

3-1972

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Zeigler, Robert E. (1972) "The Houston Worker: 1865-1890," *East Texas Historical Journal*: Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 9.

Available at: <http://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/ethj/vol10/iss1/9>

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THE HOUSTON WORKER: 1865-1890

By Robert E. Zeigler

Herbert Gutman, the prominent labor historian, argues in a recent essay that many commonly held generalizations concerning nineteenth century labor history do not apply to American workers in smaller towns and cities. The assumptions which Gutman challenges are:

those that insist that the worker was isolated from the rest of society; that the employer had an easy time and a relatively free hand in imposing the new [industrial] disciplines; that the spirit of the times, the ethic of the Gilded Age, worked to the advantage of the owner of industrial property; that workers found little if any sympathy from non-workers; that the quest for wealth obliterated nonpecuniary values; and that industrialists swept aside countless obstacles with great ease.¹

Gutman argues that small cities and towns maintained traditional pre-industrial values long after such values were discarded in large metropolitan areas. These older values tended to blunt the alienation and the class divisions that industrialism often brought. In small cities people lived and worked together, there was a sense of community in their daily lives, industries and industrialists were often viewed as being outsiders, and workers were an integral part of the community. Gutman uses various examples of successful labor activity and of public support for labor organizations to substantiate his findings.²

Many of Gutman's conclusions apply to nineteenth century Houston, the major exception being that Houston workers enjoyed few real successes prior to 1900.³ The failures, however, may to a large degree be attributed to the very absence of alienation which Gutman feels is important in explaining the public empathy with workers, an empathy which helped to limit the strength and power of industrialists. An examination of the working and living conditions of Houston workers during the period from 1865 to 1890 clearly establishes that most workingmen were skilled, relatively well off, and thoroughly integrated into the community. These circumstances served to weaken class divisions and helped to convince the workingman that he shared much in common with other citizens, as in fact he did.

In the quarter century following the Civil War Houston was similar to other, smaller developing urban areas. This is especially true in relation to rapid economic and population growth, and to the corresponding rise of a working class. Between 1870 and 1890 Houston manufacturing establishments increased in number from less than sixty-four to 210, and total capitalization multiplied almost five times, reaching three-and-one-half million dollars by 1890. Annual salaries and wages increased from 160 thousand dollars to one-and-one-third million during the same period. Additionally in the nineteenth century Houston had become an important trading center due to improvements in both water and rail transportation. In April 1876 work was completed on a channel project which allowed a ship drawing nine-and-one-half feet of water to travel Bolivar Channel, through the cut at Morgan's Point and on upstream to Sims Bayou, several miles from the central business district. Soon a

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railroad was in operation from the Sims Bayou terminal point to Houston.⁴ Also in 1893 ten railroad companies served Houston.⁵ The railroad shops, of which the Houston and Texas Central, the Houston East and West Texas, and the Southern Pacific were most extensive, accounted for the employment of 1,187 men with a monthly pay roll of \$72,274.91. In addition the Southern Pacific Company employed "at and entering Houston," 1,262 men receiving wages of \$76,886.21 per month.⁶

Industrial and commercial growth attracted immigrants and was in turn stimulated by increases in the population. Houston expanded from a city of 9,382 in 1870 to 27,557 in 1890. The growth rate was relatively consistent, 77 percent between 1870 and 1880 and 66.6 percent in the decade of the 1880's.⁷ While total population clearly increased, the percentage of foreign born showed a steady decline, dropping from over 16 percent in 1870 to 11.3 percent in 1890.⁸ Blacks, on the other hand, maintained a relatively consistent percentile rank during the late nineteenth century. In 1870 the Negro population in Houston made up 39.3 percent of the total. By 1890 the figure was 37.6 percent.⁹

Economic and population growth obviously increased the prosperity and importance of the city. Additionally it created a demand for labor of all types. Predictively, immediately following the Civil War, many Houstonians, and indeed most Texans, were concerned with the supposed "unreliability" of freedmen and with the companion problem of finding "trustworthy"—non-black—workers.¹⁰ It is true that one immediate objective was to obtain agricultural labor but citizens of cities such as Houston also exhibited an interest in enticing workers. Corporations were planned for the purpose of attracting Europeans to Texas and in 1866 Houstonians were involved in sending representatives to a state wide meeting in Galveston to determine "some immediate and practical plan for the encouragement of immigrants to the state."¹¹ The Germans of Houston formed an immigration club in the hope of attracting more of that nationality, and as late as 1887 the *Post* reported an enthusiastic meeting of Houstonians held for the purpose of discussing means of luring newcomers.¹² Although the success of these efforts is difficult to determine, the population growth of Houston clearly indicates that something attracted new arrivals to the city. Moreover, many of them were workingmen. Between 1865 and 1880 an average of 28 percent of Houston's population was classed as wage earners.¹³

