INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI
University Microfilms International
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700 800/521-0600
Preservation and the cultural politics of the past on historic Galveston Island

Castaneda, Terri Alford, Ph.D.

Rice University, 1993
PREPARATION AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF THE PAST ON HISTORIC GALVESTON ISLAND

BY

TERRI ALFORD CASTANEDA

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

George P. Marcus, Professor, Director
Department of Anthropology

Sharon Traweek, Associate Professor
Department of Anthropology

Elizabeth Long, Associate Professor
Department of Sociology

Houston, Texas

April, 1993
Copyright
Terri Alford Castaneda
1993
ABSTRACT

Preservation and the Cultural Politics of the Past on Historic Galveston Island

by

Terri Alford Castaneda

During the Victorian era, Galveston Island, Texas, was a cosmopolitan port-city, the second wealthiest city in the nation based on per capita income. In 1900, its good fortune was dramatically reversed when a hurricane struck the Island, killing more than 6,000 people and leveling much of the city. Although Galveston never regained its prominence as a shipping and financial center, it did gain notoriety of a different sort—as a haven for prostitution, rum-running, and gambling. Vestiges of this mottled past are visible today, as the rich and poor live cheek by jowl, their respective Victorian mansions and shotgun houses abutting each other at more than the occasional turn.

A resort island for much of its existence, Galveston has an old and indigenous discourse of the self (Islanders) and the other (Mainlanders, tourists, and non-native residents). And like many tourist towns and settings, it also has an internal discourse about itself as the cultural other. This
discourse is about the islandness that constitutes Galveston’s "authentic" cultural otherness, as distinct from the touristic islandness, by which it commodifies and markets itself to outsiders.

In the mid 1980s, the Island experienced an identity crisis grounded in the political economy of tourism and ushered in by a period of self-representation that parlayed a denatured historical past into cultural and economic capital. Galveston Island, in the late 20th century, was a city in the throes of historic preservation. As a form of cultural and historical production, preservation requires the privileging of certain periods and images of the past, and the suppression, if not outright erasure of others. The Galveston Historical Foundation, has been remarkably successful in this regard. For nearly a decade its hegemony remained virtually uncontested. But in the mid 80s, a series of political referendums designed to reintroduce gambling to the Island (this time by legal means), pitted the Victorian era-past against an explicitly resort-island past and exposed the symbolic connections between the patronage of preservation by the Island’s dynastic families, and their opposition to gambling as a threat to the preservation of their ancestral milieu.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research generously funded the fieldwork on which this dissertation is based, while the Office of Graduate Studies at Rice University funded preliminary investigation in the form of a summer research grant. I am indebted to both institutions for their financial support.

This project would never have taken shape had George Marcus, who directed the dissertation, not suggested Galveston, Texas to be an unequaled setting in which to study cultural production and patronage. His scholarship (resulting in part from his own fieldwork on Galveston's dynastic elite) and his personal guidance and support throughout my graduate program, have been critical in bringing this work to fruition. Sharon Traweek, who studies the production of culture and knowledge among physicists and other communities of scientists in both America and Japan, was able to guide me through components of my fieldwork and analysis that I found to be particularly difficult and complex. Without her help in this regard, and her unflagging personal support, I might still be struggling to traverse some rather formidable and poorly-mapped terrain. Elizabeth Long brought to the project her own sociological expertise in the fields of American popular culture and feminist theory. Her reading of the manuscript brought to the fore timely insights regarding the engendering
of history and place on Galveston Island, further expanding a line of inquiry I was investigating at Dr. Traweek's suggestion. Richard Handler, at the University of Virginia, generously served as an external reader for the dissertation at a time when his professional commitments were already beyond reason. His early work on the politics of culture in Quebec inspired much of my own research and helped me to conceptualize the substantive and theoretical aspects of the dissertation itself. I am deeply indebted to him for his meticulous reading of the manuscript and his invaluable commentary and advice.

Other members of the Anthropology Department at Rice University advised me on various aspects of the dissertation. I particularly want to thank Stephen Tyler, Julie Taylor, and Michael Fischer for their interest and counsel. During the course of my graduate program, a number of fellow students or visiting scholars gave valuable time to critique grant proposals, read dissertation chapters, or provide references. In this regard, I offer many thanks to Brenda Bright, Melissa Cefkin, Bruce Grant, Helen Haskell, Diana Hill, Laura Helper, Jamer Hunt, Susan Kellogg, Adria LaViolette, Gaile McGregor, Hamid Naficy, Pam Smart, Beth Tudor and Luise White. Gaile McGregor deserves a second round of thanks for text-editing the entire manuscript. I also wish to thank Barbara Podratz and Carol Speranza for their attention to the administrative matters relating to the project.
Countless Galvestonians have contributed to this work. It is an impossible task to thank them all individually, so I will begin the effort of acknowledging their contributions in a more general fashion, by noting my tremendous debt to the community at-large. Nonetheless, a number of people provided help of either a professional or personal nature for which I am particularly grateful; that list of individuals includes Peter Brink, Lennie Brown, Patrick Butler, Franka Correa, Virginia Eisenhour, Richard Eisenhour, Andy Hall, Gwen Marcus, Betty Massey, Olivia Meyer, Jerry Moore, Robert Moore, Bill and Claudia Stevens, Diane Stevens, and Leonora "Nonie" Thompson.

I am indebted to the Galveston Historical Foundation for placing its administrative records in public trust at the Rosenberg Library’s Galveston and Texas History Center. These archival documents bear witness to the remarkable commitment and tireless work of the Foundation, its staff, and its benefactors. Thanks are also due to Casey Greene, who served as the Center’s assistant archivist during the time I conducted my research. He patiently retrieved box after box of uncataloged GHF material, helped me to sort through and make sense of it, and brought to my attention other works relevant to my project.

I also owe thanks to a number of individuals at institutions with which I was affiliated during the course of my graduate tenure. The late Dr. Thomas Pulley, and Truett
Latimer, who succeeded him as Director of the Houston Museum of Natural Science where I worked from 1978-1987, both permitted me to maintain a schedule of hours that would accommodate my enrollment at Rice in the mid 80s as a full-time graduate student; and at the University of Houston-Clear Lake, where I began teaching part-time in 1987, Doug Holmes, Mary Hodge, Priscilla Weeks, Jim Lester, and Barbara Butler provided friendship and moral support. Additionally, a number of my students at UH-CL, who either lived or worked in nearby Galveston, offered important perspectives on my research. Among these individuals, Claudia Stevens, Bill Hadley, and Robbie Brewington were especially helpful.

