Autonomy and Accommodation: Houston's Colored Carnegie Library, 1907–1922

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Denied the use of the Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library, African American leaders organized their own public library in a high school in 1909. Working through native Houstonian Emmett J. Scott and his boss Booker T. Washington, local black Houstonians secured a construction grant from the Carnegie Corporation. By the time the Colored Carnegie Library building was completed in 1913, they had negotiated with the City of Houston for the right of an all-black board of trustees to govern the library. Eight years later, the city disbanded the board and downgraded the library to a branch of the Houston Public Library system. The experience of founding and administering the institution nevertheless represented an act of resistance on the part of Houston's African American activists, who turned a Jim Crow library into an opportunity for autonomy.

Ernest Ollington Smith, soon after graduating from Fisk University, moved to Houston to become principal of an elementary school in 1904, the same year the city's magnificent new Carnegie library building opened. Smith would later recall that he and a handful of like-minded black educators attempted to use the new Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library, but the staff turned them away. In response, Smith and his colleagues founded their own public library, secured a Carnegie grant for a building, and convinced the city to allow an all-black board of trustees to have autonomous control over collections and services when their Carnegie building opened in 1913. But eight years later the city disbanded the board and transformed the library into a racially segregated branch of the existing municipal library system.[1]

Buildings constructed for the use of African Americans, including library branches, have been "part of a ritual of memory, struggle, and hope," as Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg D. Kimball have put it.[2] Yet historians have tended to ignore the establishment of early twentieth-century libraries for African Americans. They have focused instead on a variety of other segregated facilities and institutions that C. Vann Woodward identified in the 1950s as ranging from "all forms of public transportation, to sports and recreations, to hospitals, orphanages,

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prisons, and asylums, and ultimately to funeral homes, morgues, and cemeteries."[3]

Educators in the field of library and information science and working librarians engaged in historical research have paid more attention to the impact of racism on library development.[4] But only detailed studies of particular cases can reveal the "rituals of memory, struggle and hope" rehearsed while establishing public libraries that conformed to the southern model of racial segregation as it existed in the early twentieth century.

The process of creating and constructing Houston's Colored Carnegie Library offers a way to explore the rituals of race relations enacted in one New South city soon after the turn of the century. With the involvement of African American activists, the contests over library funding, location, and governance typical in many communities also shaped what it meant to be black in an increasingly urbanized and segregated literate culture.[5] African Americans intent on building a library for black Houstonians moved beyond the lobbying of local white librarians and city officials to a national strategy that involved both Booker T. Washington and Andrew Carnegie. In so doing, black Houstonians proclaimed themselves actors in the civic and cultural politics that influenced their city, the services it provided, and its built environment.

Houston's New Library for Whites

The history of the Colored Carnegie Library began with the opening of the Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library. In the 1890s white clubwomen began agitating successfully for expanded library services and an improved collection at the private Houston Lyceum. In 1899 they stepped up their efforts, convincing the mayor and the city council to appropriate $2,400 annually for library maintenance. Later that year they wrote to Andrew Carnegie, who agreed to give $50,000 for a building if the city would increase its annual appropriation to $4,000. The city agreed, and white clubwomen proceeded to raise almost $8,000 in donations to purchase a site for the building at the corner of McKinney Avenue and Travis Street.

One of the rewards of their direct involvement in the project was the appointment of clubwomen Belle Sherman (Mrs. W. E.) Kendall and Elizabeth L. Fitzsimmons (Mrs. H. F.) Ring to the new public library's nine-member governing board. Both Kendall and Ring were members of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Daughters of the American Revolution, and married to prominent attorneys. The president of the governing board from 1900 to 1908, and again from 1915 until he died in 1924, was Henry Havelock Dickson. Involved in the

Houston Business League, the Houston Country Club, and the Lyceum, Dickson helped secure Carnegie's gift and was instrumental in the hiring of Julia Ideson as librarian in 1903.[6]

The board over which Dickson presided, and on which Kendall and Ring served, committed itself to the provision of a free public library for all Houstonians.[7] But it soon became clear that their policy was more restricted in practice, in keeping with local developments. Between 1875 and 1930, library policies and practices supported the growing separation of white and black Houstonians.[8] Sometime in 1907, several African-American educators attempted to use the Carnegie library. The staff informed them that black residents had never tried such a thing before and referred the matter to the board of trustees, who agreed verbally to provide library services for blacks. After a year of waiting for further action, high school principal E. O. Smith, Gregory School principal William E. Miller, postal clerk Leonard Henry Spivey, and high school teachers Richard G. Lockett and Walter L. D. Johnson, Sr., created a voluntary association dedicated to founding a library for Houston's African Americans.[9]

The group's leader, Ernest Ollington Smith, grew up in Alabama, graduated from Fisk University in 1903, and served briefly as principal of a school in Goliad, Texas, before moving to Houston in 1904, where he had taken a position as principal of Hollywood School. From 1908 until 1926, he served as principal of Booker T. Washington School in the First Ward. William Miller was a fellow educator. Born in Belton, Texas, in 1871, he worked in his teens for a white man who later sent him to Prairie View State College. From 1901 until 1926, he served as principal of Gregory Elementary School. Lockett was a native Houstonian born in 1882. He graduated from Atlanta University in 1905 and returned to Houston where he taught in the high school for blacks, as did Walter Johnson. The only board member not in the education field was Leonard Spivey. He had attended Tillotson College and worked at a grocery store in Austin for two years before taking a job at a store in Houston in 1901. In 1903 he became a postal carrier.[10]

The men approached several important white men for written endorsements of the idea of a library for blacks. Among the whites willing to support the project were attorney Presley K. Ewing, whose wife had worked to create the white library as a member of the Ladies Reading Club; P. W. Horn, who supervised Smith, Lockett, and Johnson as superintendent of schools and who served on the library board; and Postmaster Seth Strong, who supervised Spivey.[11] Confident he had the backing of white men supportive of the public library movement, Smith wrote directly to the head of the Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library, Julia Ideson.

