her best with the little amount that she gets. We have other nonprofit organizations, and I call them "money funnels," just so that other corporate organizations can get, you know, a tax write-off. Those resources also do not come to our communities, with the exception of maybe ‘buyouts,’ so that they can continue to exacerbate the minority black and brown communities that we have here.

I know you saw the graphs and see the graphs in your pamphlets and your workbooks, where there is a large majority of black and brown communities here. And it is atrocious to see that the populace of this city or even this county does not receive the resources that the federal and state government sends out. Those are just miniscule inequalities that we face here in in this area.

And one of those things that I’m doing, as an individual and as the president of our neighborhood association, is to, again, continue to monitor, continue to observe, and continue to report not only to our city elected officials: We have district representatives, we have county representatives, and we also have, you know, state representatives as well. So, I would ask that everybody, whether you’re in this room, viewing from your home, and whenever we do go back home: Share with our communities these resources. Let them know that, hey, this organization or this group is giving out. Here is an opportunity to, you know, get that information or here’s the opportunity to get that funding.

Another thing: Margot mentioned at the beginning, when she first started speaking. (And this is a real good friend of mine, and I’ve been in prayer with her from the moment she came back stateside and found out she had COVID). One of the things that we missed out on—and this hits hugely in this city; the county also—you can pinpoint whoever and however allowed so much money to be returned back to our federal government to displace … members in apartment complexes that are renting, that may even be in the process of being late … allowed these monies to be sent back and didn’t really even expose the application process to this populace. I’m not gonna say Black, because we all flooded, regardless to what your income is, regardless to if you are disabled, regardless to if you are abled, we all flooded, and some members on the other side of the city will say, “Well, I didn’t flood.” No you didn’t, because they pumped the water on the residents in the North End.

So, when I say pumping water on residents in the North End, we all know that when we look in the canal, we'll see water just smoothly, smoothly move through, especially the majority of the canals that we see in the area. Well, during Harvey because Harvey rained for days as well, those waters rose. And we saw choppy waters in these once-calm canals. And observation is key. She said, "We live flat." There's no way, shape, form, or fashion that water is going to move from the west to the east and it's choppy—unless it's being pumped. That water was pumped from the west side of the city onto residents, onto business owners, small business owners that were already struggling before Harvey.

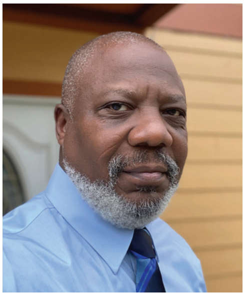
Mind you, we still had homes that had a blue roof in 2007 from Ike. So we saw that choppy water then being introduced into neighborhoods. Flooded historical black churches in the North End, flooded historical burial grounds in the North End, and these inequalities are just brushed off as, "Oh, well, we had to make do with what flooding we had in the West End," and not telling people and/or the community the real reason of why now, all of a sudden, they're flooding.

So, I do again, I appreciate the opportunity to speak. I look forward to speaking to you even more after this, and I hope that we can continue the conversation; because as I mentioned, Dr. Gage, we're still talking about the symposium that you did a few years ago. So, that conversation I know for sure has the potential to keep, continue to develop us into well-rounded people and help us bring resolve to issues that we see on a daily basis. Thank you.

Chris "Unc" Jones is a US Army veteran and lifelong Beaumonter with his own construction/consulting business. He continues on a mission to serve his community, especially the youth, including through the Charlton-Pollard Greater Historic Community Association.

Since 1865, Black People Forced onto Marshy Lands; Petrochemical Industry Hid Toxins as "Trade Secrets"—Now the Water's Rising

Hilton Kelley



First, I'd like to thank Abdul [Alkalimat], Kate [Williams], and Margot [Gage Witvliet] for inviting me to speak at this event. As stated, my name is Hilton Kelly. I am the founder and director of the Community In-Power and Development Association located in Port Arthur, Texas. Port Arthur, Texas, is my birth home.

But when I was nineteen years old, I decided that I wanted to go into the United States Navy. I decided that I wanted to make a difference in this world, and back in 1979, there was the Iranian crisis, where Americans were took hostage, and I remember seeing that on television, and I felt somebody needed to do something. And so, when I told my mom I wanted to go into the military, she yelled out, "No, no, you need to go to Lamar. You don't need to go to war. What is this?" And so, I explained to her: I said, "Mama, I wanna help. I want to be a part of, you know, bringing the US citizens home." And she said, "Son, that's not your fight. You need to go to Lamar State College, get a degree and let it be that."

So anyway, fast forward, but I lost my mother ironically that, that same year, and I had no choice but to pick up the gauntlet and take care of me and my brother; I had a younger brother. And so, what I decided to do was continue with my goal: I joined the United States Navy. I was aboard the USS *Roanoke*. I got out of the service in 1984, and I was totally discharged in 1986, because you have a delayed exit program.

And so, living in California, I was stationed in Alameda Naval Air Station near Oakland, California, and I would frequent Port Arthur. Every now and then, I would come back home. And I noticed the degrade in our downtown area. I noticed that the air quality was still the same, years after I had left here. You smell that sulfur odor and that rotten egg smell. And then you would hear stories about the number of people that have died from cancer. And you see little babies with that chronic cough.

And when I came back here in 2000—just to visit and go to the Mardi Gras, I'd been gone like twenty-one years,—and I noticed that nothing had really changed except that it had gotten worse. There were more dilapidated buildings. There were more people with cancer. And so, I kept thinking how someone needed to do something. Here I go again, wanting to save the world.

So, I got back to Oakland, California; I started jotting down ideas of what I saw and what I thought needed to be done for my hometown. I had no plan on coming back and embarking upon the journey that I'm now on. But yet after I got those notes jotted down, and I kept thinking, who would I get the notes to? Who in Port Arthur would take on this mission?

And so, I had a dream. And it was so surreal that I believe that the Almighty was showing me: "No, I'm giving you these ideas for you to do. I don't need you to go find anyone else. If you don't accept the challenge, then I'll find someone else. Amen." And I felt like nothing else in my life would have gone right had not I at least came home and tried.

I came back to Port Arthur in 2000. And my plan was to be here for maybe a year or two and then head back to California and resume my acting career. I did some background work, some stunt work, and that was my passion in life after I got out the service. And even in high school, Mr. Henry Mayes—some of you may know Mr. Henry Mayes. He was my mentor in school. He was the father figure to me. But yet he made a big difference in my life.

But when I came back home to Port Arthur, I got started with trying to identify why the air still had that rotten egg smell, why so many people had cancer. And nobody was really asking the question and trying to dive into what can they do to prevent it.

And so, I had a couple of community meetings, and at that meeting, I think Reverend Ransom Howard was still here with us, and Mrs. Hunt, former city councilwoman, first city councilwoman in the city of Port Arthur of African American descent. And they said, “Well son, you know what you’re talking about doing we think that’s very noble and, you know, I don’t think it’s a whole lot that you can do.” But nobody had never really got behind the politics of industry. They never took a close look at the rules and regulations that that govern those industries.

And so, once I had that meeting, word got around that, you know, this guy asking questions and about industry and whatnot. I ran into Reverend Roy Malveaux, and Reverend Roy Malveaux has Shining Star Missionary Baptist Church here in Beaumont. And so, he came to one of my meetings, and he said, “Son, you know, what you’re talking about doing, you need to understand how to go to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and access those records and take a close look at what’s happening.”

He said, “We need more young people like yourself to get involved with this fight, because what’s happening to our air quality is criminal.” We have the largest amount of sulfur dioxide being dumped into our air by one big industry in Port Arthur. It’s called Oxbow Calcining. Oxbow Calcining put out ninety-eight percent of all the SO_2, if you put all those industries together. We all know the TPC [Texas Petroleum Chemical] explosion that happened in November of 2019.

That devastated homes in the Groves area: blew out garages, blew off doors, concrete slabs were cracked. And that industry is located right next to a park. Right next to a park. So, after I started researching, I discovered that a lot of these industries were out of compliance with the Clean Air Act laws and regulations. And so, I started calling the TCEQ (Texas Commission on Environmental Quality) and asking them: What do they plan to do about it? What kind of enforcement actions would they be putting out against these industries that were dumping tons and tons of SO_2?

And then to even take it further, I finally got involved with taking air samples, and Reverend Roy Malveaux helped to educate me on this device: it was called "the bucket." It's a five-gallon bucket, and it has the gamma seal top on it. It has an intake valve and an outflow valve. And there's a tube that's hooked to it; you can take a regular computer vacuum, and you hook it to that tube, and then you suck the air out that bucket, allowing a vacuum to build up, and there's a Tedlar bag hooked on the other end of the inflow there. And so when you finally get the suction in that bucket by sucking the air out, you open that valve and the ambient air automatically goes into that Tedlar bag. And then you take that bag, and you send it to a lab. Now mind, I always used a third-party lab, because I did not trust a lot of laboratories here in the state of Texas.