My friends Sandra Dudley, Sherra Theisen, and Laurie Zimmerman, are owed my heartfelt thanks and the promise to see them through their own dissertations with the same measure of encouragement, patience, and emotional support. My family sustained me and put up with me in a way no one but family can or will. I want to thank my parents, Al and Peggy Alford, for their love and help over the rough spots in life, and my husband, Chris, and children, Courtney and Ramsey, for all the fun they have been and for enduring my preoccupation. Courtney, who has lived with and literally endured this dissertation nearly all her young life, is old enough to know she deserves extra thanks. So thanks again, Courtney; this is dedicated to you.
PRESERVATION AND THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF THE PAST
ON HISTORIC GALVESTON ISLAND

Introduction 1

Chapter 1  Galveston 19

Chapter 2  Historic Preservation 44

Chapter 3  Historic Galveston 89

Chapter 4  Galveston: The Timeless Island 156

Chapter 5  The Cultural Politics of the Past 218

Chapter 6  Conclusion 265

Bibliography 271
PREFACE

When I began the fieldwork for this dissertation, anthropology's so-called crisis of representation was in full swing (e.g. Clifford and Marcus 1986, Marcus and Fischer 1986). Anthropology had reached an age and level of self-reflection that begged coming to terms not only with a disciplinary biography entangled in the ideology and political economy of colonialism, but with the epistemological presumptions and limitations of social scientific positivism. Called into fundamental question was ethnography's privileged voice and claim to an authoritative representation of the cultural other (cf. Said 1978; Clifford 1988:21-45).

What I encountered in the late 1980s on Galveston Island was a similar crisis of representation. This one was grounded in the political economy of tourism and ushered in by a period of self-representation that parlayed a denatured historical past into cultural and economic capital. Galveston Island, in the late 20th century, was a city in the throes of historic preservation.

Queen City of the Gulf. Wall Street of the Southwest. Sin City. Houston's Playground. Oleander City. Historic Galveston. The Island has been known by many more names than these. Whether self-descriptions or outsiders' labels, for Galvestonians these names conjure cultural myths and imagery
associated with life on the Island during a variety of historical pasts.

Historic preservation, which began in earnest in Galveston in the mid 1970s, required the privileging of certain of these cultural images, and the suppression if not outright erasure of others. The Galveston Historical Foundation (GHF), the Island's most prolific producer of cultural knowledge and tradition, has been remarkably successful in this privileging task. For nearly a decade its hegemony remained virtually uncontested in a field of numerous other cultural players. Although the GHF's representations of island history and culture have been parodied by the local literati on more than one occasion,¹ only very recently did they become critically challenged through formal political process.

In many ways the GHF was an innocent bystander, an unsuspecting pawn, in the actual events that fomented island politics in the late 1980s. The crisis surfaced in the form of a series of heated campaigns that, among other things, questioned the authenticity of particular cultural myths and images and laid self-consciously bare the professionalized nature of cultural production on contemporary Galveston Island.

The political campaigns that catalyzed Galveston's crisis

¹ Most especially (and effectively) by Steve Long and his gang at InBetween Magazine.
of self-representation were initiated by certain on and off-island contingents who aimed to introduce legalized casino gambling to the Island. These parties met with local resistance early-on but nevertheless petitioned to hold a series of non-binding referendums to rally support for their cause and determine public opinion on the matter. The economic benefits and liabilities of introducing casino gambling to Galveston were the subject of the resulting debates, but the language in which this issue was argued was a decidedly cultural one, couched in a discourse of history that exploited nostalgia, popular memory, and the politics of dynastic wealth and patronage.

That a debate supposedly about the Island's economic development should be argued in historical rhetoric is interesting on several counts. Galveston has a history of casino gambling and related illegal activities dating from the 1920s through the 1950s. "History" is, moreover, the Island's current lingua franca, and a commodity for sale in stores and on street corners. But more significant than either of the above is the fact that daily life on Galveston Island is wrought with a strong historical consciousness—one Galvestonians claim was born more than a century ago of the realities of geographic insularity and vulnerability. Galveston cradles within this historic consciousness a strong sense of itself as culturally distinct.

A resort island for much of its existence, Galveston has
an old and indigenous discourse of the self (Islanders) and the other (Mainlanders, tourists, and non-native residents). And, as is the case in many tourist towns and settings, it also has an internal discourse about itself as the cultural other. This discourse is about the cultural otherness that constitutes the real Galveston (something knowable to natives alone), as distinct from the obvious cultural otherness by which it represents and markets itself to outsiders (e.g. 32 miles of sandy beaches and so many city-blocks of Victorian history).²

Galveston's discourse of self and other is a taken-for-granted cultural phenomenon. If there has been any concern over the ramifications of its existence, it has mostly been a worry over how tourists will take the bad treatment this talk sometimes engenders. So, it was without much creative effort, but with vast strategic insight that the cultural discourse of history, and of the self and the other, ultimately became appropriated by both sides of the gambling issue. Nevertheless, the degree of success with which this discourse was manipulated and the emotive force with which it rallied voters to one side or the other, was surprising.

Although Galveston's gambling controversy was not the

² Still further categories of cultural otherness specific to Islanders themselves have recently been generated as a result of historic preservation and the demarcation of historic neighborhoods distinct from others of supposed non-historic origin. (These are discussed in Chapter 3.)
INTRODUCTION

In the Spring of 1988, on a flight from Houston to Los Angeles, I decided to browse through Spirit, Southwest Airline’s monthly magazine. Naturally, it was filled with articles and ads about enchanting tourist destinations. Tahiti, Bora Bora, Jamaica, Rarotonga--I casually thumbed through page after page with only passing interest. Then suddenly, I stopped. What lay before me was a two-page spread featuring a panorama of captivating architecture and inviting palm trees set against a sunset rich in orange and lavender hues. "Imagine a Romantic Island," read the ad. "Kissed by the centuries, hugged by a gentle bay and pounding surf...a rare and magical place. A turn-of-the-century seaport island in renaissance."

"Now that looks like a proper place for an anthropologist to do research," I said to myself with both surprise and satisfaction. Only later did I realize how doubly ironic my momentary reaction to this image and text had been. For this photograph was but a startling view of a familiar place--Galveston Island--where for nearly half a year I had been engaged in ethnographic fieldwork.