Despite the increasing number of workers there was a continuing demand for labor. In 1871 the Houston and Great Northern Railroad was actively seeking hands through the columns of the *Galveston Daily News* and in the same year the *News* reported that young men in Houston could always find work, even in "dull" months.¹⁴ Again in 1880 the Texas and New Orleans Railroad was seeking labor and in 1890, according to the *Houston Daily Post*, there was work for everyone at "live and let live prices."¹⁵ The *Post* in 1889 reported painters and cabinet makers so busy they could not keep up with their work and expressed the view—or hope—of many residents, "Truly Houston is the workingman's paradise."¹⁶

Whether Houston was indeed a "paradise" is somewhat debatable, yet there is little doubt that high demand for labor made the worker a valued citizen.¹⁷ For example, throughout the period from 1865 to 1890 a high average of 47.20 percent—47.33 percent in 1870, 47.06 percent in 1880—of the white laborers were skilled males. Unskilled white males comprised only 20.41 percent of the white work force in 1870 and 18.16 percent in 1880. The remainder of the white male workers were engaged in either semi-skilled jobs and apprenticeships, or were employed in

some sort of lower white collar capacity such as clerks.¹⁸ It is also significant that the high percentage of skilled workers is applicable to all whites, even those of foreign birth.¹⁹ The high proportion of skilled workers meant that a similarly high proportion would enjoy some prestige and status in the community by virtue of possessing a needed trade.

In addition to the evident need for a rather large number of skilled workers in the city other favorable conditions also prevailed. The industries which were most common to Texas—sawmilling, blacksmithing, carpentry, printing, flour and grist milling—and to the Houston area—blacksmithing, bootmaking, carpentry, tinsmithing, and printing—helped during most of the period between 1865 and 1890 to produce an industrial labor force composed of relatively few women.²⁰ Likewise by 1880 a more nearly adequately supply of adult workers, improved wages, and better educational opportunity, along with the types of industries, served to significantly reduce the ratio of children employed in manufacturing.²¹ In 1870 the entire manufacturing work force in Harris County, excluding clerks, consisted of only 583 workers. Of these 5.83 percent were women and 13.21 percent were children. By 1890 there were 2,704 industrial wage earners in Houston alone.²² The percentages of women and children dropped to 4.5 and 3.06 respectively.²³ There were, however, many workers in the city who were not employed in manufacturing establishments. When all wage earning employment is considered the figures change somewhat. In 1870 white women comprised 7.85 percent of the white wage earners in the city while children made up only 3.38 percent. The percentage figures do, however, represent a small absolute number; there were only 143 white women and children employed in Houston in 1870. By 1880 the percentage of white women had increased to 8.25 percent and white children had dropped to 2.37 percent of the total work force. The figures represent a total of 179 employed white women and children. The number of white women and children employed, while not totally insignificant, is small and clearly indicates that women and child labor, among white workers, was not commonplace.²⁴

In addition to the low incidence of female and minor labor and the advantage most whites enjoyed by virtue of their skills, wages in Houston were for the most part on a par with or slightly above state and national levels. In 1870 the average Harris county worker employed in manufacturing establishments received \$292 annually or about a dollar a day for a six-day week. This compares favorably with the state average of \$225.53 a year but is well below the \$377.63 annual income of the average worker in the United States. It is probable, however, that many workers in the city earned substantially more than average. Indeed in 1875 the *Galveston Daily News* reported that salaries of Houston day laborers had only recently been reduced to \$1.30 per day.²⁵ By 1880 the typical Harris County industrial worker's wage had increased to almost \$1.30 per day for a six-day week, according to census reports, providing an annual income of \$373.80. In the state and nation, on the other hand, the annual averages were \$274.94 and \$346.90 respectively.²⁶

By 1890 the average wage in Houston industries was \$1.60 per day or \$462.42 annually. This pay was slightly above the state norm of \$435.38 a year as well as the national annual average wage of \$444.83.²⁷ There was, however, a substantial difference in the income of men, women, and children. The male operative in the city earned approximately \$1.82 daily or \$527.90 a year, while a male pieceworker averaged \$1.43 a day which amounted to \$411.95 annually. Women operatives, on the other hand, made a salary of \$1.05 a day, \$304.77 a year, while children in the same type jobs received only \$.98 a day for a six-day week.²⁸ Likewise in the 1880's there

was a vast difference in the amount earned by the skilled worker as opposed to the average operative. Statistics compiled by the Texas Knights of Labor indicate that in 1886 the skilled mechanic in Texas, and probably in Houston, earned from \$2.75 to \$4.50 per day. Assuming steady employment and a six-day week, this would provide an annual income of from \$729 to \$1296.²⁹ Although these wages are not exceptional, they are at least as good as those paid in other areas. Also between 1865 and 1890 the average Houston worker had seen his annual wage increase \$170.42. Additionally semi-skilled workers and clerks probably earned somewhat better than average pay while the skilled worker, who comprised almost one-half the white work force, was likely to enjoy earnings substantially higher than average.