So, we sent those samples off. We took one sample after another. And what we found was alarming. We found that there was a disproportionate amount of benzene being dumped into the air, 1,3-butadiene being dumped into the air, ethylene being dumped into the air—you name it. And TCEQ was not putting out any type of enforcement actions.

So, we got involved with EPA, the Environmental Protection Agency, the regional office in Dallas. And so we started questioning them, but yet we got very little action. Because the enforcement actions that are opposed against these industries that are dumping large amount of ground-level ozone material, which is contributing greatly to our climate change, these guys [EPA] are basically in business to help them get through the permitting process, even though the EPA, the Environmental Protection Agency, protection is about protecting our environment that we live in—for good reason, because the air that we breathe sustains our life. And if your air's contaminated with butadiene, sulfur dioxide, ethylene oxide, all these chemicals, and when you breathe it in, it's going through your bloodstream, so it's slowly killing you.

And so, we had to protest to get the EPA to get up off its duff and start doing its job. Groups from all over the country came together and we met in Washington, DC. I think George [W.] Bush was in office at that particular time. But yet those guys, his administration, didn't want to do much to assist in that area. This is why protests are necessary. But anyway, we finally got some traction and then came in Barack Obama and we met with Gina McCarthy, Lisa Jackson, who was the administrator over the EPA, and they were a more environmentally friendly administration, because a lot of times, it's contingent upon who's in office, which would dictate whether or not you're going to have support from the EPA or not. And so that still holds true today. It's a shame that politics are being played with the air quality that we breathe. Now with the present administration, the Biden administration, they get it. Now, they just passed a budget of sixty billion dollars, a record budget for EPA, to start divvying out enforcement actions against these major polluters.

Now, I totally get it that these industries helped to build this area. We get that. Spindletop was here right down the road. 1901: oil was big. Everybody was getting into the oil business. But guess what? By the 1930s, industries knew the dangers of many of those chemicals that they were dumping into the air, but yet they decided to keep that a secret and they called it—a trade secret. Everything is earmarked, oh, trade secrets, we can't put out.

But if you're dumping it in my air, I have a right to know what I'm breathing. I have a right to protect my kids and my family members from the dangers of those toxic fumes. But yet you don't want to tell me, and now we have to find out by fighting you and dragging you into court? And every year these industries pay millions of dollars to families to communities because of a particular incident that took place or a illegal emission event that took place or a intentional release that they had to do because of potential explosions.

So, with that being said, these chemicals do not impact just our lives, our very livelihood, but it's killing our planet as well. Around this world we have thousands and thousands of refineries, chemical plants, chemical incineration facilities, petroleum coke facilities, and all together they're dumping all these toxins into our air quality.

We all know about acid rain back in the 1970s. Trees were dying. Scientists couldn't figure it out; then they discovered that it was acid rain from industry. Now look at the climate.

Who all remember McFaddin Beach? Everybody remember McFaddin Beach, right? There was a time to where we can go from Port Arthur through Sabine to McFaddin Beach. I remember when the surf set off the road, maybe about a good thirty-five, forty yards off the road. Now that road is washed out. That is a prime example that sea level rise is real.

Now of course we had a lot of people in the beginning of this thing called climate change were doubting it. Oh, that's not happening; that's a figment of your imagination. But we're seeing it on our coastal communities. We're seeing it.

And so, with that being said, we have to do something about it. Extreme weather is real. We have an unprecedented number of hurricanes that come on shore every year. And now those same hurricanes are flooding our communities year after year after year. The hidden danger with that is also the stress that it put on each and every one of us every year that live here.

Our elderly folks are being stressed. There's a bedroom community called El Vista in Port Arthur, and many of those people that live in that area were retired. We're talking about retired policeman, retired nurses, living their best years. Now that whole community is abandoned because of Hurricane Harvey. They got no help from FEMA, because they're in a low-lying area. They got no help from the City of Port Arthur because they don't want to put money in homes that could potentially flood again.

The last thing I would like to say is this: the Emancipation Proclamation was signed in 1864. African Americans were free, but free to go where? We couldn't live in certain neighborhoods. We couldn't go in certain hotels. We were forced to live from Mississippi all the way into Texas, we were forced to live in places like the Mississippi Delta—the marshes of Louisiana, and right on into Texas where I was born and raised on the West Side—that was one of the most marshiest areas in the world. But now we've grown to love our communities. We have a culture there. And for years we have always dealt with floods.

But now we're dealing with unprecedented waters at certain heights that nobody has ever seen before. And now they tell us we should move—or we should pull ourselves up by our bootstraps—but we didn't put ourselves to those areas. We were forced to live there, and it was maintained due to Jim Crow laws.

So, I feel that many people who live in those areas today should be given an opportunity to get the funding they need to move out of those areas, because we were forced to live there, and Jim Crow laws help to maintain that.

So, we got to find solutions. We know what's happening now, so working together we can find solutions. My website is www.cidainc.org. Again, my name is Hilton Kelly. I am the founder and director of that organization, and I look forward to working with you out there who want to get some solutions. We're gonna be having an event also, on Wednesday at six o'clock in Port Arthur, Texas, at the GTEC building. And that's located at 617 Proctor. We're going to be having food, refreshments, and we're going to be giving away flat screen TVs, and it's going to be a discussion around climate change and building resiliency. Thank you.

US Navy and TV/film veteran **Hilton Kelley** founded Community In-Power and Development Association Incorporated to challenge local environmental violators and educate Port Arthurites about the toxic burden on them. In 2011, he earned the "Green Nobel," the Goldman Environmental Prize.

Extreme Weather: Discussion

Audience member: When you buy a house in Southeast Texas, you get to look at floodplain maps, hundred-year flood, five-hundred-year flood, and you try to pick a house that's outside the five-hundred-year flood line, right, and it might just be two blocks from your house where that five-hundred-year flood line comes. Are those maps any good now? Do they mean anything?

Alex Perez: I first want to volunteer my services as far as roofing issues in the area, because I'm a contractor by trade so I would like to, in the future, if we can, you know, get together and I can—I'd like to actually teach people how to do that. Because, you know, whenever—it comes down to the—it's us who have to empower each other.

Hilton Kelley: Yes.

Alex Perez: We cannot wait for some—Superman ain't coming.

Hilton Kelley: That's right.

Alex Perez: Okay. So, in giving up our power, which is what we've been conditioned to doing, giving up our power to some outside entity, be it the government, okay, once we know more about the history of that entity, once we research—because I'm a big researcher—there's a whole lot of things: Operation LAC, okay, look it up. So, first of all I'd like to volunteer my services in order to help teach, okay, how to, because we're gonna build rebuild our own communities for one, so that's one thing. My question is: Does anyone know, has anyone reached out? Where's the Army Corps of Engineers? Because how far are we from the coast? How far away? Not that far.

Hilton Kelley: Right.

Alex Perez: If they can dredge and put—from the oil rigs all the way to the mainland—they can dredge and put pipes that will take that flooding out immediately. So that's my question, is, you know, where's the Army Corps of Engineers on the subject?

David Willard: I'm an educator by profession, which means that I have to be, to a large degree, optimistic. I'm working with the future, and so I have to have some optimism that I'm training young people to get out and deal with the issues and deal with the problems that they're going to inherit. However, after listening here today, I know we're talking about the future and what we're going to do in the future, after listening to speakers today, particularly this panel that just got through speaking, I'm worried about the time frame. These issues are getting worse, I mean, just to put it in a nutshell. Everybody when, you know, August, September comes around, starts holding their breath. We escaped this year, again. We were lucky on that manner, but that's going to only hold for so long. And so I'm worried about the time frame as to how we will actually change the course of some of these problems that we're facing, because it's getting shorter and shorter. These industries that are in this area, we're talking about jobs, we're talking about—they're getting bigger and bigger. I think Motiva is, it's still expanding and is going to be the largest in the world; it already is, going to be even larger. So, the time frame about changing these, changing the course, making this in a different direction has me worried and I want to get some thoughts from the panel as to that time frame and what we're actually looking at, if that makes any sense.

Vernon Durden: Very good panel. Two questions: Ellen [Buchanan], are you at the table with anybody any time talking about the floodplain and the flooding? Are they—are you at the table, are you part of any committee? You need to be there. Secondly, is Chanelle [Stigger] also at the table? Because there are a lot of groups meeting, talking about floodplains and flooding. And thirdly, how are you all, how is it that if you're not at the table, or if you are at the table, how are people still being allowed to build in floodplains, and are they transferring the cost of their profit to us as insurance, as insuring our properties, because all our insurance is going up. Thank you.

Audience member: Oh, I have done some independent research about, via the new Center for Resiliency that was established at Lamar University, and I have found that part of the issue was in the 1960s, there were federal programs creating the National Flood Insurance Program that facilitated the building in the floodplains. So, my question would be: what are some of the policy proposals, possible policies that can be enacted in Jefferson County in order to ameliorate the problems of underprivileged communities living in these endangered floodplains at risk of losing their houses? And yet some of the—what do you suggest that either the federal or the state government should do or even local governments?

