

Grant Proposal
“God Carved In Night’: Black Intellectuals in Texas,
The World They Lived In, and the World They Made”

In the first seven decades of the twentieth century, Texas’ historically black colleges and universities incubated political activism and served as the training ground for the state’s African American civil rights movement. Graduates of the state’s black institutions of higher education would lead voter registration and poll tax payment drives, engage in voter education campaigns, conduct sit-ins at segregated businesses, organize demonstrations, and fight for jobs in their neighborhoods. They were the embodiment of those prominent intellectuals whom W.E.B. Du Bois dubbed the “talented tenth,” the African American intellectual avant garde who would lead the larger black community in triumph over segregation and disenfranchisement.

Black college graduates became politicians, newspaper editors and reporters, ministers, composers of opera and socially conscious popular music, artists and authors. They arrived at different political solutions to the crisis posed by white racism, lynching, discrimination and denial of voting rights. In the early twentieth century, some became buttoned-down Booker T. Washington-style Republicans. Others in the World War I era and in the 1920s embraced the ideas of Marcus Garvey, conceiving radical dreams of black separatism in America or the establishment of a “Black Zionist” state in an African homeland. Many joined the NAACP and fought in the legal trenches, chipping away at Jim Crow, one legal case at a time. A minority imbibed Marxism and called for revolution.

After the Democratic Party transformed itself in Texas following the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, some became Democratic liberals, while yet another group found themselves drawn to more radical groups like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Black Panthers.

Our oral history project, “God Carved In Night’: Black Intellectuals in Texas, The World They Lived In, and the World They Made,” aims to record the stories of those students. We will interview alumni from Texas’ African American colleges and universities such as Prairie View A&M University, Samuel Huston College and Tillotson College (which merged and formed Huston-Tillotson College in 1952), Bishop College, Paul Quinn College, and Texas Southern College. We hope to speak to individuals who attended black colleges, in a time span over several decades in the second half of the twentieth century, with particular emphasis on the decades between the 1950s and the mid-1980s. We hope to learn about the political and cultural atmosphere at these colleges and how the experience of being a black college student shaped these students’ later career choices and their self-image as African Americans. We hope to ask questions such as:

1. What was the educational experience of your parents and siblings?
2. What was school like for you growing up?
3. What was the racial climate where you grew up?
4. What did you want out of college and how did you choose your college?
5. What were the big events in the larger world and on the campus when you were there?
6. What did you gain from attending an “historically black” college? Do you feel you missed anything, not going somewhere else?
7. How did your college experience change or reinforce your relationship with the rest of the African American community?
8. What new ideas were you exposed to, while you were in college?
9. Did being a student at a black college shape your attitude toward politics? Did it make you more or less politically active?
10. Did you participate in political protests or direct actions while you were a college student? Had you participated in any before college?
11. In retrospect, are you glad you went to a historically black college, or do you think you missed anything from not attending a larger institution?
12. What do you think is the future of institutions such as your college?

We plan to use these interviews as a major source of information for a book on black intellectuals in Texas from Reconstruction to the 1980s. While there have been previous works on the black college experience in the Lone Star State, our work will pose new questions about African American collegiates. Previous scholarship on Texas black colleges, such as Michael R. Heintze's *Private Black Colleges in Texas, 1865-1954* (1985), Amilcar Shabazz's *Advancing Democracy: African Americans and the Struggle For Access and Equity in Higher Education in Texas* (2004), Dwonna Goldstone's *Integrating the 40 Acres: The Fifty Year Struggle for Racial Equity at the University of Texas* (2006) provided straight historical sketches of institutions or largely described these colleges in the context of the struggle over segregation in Texas higher education. The intellectual life of institutions – the art, literature, political and cultural philosophy created by the faculty and student body of institutions -- has been overlooked.

These earlier monographs begin the story after the Civil War and ignore the African American approach to education before Emancipation and how Afro-Texan slave culture shaped the pedagogical philosophies of black schools after Juneteenth. These important books discuss black political activism in the context of anti-Jim Crow activism but overlook the larger intellectual debates that took place at Texas' colleges where students also argued about and debated the future of blacks in American society; capitalism vs. socialism as models for black economic progress; and whether integration of Texas colleges and universities was constructive or destructive to black education in Texas.