Several weeks before, sitting amidst the well-heeled members of the Galveston Historical Foundation’s Board of Directors, I had learned the the Galveston Parks Board was
about to launch a $250,000.00 "image campaign." Designed to integrate the City's emerging historical identity with its long-standing reputation as a beach/resort-destination, this campaign marked a watershed of cooperation among the various sectors involved in Galveston's self-promotion. I left this meeting anxious to see the artwork and copy for this campaign, since the Island's prolific and self-conscious production of cultural myth and image was the very subject of my fieldwork. Nonetheless, I was completely unprepared for my first encounter with that $250,000.00 image. Despite my prior knowledge of the campaign (not to mention years of graduate training in a department fully committed to anthropological engagement in familiar, rather than exotic, cultural settings), my initial response embodied all the romantic notions one expects to find in impressionable tourists and anthropology undergraduates.

I relate this incident because it speaks to the nature and condition of cultural production in the consumer-driven, late-20th century. That my personal experiences and understanding of Galveston Island were momentarily suspended in favor of the romantic image conveyed by the visual and textual poetry of this advertisement speaks to the potential (in fact, achieved) success of this campaign in terms of its targeted market audience.¹ That signed, limited edition

¹ A September 11, 1988 article appearing in the Galveston Daily News noted that the summer of 1988 had been the best in the last five years and credited the "Imagine a Romantic
prints of this same photograph can today be found framed and
mounted on countless walls throughout the city of Galveston
says a great deal about the importance of cultural identity
and self-image to Islanders themselves.

Galveston Island is located approximately two miles off
the upper-gulf coast of Texas. During the Victorian era,
Galveston was a cosmopolitan port-city, the second wealthiest
city in the nation based on per capita income. In 1900, its
good fortune was dramatically reversed when a massive
hurricane struck the Island, killing more than 6,000 people
and leveling much of the city. Although Galveston never
regained its former prominence as a shipping and financial
center, it did gain notoriety of a different sort—as a haven
for prostitution, rum-running, and gambling. Vestiges of this
mottled past can easily be seen today on this tiny barrier
island, as the rich and poor live cheek-by-jowl, their
respective Victorian mansions and shotgun houses abutting each
other at more than the occasional turn. Like hundreds of
small towns across America, this economically depressed resort
island is self-consciously exploiting its past through historic preservation.

The "Imagine a Romantic Island" image campaign entreats
tourists to visit "Historic Galveston Island." Where similar
promotions from bygone decades might lure the visitor to Gulf
seafood, sport fishing, and sunny beaches, this one sells
History and Islandness. Although they are symbolically wed in this advertisement, at the current moment, the two are mutually exclusive domains.²

Herein lies the greatest paradox of cultural self-representation in contemporary Galveston. Since at least the turn-of-the-century, historical consciousness has been the font of Galveston’s culturally distinctive sense-of-self. As constitutive elements of this historical consciousness, History and Islandness have long served as the cumulative categories of cultural experience—coefficients of each other—one inevitably invoking the other. Their existence as tacit cultural categories changed radically during the 1970s and 1980s, as they became reified, counterposed, and appropriated as signifiers of culturally discreet places and times. By the late 1980s, these new distillations of older, more ambiguous sets of indigenous meanings and associations had been fully rendered into potent cultural and political categories as a convoluted function of the privileging discourse and practice of historic preservation.

Research Design

In Galveston today, history is a commodity of both the

² Only after much debate does a trolley system finally connect the beach to the restored, Victorian-era commercial district, making it easy for visitors attracted to one destination to sample the offerings of the other. The primary beneficiary of this system is the Strand Historic District, which now sees more beach-goers and retail dollars than it did prior to the trolley implementation.
economic and cultural variety. By commodity, I mean something that can be bought and sold, with a value that can be traded upon like a kind of currency or capital (cf. Appadurai 1986, Bourdieu 1984). In the chapters that follow, I explore the changing social matrix and role of the historical past in the commercial production and public interpretation of cultural myth and imagery on "Historic Galveston Island."

In this study, I discuss Galveston Island as a specific, but not atypical example of cultural process as it is played out within the context of local-level historic preservation. I focus in particular upon the intersection of historic preservation with cultural representation, entrepreneurship, and patronage in order to demonstrate the ways in which different aspects and interpretations of Galveston’s history are appropriated by various public and private entities and promoted as authentic representations of the Island’s cultural past and present.

Scholarly historians of Galveston generally identify three periods in the Island’s development: The Early Period (Spanish Contact - 1860), the Victorian Era or Gilded Age (1860 - 1900), and Decline (1900 - the 1960s). Occasionally a fourth, recent period is added to this chronology: Cultural Renaissance, which covers the mid 1960s to the present. Other chronologies and periodizations (as I will later explain) can be found in various forms of popular historical documentation—museum exhibits, preservation literature, amateur
publications, and autobiographical accounts—but most professional historians adhere to the three-period chronology outlined above.

My own research design splits Galveston's history into two approximate periods: the mid 1800s to the 1960s, and 1973 to the present. This division is based upon the changing role of history in the self-conscious production of cultural knowledge and imagery. The beginning date of my second period (1973) is marked by the hiring of a preservation lawyer to direct the Galveston Historical Foundation, and thus, with the onset of a period of cultural production based on the formal interpretation and representation of specific aspects of the Island's history. I treat the preceding century as a single period in which Galvestonians were culturally informed by their history in an informal, albeit fundamental way.

Fieldwork: Problems and Methodologies

I began this project in order to study the politics of culture in the non-profit sector. More specifically, I wished to explore the roles of patronage and entrepreneurship in the self-conscious production of cultural knowledge and imagery. As a non-profit organization in the business of marketing history and tradition, the Galveston Historical Foundation made the Island seem an ideal location for fieldwork. I planned to use the professional and institutional basis of contemporary, non-profit cultural production as a framework
for probing the relations between funding and representation in Galveston.