Courtney Pedersen (audience member): My name is Courtney, and I'm the environmental reporter at *The Beaumont Enterprise*. This year Southeast Texas has seen ongoing drought conditions, but is going from extreme floods to extreme drought the next year due to our environment and our residence?

Jonathan Brazzell (audience member): I work with Chanelle at the National Weather Service, and I'm the service hydrologist. And I'm just going to say: I was in the newspaper in Lake Charles after four or five floods that, starting in 2016, I said, "I'm tired of this." And I put in the newspaper, and it was the headline: "Everyone lives in the flood zone." And so even though the map may not show you in the flood zone, you are in a flood zone. I don't care where you live. It just takes that one event that's gonna get you.

Now, and going back to the question about flood maps, the old FEMA flood maps are junk. I don't even look at them anymore. And that is what the communities use to do enforcement of regulations in the floodway, in the flood zone. And so, with the new InFRM (Interagency Flood Risk Management) maps that they developed.[8] Anybody can go look at it. They have high-resolution maps based off the rainfall that we just updated after Hurricane Harvey that engineers use to make projects. And so, they put that rainfall in the map for the one-hundred- and the five-hundred-year events. And so, those are ones I go to now after knowing what I know about the FEMA flood maps. So just use caution.

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[8] For link see Websites Referenced page 186.

And then I think Ellen hit it really, really hard with me: you know, people building in areas where they shouldn't. We're seeing the dollar amounts go up on damage, and it really has more to do with us putting ourselves at risk and built environments that should never have been there. And so, it's very frustrating, but we do have to learn to build more resilient. And I'm hoping that the center can help us start in that direction, because Ellen, I think I was in a meeting with you, and I heard a county officials say, "Well, we can't do anything about that." Uh no, you can. You have enforcement authority when you are a FEMA flood insurance, in the flood insurance program. And I've even—Bevil Oaks: I remember there was a flood event there. The county actually came in and said, "Well, we're waiving the fifty percent thing," where they don't have to build up high or anything like that. And so that's just frustrating: we're killing ourselves. And so, I guess, Ellen, how can we get our community leaders on board with our ideas? Because it took me where I live in Sulphur, Louisiana, a year and a half, because I'm on the zoning board, and I said, "I am done with this." And it took me a year and a half to for us to stop giving variances to these developers that come into our communities, make a development, then they're gone. Then it's on us.

Audience member: It's on us.

Margot Gage Witvliet: Thank you. Bevil Oaks has been mentioned quite a lot. I will say it's like the safest community in this area, full of sheriffs, and we can leave our doors wide open and our children unattended. It's like going old school. But we do get water, little bit. Our last question face to face.

Liv Haselbach (audience member): Well, it's not so much a question, but I'm Liv Haselbach. I lead the Flood Coordination Study for Southeast Texas, and I have been leading it for the last three years. We have monthly meetings with presentations and whoever wants to listen to them may.

Ellen does all the time, Jonathan [Brazzell] does all the time, Dr. [Joseph] Kruger does all the time. So, it is DD6 [Jefferson County Drainage District 6] and Orange Drainage Districts and the Army Corps of Engineers and the Texas Water Development Board. The presentation that will be November 15th, by the way, is by the US Army Corps of Engineers for the gentleman that asked about that. They will be talking about Sabine to Galveston, so it's S2G; they'll be talking about the levees that are going to be put up—or extended in Port Arthur, the new levees that will be going in into Orange County. I'm the only Liv in Southeast Texas; I'm on the Lamar website. If you'd like me to email you the link to that presentation by the Army Corps of Engineers or look at what other presentations we will be doing, you are more than welcome.

Audience member: I think it's important for information and research institutions to bring their resources together in some way, so that we can expand efforts and cover more ground, to share information with communities in need, things like legal resources, translation resources, funding opportunities, research, and etcetera.

Chris Jones: I totally agree. I totally agree.

Hilton Kelley: To the gentleman [David Willard] that asked the question about how long will we be in this predicament that we're in, when it comes to climate change—the educator. You know, we didn't get here overnight. This is years and years of neglect on behalf of industry, and man, and our politicians. We slowly put ourselves in this position by disregarding the types of chemicals we've been dumping in our water. We've been illegally dumping in cesspools and in the woods and whatnot. And now here we are, continuing the same old trend. This is why scientists are quickly trying to usher in clean energy technologies, such as solar panels, electric vehicles, even though at the end of a electrical vehicle's life there is still some debris and trash and some type of material leftover that could leave a carbon footprint. But yet we have to continue to search for new ways of doing business. We cannot do the same business as usual, so it's going to be a while before we turn this boat around. We didn't get here overnight; we're not gonna get out of here overnight, but we can start to work together to find solutions, and I think we all can play a role, and number one, that's reduce our plastic use. We all can play a key role in turning that carbon footprint around and being a better steward for our planet.

Chanelle Stigger: I just want to add to that really quick. No, we did not get over here overnight; no, we cannot change that overnight, and something that we can do now, adding to what he is saying, is we can do our best to prepare, so making sure we are prepared for these events.

Chris Jones: I totally agree, especially about the preparation. Again, I live in a hundred-plus-year-old neighborhood adjacent to a hundred-plus-year-old petrochemical plant. So again, we didn't get here yesterday. I do know that it's going to take, just like you mentioned Pastor Roy Lee Malveaux, originally from the Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church, which is in my neighborhood, sits at a hundred plus years old. The reason that a lot of us have, are dealing actually in our neighborhood, are dealing with—or have actually cleaned up our act a little bit—is because of the work that they did requiring the EPA to address some of these issues, especially in my neighborhood that is predominantly Black and closer on fenceline than some of the other industries that or communities that we see throughout Texas with the exception of Port Arthur, and if you've been to Port Arthur, maybe the last ten years, it's not the same. Some of those apartment complexes that were adjacent to industries are gone.

John Beard: Are gone.

Ellen Buchanan: I was going to say, I think one thing that happened to us, 1962, was Carla, Hurricane Carla, turned out to be not so bad here as it was, I mean, my family, we went to Navasota, and I remember it rained like the devil there. Didn't have that much effect on here. Then it wasn't until Rita that we had a major hurricane and we all got complacent. We all got complacent and then bam, bam, bam it just hit us. And so, we went too long—without a major hurricane and not to keep on our toes and no planning, you know, for the for the future. But this is what I always say is: "What is your vision for the future?" And so how are we going to get there? And so, you have to think of that, and you have to think of all the bad things that can happen. We've got the good things, but you got to think about the bad things.

Hilton Kelley: Someone asked the question about where is the Army Corps of Engineers. They're on the ground. We have a project going on at this present time in the Montrose District in Port Arthur, where we are building permeable pavement. We're looking at waste. Yes. Yes. Yes. Michelle Smith?

Michelle Smith (audience member): Yes, I'm the permeable pavement person.

Hilton Kelley: Yeah, there we go. And so, we're working with Lamar and, you know—yeah, we talked earlier—but yet there's a good project that's happening now. We're really excited about it, and the Army Corps of Engineers are playing a key role in helping us to discover water flows and whatnot, and we got our city and the Army Corps of Engineers now talking. This is what it's going to take: people working together and those agencies with boots on the ground, getting out of the silos.

Chris Jones: I do want to answer what policies, especially like policies that would be beneficial to underprivileged communities. Again, first and foremost, we have to elect these people and not per se receive a plan from these elected or appointed individuals, but to present these appointed and elected individuals with observation from the ground. The majority of the people that's making law and making policy do not live where we live. But if we are adamant, and as visual and audible as we possibly can, to let these elected officials know and or appointed individuals know that, hey, this is what we think should be best for us, because you don't live where I live, you're not enduring what we have to endure. So this is the plan that we have for you. And if you as the elected and or appointed don't go along with that, I heard it earlier, there is the come-back-and-sit-with-me process or wait till the next election come about and then we'll, you know, we'll vote you out. But me personally, I like the "come back and sit down with me" and a lot of people have it, I guess like, no, we may not have a recall process to the knowledge of Texas voters, but we do have a recall process that's allotted to Texas voters, and I think those policies that we are to develop and we are to cultivate should be presented to those seats—not people—seats that represent us directly.

Ellen Buchanan: Yes, well, I was asked about being a part of a committee and again, Dr. Liv and I sit on the Neches River Flood Planning Group. This is Texas Water Development Board: all river basins have a flood planning group. The draft plan is online now and are still taking comments, I think through this weekend, I can't remember. It is huge, okay; it has maps of where's the flooding now; it has maps to what the risk they call it, the risk maps of what it will be in the future. I look at those maps all the time, you know, to see if an area floods or not. So do that. You can comment; you can be a part of that. We meet usually once a month. You need to look at that plan, because it's going to affect you and your cities and counties are going to get money from that plan. So, you need to make sure that the projects are in there that you think should be in there.