Ideson was not a native Houstonian. In 1892, when she was twelve, her family had moved from Hastings, Nebraska, where her father owned a bookstore, to Houston, where he worked in one. Mr. Ideson soon turned to real estate and apparently did well in Houston's growing economy, for he was able to send his daughter to the University of Texas where she completed the first program in library science offered there.[12] Ideson had been head of the Houston library for five years when Smith wrote to her in September of 1908 to ask for a five-minute-long meeting during which he hoped to get her support and advice.[13] A month later, when he had received no reply, he wrote again, using a number of rhetorical devices that indicated his position as a southern black man writing to a white woman for a favor. His letter opened deferentially:

> We have reason to think that you may be enough interested in my people to listen to their cry for the crumbs which fall from your table. If I am mistaken in this, however, charge me with credulity rather than audacity.[14]

Reiterating that public library space and collections were not available to the city's black residents, Ideson noted again the endorsements of several respected white men by name. Superintendent Horn understood the need, especially among schoolchildren, for library books and magazines and story hours. The others approved of Smith's efforts because, he wrote, "they feel we ought to be encouraged in interesting our people in anything which will make them less idle, less criminal, and more industrious, peaceful and law-abiding citizens."[15] Such wording may have reflected both Smith's own class biases as a member of the black professional elite as well as an understanding of whites' negative stereotypes of African Americans.

Ideson did meet briefly with a small group and advised them to ask the mayor directly for the city's assistance. The city had recently instituted a commission form of government, and Mayor H. Baldwin Rice enjoyed the power of the executive office which made it necessary for interest groups to lobby him directly. Born into one of Houston's wealthiest families and married to a woman who supported the activities of the public library, Rice represented one New South perspective on race relations. He understood the advantages of African Americans participating in the city's economic progress, but at the same time wanted them to do so in their own separate sphere. During their meeting with Rice, Smith and his cohorts extracted a promise of $500 per year to fund a library for African-American Houstonians.[16]

Aware of the mayor's funding offer, the public library board in its meeting of 20 October 1908, considered Smith's request for a library.

They passed a motion "that if the colored people would secure the use of suitable rooms, and attendants, the library would donat [sic] one hundred dollars, and such duplicates as could be spared."[17] Ten days later Smith called a meeting of Houston's black residents at the United Brotherhood of Friendship Hall, explained the white board's offer, and officially formed what he considered a temporary organization with himself as chairman and Walter Johnson as secretary. Smith appointed a Committee of Seven on "ways and means" which included Professor James Codwell, editor at the Western Star Publishing Company; the Rev. N. P. Pullum, a businessman and pastor of Houston's Friendship Baptist Church who had raised $25,000 for a new church building; and the Rev. F. L. Lights, leader of both Antioch Baptist Church and the Orgen Banking Company. Also involved was realtor J. B. Bell. Smith, Johnson, and Spivey also served on the committee, and at the motion of Pullum, Smith added Mrs. J. V. Lewis and Mrs. C. A. Scott.[18] The ways and means committee diversified the library's support group beyond the field of educators to include members of Houston's African-American elite in the often combined endeavors of business and religion.

A Branch for Blacks

Superintendent Horn approved the use of available space at the African-American high school for three years, and on 1 March 1909, the city appropriation of $300 for a librarian and $200 for books began. At the library board meeting on 9 March 1909, Ideson reported that Smith had raised $100 for books and another $100 in pledges, and had secured space in the colored high school where bookshelves had been installed. The board then approved the expenditure of the earlier promised $100.[19] A week later an African-American woman by the name of Emma Myers began her employment as librarian of the Negro branch at $25 per month. Ideson arranged for her to spend two mornings a week at the main library to process books for her branch, and so the two librarians could keep each other informed of developments at their respective libraries.

In preparation of the branch's opening on 5 May, Ideson sent three white female staff members to the high school for half a day to catalog and shelve books. The branch opened with 356 books, about three-quarters of which had been weeded from the white library's collection: 144 volumes of adult fiction, 106 volumes of juvenile fiction, 72 volumes of adult nonfiction, and 34 volumes of juvenile nonfiction.[20] From May 1909 until April 1913, it operated as a branch of the Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library with the city appropriating $500 to the white library board to fund the Colored Branch.