Regardless of what wage the worker earned, it apparently was not sufficient to afford him the luxury of property ownership. In 1870 only 14.68 percent of the white workers owned real estate and a meager 4.4 percent claimed to have accumulated any personal property.³⁰ It is possible that home ownership was not common among any group in this period. This supposition is born out by an incessant demand for rent property. Early in 1868 a correspondent to the *Galveston Daily News* complained of high rents in Houston and expressed the thought that lower living cost would encourage immigration.³¹ Unfortunately for renters, landlords failed to accept this theory. As industry and population grew rent also increased.³² In 1893 workers were reportedly leaving Houston because of high housing cost. One of these complained that he was forced to pay \$30 a month for a story-and-a-half cottage with six rooms and a bath. To find such accommodations this worker was compelled to live fourteen blocks from his place of employment and spend \$2.50 a day for car fare.³³ This complaint may be exaggerated somewhat; newspaper advertisements in the 1890's indicate that five room cottages could be rented for about \$15 a month.³⁴ Even so, with an average wage in 1900 of \$503.32 an annual housing cost of \$180 would absorb an excessive 35.76 percent of a worker's total annual income. Moreover, in 1890 it cost the average family in the Houston area approximately \$260 a year for food. If this is added to the cost of rent the average worker would have only \$63.32 remaining for other expenses. Obviously the average were forced to live in a less spacious house and the skilled were often unable to set aside much of their salary.³⁵ By the mid 1880's, however, at least some workers had managed to accumulate some personal savings.

High living cost had other effects. Some tenants, especially those of limited income, were driven to adopt the expedience of moving from house to house leaving unpaid landlords in their wake. The unskilled were no doubt reduced to living in buildings such as one in the fourth ward described by a reporter for the *Galveston News* in 1885. The structure, according to the newsman, looked as if it had stood for generations without paint or repair. The roof "was bent and [the] shingles [were] rotten and displaced while [the] shutters hung loose from their broken fastenings."³⁶ The building was of several stories and the stairs were "narrow and rickety," almost "ladderlike."³⁷ The rooms "were bare of furniture except filthy-looking beds, trunks, and a few rickety chairs and washstands."³⁸ The reporter summed up his revulsion by concluding that "the whole scene could not do otherwise than inspire disgust in a well regulated person."³⁹

The worker, despite the fact that at times he paid high rent and lived in substandard housing, was thoroughly integrated into the community. In 1870 all wards contained a relatively equal proportion of workingmen, ranging from 39.16 percent in ward one to 31.72 percent in ward five. By 1880, because of increasing

industrialization in the northern part of the city, the fifth ward contained a higher proportion of workers—30.30 percent—than any other ward in Houston. This trend continued and after 1880 wards one and five, both in the northern part of Houston, became the ones in which the working class was the most influential.⁴⁰ This is not to say, however, that the majority of workers lived in these two wards. Indeed in 1870 and 1880 most laborers—62.80 percent in 1870, 59.10 percent in 1880—lived in wards three and four. Rather it appears that after 1880 workers became more numerous in relation to the entire population of the first and fifth wards and therefore could exert more influence on ward politics.⁴¹

Thus workingmen in Houston earned at least an average wage and many probably made more than average, they lived in all parts of the city, and most found it unnecessary—or perhaps impossible because of the nature of the economy—to have wives and children employed outside the home. Yet despite the favorable conditions enjoyed by the Houston worker, many were unable to save much money and were also forced to endure other hardships. Most wage earners probably worked at least ten hours a day and six days a week, while some labored for eleven or twelve hours a day.⁴² The effects of long hours and an absence of adequate safety precautions is clearly illustrated by the number of accidents in which workers were involved. Throughout the period between 1865 and 1890, the press makes frequent reference to mishaps, especially on trains and in railroad shops.⁴³ Accidents occurred for a variety of reasons. At times the employee failed to take proper precautions; on other occasions employees were to blame for not providing properly functioning equipment and facilities. Regardless of who or what was at fault for accidents which resulted in a worker's temporary injury, permanent disability, or death, he and his family had little beyond their own resources to fall back on. The skilled worker, if he belonged to a union, might receive some aid from his fellows; others were left entirely to the mercy of voluntary charity or to dependence on family or friends.

Additionally, laborers, especially the unskilled, were subject to the intermittent fluctuations in the financial condition of single corporations in the state and nation. Although times were relatively good until 1890, railroad workers, and possibly others, suffered periodic unemployment. In 1875 and 1886 the Houston and Texas Central reduced its work force; in 1877 The Central Road reduced wages and employees. Likewise in 1884 the Galveston, Harrisburg, and San Antonio Railroad twice laid off hands because of limited traffic, and in 1885 the Sunset Route cut the wages of office clerks.⁴⁴ While these examples appear isolated and in some instances are explainable by slumps which occurred in the national economy, similar incidents were probably not uncommon. Moreover, isolated or not, such cutbacks on the part of businesses were very real to the effected worker who could take little comfort in being either an isolated case or the victim of a nation wide recession. In addition to those who were temporarily unemployed due to dips in the business cycle, there is evidence of the continuing presence of a frequently jobless, permanent lower class which constantly moved from place to place, city to city. As the noted historian of nineteenth century urban and workingclass development Stephen Thernstrom has pointed out:

We know very little about these people, and it is difficult to know how we can learn much about them. You get only occasional glimpses...in the person of the tramp....⁴⁵

Throughout the period of 1865 to 1890, and indeed until 1914, there are numerous reports complaining of vagrants in Houston, certainly enough to verify that this class of workingman was present and was considered a nuisance in the city.⁴⁶

Workers also suffered from developments in the financial affairs of the city, developments which did not directly threaten the laborer's job but which could destroy the savings of a life time in the space of a few days or weeks. This sort of threat was both more subtle and less comprehensible than unemployment. When a man was laid off as an economic necessity he could at least rationalize some need for his loss and could, usually with justification, look forward to better times in the near future. When a bank or savings company failed, the worker saw his financial reserve or perhaps his property, both of which were uncommon under the best of conditions, wiped out in one fatal swoop. Adding to the hardship was the fact that those who lost the most were workers who were older, who had been employed a sufficient number of years to accumulate some savings.

One such calamity occurred in 1886. Late in 1885 the City Bank of Houston failed and this precipitated a run on the Houston Savings Bank.⁴⁷ On February 27, 1886, the *Galveston Daily News* reported that the Savings Bank, previously thought to be on firm financial footing, had not opened its doors on the morning of the twenty-sixth.⁴⁸ Most of the bank's depositors were wage earners, and the sentiment expressed by one dismayed laborer, "D-n banks on general principle. D-n poor government that can't protect its people from their outrages,"⁴⁹ was probably felt by all.⁵⁰ Newspapers reported the depositors "much depressed in spirits and...bitter in their language."⁵¹ Perhaps the report was referring to the worker who was quoted as saying, "If this sort of think is not soon stopped, men will be marching the streets with the red flag at the head of them."⁵²

No red flags were seen, however. Instead on October 1, 1886, it was announced that depositors would be paid off at thirty percent. The report carried with it the hope that another payment would be made at some later date.⁵³ Additionally a Houston wholesale grocer, William D. Cleveland, offered to pay off all interest deposits of \$100 or less. Cleveland said he knew most depositors "[were] persons of very limited means, to [whom] the loss [was] a serious hardship, and in some cases a real calamity."⁵⁴ He felt his contribution would allow him to be of "some service to [his] fellow man."⁵⁵ Cleveland's service cost him the tidy sum of \$11,326.⁵⁶ Obviously such a magnanimous gesture was exceptional; however, it is indicative of the good will which often existed between wage earners and businessmen.

Most workers, with the aid of men like Cleveland, managed to adjust to the uncertainties and hardships of their day to day lives. Some, however, vented their frustrations by indulging in bouts of drinking and violence, in seeking solace from prostitutes and preachers, or in the ultimate escape of suicide. It was a common occurrence for Houston workers to be arrested for drunkenness. Many merely indulged too freely on their way home from work; others deliberately embarked upon binges of several days duration. Often drunkenness led to violence. Such incidents ranged from fist fights to murder.⁵⁷ Occasionally distraught workers gave expression to their frustrations in rather comical yet revealing actions. In 1888 two railroad laborers were arrested for "disturbing the peace." They had "imbided too freely" and were discovered throwing rocks at the Santa Fe Depot.⁵⁸ This futile and childish gesture well expresses the sheer hopelessness many workers must have felt at being threatened by the business cycle and the faceless corporation.

For those who craved variety other means of escape were available. Revivals were held frequently and probably added a welcome break in the workers' often monotonous daily routine. Vice, especially prostitution, was also common and did no doubt provide yet another means of escaping the reality of day to day existence.⁵⁹ Some distraught members of the working class elected the final form of escape, suicide. The daily press frequently contains reports of laborers taking their own lives. Often the reports would contain brief, yet poignant statements such as "deceased was in reduced circumstances," "the supposed cause, destitution," "did so because he was unable to find steady employment," "victim said he was out of work and broke and wanted to die."⁶⁰

It is of course obvious that most wage earners did not kill themselves, and that many did not seek solace in excessive drink or mindless vice. The fact remains, however, that a number—although we cannot say how large a number—did engage in these actions. The insecurity the worker lived with in the nineteenth century, combined with his lack of understanding of the economy, or for that matter of the single corporation for which he worked, must have left him at times disillusioned, at times frustrated, and often angry. It is surprising that there was not more suicide, more crime, and more violence. Surprising at least until one recalls that the worker knew nothing else, thus he, like most Americans, learned to live with his hardships. Indeed as hard as his lot was it may well have been better than the conditions the European immigrant had endured in the old country or those which the rural immigrant had suffered on the farm.⁶¹ Also the brunt of such conditions was born by a minority of white workers; the skilled could avoid the more unbearable conditions. Moreover, the Houston worker could not have viewed his situation as unique. All citizens were subject to economic setbacks, accidents, and other hardships. Insecurity was a fact of life for most Houstonians, and this may well have led to a feeling of sameness or a sense of community among workers and non-workers.