And then I will say this, that—I think these are like two questions. I talked to about our county judge in Hardin County the other day and goes back to the question that I ask in the meeting: Lumberton is just, you know, booming and flooding. Booming and flooding. It's continual. A new 2500-house subdivision is going in. What's it gonna do? It's gonna flood the people down below. In other words, you've got the subdivision and then you have Pine Island Bayou. I talked to the judge, I said, "Judge, on the west side of that is ten thousand acres for sale. The county needs to spend some of their grant money that they have and buy that ten thousand acres to keep a developer from buying it and putting it into another 2500-house subdivision. There is money for buyouts and acquisitions. It doesn't have to be an acquisition with a home on it. It can be green space again. Let's go back to nature-based solutions of buying up some of this land, keeping it in green; if it's adjacent to the Big Thicket National Preserve, it can go to the preserve, so that the county doesn't have to maintain it. If it's adjacent to Texas Parks and Wildlife or US Fish and Wildlife, same thing can happen. So, the problem is our folks have done the same thing all the time; again, I said "Bulldozer and track hoe." That's what they know, and for elected officials, their constituents expect to see the backhoe out there. They don't understand green infrastructure. So, I think that elected officials feel under pressure to, like, do something.

Margot Gage Witvliet: And I encourage everyone not just to think about industry, but about what you can do in order to curb it. Think about what kind of car you're driving, how much trash, how long your showers are, et cetera. Thank you.

THE FUTURE

Union Members Need a Seat at the Table

BRYAN GROSS

Bryan Gross, United Steelworkers Union, born and raised in Southeast Texas, born and raised in Orange. Spent seventeen years at a oil refinery in Port Arthur and recently came on staff for the steelworkers, officially in January. So, I want to talk a little bit about the steelworkers because our organization is a little different than the building trades unions. We don't have apprenticeship programs. What we do is we have labor contracts mostly in this area with the plants and the refineries and the chemical plants. So, we have contracts—so we have to rely on who the companies hire, and then they become members, or we attempt to get them to become members, because Texas is a right-to-work state, so they don't have to join if they don't choose, but unfortunately, we have to represent those people regardless.

So, I have about three thousand members in the area that I represent between Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Port Neches. I can tell you most of those people are climate deniers, unfortunately, because it's their livelihood. It's a struggle to educate them. You know, it's like you don't see any of the industry here today to talk about anything. So that's always an ongoing battle.

Elected officials are important. Two weeks ago, Jay Kleberg was here that's running for land commissioner. He talked about some of the things that was talked about today. Along the whole Gulf Coast, $8.4 billion was not handed out from the storms, and it was—according to him—mainly because of Democratic coastal counties and minority counties. The money was given to the counties just inside the coast that were predominantly Republican, predominantly rich ranchers further south. So that's always an issue.

What else do I wanna talk about? The future: So, carbon capture is a big topic. It's gonna be a big topic. It's going to affect all of our refineries, all of our plants going forward, and it's jobs. It's good opportunities for people. But it's gonna be, it's a long-term plan that's going to take a long time to get accomplished. But we've got to start somewhere. But yeah, I think the biggest thing is the politicians and electing people that put us at the table. We need a seat at the table whether it's union, whether it's whatever organization it is, we need to have a say and have an opinion and we need those people to support our opinion. Thank you.

Bryan Gross earned two associate degrees from Lamar Institute of Technology, worked six plus years as a heavy equipment/truck mechanic and sixteen plus years as a machinist at a local oil refinery, and now serves as United Steelworkers International staff representative.

The Only World within Our Reach

Jimmy L. Bryan Jr.

It is good to see you all again after a long day—a productive day. I am in awe of the experience and expertise that we have witnessed today, and I am a little intimidated to come up here and talk to you. When Kate [Williams] and Abdul [Alkalimat] approached me and asked me to speak, I said, "Sure, I'll speak." But then they said, "We want you speak about the future." I responded, "Well, what am I going to say about that?" I am a history professor here at Lamar teaching nineteenth-century US cultural history—early nineteenth-century US cultural history. I study the past. I am not a prognosticator.

But we are gathered in this place, an appropriate confluence of time and space. We heard earlier from Chanelle Stigger that Lamar University is the site of the largest rainfall event in US history—Hurricane Harvey (2017). Just five miles down the road in Nederland, Harvey dumped 60.58 inches of water—the largest rain total in a single event. Tropical Storm Imelda (2019) dropped over forty inches—thirty inches in a twelve-hour period at Fannett, just about fifteen miles from the campus here. Imelda was the seventh largest rain event in US history. As Dr. Dann Brown mentioned this morning, this room was devastated during Hurricane Rita in 2005. The Lamar University campus flooded during both Harvey and Imelda.

If you look out these windows to the south just a mile across the highway, you can see the site of the Spindletop strike, where oil was discovered in Beaumont in 1901 and touched off the petrochemical industry that we know today. We see the legacy of that strike through the north windows and the east windows—the ExxonMobil refinery. That refinery was established in 1903 just two years after Spindletop on the banks of the Neches River. Today, it processes over 130 million barrels of oil and 2.8 billion gallons of gas per year. The Texas Company, later Texaco; the Gulf Oil Corporation; and then Humble Oil, later the Exxon Corporation—three of today's major gas companies—had their start right here in Beaumont. Yet Beaumont was already a hub for extractive industries before the Spindletop strike in 1901. It was hub of the lumber industry—a sawmill town.

As I said, I am a cultural historian. I am not an expert on these events that we have heard today, but I have taught a couple of courses here at Lamar that may have some bearing on our discussion today—or at least for my topic today. I have taught a course on US environmental history, and I have taught a course on science fiction and US culture.

In the US environmental history course, I tell my students that when environmental advocates are chanting, "Save the planet, save the planet," they do not mean that the Earth itself is in jeopardy. The planet Earth will still be here. The planet Earth will outlive humanity. Unless the sun goes supernova, or some interstellar fragment comes through the solar system and collides with us, the planet will still be here. Environmentalists are really saying, "We need to save the planet for us." We need to preserve the planet's capability of sustaining human life.

In my science fiction class, I tell my students that we can learn a lot by studying how people in the past have envisioned their future. Among other things, we talk about how in the last forty years a subgenre of science fiction has emerged that tackles environmental issues. Some fans call it "climate fiction" or "cli fi." There are several examples that we can point to, but I will only mention a few here.

You might remember the old Cold War movie *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951). This movie was preoccupied with Cold War anxieties and especially nuclear war. It appeared only a few years after the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In *The Day the Earth Stood Still,* an alien arrives on the Earth to intervene in our petty conflicts.

To protect the galaxy from our destructiveness, they give humanity an ultimatum—stop your descent toward nuclear war, or we will destroy you. In this case, the alien attempts to save humanity from itself.

In 2008, Hollywood remade and updated the film. In the newer version, the alien arrives on Earth with a message, but this time, he is not concerned with saving humanity from itself. He wants to save the Earth from humanity. He explains that inhabitable planets like the Earth are so rare and precious that our alien neighbors will not let us destroy this one.

Other cli fi films include *The Happening* (2008) where plant life develops a new airborne substance that infects humans, causing them to self-destruct. They walk off rooftops of buildings and otherwise commit mass suicide. This is nature's way of defending itself from the destruction of humans.

One of the most obvious examples of cli fi is *Avatar* (2009). In this film, humans from Earth have exported their capitalism to the galaxy. On the moon Pandora where wondrous alien life flourishes, the company strip mines for the precious mineral called "unobtainium." Pandora's native inhabitants—the Na'vi—fight back. The symbolism is not subtle, and *Avatar* is very much a cli-fi film. The surge in films and novels produced in this genre in the last twenty years demonstrates a growing anxiety about our environmental future.

Of course, not all science fiction is climate fiction, but even when the environment is not central to the story, it often serves as a crucial backdrop. For example, in a trope that I call "the doomed Earth scenario," humanity has already devastated the Earth. Now, they must go somewhere else. The movie *Interstellar* (2014) uses this premise, and it is a good illustration of the trope's fallacy. In this story, the Earth faces an unspecific human-created calamity. It verges on the brink of being unable to sustain human life. To save humanity, scientists develop interstellar travel so that the Earth's refugees may travel to and colonize another world.

The screenwriters do not identify what calamity the Earth faces. They do not reveal the cause because they understand the illogic of their story—

that if scientists have the capability to develop interstellar travel, then they should have the technology to heal the planet. The screenwriters could not imagine a calamity so complex that it would stymie a society capable of faster-than-light travel. It would undermine their entire story.

Science fiction is an old and popular genre, and the dream of interstellar travel has permeated our culture. It seems to have created a kind of subconscious confidence in a future safety net—a confidence that when the Earth fails, we might travel to other worlds within our reach. But this is a fantasy. Humans will likely never develop interstellar travel. We will not be able to travel to another planet outside our solar system. Scientists have already identified many Earthlike exoplanets, but we will never be able to travel to them—not within our lifetimes—not within our great-great-great-grandchildren's lifetimes. But within our lifetime, we may well see irreversible damage to our planet's ability to sustain our quality of life—a quality, we have learned today, not equally accessible to all. Furthermore, Earthlike planets likely serve home to its own lifeforms who may not welcome our future refugees.