I viewed the Galveston Historical Foundation as a good anchor for that research, so in January of 1988 I began my initial fieldwork by volunteering for the foundation. I soon discovered that I could not study the GHF as simply a non-profit organization. It is first and foremost a preservation organization. As such, it has a specific set of theories and practices which determine its operation in a far more explicit fashion than does its non-profit status.³

Historic preservation commodifies the past. This process occurs most obviously on an economic level, but also involves a decidedly cultural component. This latter fact guided the bulk of my research in Galveston. The more I learned about the Galveston Historical Foundation the more I pondered the cultural impact of historic preservation on its subject community. How do people incorporate the reified presence of

³ From January through June of 1988 I worked as a volunteer in two of the Galveston Historical Foundation's museums. Having spent nearly a decade in museum anthropology, I believed that situating myself within the GHF would be a good (and a familiar) way of discovering the basic philosophy or ethos that drove the GHF as a non-profit organization. I was correct in the former regard, but in many ways, I paid too much for this knowledge, becoming side-tracked from my own research and putting myself in situations where I ended up, particularly in one case, as a producer of the self-same texts whose production I was in Galveston to study. As soon as possible, I extracted myself from this situation and went about the business of studying cultural process from within the context of greater Galveston. I continued to attend GHF Board Meetings but was henceforth able to begin learning about GHF's partners and competitors in preservation and cultural production.
the past into their lives on a daily basis? Who decides what of the past will be preserved? How does cultural meaning get embedded in particular places, people, structures, and events? How does this meaning get transmitted and transformed from one generation to the next? And more importantly, how is the theory, practice, and pedagogical mission of preservation confounded by nostalgia, popular memory, and the promotion of alternative historical narratives and constructions of the cultural self? In short, how does historic preservation's revisioning of the past effect a community's understanding and enactment of its contemporary self? With this much broader concern in mind, I decided to engage in an ethnography of the Island itself. The notion of history as a cultural commodity, both before and after the onset of historic preservation, became the refractive lens through which I filtered my work.

The data on which this study is based were collected between January 1988 and May 1990, with some preliminary interviews and library research pre-dating the formal fieldwork period. Galveston's close proximity to Rice University was both a help and a hindrance to the fieldwork process. While it facilitated easy follow-up research, it made withdrawal from the field seem especially arbitrary. Peter Brink, long-time head of the Galveston Historical Foundation, moved to Washington, D.C. in January of 1990 to accept a position with National Trust for Historic Preservation. His departure, after 16 years in Galveston,
signaled a new period of leadership for the GHF and the Island in general. It also provided me with a reasonable point of closure on my own work. Thus, in the late spring of 1990, after observing the GHF's transition to a new director and one final political campaign (this one was for a city council seat, but dredged up old issues of gambling and cultural patronage), I drew my research to a resolute close.

During the two and one-half year fieldwork period, I tried, as much as possible, to engage in participant-observation as it has typically been practiced in anthropology. That is, I went about the process of collecting data by positioning myself in social settings and structural contexts not typically controlled or arranged by myself. Conducting a traditional kind of fieldwork in a city of 60,000 produced, in the first few months, an overwhelming sense of anonymity. Trying, moreover, to move among a group of insular and elite people, cultural patrons and their professional brokers and clients, compounded the sense of being "on the outside" that I automatically suffered as a non-native.\footnote{Ginsburg (1989) and Traweek (1988) contain valuable discussions of the special problems of conducting ethnographic fieldwork in cultural settings that are at once familiar and alien. Researchers working among social elites in a preservation setting will find Press (1985) and Breen (1989) to be particularly relevant to their own work.} Fortunately, during my first few months in the field, friends who shared my background in museum work eased the way for me. As some of these individuals moved on to other cities and
states, I became close to a family of fifth-generation Galvestonians who lent an important intergenerational perspective to my work and without whose friendship and interest I would have felt personally lost.

When I first began my fieldwork, I represented myself to those Galvestonians with whom I interacted as a graduate student studying the endowment and production of culture in contemporary society. It wasn’t until I was several months into my fieldwork that I finally managed to free myself of the anthropological jargon and rhetoric that I had so long been immersed as a graduate student. Thus my initial contacts in Galveston sometimes heard an explanation of my presence that included concepts such as the social construction of culture, the invention of tradition, and the politics of cultural patronage. Surprising in some ways, though not in others, this was more mystifying and problematic for Galveston’s professional culture producers and elite, who participated in this business on a daily basis, than it was to lay individuals, who understood these themes in more naive and experiential ways. In time, I learned to amend this representation of my work to something much more general and concise. I characterized myself as an anthropologist studying the relationship of Galveston’s history to its contemporary culture.

During the course of my fieldwork I frequently heard various informants translate the subject of my research into
the terms by which they understood it as it had been related to them by myself or someone else. More often than not, I was said to be working on a cultural history of Galveston. Galvestonians are accustomed to historians, both amateur and professional. They also consider themselves to have had an interesting cultural past. So it stood to reason that the way they made sense of an anthropologist in their midst was to conclude that I was writing a cultural history of the Island. In an ambiguous way, their version of my work was correct; certainly it was far more in line with reality than earlier theories that had cast me in the anthropological roles of ethnohistorian or archaeologist with which Galveston is more familiar.

Anthropologist or not, I was sometimes held at arm's length, as if I were a member of that category of writer which frequents Galveston more than any other—the dreaded investigative journalist. This proved to be troublesome to me personally and professionally. Galveston nurtures a formidable xenophobia, partly as an expression of its tourist economy and partly because it considers itself to have been "burned" by outsiders (especially writers and developers) on more than a few occasions. In these cases there was little I could do on my own behalf. I took some solace from the fact that I was not the first researcher to be treated like an interloper. During the course of archival work, I ran across the following article published in InBetween Magazine (IBM),
a short-lived, but excellent alternative Galveston newspaper. It spoke to the reality of being an outsider in Galveston and offered "Five Solid Pieces of Advice for Galveston Newcomers":

1. Refer to Galvestonians as 'us' and Houstonians as 'them.'
2. If you must complain, preface every criticism of the Island with: I just love Galveston but...then issue your complaint.
3. Don't expect too much.
4. Never say anything bad about Islanders. They're the only living thing on the Island that will never say anything bad about you.
5. Keep your reason for coming to the Island to yourself. The people you meet will make up a much better one if you keep your mouth shut. Also, never ask anybody what they're doing here. Even in these days, it's inappropriate. [IBM #75, May 1980]

By the time I read this received wisdom from a more experienced outsider, I was already guilty of expecting "too much" (#3), and had certainly not kept my "reason for coming to the Island" to myself (#5).

Close informants realized I was more than a little taken aback by the strength of Galveston's social insularity and defensiveness. Many of them were strapped with the same problem, being transplants to the Island themselves, which on the one hand provided a perspective that made them valuable cultural informants, but didn't necessarily put them in a position to help me out of my dilemma. One of them (who happened to be a GHF employee) called me during my first few months in the field with the suggestion that we go to lunch and commiserate over the "downtown group," even though this
individual realized I was "smart enough not to take those people's personalities too seriously. This is a small town where everyone knows everyone else. Everybody is subjected to unnerving scrutiny at first, but soon, you'll fade into the woodwork like the copy machine." Another informant, who happened to be a native, summed up Galveston's xenophobia with the comment "We don't hate outsiders, we just hate it when they try to be one of us." (At the time I was most afraid that he was going to say was "we just hate it when they study us.") Learning not to take this view of "outsiders" too personally, and extending my fieldwork for a longer period than planned, were the only things I could do on my own behalf. In time, I came to respect this mentality as basic to Galveston's islander sensibility.