Black Houstonians had their library, but it was in a temporary space and operating with only a short-term commitment of funds. The advantage of seeking a gift from Andrew Carnegie for a solid brick building was his requirement that the city receiving the gift agree to provide maintenance funds, usually amounting to about ten percent of the gift. In response to a letter from Smith recounting efforts to found the library, Washington wrote James Bertram, Andrew Carnegie's assistant, that Houston's Negroes were ready to secure a library building grant for themselves.[21] Apparently unbeknownst to Washington, however, the branch was not quite as stable as its supporters would have liked. Fundraising efforts had lagged while Smith was on an extended visit to Chicago; the ways and means committee raised fewer than $75 of the $200 Smith had promised from black Houstonians. Ideson wrote to Smith that she had already ordered $200 worth of books and had had to use part of the city's $500 "donation" to pay for them. She told him not to expect any more assistance until his group had raised the full amount promised.[22]

Smith needed help, and he decided that a board the same size as the white library's board, with nine trustees and with the official approval of the white board, would be a more powerful instrument for progress. Early in 1910 Smith wrote to the library board suggesting that the trustees appoint a committee recommended by Ideson to oversee the Colored Branch. Smith was apparently not satisfied with working through Myers, who served as a go-between for her white supervisor and her black trustees. He also worried that factionalism within the association might affect the outcome when it was time to elect officers. As Smith rather delicately put it in a letter to Ideson, "you could appoint practically the same persons whereas if left to an election there might be an undesirable change."[23] Ideson's trustees instructed her to find out who the association's officers were and how they were appointed. During their next board meeting, the trustees approved what they called a "governing committee" of persons suggested by Smith. Ideson recommended a year-long term beginning 1 March 1910, listing Smith as chairman along with Leonard Spivey, W. L. D. Johnson, R. C. Lockett, the Rev. W. H. Logan, Nat Henderson, Mrs. J. M. Johnson, Mrs. M. Baker, Mrs. J. B. Bell, and R. T. Andrews. Logan did not serve, nor did Mrs. Johnson, Baker, and Bell. Three decades later, Smith recalled that the original five-member group of trustees included Spivey, Lockett, Miller, W. L. D. Johnson, and himself, and that the board expanded to nine members including J. B. Bell, Andy Parr, John M. Adkins, and Nat Q. Henderson in 1910.[24]

Adkins was a messenger for the federal courts in Houston and was able to ask the white attorneys he knew for legal advice on behalf of the board; Henderson was principal of Bruce Elementary School. Bell and

Parr were real estate dealers. With the addition of Bell, whose wife had served on Smith's ways and means committee, the library project gained a crucial ally. Early in 1910, Booker T. Washington had led selected members of his National Negro Business League to a meeting at Carnegie's home. Bell was among the delegation. A couple of months after his visit to Carnegie's home, Bell visited Mayor Rice, whom he knew personally, and secured a written commitment indicating the city would provide annual maintenance for a library for blacks. Bell included it in a letter he wrote to Bertram asking that Carnegie fund a building. Bertram then informed Mayor Rice that Carnegie would give $15,000 for the building. Smith managed to raise $500 as a down payment for a lot on the corner of Robin and Frederick owned by St. James Lodge No. 6 of the United Brotherhood of Friendship. This placed the library in the heart of the Fourth Ward, which by 1910 had the largest African-American concentration in Houston, 38 percent black. Overall, 26. 6 percent of the population of Houston was black. The library would be across from Antioch Baptist Church on Robin Street and close to the high school on the corner of San Felipe and Frederick. Bell, who had negotiated the purchase, agreed to lend the remaining $1,000 to pay for the $1,500 site.[25]

The Colored Carnegie Library Association solidified its position in March of 1911, by passing bylaws requiring monthly board meetings; annual elections of president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer; and five standing committees for rules and regulations, administration, finance, building and grounds, and books and periodicals. The bylaws also required the trustees to appoint a librarian, who reported to them. When the bylaws went into effect, the group incorporated as the Colored Carnegie Library Association, and its charter listed the nine members of the board as Smith, Miller, Adkins, Bell, Johnson, Spivey, Lockett, Parr, and Henderson. The corporation, decreed to exist for a duration of fifty years and listed as its assets the building site, publications, and gifts totaling $20,000.[26]

The board further stabilized its role in the fall of 1911, when Washington arrived in Houston on 27 September for a speaking engagement. Bell hosted a dinner at his home for Washington and his entourage and invited guests (all black), including *Texas Freeman* editor C. N. Love; David Abner, president of Conroe College in Houston and a real estate dealer; F. L. Lights, Antioch's pastor; Frederick William Gross, president of Houston College and grand secretary of the United Brothers of Friendship of Texas and of its savings and loan function; Orgen Banking Co. cashier George W. Jenkins; and realtor J. Leon Jones.[27] Next, surgeon Benjamin Jessie Covington, a graduate of Meharry Medical College in Nashville and a trustee of Bethel Baptist Church, hosted a reception at his home for the Washington party and the trustees of the Colored

Carnegie Library as formal recognition of the key role Washington and his secretary, native Houstonian Emmett J. Scott, had played in acquiring the library building.[28]

That night, Scott, Smith, and Washington addressed an audience of about five thousand black and two thousand white people packed into the City Auditorium. Knowing that Bell was still waiting to be paid back his $1,000 loan for the site, Smith took advantage of the opportunity to exhort his listeners to contribute money to the endeavor. After summarizing the history of the movement for a library for Houston Negroes, he said:

> Are you so burdened with self and self-interest that you can not do your share in building up an institution which shall benefit your children and benefit generations unborn? I have never yet said that we could not get this money from white men. I believe we can raise it ourselves and so I have said that I thought we would feel more manly and enjoy this library better if we built it ourselves, but if necessary I shall swallow my pride and put my hat under my arm and ask the white men to give us the thousand dollars to build the library which 25,000 shiftless negroes [sic] could not raise. But let no one get the idea that the library will not be built because his bigotry or miserliness prevents him from cooperating with the movement.[29]

Thus construed as both a project and a test of black manhood, the library took on a symbolic meaning that went beyond the utility of its collections and services; here was something African Americans had organized, struggled for, and accomplished. The manliness of the project constructed the library as a triumph, however partial, over racism as black elites made common cause with white elites to help uplift the race.[30] Aware that their words were reaching influential whites as well as blacks, the three speakers at Washington's Houston appearance linked the creation of a racially segregated library to the Washingtonian philosophy of self-help and self-reliance, conceding their new public space as a social arena where the races would not mix. At the same time, as Scott noted, it was a municipal service not "purely social" but one concerned with "the moral and material well being of this our common section," and, as such, deserving of white support. On a day-to-day basis, Smith's group needed the cooperation of the local white elite, but the connection of black Houstonians through Scott to Washington and through Washington to Carnegie elevated their status. Houston's white leaders no doubt registered the message that their African-American neighbors

were real men who had the interest and assistance of two internationally known figures, one black and one white.

The involvement of the most famous and influential black man in the country no doubt smoothed the way for the donation of Carnegie dollars and reassured leading white citizens of the seemingly inherent conservatism of a separate library for blacks. But it did not lessen the conflicts over the design and construction of the building, common in so many communities receiving Carnegie libraries. The board secured a Washington, D. C., architect, William Sidney Pittman, Washington's son-in-law. Pittman had won the contract on the Carnegie library building for the Colored State Normal School in his hometown of Montgomery, Alabama, in 1910.[31] However, his plans for Houston's library building did not meet with Bertram's approval. Bertram considered the grand entrance Pittman had designed a waste of space in a small building and urged him to draw new plans that would allow for larger reading rooms on either side of the central circulation desk. In January of 1912, Pittman and Bertram were still wrangling over the matter.[32] Mayor Rice had never received Bertram's guide describing library floor plans routinely sent to all Carnegie grant recipients. Pittman had designed the building without the guidelines, and the New Jersey bank in charge of disbursing Carnegie's funds balked at doing so until the plans were approved. Scott wrote to the bank in late December claiming that all conditions had been met and wondering when the money would be released.[33] The building finally opened officially on 11 April 1913, with 3,500 to 4,000 volumes but without chairs in its 210–seat basement auditorium.[34] Bertram apparently won the battle over the size of the entry, for the *Houston Chronicle* reported that upon ascending the steps "one enters a minature [sic] foyer and thence a tiny hall."[35]

The board also clashed over the selection of a librarian. Emma Myers served from 8 March 1909, until 15 October 1911, when she resigned to move to California.[36] Mrs. J. V. (Pauline) Lewis had taken her place temporarily, but Smith felt that Lewis neglected her work, and the board decided to recruit for the position without inviting her to apply. In August 1912, Lewis took the hint and resigned, and the board members then began to argue over which of the applicants, including Lewis herself, to hire. Urging the board to hire only the most competent person, Ideson administered a test to three candidates, Pinky Henderson, Annie Edwards, and Pauline Lewis, and asked School Superintendent Horn to grade them. He suggested asking Emma Myers to come back from California to take the position, but she declined.[37] His second choice was Annie Edwards, but Smith had already told Ideson he opposed Mrs. Edwards because "She has a young baby and a disagreeable husband. I do

not see how she could possibly give us the best service."[38] Smith instead began negotiating with Bessie Osborne, whom he described as "a splendid young woman," a college graduate, and a teacher earning $70 per month. The *Houston Chronicle* described her merely as a "graduate of the Colored High School."[39] The white library board and Ideson recommended to the African-American board Bessie Osborne as first choice, citing as her chief qualification her "freedom from family ties which would seem to assure undivided attention for the Library and her youthfulness which assures greater adaptability."[40] Smith used the white librarian and her board to his advantage in ensuring that his candidate would be chosen.

Although the white library's staff provided apprenticeship training for its librarians, the Colored Carnegie board apparently did not ask for such training for their new librarian.[41] The board hired Bessie Osborne on condition that she would travel to Louisville for an apprenticeship with Thomas Fountain Blue, head librarian of Louisville's Western Colored Branch since its establishment in 1905. Blue had instigated training classes to prepare black women for work at his library and at other segregated branches that opened in the South. On 8 March 1913, the director of the Louisville Free Public Library, George T. Settle, reported to Ideson that Osborne's training included actual work in all departments and he assured her, "you have not made any mistake in your selection of the young woman and I feel sure that the Board will be amply repaid for any expense incurred in sending her to Louisville."[42] A couple of weeks later he wrote again, apparently in response to a pointed inquiry from Ideson. This time he reported that Osborne seemed a bit slow but suggested that she would improve over time with close supervision.[43] Osborne reported to Smith that "I have visited the main branch often and have been treated royally."[44]