Terraforming is another fallacious trope in the science fiction genre. Terraforming represents the future technology of remaking the moon, Mars, or another rock in the galaxy in the image of the Earth—to make them inhabitable for humans. But like interstellar travel, if humans know how to transform an entire planet to look like the Earth, they should know how to repair whatever ails the Earth.

This is my point with this brief look at science fiction film: we know what our environmental problems are. We know how to solve them, and we can also look to history to see that we have done this before.

In the 1930s, the Dust Bowl devastated the Great Plains. The Dust Bowl was a convergence of both natural and human-made disasters. It was an era of significant drought that just followed the Great Plow-Up of the Southern Great Plains. In facing the problem, scientists, academics, farmers, government agents worked together to formulate solutions, and they put them into action with contour plowing, rotating crops, and other forms of soil conservation. Their solutions did not solve the problem of the drought, but they mitigated the human causes of the disaster.

In 1950, scientists David Bates and Marcel Nicolet reported the diminishing ozone in the atmosphere. Although they knew that the Ozone Layer protected organic life on Earth from harmful ultraviolet radiation, they could not say why it was depleting at that time. In 1974, however, another pair of scientists Sherwood Rowland and Mario Molina determined that chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs)—the chemical used in aerosol sprays—caused the depletion of the ozone.

In 1962, Clair Patterson and Tsaihwa J. Chow published their findings that the high levels of lead in the environment were not naturally occurring. Patterson demonstrated that lead added to gasoline was responsible for this harmful contamination. He became an advocate and fought the oil and automobile industries to discontinue lead additives.

Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring* in 1962. She demonstrated that the widely used pesticide dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (DDT) lingered in the watersheds and entered the natural food chain. In 1967, D.A. Ratcliff first suggested that DDT was responsible for the decline in bald eagle populations—which had reached its low in 1963 with only 417 breeding pairs in the continental United States. The eagles consumed fish contaminated with DDT which weakened their shells and prevented successful hatchings.

The 1960s was also an era of social activism: civil rights, women's rights, antiwar, and environmental movements. Carson's book inspired a generation of concerned citizens to take the lessons from the social movements, and they campaigned against pollution, over consumption, and other environmental concerns.

In 1970, science and activism converged into action when Republican President Richard M. Nixon created the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). That year, the US Congress passed the Clean Water Act and two years later passed the Clean Air Act—both with wide majorities when Republicans and Democrats listened to their constituencies, followed the science, and formulated solutions.

With the authority of the EPA, with new laws, and with Republicans and Democrats in concurrence, the federal government could take decisive action. In 1972, the EPA issued a ban on DDTs. Although it still has its uses, the diminished amounts of the pesticide in the environment contributed to a dramatic recovery for the bald eagle in 2022 to over three hundred thousand breeding pairs. In 1973, the EPA issued its first reduction standards for leaded gasoline which culminated with a full ban by 1996. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, the worldwide reduction in lead prevented 1.2 million deaths. In 1978, the EPA banned the use of CFCs, and with other nations joining in, the Ozone Layer is currently rebounding, and scientists predict a near-full recovery by the end of the twenty-first century.

We can look to the past for solutions to current and future environmental concerns. After we identify the problem, we should listen to the science, and heed the experiences of those on the ground—like many of those experiences we heard today. We need to become activists, and we have seen many examples today of what activism can do. We must demand science-based action from our political leaders, but therein lies the key missing ingredient—the political will to act. If you want to effect that change—and if you have not already—you can do so in three days and go vote.

Jimmy L. Bryan Jr. is professor of history and director of the Center for History and Culture of Southeast Texas and the Upper Gulf Coast at Lamar University. He is the editor of *The Texas Gulf Historical and Biographical Record*. Most recently, he is the author of *The American Elsewhere: Adventure and Manliness in the Age of Expansion* (2017) and editor of the anthology *Inventing Destiny: Cultural Explorations of US Expansion* (2019).

Racist Past, Systematic Barriers Wreck Poststrom Lives: Let's Keep on Pushing

Kaitlin Bain

First, I wanted to go on the record with all of you, with everybody watching, anybody you might tell: The *Beaumont Enterprise*, I and my staff, are committed to Southeast Texas and committed to the future of Southeast Texas.

We understand the importance of representing the whole community in a way that traditional media quite frankly hasn't in the past. So, that means we need community partners. That means some days we might need to be called in about missing a specific sector of the community. That means we might need to tweak the way we're covering certain stories, because of our own worldview, and how we're trying to learn and grow from that. So, I just want to go on the record with that commitment to the future. Because obviously with the industry that I'm in, I believe in media, and I think it has the ability to change when we all work together for it.

Second, one of the most terrifying things you can ask a journalist to do is talk about the future. I'm really good at chronicling the past and what is currently happening. The future, maybe not so much so. I'm going to tie together some recent past events, people, projects that my reporters and I have covered in a way that I think casts an eye toward the future.

I want to tell you a story about a woman [Havalisia Owens] that I met while reporting in 2018.[1] I had just moved to the area—lived here for a month—and the Texas General Land Office (GLO) was at her house to announce the Homeowner Assistance Program. The program was set to rebuild or fix and elevate homes of qualifying individuals whose homes had been destroyed after Hurricane Harvey.

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[1] Kaitlin Bain, "New funds available for Harvey housing help," *Beaumont Enterprise*, November 29, 2018.

As an aside, if you see it in the newspaper, we call it Tropical Storm Harvey. It was a tropical storm when it hit Southeast Texas. Not only is that 'accurate' for us, but it also underscores the importance that hurricanes are not the only thing that devastate us—it's tropical storms, it's tropical depressions.

I was at this woman's house, and she walked Land Commissioner George P. Bush, all of his people, through her house—or what was left of it. I had evacuated from Ike and Rita growing up and watched from college as Harvey decimated my hometown. But the house I grew up in has always been fine, and I think until I moved here, I took that for granted. So, as a transplant, it was easy to ask why this woman didn't just pick up and move. Your house is decimated, you don't have the money to fix it, go somewhere else.

She'd already been told by more than one contractor that her house could not be elevated; it was already sinking into the ground. But it was her grandparents' home. She remembers summers spent there with her cousins, and she knows that the village surrounding the home is the one that will help watch her grandchildren when they come back to visit.

Not only that, but all her personal history is also steeped in that land, along with the racial past that we've talked about in these sessions and the systemic barriers we know exist between traditionally underrepresented populations and homeownership. All those reasons are why she stayed, on top of—it's just home.

But even as the seeming poster child for the Homeowner Assistance Program—she did get a visit from George P. Bush—initially she was denied. She misused FEMA funds after Harvey. She rented an apartment with the money—exactly what they're supposed to be used for—but she also replaced some clothes and home goods after Harvey took everything.

The GLO ultimately worked with her and got her set up for a new home, smaller than originally would have been approved because of that misuse of FEMA funds, but it's a home hopefully elevated from future floodwaters. But at the end of the day—I don't know that she would have gotten that help, had she not have had the media attention on her case from the beginning; had she not have shaken the hand of George P. Bush and shown him her house, looked him in the eye, and he told her, "We're going to help you." I also know that there were dozens of other people in the exact same situation, facing these FEMA regulations, who were denied. And I don't know what happened with their cases.

But Ms. Owens got her happy ending—so why are we talking about her? As a journalist, I have the opportunity to talk with so many people who eventually become statistics for a lot of our nation. There is not print space to tell each individual person's story, and quite frankly, I watch the numbers: the audience doesn't want to read about it, probably because half of them live in the situation every day, and they don't need to be told that their neighbors are in it, and the other half really aren't, and they don't feel the need to read it either.

But as I talked with one of our reporters in advance of this conversation, Olivia Malick—in case you want to follow her on Twitter and read her stuff—she had a quote that really struck me. I'll read it directly, so I don't mess it up: "These people deserve a future that's independent from their relevance to the rest of the nation."

A lot of the nation sees this as a home for oil and gas, but every single person—including the people who make the oil and gas machine run—is a person first, and it's their humanity that I hope will be your guiding light as you continue after this conversation.

I don't have many solutions. I interview people much smarter than I am. Most of you are in this room today to find those, but I can shine light on some pressure points. And don't worry, we will get to some good news by the end talking about the future. We have to have something good.

First, Ms. Owens's and other stories have shown the pitfalls of something like the Homeowner Assistance Program. Such requirements fail to understand how long recovery truly lasts. A researcher I was working with—before COVID completely derailed all of life—frequently asked if it was possible to discover what Southeast Texas is truly recovering from on any given day.

I think that point is especially well taken here, given that recovery programs require the applicant to demonstrate how the damage is directly tied to whatever the program was given the money for, and Southeast Texas has been under a disaster declaration at this point for years: COVID-19, Hurricane Laura, the TPC explosion, Imelda, Harvey, and I know that I did not list them all. Not all of these are extreme weather events, but they all underscore and/or exacerbate existing inequalities. When you lose everything, work clothes—or even regular clothes—become a necessary expense in the days, weeks, and months that follow. A couple of pillows or blankets, maybe a picture frame, aren't really grandiose expenses to make the worst days of your life more livable, but they don't necessarily qualify under "FEMA-approved" expenses.