Fortunately, I was able to engage a diverse group of cultural informants. Some of these individuals were intimately involved in the professional production of culture, others were critics or consumers of that knowledge. Many were Galveston natives, while others were relative newcomers. Most of my informants lived on the Island, but many of them followed the same work pattern as myself, living on the Mainland in far less expensive housing, and commuting to the Island across the Galveston Causeway. This category of individual proved to be particularly informative, since its members were often avid speakers on behalf of the island/mainland discourse of otherness.
I learned about the professional and political aspects of contemporary cultural production by attending meetings of public and private groups involved in the design and promotion of historical and cultural representations of Galveston. Among the most valuable of these were the meetings of the Board of Directors of the Galveston Historical Foundation and workshop or organizational meetings of various city entities related to waterfront development or other forms of community development. I also collected the various images and texts these groups generated, along with community responses to these images and publications, both as they appeared in public forums, such as the print and electronic media, and as they were offered to me by individual informants.

For the most part, I conducted interviews on a completely informal basis, making use of a notepad during or after the session. I chose not to make formal tape recordings after several attempts produced anxiety and clearly thwarted candid discussion, despite assurances of anonymity, objective interest, personal neutrality on political issues, etc. I nevertheless carried my tape recorder to group meetings and used it to tape public speakers. On one occasion the sight of the recorder, which I had not yet engaged, provoked comment among the meeting participants. One person in particular turned to me and suggested that I surely should have it going. I immediately commenced taping. Nods of approval followed from fellow listeners who then began to deluge me with contextual
detail. Still, as soon as the local media gathered their information, packed up their pens and paper, and vacated their front row seats on this gathering, I was approached by the chairman of the group hosting this meeting and told that I would "have to turn that thing off." Deferring to this man, a nearby woman apologetically stated: "you have to understand our concern." Not surprised, I turned it off, and was quite happy to have been allowed to remain in the meeting, since discussion soon turned to the nitty gritty of local cultural politics. Many of my fieldnotes were transcribed from tapes I made following such meetings or conversations.

Library research provided equally crucial information. Of particular significance were the administrative records of the Galveston Historical Foundation which I examined for the period 1965-1983, and InBetween Magazine, published from 1977 to 1988, which I read in its entirety. Archival investigation also facilitated the collection of historical images and texts across time and space. These represent important data. As my informants were quick to point out, like any group of people who have been written about prolifically, Galvestonians have internalized much of what has been said about them. These on and off-island versions of Galveston history and culture facilitated the establishment of chronological sequencing, authorship, and promotion of some of the island’s earliest cultural myth and imagery.

Much of my archival research was conducted in the
Rosenberg Library, in the Galveston and Texas History Center. Perhaps the greatest value of that work lay in the fact that it exposed me to a side of the lay public's historical consciousness that I might otherwise never have seen, or believed the intensity of, had I not personally witnessed its expression by countless individuals who patronized the archives. It is true that Galveston Island has an interesting history, but so do many cities and places. The degree to which contemporary Galvestonians look to the past to make sense of their daily life is astonishing, but not completely without explanation.

The Galveston Daily News was especially valuable for its Op-Ed pages, where Galvestonians debate everything from the objectivity of the local media to the merits of historic preservation. Likewise, official publications of the city, particularly promotional convention and tourist brochures and economic development literature, provided an important perspective on the Island's official aims and self-image. I tried to collect every contemporary cultural text produced by official city entities, whether for local or external consumption. Galveston has also been featured in a number of nationally-televised documentaries, newspapers and journals, and is the setting for a romantic historical novel of some regional popularity. The cultural images and representations conveyed in these kinds of sources are extremely important to Galvestonians and thus to my own work.
Finally, Galveston Island has many annual traditions and public events, some newly invented like the Victorian Christmas festival "Dickens on the Strand" and the Galveston Historic Homes Tour; others recently revived, such as Mardi Gras and the annual Blessing of the Shrimp Fleet. These events are all skillfully designed to give contemporary expression to Galveston’s historic past. Some, like Dickens on the Strand, include a full slate of preparatory or other related activities. I regularly participated in these events and found them to be vital (if somewhat ironic) expressions of cultural identity as it is self-consciously constructed on contemporary Galveston Island.

Reflections on Cultural Production

Although remote peoples with unfamiliar ways of life are no longer the mainstay of cultural anthropology, fieldwork (the research methodology by which they have classically been studied) and ethnography (the textual product of the fieldwork experience) continue to be critical, albeit radically reformulated, components of the anthropological enterprise.\(^5\) Broadly conceived, they can themselves be counted among the activities and processes this study explores: the contemporary production of cultural imagery, knowledge, and

\(^5\) For discussions of experimental ethnographies, ethnography as cultural critique, and the dilemmas of culture and anthropology in the postmodern age, see Marcus and Cushman (1982), Marcus and Fischer (1986), Marcus and Clifford (1986), Clifford (1988).
meaning. Ethnography merely represents the extreme and formalized end of a continuum wherein "culture" is reified and rendered "knowable" for purposes ranging from scholarly pursuit to the self-conscious construction of cultural identity. By virtue of my engagement in the former, I will necessarily become a party to Galveston's enactment of the latter. This is the inevitable outcome of a shared object and mutual accessibility.
Chapter 1

GALVESTON

The first time I saw Galveston was the summer of 1927. My family brought me down from Fort Worth in a Model T. It was a long trip. It was the first time I saw a body of water I could not see across. It was my first taste of salt water and my first exposure to fresh seafood. I have been partial to salt water and seafood ever since."

--Ray Miller, 1983

"My early memories, fragmented and distorted, include a ride to the beach over the unfinished Gulf Freeway in a 1946 Ford with my brother at the wheel and the windows rolled all the way down to circulate the oven-heat of the Texas summer. The white dust from the oyster shell foundation rose in a huge cloud behind us and drifted onto the low trees along the right-of-way. They remained white until the next rainfall."

--David G. McComb, 1986

Most people get to Galveston Island by the same method and route: in a vehicle traveling southbound on Interstate 45. While this entrance to the island-city has been beautifully romanticized by countless writers, the inspiration for such descriptions was surely derived retrospectively, from some nostalgia or recalled island ambiance less tangible than the view of Galveston and Texas City afforded by the traditional freeway approach.