Likewise, the worker in Houston found it natural to accept the values of the Gilded Age. These values of law, order, and hard work were equated with civic duty, patriotism, and Christianity. Additionally economic benefit, acceptance in society, and the respect of both peers and community leaders would and did come, even if in rather small doses, to those who accepted and lived by community mores.⁶² Also skilled workers, who made up almost half of white wage earners, gained more from the system than did the unskilled and were therefore probably looked to as leaders. Their success was testimony to the value of living according to accepted patterns. Moreover, the successful—the semi-skilled, the craftsman, and the white collar workers—were in the majority, this fact serving to increase both the worker's faith in the system and the larger communities belief that most wage earners were fellow citizens, not merely a "commodity." Rather than working solely to the benefit of the businessman, these values helped to make the worker a part of the community and served to provide him with some of the fruits of capitalistic activity.

Also helping to keep workers satisfied was the fact that community values did not reject workingmen's organizations. Indeed Houstonians, beginning in 1866, established unions which enjoyed rather rapid and sustained growth. By 1885 there were 1,190 organized workers in Houston, approximately 32.66 percent of the total work force. Of these 740 were Knights of Labor, and 370 belonged to the more exclusive trade unions.⁶³ All these unions gave workingmen a legitimate voice and were, from all available evidence, viewed by most citizens as acceptable social, civic, and economic organizations. To keep this reputation workingmen had to conduct themselves in a responsible manner, and for the most part they did.

Responsibility did not mean inaction. Political activity on the part of labor began early. In 1867 the *Galveston Daily News* reported that the majority of aldermen chosen in the previous city election were "mechanics."⁶⁴ In 1878 men endorsed by workers, after a split in the ranks of the Greenback Labor Party, won the positions of assessor-collector and alderman for ward two.⁶⁵ In 1886 Houston Knights of Labor, using what they called "Democratic Pressure", forced the city Democrats to nominate municipal candidates by convention rather than by committee.⁶⁶ Knights also used their influence to elect an alderman in 1884 and a mayor, D. C. Smith, in 1886 and 1888.⁶⁷ Such victories are clearly indicative of the worker's place in the community. Political success seldom comes to the alienated victims of industrialism.

In relation to traditional labor action Houston workers were active although they had not yet achieved sufficient unity to sustain a long walkout or to gain adequate support from workers not directly affected by the question at issue. Despite these weaknesses, workingmen who entered into strikes were not automatically condemned by the public, probably because they conducted themselves in an acceptable manner. For example, in 1872 employees of the Houston and Texas Central struck for higher wages. In the course of the futile two-week strike the men made every effort to prevent violence, advocated nothing stronger than social ostracism for strike-breakers, and received some support from the public. The strike failed simply because the road was able to hire new men.⁶⁸ In 1883 Houston telegraphers, probably not more than twenty in number, went out as part of a national strike. They secured the support of the Knights of Labor, received donations from the public, and even attempted to "discover and convict" persons who were sabotaging company equipment. Again the availability of men who were willing to break the strike caused the workers defeat.⁶⁹ In 1886 brakemen on the Southern Pacific went out in an effort to gain higher wages. After approximately five days the road began to lay off laborers and clerks, and soon 250 men in Houston were out of work. Despite this type of pressure, the workers refrained from violence and were, in less than a week, successful in winning their demands.⁷⁰ The features of these strikes—responsible behavior, poor organization, and frequently, defeat—are evident in others in the same period.

These defeats may be attributed, however, to the very characteristics of the worker's life which brought him benefits. Because he was often skilled, generally responsible, usually able to organize without opposition, and an integral part of the community, the Houston worker had a variety of loyalties. He was loyal to his city, his friends and neighbors, his family, his political party, his church, and no doubt to numerous other groups. The loyalties at times conflicted. When a conflict did occur the workingman, because of his position in the community, often found other interests more compelling than labor solidarity. Had he been alienated and persecuted a stronger class consciousness may have developed and more success in the sense of acting in accord with other workers might have been more quickly achieved.

The fact is that many Houston workers were skilled, made a fairly good wage, were usually able to avoid the social hardships of having their entire family employed, lived all over the city under conditions which were probably not a great deal worse than those of other citizens, and, judging from their actions, were a responsible part of the community. There is no evidence to indicate that any significant number of white workers made up an alienated class; conditions actually served to make the opposite true. As a result labor activity was not necessarily viewed with hostility or suspicion on the part of the larger community. Instead of carrying the odious brand of "radicals" or "labor agitators" Houston wage earners were probably looked upon as friends or acquaintances who made worthwhile contributions to the prosperity of the

city.⁷¹ All of these many features of the worker's life helped to create, in Houston, Texas, the sense of community which Gutman suggests existed in many nineteenth century American towns and cities.