But let's say you followed everything to the letter: You spent FEMA money on everything that you were allowed to and nothing else, but you misplaced your receipts. Over the last week, we had a visit from the president of Hearst Community Newspapers, and I misplaced my notes probably five times during the week. I don't know what I would have done if I had lost my entire home; I'd probably be more forgetful, and I would hope that a federal agency would not expect me to keep track of very small pieces of paper to guarantee that my home could be rebuilt.

Then there are required documents for something like the Homeowner Assistance Program. I spoke to several people who didn't even apply, didn't even chance it at all, despite their homes being totally unlivable, because they didn't have the money, the time, or the know-how—back to information—to probate the will that left them the structure in the first place.

They also knew that they wouldn't have the money to ultimately pay for flood and wind insurance. For reference, my wind insurance is three times my homeowner's insurance, and I live so far north I'm basically

Hardin County. So, these people didn't even apply. And yet they're still living in these homes that I think if any of us drove by, we would probably think they were condemned structures. But there are people living there because they just can't get help.

But if these people don't have the money to probate a will or pay for insurance, moving doesn't seem like an option. And quite frankly, I don't know that they should be forced to move. So, they're stuck.

I've focused a lot on the Homeowner Assistance Program because I spent a lot of time reporting on it. But it's just one example of a program to help individuals. The people are what make Southeast Texas great, but there's no denying that much of the state and nation sees us simply as an energy hub. Two of the top ten US refineries are in Southeast Texas. If you extend that boundary up and down the Gulf Coast just a little bit, we get to half of the top ten refineries.

Yet we still desperately need someone with an Uncle Sam-branded pocketbook to recognize and take responsibility for that. When Beaumont lost water service in Harvey's wake, ExxonMobil jumped in and fixed it. But at the end of the day, it's not a private company's job to take care of our citizens. And we don't know when they're not going to do that next time, whether they don't have the money, the time, the effort, whatever it is. It's not their job.

And yet, like John Beard mentioned, when Beaumont applied for disaster preparedness money to build resiliency into that very water system that already showed that it had failed, that application was denied. It was part of the more than one billion dollars in federal aid that was allocated to inland, white, conservative counties and not Southeast Texas.

The people who can afford to leave will, if they haven't already, and the only way to keep a tax base in the region is to do the work now. Sabine Pass already gets cut off from emergency services an hour before a "capital 'S' storm"—Olivia used that term and now it's my favorite thing ever—takes hold, because the Intercoastal Canal rises over the roadway. That's before the storm even starts to hit.

We are already living in the future. We need to see local elected officials lobbying for jobs in transition and green fuels the same way they do for the petrochemical industry. I'm not advocating to take away the jobs of people who show up every day at ExxonMobil or Motiva or Chevron Phillips. Instead, make sure that we are looking for good-paying, clean jobs for generations of Southeast Texans to come.

We must also build with instead of against nature. I wrote this before Ellen spoke; I should have just let her, she's better at this than I am. But I am so impressed by the farmers in Winnie and Hamshire-Fannett, who can tell you exactly when such and such building or a barrier on Interstate 10 was installed, because they see the water patterns change.

They have farmed on this land for years, they know how the water moves, and they know when that's changed. We only have to look an hour or two west to see an example of a city that didn't build with nature and that floods every single time. So, if we, you know, consulted some of those farmers, some experts, when we're building, we'd probably be better off. I still remember a relatively routine interview I did with the drainage engineer before the 2020 hurricane season to see how drainage had improved over the past year. He was walking me through the standard that each project was built on, and I was still relatively new at reporting on drainage.

So, I asked why every single project couldn't just be built to the thousand-year-flood standard. If we seem to be flooding like that more frequently, let's just build the projects. That is massively cost prohibitive, he told me, nearly impossible if we want to get more than, I don't know, one project done every five years. So, we have to find other ways to keep from breaking the natural drainage system process in the first place.

All of this is without even touching on air pollution, which I don't have time to get into, but it's something I would wax poetically on any day and also exacerbates extreme weather and inequality.

Everything I mentioned today is a place to start. It is by no means an exhaustive list, but I hope it adds to the conversation. The good news is it isn't an effort that hasn't been started in Southeast Texas already.

We've seen the creation of some 'bipartisan' solutions. It's possible. And hopefully that's included encouragement to push forward with this work. They're not perfect, but they are a start.

Jefferson County is home to the largest coastal restoration project in the United States. The work restores not only wildlife habitat but also resurrects the beach and marsh and sand dune that previously provided some storm surge protection. The Flood Infrastructure Fund, thought up in part by now-Texas [House] Speaker Dade Phelan, demands regions work largely with river basins, as opposed to political boundaries, to create flood control projects that will be financed by the Flood Infrastructure Fund. The Ike Dike, Sabine-to-Galveston Project, Coastal Spine—whatever we're calling it today—is moving forward, and it's set to protect the Texas coast from storms and break records as the largest civil engineering project in the country. And finally, much disaster recovery money is now being allocated in such a way to mitigate future damage, as opposed to simply putting things back the way they were before. But we have to keep pushing for better.

There's a line through all of these solutions: coalition building and collaborating. Whatever reason you give for storms like Harvey, Imelda, and others, we can agree that solutions that prevent the loss of life and property, in that order, should be ones we can get behind.

We've heard it time and time again that Southeast Texans are resilient: we can take it. But I'll leave you with a quote from *Scalawag*'s Race & Place editor—someone I really look up to, Ko Bragg—that I think puts it in perspective, gives a little bit of context, particularly for people who might be watching not from Southeast Texas. She says,

> It's different when a community is calling themselves resilient, because what I'm hearing in that is we are resilient to forces, whether it's the climate or the people who are supposed to be supporting us. It's different when you have outsiders, who are like, Y'all are so resilient! It's like you are expecting us to continue to endure this, continue to bounce back into shape and be happy with whatever

> little handouts we get, whether it be a president throwing paper towels or some little blue tarps on the roof. Either way it's not enough. And it's not okay for you to continue to feel good about yourself because certain communities continue to get the short end of the stick and make grits out of it.

Kaitlin Bain is the editor of *The Beaumont Enterprise*.

The Age of Petroleum Is Ending: What Does That Mean for Beaumont?

DAVE WILLIAMS

Bryan Gross, when he began this panel, mentioned, regrettably, that there were no industry officials here in this entire meeting. The truth was—is—an Exxon employee was on this panel, this particular panel, and he resigned, citing a conflict of interest. There was probably a little more to it than that, but it is interesting that little 'us' frightened mighty ExxonMobil into not appearing with this panel. I'll let that pass, but I did think it was notable.

A little more about the future from me, however. As I mentioned at the beginning of the program, my focus is particularly on trying to see the future approximately a generation out or twenty-five years out in the future. And I think one thing is pretty clear, twenty-five years from now, is that—as one of our other speakers, I think it was John Beard, just kind of mentioned in passing—as we know, the age of petroleum is over. It's ending.

You read about it in the newspaper every day. California is banning any car that produces a hydrocarbon exhaust for sale after 2035. That means in about ten years later, 2045, just less than twenty-five years from now, there are not gonna be any petroleum-burning cars in California, and I think that means in the nation. China: a quarter of the cars that are being sold in China this year—one-quarter of the new cars being sold in China—are electric vehicles.

There are a lot of anecdotes suggesting that yes, the age of petroleum is ending. And it's not too hard to imagine that, when you think about in twenty-five years, there won't be any gasoline-powered cars. There won't be any diesel-powered vehicles. It'll all be electric. And remember that half of a barrel of crude oil today goes into diesel fuel or gasoline. So that means half of what this refinery produces in twenty-five years, nobody's gonna need. What does that mean for the future of Beaumont? I think it deserves a fair amount of consideration. Thank you very much.

Dave Williams was born in Beaumont and grew up here and in Austin. After following his uncle into the oil industry, he worked in investment management for forty years. He attended Beaumont High School and is president of the Ancient to the Future Project.

The Future: Discussion

Jeff Darby: The ExxonMobil employee was the one we were talking about. Yeah, he was not going to even represent ExxonMobil. He was a union official that works at ExxonMobi,l and they pressured him enough to not come here. Instead, he sent Bryan Gross, who's not even tied with ExxonMobil, other than being the union official in charge of the union officials at all the area refineries and chemical plants, but that's an example, and offline, I'm gonna try to find out who that Exxon Mobil manager was and pay him a friendly visit. Thank you.

Judy Linsley: Well, first of all I would like to thank the Ancient to the Future and the Center for History and Culture for getting this together. This was an incredible gathering; had no idea it would be like this. It's just been wonderful. And also, I would like very much to think that this would be continued in the future. If we can terrorize a few people in power, so be it. As small as we are, just think what we can do when we get a little bigger, and I would love to see this grow and continue. Thank you so much.

Audience member: Dave Williams, I'm pretty sure you have a better sense of what sort of industries would replace the petrochemical industry in Beaumont. So, my question to you would be: What is the future for Beaumont in regards to industry? What new industries will replace them in twenty-five years? What would be your best guess?