A Segregated Building and Separate Governance

With the grand opening of the African-American building only a month away, the white library board moved that two of its members, "find the conditions attached to the Carnegie gift to the Colored Library and the city's acceptance of same so that the Board could know its legal position in regard to to negro [sic] board and library."[45] At the next meeting, the board heard a report that both the mayor and the city attorney had agreed that their "understanding with the Negro Library Board had been that they should administer their Library independently of the Public Library Board and should be answerable directly to the city."[46] A couple of months later, Smith asked Ideson for whatever

remained of the city's $500 annual appropriation and she responded with a letter detailing the accounts and a check for just over $122. In closing she wrote:

> Your Library is now independent of this Library in all respects. It therefore seems unnecessary to call it a branch of this Library and I think it would be advisable for you to adopt some official name such as Colored Carnegie Library that would not designate it as a branch since it is not so in fact.[47]

The city's allotment of $1,500 for the African-American library fell far short of the library's needs during its first year in the new Carnegie building. On the library's first anniversary, African-American teacher Charles F. Smith wrote an account of the library for the *Houston Post*, based in part on Bessie Osborne's first annual report to Mayor Ben Campbell. More than eleven thousand visits to the reading rooms and more than one hundred meetings in the basement auditorium had taken place. Of the 1,760 registered readers, most were "porters, nurses, cooks and working girls and boys." But, Smith wrote, "The greatest drawback to the institution is the inability to procure many readable books. The appropriations are not large enough to meet the current expense and provide funds for books."[48]

The library board agreed with Smith's assessment. At the end of the first year in the Carnegie building, Treasurer Bell submitted his financial report to the city. Board president Smith also addressed the mayor and city council on the subject of the library's finances, which he stated were inadequate. He pointed out that the $125 monthly barely covered staff salaries and utilities. He also noted that "Unlike the other city buildings we have had to assume all responsibility for repairs," as well as furnishing the basement auditorium with two-hundred chairs and purchasing shelves and tables for the library. In fact, the city's appropriation for the first year fell short of actual expenses by almost $1,100, but, in keeping with the board's desire to demonstrate their self-reliance, they had organized a fundraising picnic which had netted about half that amount.[49] Despite the board's request for an increase, the city again earmarked the promised $1,500 the second year. The library held benefit picnics again in 1914 and 1915, but Bessie Osborne recorded that they were failures and reported no income from them.[50]

On 1 June 1915, the city's appropriation increased to $200 per month. Of that, $50 went to librarian Bessie Osborne, $20 to her assistant Mabel Westmoreland, and $30 to the janitor John Routte. The library spent $20 to $25 a month on electricity, telephone service, and, in the winter, coal.

The total usually came to around $125, without books or periodicals. Once the allotment increased in 1915, more outlays for books appear in the records.[51]

Meanwhile, Julia Ideson advocated the takeover of the black library. As early as December 1910, she had written to William F. Yust, head of the Louisville Free Public Library, to ask about governance of the library's Western Colored Branch. He assured her that allowing two boards to exist would be a waste of taxpayers' money; he also assumed that the one board would be all white.[52] In an undated memo to white library board president Dickson, Ideson outlined the position the board should take regarding the branch, noting, "We are not seeking to have the Mayor invest us with any authority if he does not see fit." But she called into question the advisability of having a separate board and expressed frustration that she had no official position from which to "be of any assistance to those members of the Library staff and Board who are sincerely and intelligently desirous of having an effective Library." Asserting that "the Colored Library as at present administered is not productive of much service or credit in the community," she suggested that the library institute an accurate system of bookkeeping and that the city audit the library's accounts periodically.[53] In 1918, Ideson took her case to the mayor and he replied that after an audit of the Colored Carnegie Library's accounts, he would decide whether to retain the separate board.[54] Nothing happened, however, partly because Ideson left the country to work in the American Library Association's War Service.

An End to Autonomy

Upon her return from Europe, Ideson realized that Houston's library appropriation had not grown with the rapidly increasing population. Consequently, early in 1921, Ideson orchestrated the passage of a levy of two-and-a-half cents per one-hundred-dollar valuation to support the library. When the measure passed on 9 February 1921, the library's income amounted to $42,021.78, almost double the prior commitment.[55]

On 14 February 1921, Ideson wrote to each board member regarding the budget for 1921, apparently in preparation for the March board meeting. After discussing the library's budget and the new tax levy in some detail, she wrote:

> The tax levy is for all libraries in the City and will, therefore, include the colored library. The colored library has not, for a number of years, been administered by the Trustees of this library. It would seem a more advisable arrangement that it should be, just as the colored schools are managed by one School Board.[56]

On 8 March the board passed a motion that its Finance Committee discuss with the mayor and city council the proportion of funds that should be earmarked for the black branch.[57] The Finance Committee wrote to Mayor A. E. Amerman on 9 April outlining its understanding that the city had already allotted $4,000 to the colored library, leaving $38,000 for the white library, including two planned new branches for whites. The committee urged the city to downgrade the Colored Carnegie Library to a branch whose allocation would go to the white board for disbursement. They also conceded, "We would be glad to have the Board of colored trustees continue to function as an advisory committee."[58]

The city did disband the black library governing board, and the library reverted to a branch of the Houston Public Library as it had been when it first opened in the high school in 1909.[59] An Atlanta University graduate student interviewed Walter Johnson in the early 1960s regarding that change, and he expressed frustration that no African Americans were appointed to the single board. The all-white board did appoint Ernest O. Smith, John M. Adkins, Walter L. D. Johnson, R. G. Lockett, and Nat Q. Henderson to a "consultation committee," but Johnson reported that it soon ceased to exist.[60] As late as 1933, however, a Negro Committee headed by Smith continued to function, although Johnson was not a member.[61]

No records provide full documentation for the final move to eliminate the separate African-American board, but the context within which the transition took place is suggestive. Race relations had deteriorated during and after World War I, and with the waning influence of accommodationism after Washington's death in 1915, Black Houstonians began to turn to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for leadership.[62] Activism to slow the continued degradation of their voting rights and to protect themselves against official and unofficial sources of violence during and after World War I distracted Houston's black leaders. Given the choice of concentrating their resources on fighting for civil rights or for retaining control of a small library, African-American activists made the only decision they could have made.