Interstate 45 cuts a low, straight path across the flood plain that lies between Houston and Galveston. The 50-minute
drive that separates the sprawling metropolis from the island-city is lined on the northern end with suburban development—bedroom or satellite communities that serve Houston and NASA and on the southern extreme with freeway exits, radar warnings, and fast food stops that signal one’s impending arrival in the smaller towns of League City, La Marque, and Santa Fe.

About 30 miles outside of Galveston, billboards begin to punctuate the skyline: "The Tremont House: Galveston’s Luxury Hotel"..."The Reef Condominiums: Galveston’s Best Kept Secret!"..."Landry’s Seafood Inn & Oyster Bar"..."The Galvez Hotel--Since 1911"..."Sea-Arama Marineworld"..."Elissa: Tall Ship for Texas"..."The Grand 1894 Opera House"..."The Victorian Condohotel: Share Our View of the Gulf."

As the final approach nears, the freeway begins to rise above the grassy wetlands that hug the bay. Sloughs and inlets snake outward from the road. Canal subdivisions cut geometric patterns across the marshy terrain.

Galveston Island is connected to the Texas mainland by a two-mile span over Galveston Bay known simply as "the causeway." Elevated and arched to permit ship passage below, the causeway provides a low-flying, bird’s-eye view of Galveston Bay. In the light of day, this view is dominated by the industrial landscape of Texas City, a petrochemical and refinery town lying to the northeast of Galveston, across the bay. At night, when the usual puffs of black pollution are
invisible, an altogether different panorama predominates, as the lights from the tank farms and smoke stacks twinkle hazily in the distance like constellations hung low on the darkened horizon.

As the traveler crests the causeway’s arch and begins to descend, Galveston Island drops into view. Although the harbor facilities and midrises of downtown are visible on the far left, this view of the Island is remarkably unextraordinary. Only the odd-shaped steel artifacts of port industry foregrounded on the near left side of the bay and the small fishing marinas on the right break the overall continuity of a flattened landscape peppered with treetops, powerlines, and gray-black roofs.

As the freeway returns to sea level, this view of the Island is temporarily obscured by a road-side curtain of oleanders—hearty flowering shrubs that thrive in hot, humid climates and saline soils.\(^1\) Just as the City breaks once again into view, the driver is suddenly and unceremoniously deposited at the City’s official entrance, marked with the ubiquitous small-town welcoming sign. Galveston’s is laden to overflowing with the plaques and insignia of the local civic clubs—Optimists, Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions—to name only a few.

The avenue that stretches ahead is officially an

---

\(^1\) The Galveston Oleander Society celebrates the proliferation of this shrub on the Island. It claims that more varieties of Oleander can be found on Galveston Island than in any other location worldwide.
extension of Interstate 45, but it takes on a different character as Galveston's "Broadway Boulevard." Palm trees, oleanders, and signs directing tourists to the beach and historic sites dot the esplanade. Fast food chains, convenience stores and gas stations line both sides of the street, conveniently catering to the constant flow of motorists on and off the Island. Occasionally diverting the driver's attention are vestiges of a much earlier time: Victorian homes in various states ranging from meticulous restoration to benign neglect and outright abandonment.

Broadway's contrastive character, an odd melange of Victoriana and Gasoline Alley,\(^2\) essentializes the Island's mottled history and economy. Galveston's sociopolitical environment is clearly one of adaptive extremes. The very rich residing cheek-by-jowl with the very poor is a lived cliche on Galveston Island.\(^3\) A jaunt down nearly any of Broadway's 50-odd side streets will further reveal this state of affairs.

A turn to the north leads to the city's East End and the

\(^2\) In the 1950s and 60s, Broadway was derogatorily referred to by some as Gasoline Alley due to the proliferation of corner gas stations. Ironically, decades earlier, when they were first built, these establishments were welcomed as symbols of modernity and a healthy tourist market.

\(^3\) The late Mary Moody Northen, matriarch of the Moody dynasty, is said to have provided many a news reporter with directions to the family home, located on Broadway Boulevard, by noting that it was "right across the street from the Dairy Queen." The private foundation Mary Moody Northen Inc., today restoring the Moody home to its former grandeur, no doubt hopes that the "Moody Mansion and Museum" will become favored over the Dairy Queen, as a prominent Broadway landmark.
Galveston wharves. The provincial quality of these quiet, somewhat quaint side streets stands in stark contrast to the port activity often visible where the road dead-ends at the water's edge. During 1988 and 1989, I often traveled north off Broadway at 23rd street, where within less than a half-mile of driving between modest red brick buildings and young children at play in church school yards, I would be greeted by a red hammer and sickle looming larger-than-life in the distance, where it stood dramatically emblazoned on the white smokestack of one of the many Soviet tankers that called at Galveston's port during the late 1980s to transport shipments of U.S. grain.4

In addition to the port, The Strand Historic District (the restored commercial and financial hub of 19th-century Galveston), a blighted "downtown" district of mid-20th century origin, and the nationally renowned University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB), an institutional and economic anchor since its founding in 1891, are also located along this northeastern perimeter of the Island. Compactly nestled between these commercial centers and Broadway Boulevard, are municipal buildings, subsidized housing projects, apartment complexes, and single-family residences of various styles and origins. Sprinkled throughout are occasional restaurants or

---

4 This sight, more than any other, helped fix in my mind the meaning of the "view corridor" concept, which frequently came up in local seminars and workshops focusing on preservation and urban design.
other retail businesses—not the least of which is the corner grocery. While these stores are often as decrepit as they are individually distinctive, they are successful in maintaining a loyal clientele that ranges from transient and impoverished young medical students to elderly, long-time neighborhood residents of established financial means.

South of Broadway one finds a similar mixture of residential and commercial land use. Where, on the northern extreme, Broadway’s cross-streets end at the bay and the Galveston Ship Channel, on the southern side they lead to the beach. These streets, running the narrow width of the Island, perpendicular to the bay and the beach, are numbered consecutively from the eastern end of the city to the far side of the so-called "suburbs," which begin at 45th street and continue west. By contrast, the streets which run the length of the Island, roughly parallel with the bay and the beach, are alphabetically labeled. In this simple grid plan, which was devised, surveyed, and mapped in 1838, Broadway Boulevard represents Avenue "J."

---

5 The significance of Galveston’s suburbs will be discussed in Chapter 3, where the Island’s spatial dichotomies are related to the onset of historic preservation.