FOOTNOTES

¹Herbert G. Gutman, "The Worker's Search for Power," in *The Gilded Age* edited by H. Wayne Morgan (Syracuse, N.Y., 1970), 33. For a brief survey of the status of Texas Labor History see F. Ray Marshall, "Some Reflections on Labor History," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, LXXV, 137-157. One may question Marshall's insistence that there are a "number" of studies on various aspects of Texas labor history. Marshall cites seventeen such studies, many of them being unpublished theses and dissertations. It is also curious that Marshall fails to mention the opportunity for research provided by the Texas Labor Archives, University of Texas at Arlington, Arlington, Texas.

²Gutman, "The Worker's Search for Power," 31-54.

³The inclusive dates 1865 to 1890 are chosen because the labor movement in Houston began in 1866. In 1889 the Houston Labor Council was established and the movement entered a new phase. Thus 1890 is a logical closing date. Also Gutman's study, and therefore the basis for comparison, deals exclusively with the nineteenth century.

⁴*Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Manufactures*, 572; Mary Alice Lavender, "Social Conditions in Houston and Harris County, 1869-1872" (M.A. Thesis, Rice University, 1950), 27; *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, Manufactures*, II, 250; *Houston City Directory 1887-1888* (Houston, 1888), 333-357. The total industries in the 1890 census do not always correspond with the figures given for individual industries. Attempts were made to correct the errors in totals, but in view of the error in totals there may be errors in the individual industry statistics also. Therefore the figures for Houston in 1890 may be incorrect. Considering that there were 145 establishments in Houston in 1900, the 1890 figures may be inflated or the Panic of 1893 which did hit hard in the city may account for the decline. See also Marilyn McAdams Sibley, *The Port of Houston: A History* (Austin, 1968), 100-101. This work is an excellent history of the entire ship channel project.

⁵*Houston City Directory 1892-1893* (Houston, 1892-1893), 76-81.

⁶*Houston Daily Post*, September 25, 1891.

⁷*Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Population*, III, 852.

⁸*Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Population*, 272, 273; *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, Population*, I, 608-611. In 1890 the four top foreign groups were Germans with 46.4 percent of the total foreign population, English, 12.6 percent, Irish 15.1 percent, and Italians 6.3 percent.

⁹*Ninth Census of the United States, 1870, Population*, 272-273; *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890, Population*, I, 540-549.

¹⁰See the *Galveston Daily News*, June 22, 1866, February 12, 1868, September 8, 1869, for examples of the fear of black labor and the desire to locate another source.

¹¹*Galveston Daily News*, May 26, 1866. See also Fred C. Cole, "The Texas Career of Thomas Affleck" (Ph.D. dissertation, L.S.U., 1942).

¹²*Galveston Daily News*, June 24, 1871; *Houston Daily Post*, December 17, 1887.

¹³Ninth Census of the United States, Manuscript Returns, Houston, Harris County, Texas, 1870; Tenth Census of the United States, Manuscript Returns, Houston, Harris County, Texas, 1880. The exact figure is 28.27 percent. Manuscript returns from 1890 were destroyed by fire. Thus there is no way to determine the total number of wage earners in that year. The census summary provides only the statistics for manufacturing establishments. The 28.27 percent figure is misleading. In 1870, 27.39 percent of the white population were wage earners while 53.10 percent of the blacks were workers. In 1880, 16.81 percent of the white population was wage earners, while 33.90 percent of the blacks were workers.

¹⁴*Galveston Daily News*, April 6, 1871, July 20, 1871.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, July 23, 1880; *Houston Daily Post*, May 23, 1890.

¹⁶*Houston Daily Post*, August 8, 1889.

¹⁷Black workers were largely relegated to the position of unskilled labor and constitute a distinct group, differing from both native and foreign born whites.

¹⁸Ninth Census of the United States, Manuscript Returns, Houston, Harris County, Texas, 1870; Tenth Census of the United States, Manuscript Returns, Houston, Harris County, Texas, 1880. Workers who listed themselves as having a trade were considered skilled. A few types of employment such as "apprentice carpenters", "draymen", and the like were classed as semi-skilled. Unskilled workers include such listings as "laborers", "railroad laborers", "wood cutters", etc.

¹⁹The Irish are the only foreign born group with a high percentage of unskilled workers—36.66 percent in 1870, 54.76 percent in 1880. However, these figures are not especially significant in light of the small number of Irish workers in the city. There were 90 in 1870 and 84 in 1880.

²⁰The 1870 and 1880 census summaries provide manufacturing only for Harris County, not Houston. For comparisons sake, Harris County is used.

²¹*Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Manufactures*, 573-574; *Eleventh Census of the United States 1890: Manufactures*, II, 174-181, 226-229, 250-253, 526-533. Most Harris County women were employed in cotton bag factories, an overall factory, bakeries, laundries, and after the telephone became common, by the phone company. Children in Harris County were employed by foundries, bakeries, lumber concerns, and printing shops. At times census reports designate children as males under sixteen and females under 15. At other times all under sixteen considered children. In evaluating manuscript returns, all under sixteen years of age were considered children.