Additionally, the library profession itself was against the idea of a separate African-American board and some opposed even an advisory committee. In 1913, George T. Settle, director of the Louisville Free Public Library, advised Ideson that "the Colored Branch Library should not be controlled by a separate board, as one board can better manage the entire system and do so more economically and efficiently than two."[63] The results of a questionnaire to public libraries in early 1922 indicated that almost none had an African-American person on the governing board and only two of the ninety-eight respondents, Savannah and

Charlotte, had separate boards. Roanoke had a black advisory committee but it provided advice only about the African-American branch and not about library policies in general. Atlanta reported: "We tried having an advisory committee from the colored people, but as they did not confine their activities to advice, we disposed of them."[64] Ideson, a regular attendee at American Library Association meetings, having lost the branch once, was intent on getting it back, probably for personal as well as professional reasons. If personal pride was at work, so was a professional commitment to bureaucratic efficiency and consolidation.

"[P]art of a ritual of memory, struggle, and hope," the Colored Carnegie Library served as a new urban venue in which blacks and whites negotiated their beliefs about race and rights. Over the course of their struggle, it became clear that the legal and customary practice of segregation would extend even to the public library, undermining its much-proclaimed "free to all" philosophy. Nevertheless, the construction of a library for African Americans, even though it was not equal to the library for whites, represented an improvement over the lack of collections and services that came before.[65] The Colored Carnegie Library represented both the expansion of segregationist practice and the provision of services previously denied African Americans. Comprehending this duality, Houston's African-American library leaders sought to control their institution within the larger system they could not control. In a quiet but undeniable act of resistance, they maneuvered themselves into a self-governing body whose very existence challenged the underlying function of Jim Crow, the symbol of African-Americans' inferior status in a white-dominated world. Ernest Ollington Smith and his board of trustees accommodated themselves to the culture of segregation, but in asserting their desire for self-governance they had forced whites to accommodate them as well, at least for a time. The result was not a test of the system of segregation so much as an elaboration of its ironic possibilities.

Notes

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1. This is a summary of events detailed and documented more fully in this article, based on my reading of primary sources in the Houston Public Library Collection at the Houston Metropolitan Research Center (hereafter cited as HPLC) and in the microfilmed records relating to public library building grants available from the Carnegie Corporation Archives, Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Columbia University, New York (hereafter cited as Carnegie Archives). See Cheryl Knott Malone, "Accommodating Access: 'Colored' Carnegie Libraries, 1905–1925." (Ph. D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1996), especially 107–158.

2. Elsa Barkley Brown and Gregg D. Kimball, "Mapping the Terrain of Black Richmond," in *The New African American Urban History*, eds. Kenneth W. Goings and Raymond A. Mohl (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1996), 84.

3. C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 8. Among the works investigating specific institutions and services as they developed under Jim Crow are James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill, N. C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, N. C.: Duke University Press, 1990); Dorothy Salem, *To Better Our World: Black Women in Organized Reform, 1890–1920* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1990); Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers during the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Robert E. Weems, Jr., *Black Business in the Black Metropolis: The Chicago Metropolitan Assurance Company, 1925–1985* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996); and Roberta Hughes Wright and Wilbur B. Hughes III, *Lay Down Body: Living History in African American Cemeteries* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1996).

4. Examples include Lorna Peterson, "Alternative Perspectives in Library and Information Science: Issues of Race," *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science* 37 (Spring 1996): 163–174; Robert Sidney Martin and Orvin Lee Shiflett, "Hampton, Fisk, and Atlanta: The Foundations, the American Library Association, and Library Education for Blacks, 1925–1941," *Libraries & Culture* 31:2 (Spring 1996): 299–325; James V. Carmichael, "Tommie Dora Barker and Southern Librarianship," (Ph. D. diss, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 1987), 11–12, 70–77; Rosemary Ruhig Du Mont, "Race and American Librarianship: Attitudes of the Library Profession," *Journal of Library History* 21:3 (Summer 1986): 488–509; E. J. Josey, *The Black Librarian in America* (Metuchen, N. J.: Scarecrow Press, 1970); and Eliza Atkins Gleason, *The Southern Negro and the Public Library: A Study of the Government and Administration of Public Library Service to Negroes in the South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941).

5. The public library as contested terrain open to various interpretations and uses is a theme in Abigail A. Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), xxvii, and especially 64–159, and in Robert Sidney Martin, ed., *Carnegie Denied: Communities Rejecting Carnegie Library Construction Grants, 1898–1925*. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1993). My thinking about "what it meant to be black" is influenced by the discussion of African Americans' periodic reinvention of the "New Negro" metaphor against the backdrop of the dominant culture's caricatures of African-American aspirations to literacy, education, and intellectual achievement discussed in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black," *Representations* 24 (Fall 1988): 150–155.