6 Many of Galveston’s streets have been further named after city benefactors and prominent families (e.g. Sealy, Rosenberg, and Tremont), or been given functionally-related place names (e.g. Water, Mechanic, University, and Post Office). In some instances, these second names supercede the alphabetical or numerical designation in terms of native usage, but in many other cases, they do not. The convenience of the letter/number system has, for the most part, withstood the test of time.
Bisecting the city in a northeasterly direction, Broadway continues on beyond the bed and breakfast inns, real estate offices, auto part stores, and gas stations, straight to the Gulf of Mexico. City-owned Stewart Beach Park is the only thing that stands between the end of Broadway and Galveston’s own view of the edge of the world.

An acute right-turn puts the driver on Seawall Boulevard. This street, which runs approximately one-third of the 30-mile length of the Island, is named for the massive concrete bulkhead it sits high atop. The seawall’s 17-foot elevation affords pedestrians and motorists a generous view of the tempermental gulf waters it was designed to protect against. Perched on precarious-looking piers stretching hundreds of feet beyond the narrow beach below and out into the Gulf of Mexico are restaurants, souvenir shops, and "The Flagship," a landmark hotel and fishing pier. Across the busy six-lane street, similar commercial establishments line the sidewalk.

During the height of the tourist season, Seawall Boulevard is transformed into a carnivalesque resort-town promenade, as pedestrians, bicyclists, pedal cars, skateboards, sunbathers and street musicians all vie for space on the crowded sidewalks. Out in the boulevard itself, station wagons carrying eager, wide-eyed children, and sports cars overflowing with well-oiled teenaged bodies, cruise slowly along—taking in the breathtaking views of the
expansive gulf and the opposite sex.

The seawall's 10.4 mile length comes to an eventual halt on the west side of the Island and the road begins to veer away from the coastline. Continuing on this southwesterly course, the Island stretches ahead for some 20 miles more. The marshy grasslands here are heavily developed with new residential and resort housing. With price tags reaching into the multi-million dollar range, these communities cater to Houstonians and other urban Texas dwellers, who spend weekends and summers enjoying the Island's leisurely pace. Galveston Island State Park, a natural preserve of beach frontage and interior wetlands encompasses a good portion of this territory. Its 1,952 acres stretch the full width of the Island and provide a ready context for understanding the critical ecological balance in which Galveston Island exists as a gulf coast geologic formation.

Galveston and the Gulf

Lying roughly parallel to the upper-Texas coast, Galveston measures almost three miles at its widest point and about 30 miles in length. It is situated two miles out into the Gulf on a southwest to northeast axis. Galvestonians often refer to "their" Island as "this little sandbar." Beyond the obvious comment about its diminutive nature, they are typically making reference to the unlikely odds against which Galveston exists today as a heavily developed and populated gulf coast island-
city.

The Gulf of Mexico arcs 2600 miles along the southeastern perimeter of the North American continent, doubling back on itself 180 degrees from its easternmost point in Florida Bay to Cabo Catoche in northeastern Yucatan. The Carribbean basin marks the southernmost boundary of the gulf waters, which extend from Key West, Florida, to the eastern tip of Mexico’s Yucatan peninsula (Britton and Morton 1989:3).

Galveston is one of seven primary barrier islands that fringe the western coast from Texas to northern Mexico. These barrier islands were formed during the most recent geologic period, the Holocene, some 5,000 - 8,000 years ago. In contrast to the older, hard bay shores that lie behind them to the north, the Gulf’s coastal beaches support life only under extreme environmental conditions:

Sands are harsh habitats, and the sandy surf zone is a particularly difficult environment for life. Breakers keep the sand in constant motion, filling burrows, abrading shells, and exposing the few organisms living here to surf and sun....On the beach above the surf, the environment is more extreme. Winds dry, move, and pile sand into dunes. Summer sun sear the dunes, and in the north, winter cold occasionally freezes them. Animals of the upper beach must burrow deeply or go elsewhere for refuge. Few plants occur on the foreshore, backshore, or dune fronts. Those that do have adaptations that enable them to cling to the unstable substratum, compensate for sand burial, and conserve water. [Britton and Morton 1989:109]

The gulf coast climate progresses through six major zones as one moves southwestward from Louisiana to the Yucatan.
Galveston lies in a transitional zone between warm-temperate to semi-tropical. An annual rainfall of 42 inches produces a humid climate that supports diverse flora. Vegetation is predominantly deciduous as a result of prevailing temperate conditions (Britton and Morton 1989:12).

Despite these seemingly benign conditions, Galveston is occasionally subjected to extreme climactic phenomena—hurricanes. By definition, these are massive storms originating in tropical seas such as those of the Caribbean and western Atlantic. The Gulf of Mexico frequently bears the brunt of these chaotic onslaughts of wind and water. Britton and Morton report that between 1900 and 1980 "31 hurricanes and about two dozen tropical storms have struck the Texas coast, and an additional 40 hurricanes and about 50 tropical storms have come ashore along the Gulf coast of Mexico" (1989:34). Most commonly occurring during August or September, but possible any time between June and November, the gulf coast averages one hurricane every three years.

As regular occurrences in the gulf coast region, it is important that hurricanes and their consequences be understood in their larger ecological context:

Their landfall brings change to the coastal zone which persists months, years or decades. On the geological time scale, hurricanes are important, frequent events influencing the geologic history and development of the Gulf of Mexico coastline, and especially the barrier islands. So often we measure the catastrophic consequences of hurricanes and rightly so, for they can be immensely destructive agents. But there are also
constructive attributes of these storms. Without them, our coastline would be vastly different. [emphasis added, Britton and Morton 1989:34]

More than any other gulf coast inhabitants, Galvestonians can speak to the catastrophic consequences and constructive attributes of these storms on a human scale. On September 8, 1900, Galveston suffered the worst natural disaster our nation has ever recorded, when a massive hurricane and tidal surge killed more than 6000 Islanders and leveled much of the city. Galveston spent the next decade and a half building the 17 foot concrete and granite block seawall and raising the City’s grade some 8 feet above mean sealevel, gently sloping it from the coastal side to meet the bayside elevation of the Island. The 1900 hurricane was neither the first nor the last of the storms Galveston would endure, but it had many profound consequences for the Island and its legacy continues to be lived out on a daily basis.⁷

Because Galveston’s vulnerability to hurricanes and flooding is so thoroughly documented throughout the Island’s history, many people have pondered how a city ever came to be established on this narrow swatch of land. By all accounts, Galveston’s natural and protected deep water harbor was the Island’s critical feature. Native lore on this subject is plentiful and inevitably harks back to the days of Native