Vernon Durden: That was, that was my question. But for Bryan. I see you all, a lot of politicians getting your endorsement, so how is that happening, in light of what your position is on the future, and also how they're supporting this region?

Chris Jones: Yes, I've enjoyed the entire panel. Thank you all for your information. One of my questions is, and I know you offered your platform, which is the *Enterprise*. But where are we going to, where and how, actually, are we going to communicate this information, to a point to where our students, who deal with weather anxiety, can be able to get this information and spread it amongst themselves?

Bryan Gross: Okay. So, the first question: How do we manage the current situation and long term? I think we have to hold these companies accountable. I think we have to get involved with the political leaders and make them hold them accountable. Tax abatement should have some type of ties to their environmental impacts. The only way we're gonna hold them accountable is through their money, through their back pocket. That's all they understand. As far as the replacement industry, I don't know what that would look like. The amount of money that's contributed to the region through just payroll is tremendous from the oil and chemical industry. So that would have to be a long-term plan and something to consider, because Jeff had mentioned that every dollar made in the refinery—or every dollar made and put in the community turns over nine times. I mean, you take ExxonMobil: 650 hourly represented employees make 150,000 a year. So, you take that and you figure out what that is turned over in the community. So long term is gonna be a lot of work to find a replacement industry for the oil industry.

The question about the Sabine Area Labor Council Meeting—Mr. Vernon—or the endorsements, I'm sorry. So political endorsements—and Jeff can jump in if he wants—are done through the Sabine Area Labor Council. We have a vetting process that the politicians come, talk to us about issues. We get to ask them the hard-nosed questions. The vetting process last year was, for this election cycle, was right in the middle of the Exxon lockout, so don't think we wasn't there to ask them where they stand on that lockout. Because we went to the Jefferson County Commissioners Court: We got very, very little support at the most. The commissioners that control or are over the different entities that give the tax abatements would not touch them. So, we did get a couple of letters that some of the commissioners put together and sent to the Exxon CEO, just basically saying, "Hey, you need to end the lockout because the community, the effects to the community, and everybody still recovering from different events." But there was no real—no real—enforcement to try to pressure them to put our people back to work. And I would also like to say: the two spokespersons at the table for ExxonMobil are not even in the area no more. They were here to bargain a contract; they hurt the community for ten months and then they moved on.

Chris Jones: Yes, they did.

Bryan Gross: And that's how they operate. Jeff, you wanna?

Jeff Darby: Yeah, just, Bryan, you covered it real well. I just wanna add one thing, just to, the Sabine Area Central Labor Council, again, it's the unions, AFL-CIO unions: Jefferson, Orange, Hardin, Newton, Jasper, Tyler, plus Liberty and Chambers east of the Trinity River. Our fifteen-member executive board also sits as the Committee on Political Education, the COPE. During the month of January—well, there was the one of the COVID outbreaks—we were doing our best to try to have a screening process for county officials down, plus state representatives. That's about—anything beyond that state land commissioner, governor, so that's the decision of the Texas AFL-CIO. We have, we're delegates there, but we're one, two votes out of five hundred. Our CLC [County Labor Concil] COPE has the fifteen: I'm the chair. Bryan is one of the members. We talked to as many of the local candidates that wanted to talk to us. If that candidate gave us the time of day and at least made some promises that we could hold them to, and those that did come made promises we could hold them to. It wasn't a "oh yeah, I'm for two chickens in every pot and a car in every garage type" thing. Plus, if the candidate had a reasonable chance of winning: we're not going to—in years past, when this was a Yellow Dog Democrat area, it was easy to screen everybody in the Democratic primary. Well, if you're from around here those days are gone. Reasonable chance of, likelihood, of winning a county commissioner race in most of our counties is the Republican candidate. And if that candidate says, gives us the time of day and has a reasonable chance of winning and is at least going to have his door open to us and for real dialogue, we're gonna highly consider endorsing that Republican candidate at this level. We didn't. The AFL-CIO did not endorse a Republican at the state level, okay? So let's, I just I hope that helped your question, sir, on how our COPE process works. I wasn't trying to preclude Bryan, but as the chair of the committee I needed to really fill in the blanks. He did a great job otherwise. If you have any questions about that, I'll be outside later on. Thank you.

Vernon Durden: Bryan seems like—he seems like, you seem like a guy who reserves a lot of comments to be politically correct, and I just think you're a tougher guy than you're coming across today, and I hope I'm saying it right, but you, you know, you seem like a whole lot of tougher guy than you're having to agree with, so I know you gotta eat; you gotta have a salary, so I mean, you know, keep the money coming in. But at the end of the day, we hear about default decisions, and it appears that this was kind of what happened, because now we're trying to make this, having to react to a default decision, and more people are being hurt by just, you know, cutting off the toe rather than having to worry about the whole foot. So, I mean at some point, you know, the real truth got to come out. We don't have, amazingly, we don't have term limits. And we've kind of looked at that kind of stuff. Some people just kinda need to go away. They just need to go away, because you got one party here, one party there, I mean, there's no such thing as picking parties or picking what's best for the community And you just seem like, you know, I'm giving you a pass, because you just look like a tough guy in that.

Bryan Gross: Well, I don't live in Jefferson County, so I don't have a vote in any of that part.

Vernon Durden: That's another part of a lot of this, yeah.

Bryan Gross: But also, and we have to work with whoever is elected, right? And it's tough. I mean, we as a union, we can't compete with the oil industry, right? I mean, we do what we can; we rely on our contacts, and we rely on our relationships. But at the end of the day, we didn't make twenty billion last quarter, right? So, there's a lot of that that goes into it. But we do what we can. We rely on who we can and our strength in numbers, you know, but one of the hardest things is getting our membership to support this type of change, right? I mean, it's all the majority of the people in the area know. Everything revolves around the oil industry and livelihoods—I mean generation after generation of family members working in these plants. All of that plays a factor into how people feel about the oil industry, you know, potentially going away at some point, and I think it's just a scary, it's a scary thing, and we just have to, I have to keep in mind my members at the same time. So, thank you.

David Willard: I have one more question for the panel. Yeah, my question is: Rubber meets the road, and I want the panelists to give an opinion on this. We've got increasing temperatures, hotter and hotter in this area. We've got weather conditions, increased storms, more powerful, more hurricanes. We've got industry in this area that's increasing; pollutants, growing in this area. The question that's posed in the program is: can this area survive these challenges as we move into the future? And I'd like to get your honest opinion on that: do you see this area surviving fifty, sixty, seventy years from now, with all of those forces coming together, it seems like, at the same time? So.

Abdul Alkalimat: Since we're improvising here, I want to interject a comment on your question. Because the silence in this day has been about the polarity that this country is experiencing right now. It's the union members; this polarity is forcing us to raise the question, not can Beaumont survive: How is this country going to survive with this polarity that's happening, with the potential that the nominative structure of democracy, that is the electoral process …

Audience member: Come on, sir.

Abdul Alkalimat: … is on the table, is being challenged by people who would be in elected office. So, we're now talking about the government splitting against itself. So, the small question is: Is Beaumont going to survive? The bigger question is, and the context for it, including the technological transformation of all work, is how is this country going to survive?

Kaitlin Bain: Yeah, this is kind of a scary place to pick up. I'm gonna be optimistic—which, I'm really optimistic. You can ask anybody who knows me. I'm going to say, "Yes." And that is based on the discussion that we had of the generations of Southeast Texans who keep coming back here—about the community that we have. We look out for each other. This is an interesting place to name-drop this person, but what sticks with me frequently when reporting on the aftermath of disasters is a quote from Judy Nichols, former Jefferson County Republican Party chair: "When you need help out of your house, nobody asks you, 'Are you a Republican or a Democrat?' They just said, 'Get in the boat.'" I think as much as I just said resiliency is a dirty word when someone from New York is like, "Oh, it's so cute. You guys are so resilient." We are, and we love this community. But I think it's also going to force some really tough decisions. I think Gen Z, Gen Alpha have a lot to, kind of come up and take the—even if by way of voting—reins from us they understand how important climate is in a way that the majority of an older population doesn't. And so is it going to be rough. Absolutely. Are we going to continue to lose the very bottom of the population? Probably, because we've waited for too long to set up systems that will save those people.

Chris Jones: Yes.

Kaitlin Bain: But I think Beaumont has a future. That's scary to say, because fifty years from now someone's gonna be like, "Wow, Kaitlin was crazy," but that's fine. Another way I think we can push our elected officials: I have seen numerous local advocates, activists—either word—push for an air quality office. Harris County has one. Repeatedly, they have asked our local county officials, "Why can't we have one, too?" And they say, "Well, we don't need it. We have TCEQ" [Texas Commission on Environmental Quality]. We all know, based on all of the panelists who talked today, TCEQ is not 'fixing' pollution in Southeast Texas.

David Willard: Correct.