Our oral history project will be the first to explore these debates, to describe the broader cultural context in which black intellectuals worked, and to analyze the literary and artistic output of black college graduates. A \$3,000 grant would go far to enable us to travel to places like Houston to interview Texas Southern University alumni, Prairie View to interview graduates of Prairie View A&M University, Marshall to interview former Wiley College students and Austin to speak with Huston-Tillotson exes. The authors also plan to create a website that will contain audio and video from the interviews, a timeline describing major events in black education in Texas, and passages from the planned book.

Michael Phillips and Betsy Friauf have extensive writing experience and are seasoned interviewers. After a career in professional journalism, including a stint at the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, Phillips received a Ph.D. from the University of Texas at Austin in 2002. His dissertation, *The Fire This Time: The Battle Over Racial, Regional, and Religious Identities in Dallas, Texas, 1860-1990*, won the University of Texas at Austin Outstanding Dissertation Award, and the University of Texas History Department Barnes D. Lathrop Prize for Best Dissertation in 2002. The dissertation was published by the University of Texas Press in 2006 as a book titled *White Metropolis: Race, Ethnicity and Religion in Dallas, 1841-2001*, which in 2007 won the Texas Historical Commission's T.R. Fehrenbach Award for best work on Texas history.

In 2010, UT Press published another book co-authored by Phillips, *The House Will Come to Order: How the Texas Speaker Became a Power in State and National Politics*. This work is based on oral histories of all living former speakers, then-speaker Tom Craddick, speakers' family members and staffers and experienced Capitol journalists and written by Phillips and Patrick L. Cox.

Phillips also contributed an essay, "Why Is Big Tex Still a White Cowboy? Race, Gender, and the 'Other Texans,'" in Walter Buenger and Arnoldo de León's *Beyond Texas Through Time: Breaking Away From Past Interpretations*, published by Texas A&M University Press in February 2011. His essay, "'The Current is Stronger': Images of Racial Oppression and Resistance in North Texas Black Art During the 1920s and 1930s" was published later in 2011 in Bruce A. Glasrud and Cary D. Wintz's *The Harlem Renaissance in the West: The New Negroes' Western Experience*.

Phillips co-authored both volumes of the American history textbook, *The American Challenge: A New History of the United States* as well as *Imperial Presidents: The Rise of Executive Power from Roosevelt to Obama*, both published in 2012. He also co-created the website *Texas House Speakers Oral History Collection Guide* (at <http://www.cah.utexas.edu/projects/speakers.php>) for the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History. Phillips' essay on racial ideology in early 20th century Texas, "Texan By Color: The Racialization of the Lone Star State" will appear in *The Radical Roots of the Texas Right*, edited by David Cullen and Kyle Wilkison, to be published by Texas A&M University Press in 2014.

Betsy Friauf 's extensive career in writing, editing and public information is predicated on public service. She is a native Texan and earned her journalism degree from the University of North Texas, where she was assistant editor of the *North Texas Daily* and recipient of the Outstanding Reporter award.

Friauf was in the "first wave" of female Texas journalists who refused relegation to the "society page." From 1977 to 2007 she served as a writer and editor in hard news and news features, first for the *Denton Record-Chronicle* and then for the *Fort Worth-Star-Telegram*. She was primarily an editor, but she often wrote. Her topics included women in politics, milestones in the history of women's health, the mind-body connection as it influences success and the relationship between African-American women's employment and their cardiovascular health.

Later, as deputy chief communications officer for the City of Fort Worth, she assisted in providing information to hurricane evacuees from the Gulf Coast who were housed in Fort Worth shelters. She also edited all municipal publications, earning a first-place award from the Texas Association of Municipal Information Officers.

Friauf is a Poynter Institute seminar graduate and editor of a Death Row series that placed first in the Associated Press Managing Editors Contest. She is a founding board member of the Association for Women Journalists.

Now a writer and editor for the University of North Texas Health Science Center in Fort Worth, Texas, she has a special interest in health disparities and the education of minorities to become health care providers for underserved populations.