²²*Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Manufactures*, 572. *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Manufactures*, 5, 9, 360; *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890: Manufactures*, I, 68, 69; II, 250.

²³*Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Manufactures*, 572. *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880: Manufactures*, 5, 9, 360; *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890: Manufactures*, I, 66, 69; II, 250.

²⁴Ninth Census of the United States, Manuscript Returns, Houston, Harris County, Texas, 1870; Tenth Census of the United States, Manuscript Returns, Houston, Harris County, Texas, 1880.

²⁵*Ninth Census of the United States, 1870: Manufactures*, 572, 392; *Galveston Daily News*, December 3, 1875. Wage statistics for this period include clerks as company officers; therefore, they are not included with wage earners. In computing the total workers from manuscript returns the author did include clerks because in Houston this group formed unions and seemed to identify more closely with labor than with management.

²⁶*Tenth Census of the United States: 1880: Manufactures*, 5, 9, 360.

²⁷*Eleventh Census of the United States 1890, Manufactures*, I, 67-69; II, 250. These figures were based upon the 1890 census summary which appears to be inflated as to total establishments and workers for Houston but more accurate when average wages are concerned.

²⁸*Ibid.*, II, 250. The state average for male wage earners was \$456.10 a year, \$253.07 for women, and \$125.37 for children. Nationally the average was \$498.71 for men, \$267.97 for women, and \$137.53 for children.

²⁹District Assembly No. 78, Knights of Labor, *Proceedings of the First Annual Session* (Fort Worth, Texas, 1886), 15. The wages given, with the exception of the 1886 figures, are based upon census reports of average annual wages. The daily pay scale is, therefore, figured on a six day week and assumes steady employment. This may well mean that daily wages are somewhat deflated. The Knights of Labor report lists painters, tanners, carpenters, brick masons, stone masons, stone cutters, printers, engineers, blacksmiths, "and all trades" as "skilled mechanics."

³⁰Ninth Census of the United States, Manuscript Returns, Houston, Harris County, Texas, 1870. The 1880 manuscript returns do not designate property ownership. In 1890, 33.21 percent of all families in Houston owned their homes, yet a Bureau of Labor Statistics Report (Texas) for 1913-1914 lists only 9.73 percent of the 13,108 Harris County workers reporting were home owners.

³¹*Galveston Daily News*, March 28, 1868.

³²*Ibid.*, September 3, 1868, February 21, 1871.

³³*Houston Daily Post*, August 21, 1893.

³⁴*Ibid.*, November 19, 1893; October 26, 1895.

³⁵*Ibid.*, April 16, 1887. Ruth A. Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers: An Economic and Social Picture* (Austin, 1961), 125.

³⁶*Galveston Daily News*, August 23, 1885.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸*Ibid.*

³⁹*Ibid.* The reporter happened to see the building because of a murder which occurred there. The reporter was, however, clearly as disgusted by the filth of the building as he was by the murder scene.

⁴⁰Ninth Census of the United States, Manuscript Returns, Houston, Harris County, Texas, 1870. Tenth Census of the United States, Manuscript Returns, Houston, Harris County, Texas, 1880. The census taken in 1880 combined part of ward four with ward one. Thus the percentages of workers in one and four is uncertain.

⁴¹Newspaper stories throughout the period refer to the fifth and first as the wards in which workers exerted the most influence. Ninth Census of the United States, Manuscript Returns, Houston, Harris County, Texas, 1870. The 1880 figures are approximations only due to the peculiarity of the census taker. See Footnote 36. Foreign born and blacks were also evenly dispersed throughout the wards. However, manuscript census returns do indicate black pockets of several blocks within wards.

⁴²This is a guess and probably a conservative one. In 1909 nine or ten hours a day and a six day week was the norm. By 1914 eight or nine hours and six days a week was common. See Texas Bureau of Labor Statistics, First Report 1909-1910, 172-173, 226-232; Texas Bureau of Statistics, Third Report 1913-1914, 48-50, 82-83; B. H. Carroll, Jr., *Standard History of Houston, Texas* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1912), 307-312.

⁴³For examples see *Galveston Daily News*, March 24, 1867, November 15, 1868, April 30, 1873; June 28, 1873, November 23, 1882; September 16, 1885; *Houston Daily Post*, July 2, 1889; May 16, 1892. These are merely examples of numerous reports of accidents carried in the local press.

⁴⁴*Galveston Daily News*, July 16, 1875, January 15, 1886, April 5, 1877, May 31, 1885. *Houston Daily Post*, January 16, 1884, March 19, 1884.

⁴⁵Stephen Thernstrom, "Urbanization, Migration, and Social Mobility in Late Nineteenth-Century America," in *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History*, edited by Barton J. Bernstein (New York: 1968), 169.