Kaitlin Bain: I've lived here long enough to not smell it anymore, but my goodness, the first couple of weeks here I was like, "This is disgusting. Did I really choose this to be my home?" But bringing someone in that can enforce our tax abatement agreements, that can say, "If you're not going to follow the law, we don't have to follow these agreements, either." This isn't a free ride, because what are our people getting out of it …

Chris Jones: Right.

Kaitlin Bain: … if they're not, if the ExxonMobils, the Motivas, the Chevron Phillips aren't holding up their end of the bargain. So that's one way.

Some ideas for the future: We're already seeing some transitional fuels relocate to this area. They're not perfect: They're transitional fuels. But they are saying that Southeast Texas has something to offer. We have the ground infrastructure, we have the trains, we have the ports, we have people who are trained in this field. But we just need to see the same energy given to chasing these projects, instead of having some very, very motivated people working with the projects that just happen to like Southeast Texas and forge that bond, as opposed to some of our officials going out and seeking it first. We also—I have very few details on this—but there is the pursuit of a wind energy project off of our coast coming in the next several years. As much as I went to Texas Tech—and it leads wind energy—I couldn't tell you if the 'skills' for the petrochemical industry are similar to the wind energy industry, but it is something that we have and something that is already looking at our area.

And finally, the students: I'm not gonna sit here and tell you I think the students are reading the *Beaumont Enterprise*. I know they're not. But we are working on a project with Lamar University to breed more collaboration between us to get more of their news in our newspaper, our news in their newspaper, and figure out how we can appeal to that audience, because it's a business decision, it's a market that we need to get to. From a commitment to the community, it's a market that we need to get to. We're also in the next year implementing a whole lot more new social medias, ones that you won't just see us post a link, post a link, post a link, hey please, click on it—more about engagement. And we know that climate is something that this community cares about, it's something that this generation cares about. So, when we're talking to them on their social platforms, that's something that will be prioritized in that conversation.

Dave Williams : A question that I don't know the answer to is what will replace energy in Beaumont? I don't think anybody knows, so I'll put the burden on Lamar University. It's got to come from education. It's got to come from something we don't know about today, but an educated person, an educated community will come up with something. And that's your job [turns to Jimmy Bryan]. You've got to educate this community; you've got to bring students who will be able to cope and figure out the future that can help this area survive. It all goes back to education, as we heard about all during the day: the importance of better, more education. I think that's got to be the answer that we don't know the answer to.

Jimmy Bryan: Alright, well—we got some work to do. But speaking to Abdul's point about the polarization, that was kind of the point I was trying to allude to, reminding us that not too long ago, both Republicans and Democrats were able to come together, respect the science, and put action into place. We've heard a number of speakers today. The EPA is not the perfect organization, but it has done some good things. And that's something that can be perfected yet to do better things in the future. But I guess the point is that it's not the same Republicans and Democrats that we have today. That's a completely different breed of animal than what we have today.

In regard to change in our area, I guess that depends on how you define the area. If you mean the land, well, the land will still be here. It might be underwater, but it will be here. But if you mean the communities, the industries, whether or not they survive, of course I cannot answer that. I can say, as an historian, that there will be change. And it might hurt. And I really don't have anything better to add than that.

As to the future—what we want to do with what we've done here today—the Center for History and Culture, we were happy to host this event. Ancient to the Future—who organized this event—we are talking about ways in which to get what we've talked about today to the public. We haven't decided what that's gonna look like yet, but we are in the works of getting that out there. We have most of your contact information. If we don't have your contact information, make sure that we get it, and we'll let you know how to get at what we talked about today in the hopefully foreseeable future.

Kate Williams: Yeah, I wanted to, Jimmy is saying part of what I wanted to say. And that is: How are we going to survive? The first way is we have to keep sharing this information and keep developing more of it. So, the very beginning of that is the videos from the session are going to be online in a few days, in a day or so, if not a few days. We are hoping to publish the text of the remarks today. So, everybody who spoke will get their text and be able to revise and extend their remarks. We have the *Beaumont Enterprise* staff here in full force; there are four of them here, so they're thinking about how to go deeper in a lot of these stories. And then just reconvening in some way, shape, or fashion: more conversations like this, and some conversations not like this, to get to the future that we are trying to envision.

Vernon Durden: So, but you know, this group right here, you know, you guys trying to get off easy, you really are, but we talked about climate change and people don't think it's, the world is getting warmer. We talked about—well, we talked about the election. There's people think the election was stolen. We got information, and we got deniers out there, and the question Mr. Willard asked was, you know: can we survive? We cannot survive as long as we are lying to ourselves about what the truth is, and the truth is, if a lot of, large part of the community doesn't believe the earth is warming or climate change, they're denying the inevitable. If a large part of community don't believe that President Biden won the election and want to, you know, turn over democracy because they're denying that, you know, the question becomes very relevant. How can not only, you know, like Abdul said, how can not only just Beaumont, how can the country and democracy prevail with people just denying what's right in front of their face, and you were [points to Bryan Gross] part of the group that walked out of ExxonMobil, and there were persons on both sides denying, you know, what the real reason why they walked out and denying why they should not go back. So, you know, it's a real serious question: Where are we going from here, when people still lying about stuff that we're seeing right, you know, right in front of our face?

I mean, the meteorologist put a map up there that showed the Earth was cool; and now it's warm all over, and she showed that water levels were here, and now they're higher, and then I'm living in an area that didn't flood with the hundred-year flood, and now every time it rains, you know, I'm flooding. And I had to give twenty-five feet so they can, you know, put a ditch to put water around my property. So, the question is—that's a very good question about, you know, when is the truth going to come out and when are people gonna start believing it, because, you know, all this stuff about abatements, you know: we gave abatements, you know, to these big companies and they made promises. And then we got people who are elected who don't hold the companies accountable for the promises they made to do hiring, and I look around Beaumont, Texas—and I'm a Beaumonter, born and raised here—and I look at license plates—I don't even know where these people coming from.

Chris Jones: Right.

Vernon Durden: But the abatement said they were going to hire your guys here and your people [points to Bryan Gross], and we have citizens who can't make it, because the promises aren't being kept. So, it's a very relevant question: How are we going to—we can survive if people just stop lying and just start doing what they say they're gonna do.

Kate Williams then asked Abdul Alkalimat to sum up the day.

Abdul Alkalimat: First of all, I want to say: we are so grateful, we are so pleased that we've had such a wonderful encounter, wonderful conversation. We want to remind everybody that in a tiny little day of conversation, what we can hope for is that really good questions were raised—and it may be a little bit of information. And I say that because of the complexity of the questions and the depth of the issues. We did not expect to come here with answers to anything. We came here with the possibility that democracy is still important; it's important to have a conversation—a conversation that represented or that included representation: people who have been silenced had to be here. My man Strong Wind had to be here. We had to have everybody here.

So, I want to ask you a question, and in answer I, want you to look around the room. How many of you all would like to see us have another conversation like this? Raise your hand. Now look around the room: almost everybody is raising their hand. Hmm. This is another affirmation that what we've done here today is a really positive and important thing.

This is not a Beaumont discussion. This Beaumont situation is a biopsy of the entire country—the world, really. And it is precisely a place like Beaumont that is devalued in the context of national and global discussions. So again, we want to thank you so very much from the standpoint of Ancient to the Future, because you are ancient to the future. What you do will be remembered in the future …

Audience member: Right.

Abdul Alkalimat: … as what those ancients did. And some of us have younger people in our family who already know we are the ancient ones, you know. So again, thank you so very much for being part of this. We have videoed it; the videos will be online. We will work with proceedings. We'll figure out how to extend this conversation. We've got people here who are dealing with high school students. We've got people who we're dealing here with Lamar University. We've got people here with the media. And all of those are going to be context for the distribution of this information. Because what we're trying to do is stimulate people for what we're calling our collective intelligence, our collective intelligence, and it's when we gather like this and begin to talk to each other, even in different languages. We heard a little Spanish; [points at Alex Perez/ Strong Wind] I don't know what you were saying, but we heard what you had to say earlier. You know, in other words begin to celebrate the diversity that our species represents and that these crises are forcing us as a species to come together. So, thank you so very, very much.

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Page 10: The Ancient to the Future Project website at http://ancienttothefuture.org includes links to session videos which are archived at the University of Illinois Media Space at http://mediaspace.illinois.edu. The Center for History and Culture of Southeast Texas and the Upper Gulf Coast streamed and then published the day's video on its Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/centerhistoryculture/.

Page 15 caption: Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

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Page 114 note 1: CBS News calculated and ranked murder rates in cities (>100,000 residents) using the FBI's 2019 Crime in the United States data. Beaumont was thirty-eighth highest at 16.03 per 100,000 residents; the other Texas city listed was Dallas, forty-second highest at 14.89. Accessed on November 26, 2022.

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Page 151 note 8: Interagency Flood Risk Management is a project of four federal agencies concerned with water resources, including the National Weather Service.

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Ancient to the Future:

https://ancienttothefuture.org/

The Center for History and Culture of Southeast Texas and the Upper Gulf Coast:

https://www.lamar.edu/historyandculture

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