6. Orin Walker Hatch, *Lyceum to Library: A Chapter In The Cultural History of Houston* (Houston: Texas Gulf Coast Historical Association, 1965), 43–48; 57–59; 61–62.

7. Ibid., 48.

8. David G. McComb, *Houston: A History*, rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 107–114; Cary D. Wintz, "Black Business in Houston, 1910–1930," *Essays in Economic and Business History* 10 (1992): 30–31; Thomas C. Mackey, "Thelma Denton and Associates: Houston's Red Light Reservation and a Question of Jim Crow," *Houston Review* 14 (1992): 139.

9. [E. O. Smith], Untitled Speech, 2–3, Box 8, HPLC. Although unsigned, this document is in the same handwriting present in Smith's signed letters elsewhere in the collection. No date is provided on the document, but the text begins, "Dr. Washington, visiting friends, and fellow citizens" and makes references to Booker T. Washington's presence and to the roles he and his secretary played in securing the Carnegie grant. The speech offers the only evidence I found of African-American Houstonians being refused service at the Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library, but it is convincing since the speech was intended for an audience that Smith must have known would include some of the whites implicated in his memoir of discrimination.

10. A. W. Jackson, *A Sure Foundation* (Houston: n. p., n. d.), 94–95, 180–182, 739–740; Emmett J. Scott, *Red Book of Houston* (Houston: Sotex Pub. Co., 1915), 91, 158.

11. Hatch, *Lyceum to Library*, 43.

12. Mary Brown McSwain, "Julia Bedford Ideson, Houston Librarian, 1880–1945," (Master's Report, The University of Texas, 1966), 5–6.

13. E. O. Smith to Julia Ideson, 9 September 1908, Box 8, Houston Public Library Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center; hereafter cited as HPLC.

14. Smith to Ideson, 6 October 1908, Box 8, HPLC.

15. Ibid.

16. Harold L. Platt, *City Building in the New South: The Growth of Public Services in Houston, Texas, 1830–1910* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 202–211; E. O. Smith, "Library History," typescript of a speech, [1939], [1–2], Box 8, HPLC.

17. Houston Public Library Board Meeting Minutes, 20 October 1908, Minutes Book, HPLC.

18. Minutes of Meeting of Colored Carnegie Library Association, 30 October 1908, Box 8, HPLC; "Negroes Want Library," unidentified newspaper clipping, Box 8, HPLC; Scott, *Red Book*, 153; Cary D. Wintz, "Blacks," in *The Ethnic Groups of Houston*, ed. Fred R. von der Mehden (Houston: Rice University Studies, 1984), 19, 23, 29.

19. Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library Board Meeting Minutes, 9 March 1909, Minutes Book, HPLC.

20. Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library Board Meeting Minutes, 8 June 1909, Minutes Book, HPLC.

21. Smith, "Library History," [1–2]; Booker T. Washington to James Bertram, 13 November 1909, R. 14, Carnegie Archives.

22. Ideson to Smith, 20 November 1909, Box 8; Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library Board Meeting Minutes, 18 November 1909, and 8 March 1910, Minutes Book; both, HPLC.

23. Smith to Ideson, 1 January [1910], HPLC.

24. Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library Board Meeting Minutes, 11 January 1910, Minutes Book; Smith to Ideson, 1 January [1910], Box 8; Ideson to

Smith, 9 February 1910, Box 8; Smith, "Library History," [1,3]; *Constitution and By-Laws: Colored Carnegie Library*, (n. p., n. d.), 4, Box 8; all, HPLC; Scott *Red Book*, 30.

25. *The National Cyclopedia of the Colored Race* (Montgomery, Ala.: National Publishing Co., 1919), 321; Jackson, *Sure Foundation*, 261–262, 750; Wintz, "Blacks," 22, 27, 29; Scott, *Red Book*, 17, 83, 91; J. B. Bell to James Bertram, 8 April 1910, Bertram to Rice, 10 June 1910, R. 14, Carnegie Archives.

26. *Constitution and By-Laws*, 6–16.

27. Horace D. Slatter, "An Account of Washington's Tour of Texas," *Tuskegee Student*, 23 (14 October 1911), 1–4, reprinted in Louis R. Harlan and Raymond W. Smock, eds. *The Booker T. Washington Papers*. Vol. 11, 1911–12. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 335, 342–343.

28. Ibid. ; Scott, *Red Book*, 153.

29. [Smith], Untitled Speech, 14–16.

30. Robin D. G. Kelley, "'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," in *The New African American Urban History*, 206–207.

31. Harrison Mosley Ethridge, "The Black Architects of Washington, D. C., 1900–Present" (D. A. diss., Catholic University of America, 1979), 31.

32. James Bertram to Mayor Rice, 12 December 1911; Bertram to W. Sidney Pittman, 8 January 1912; both, R. 14, Carnegie Archives.

33. H. B. Rice to R. A. Franks, 30 June 1911; J. B. Bell to E. J. Scott, 20 December 1911; Scott to Franks, 23 December 1911; all, R. 14, Carnegie Archives.

34. Sidney W. Pittman, architectural drawings of Colored Carnegie Library, Architecture Collection, Houston Metropolitan Research Center.