⁴⁶See *Galveston Daily News*, November 9, 1867, March 19, 1874, January 16, 1876, September 17, 1880, December 4, 1885, October 1, 1911, December 18, 1911; *Houston Daily Post*, January 11, 1889, for reports of tramps. These are merely examples of numerous similar reports. There were 1,344 vagrants arrested in 1902, 704 in 1908.

⁴⁷*Galveston Daily News*, December 20, 1885.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, February 17, 1886.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, March 5, 1886.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, February 27, 1886.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, February 28, 1886.

⁵²*Ibid.*, February 27, 1886.

⁵³*Ibid.*, October 21, 1886, November 4, 1886.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, March 11, 1886.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*

⁵⁶*Ibid.* It is interesting to note that Cleveland had not always been a friend to all workers. In January, 1886, at a meeting of the Knights of Labor District Assembly No. 78 a resolution was proposed by Houston delegates declaring a boycott against *The Houston Age*, an anti-labor paper, and condemning "Mr. W. D. Cleveland... who had come to the assistance of said paper...." See District Assembly No. 78, Knight of Labor, *Proceedings of the First Annual Session*, 1886. Workers were of course also subject to the loss of their homes and other property by the frequent fires which occurred in the city. Daily newspapers made frequent reports of such occurrences.

⁵⁷For some examples of drunkenness and violence involving workers see *Galveston Daily News*, March 30, 1873, April 2, 1873, April 11, 1873, May 6, 1874, June 20, 1874, December 16, 1874, August 7, 1875, December 29, 1876. *Houston Daily Post*, December 30, 1883, September 10, 1893.

⁵⁸*Houston Daily Post*, August 30, 1888

⁵⁹*Galveston Daily News*, July 23, 1875, August 5, 1875, March 17, 1886, May 4, 1886. *Houston Daily Post*, June 25, 1895, July 2, 1895, September 17, 1895. Numerous revivalists ministered to the entire population. "Sin Killer" Griffin worked exclusively with blacks.

⁶⁰See *Houston Daily Post*, July 4, 1894, December 25, 1888; *Galveston Daily News*, March 25, 1873, February 23, 1873, November 19, 1875, May 7, 1887, June 9, 1880, June 14, 1875, November 6, 1874.

⁶¹For support of this view of the reason for workingman complacency see Thernstrom, "Urbanization, Migration, and Social Mobility in Nineteenth Century America."

⁶²The dislike of "radicalism" or "agitators" by most nineteenth century Americans is obvious. This does not mean that workers could not take steps to correct abuse, but the steps had to be in accordance with other values. Workers were forced to operate within the framework of public opinion and to be successful had to court public sympathy.

⁶³The percentage is based upon the work force in 1880. It was larger in 1885 thus the percentage is possibly inflated. Also eighty of the workers belonged to the Ancient Order of United Workmen which was more of a benevolent organization than a traditional union. Also a worker might belong to a trade union and to a local of the Knights of Labor. In 1885 there were five assemblies of Knights in Houston and one in Harrisburg with a combined membership of 740. There were seven trade organizations with a membership of 370. The Ancient Order was comprised of about eighty members. *Galveston Daily News*, October 25, 1885; Knights of Labor, *Proceedings of the First Annual Session of D.A. No. 78, 4-5*; *Houston City Directory 1884-1885* (Houston: 1885), 344-347; *Galveston Daily News*, October 25, 1885.

⁶⁴*Galveston Daily News*, January 10, 1867.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, January 7, 1879, March 11, 1880.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, February 19, 1886, February 23, 1886.

⁶⁷*Houston Daily Post*, March 18, 1888, March 15, 1888, April 8, 1888, November 17, 1886, December 23, 1887, February 2, 1888, March 7, 1888; *Galveston Daily News*, March 3, 1886, April 8, 1886.

⁶⁸*Galveston Daily News*, June 6, 1872, June 9, 1872, June 12, 1872, June 7, 1872, June 8, 1872, June 11, 1872; *Houston Daily Telegraph*, June 8, 1872. See also Reese, "Early History of Labor Organizations in Texas," 16-17.

⁶⁹*Houston Daily Post*, July 18, 1883, July 26, 1883, July 27, 1883, July 28, 1883, July 31, 1883, August 2, 1883, August 19, 1883.

⁷⁰*Galveston Daily News*, February 15, 1886, February 21, 1886, February 17, 1886, February 19, 1886, February 18, 1886, February 20, 1886. There are other strikes which occurred during the period between 1865 and 1890, most of which follow a similar pattern. The major exceptions are strikes involving blacks. When these occurred, public opinion was often more hostile and the city was much more inclined to call out troops for protection. Troops did not, however, actually break even these strikes. See Zeigler, "Minorities in the Houston Labor Movement."

⁷¹See Robert E. Zeigler, "The Houston Labor Movement 1865-1914" (unpublished paper read at the fall meeting of the East Texas Historical Association, October 9, 1971).