35. "Dedication Exercises at Colored Carnegie Library," *Houston Chronicle*, undated clipping, Box 8, HPLC.

36. Emma Myers to Ideson, 14 January 1912, Box 8, HPLC.

37. Smith to Ideson, 10 August 1912; Ideson to Smith, 12 August 1912; Pauline Lewis to the Board of Trustees, Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library, Colored Branch, 14 August 1912; Ideson to P. W. Horn, 29 August 1912; Horn to Ideson, 3 September 1912; Myers to Ideson, 12 September 1912; all, Box 8, HPLC.

38. Smith to Ideson, 24 August 1912, Box 8, HPLC.

39. Smith to Ideson, n. d. ; and "Dedication Exercises at Colored Carnegie Library," *Houston Chronicle* clipping, n. d. ; both, Box 8, HPLC.

40. Ideson to the Board of Trustees, n. d., Box 8, HPLC.

41. Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library Board Meeting Minutes, 13 April 1909, Minutes Book, HPLC.

42. George T. Settle to Ideson, 8 March 1913, Box 8, HPLC.

43. Settle to Ideson, 24 March 1913, Box 8, HPLC.

44. Quoted by Smith to Ideson, 3 February 1913, Box 8, HPLC.

45. Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library Board Meeting Minutes, 11 March 1913, Minutes Book, HPLC.

46. Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library Board Meeting Minutes, 8 April 1913, Minutes Book, HPLC.

47. Smith to Ideson, 24 July 1913; Ideson to Smith, 31 July 1913; both, Box 8, HPLC.

48. Charles F. Smith, "Negro Boy Contributed Most Books," *Houston Post*, 19 April 1914, Box 8, HPLC.

49. Memorandum to the Honorable Ben Campbell, Mayor, and Commissioners of the City of Houston, Box 8, HPLC. Although unsigned and undated, internal evidence indicates it was written in May 1914 by E. O. Smith.

50. Bessie B. Osborne, "Report Sent Carnegie Corporation by Colored Carnegie Library." 26 October 1915, Box 8, HPLC.

51. "Annual Report of J. B. Bell, Treasurer, Colored Carnegie Library," *City Book of Houston.* (Houston: The City, 1916).

52. William F. Yust to Julia Ideson, 8 December 1910, Box 8, HPLC.

53. Ideson to Henry Havelock Dickson, n. d., Box 8, HPLC.

54. Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library Board Meeting Minutes, 8 October 1918, Minutes Book, HPLC.

55. McSwain, "Ideson," 49–50.

56. Ideson to individual members of the Houston Public Library Board, 14 February 1921, Box 8, HPLC.

57. Houston Public Library Board Meeting Minutes, 8 March 1921, Minutes Book, HPLC.

58. Finance Committee to A. E. Amerman, 9 April 1921, Box 8, HPLC.

59. "City Centralizes Library Control," *Houston Press*, 12 April 1921, clipping in Houston Public Library Scrapbook, 1921, HPLC.

60. Fayrene Neuman Mays, "A History of Public Library Service to Negroes in Houston, Texas, 1907–1962," (Master's Thesis, Atlanta University, 1964), 24.

61. "The Report of the Colored Carnegie Branch for the Month of July 1933," *Houston Public Library Monthly Reports, 1931–1933* (bound volume), HPLC.

62. Robert V. Haynes, *A Night of Violence: The Houston Riot of 1917* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 306–307; Wintz, "Blacks," 30–32. For a discussion of Houston newspaperman Cliff Richardson's blending of the philosophies of Washington, Du Bois, and Marcus Garvey, see Howard Beeth, "A Black Elite Agenda in the Urban South: The Call for Political Change and Racial Economic Solidarity in Houston During the 1920s." *Essays in Economic and Business History* 10 (1992): 41–55. The library itself played a part in fostering interest in black activism; in 1920 the library was the site for a meeting to discuss "Shall the Houston Branch of the N.A.A.C.P. Die for lack of Interest," "Important Notice," Houston Lyceum and Carnegie Library Scrapbook, 1919–1920, HPLC.

63. Settle to Ideson, 24 March 1913, Box 8, HPLC.

64. "Work with Negroes Round Table," *Papers and Proceedings of the Forty-Fourth Annual Meeting of the American Library Association held at Detroit, Michigan, June 26–July 1, 1922.* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1922), 362–363.

65. My assertions here allude to a long-standing discussion among historians of the U. S. South sparked by C. Vann Woodward's essays regarding the fluidity of immediate post-bellum race relations hardening into the rigidity of segregation by the turn of the century and Howard Rabinowitz's response, which characterized segregated services as a kind of middle era between exclusion and integration. See C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 7–8, and Howard N. Rabinowitz, *Race Relations in the Urban South, 1865–1890* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 331–332. Woodward discusses some of the work and criticism inspired by *Strange Career* in *American Counterpoint: Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1976), 234–264; and *Thinking Back: The Perils of Writing History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 81–99. Related books and articles, both supporting and refuting the Woodward thesis are discussed in Howard N. Rabinowitz, "More Than the Woodward Thesis: Assessing *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*," *Journal of American History* 75 (December 1988), 842–856; and C. Vann Woodward, "*Strange Career* Critics: Long May They Persevere," *Journal of American History* 75 (December 1988), 857–868.