⁷ The end of Chapter 4 discusses the cultural aspect of Galveston’s vulnerability to hurricanes and the role these storms play in bolstering historical and islander consciousness.
Americans, Spanish chroniclers, and the brief encampment of the infamous French pirate, Jean LaFitte. Local historian Virginia Eisenhower opens her history and guide, *Galveston: A Different Place*, with a classic version of the romantic myth of primal time and place I encountered repeatedly on Galveston Island:

Millions of years after dinosaurs had vanished and volcanoes had become dead peaks, the receding inland sea exploded a sand bar off what is now the Gulf coast that trapped silt and debris until a barrier island twenty-seven miles long and almost three miles wide was formed. Birds and wind dropped seeds while small animals, snakes, and insects, hitch-hiked rides on floating logs until the island collected flora and fauna. The rest of the world may have been created in six days but Galveston was born on the seventh, day of rest or not. Different and isolated from the mainland, it accumulated an exotic history of rattlesnakes, cannibal Indians, Spanish explorers, pirates, slave markets, a town developed by a business, Civil War blockade and battles, pestilence, killer hurricanes, gigantic fires, an astounding grade raising, illegal gambling, and buried treasure still undiscovered....It seems in keeping with Galveston's exotic history that its first permanent settlers should have been pirates. A nearly tree-less wasteland, the island's sole attraction was a deep harbor protected by a secret channel lying between waters only four to five feet deep, into which strangers bent on revenge would never enter. [Emphasis added; Eisenhour 1983:1-4]

In the introduction to his book *The Galveston Era: The Texas Crescent on the Eve of Secession* (1961), Earl Fornell discusses the seminal role of the natural harbor in the

---

8 This theme of history and islandness, or history as islandness, is fully developed in the final chapters of the dissertation.
settlement of the Island.

Since the southwestern end of the Bay was shut off from the open sea, except to shallow-draft vessels, by the sand bars, there remained only one harbor opening—the pass between Bolivar Point and the Island. Galveston Bay, the water area enclosed by the long island and the mainland, thus provided a fine harbor which, except during extremely bad weather, enjoyed considerable natural shelter from the open sea. [Fornell, 1961:7]

The city of Galveston developed in close proximity to this navigable waterway, as Fornell explains:

Since the eastern end of the Island, the tip nearest the deep-water pass at Bolivar Point, possessed the greatest elevation above sealevel, the city was constructed there, with the wharves on the sheltered, landward side of the Island....The beaches of the Island were, of course, on the other side, facing the open sea, some three miles away from the wharf frontage, and passage to the beach front ran along short streets, numbered from first to thirty-third, which crossed the narrow eastern tip of the Island. Actually, the city occupied but one-eighth of the Island at the tip nearest to Bolivar Point; the long western end of the Island was vacant except for cattle grazing, small farming, and fruit growing. The far western end was in reality but a salt marsh covered with grass too coarse to even be used for cattle.[Fornell, 1961:7]

Excepting limited urban expansion and recent West End resort home development, Fornell’s characterization of the Island at mid-19th century provides a remarkably apt description of Galveston’s basic design as it appears in the late-20th century, with the heavy concentration of commercial and
residential development still clustered on the eastern end of the Island.

**Galveston and the Historical Past**

Background history has long been a standard component of cultural description. However, in recent years, the nature and locus of "culture" within the anthropological enterprise has begun to shift. Where anthropology once took culture to be its unique object, culture has increasingly become the subject of critical ontological and epistemological inquiry. For instance, anthropologists have begun to examine the appropriation and interpretation of the culture concept (and other social scientific rhetoric and theory) by the political discourses of postcolonialism and nationhood. Recent ethnographies by Dominguez (1989), Handler (1988), and Herzfeld (1989, 1991) are representative of a recent movement toward empirically grounded analysis of this phenomenon. These works demonstrate the multiplicitous ways in which "culture" has come to be meaningfully objectified in specific social and historical circumstances.

These studies of cultural representation each pose special challenges in their narrative construction. Richard Handler's *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (1988) was one of the first such studies to foreground the problematicity of such representational issues against the larger backdrop of ethnographic inquiry. From the outset,
Handler flatly refused to indulge his readers in a neat historical summary, despite the long-standing tradition of so doing in the social-scientific field. He argues,

This strategy obliterates any sense of history as story or construct. Relegated to the background, history can be presented in a matter-of-fact fashion as what is already known or what needs to be known to understand the present-day problems that one wishes to examine. [1988:19]

Handler's specific concern here is to excavate for meaning, rather than bolster through an authoritative retelling, the primordializing bulwark of myth and history that underpins Quebec's claims to a nationalist culture and identity.

Following Handler's lead in this tricky narrative arena, I too refrain from presenting a coherent "history" or tidy chronology of the modern Island. My need to take this tack is more than a little ironic, since it is the thoroughly mythologized and contentious status of the Island's history--its 19th-century urbanity and 20th-century decline--that forms the very basis of this study. Certainly, the absence here of a traditional historical narrative in no way represents a move on my part to deny Galveston its historical experience. A cavalier rejection of the ontological status of Galveston's past(s) as a means of establishing the arbitrary nature and changeable meaning of "history" for Galvestonians would

---

9 Several academic histories of, or relating to the Island have been written by professional historians, e.g. Fornell (1961), McComb (1986), Hyman (1990), and Turner (1991).
clearly amount to the proverbial tossing of the baby out with the bathwater. Yet I can hardly examine Galveston’s construction of its collective cultural self through the indigenous privileging and investiture of contentious symbolic meanings in historical experience by constructing my own narrative of Island history.

As I see it, the difficulty at stake in my own project goes beyond that inherently posed by the desire to re-present claims to cultural otherness without compounding their objectification and contributing to the social reality in which their meaning takes form. The real dilemma is one of how to problematize the practice of cultural and historical objectification as it occurs not only in the legitimating auto-ethnographic form indigenous to the actual site of inquiry, but in the deconstructed form of its (ethnographically-legitimating and authoritative) textual representation. Clearly, any ethnographic endeavor involving this kind of cultural critique must entail the recognition of one’s own engagement in a version of the selfsame process under scrutiny. My own concern with this latter point has forced me to labor with and against the paradoxical implications of my ultimate resort to what is inevitably the

---

10 My use of this term follows that found in The Written Suburb (1989). Here John Dorst employs the term auto-ethnographic to name and describe the localized process of cultural construction ongoing in Chadd’s Ford, Pennsylvania, where cultural and historical identity is embedded in the artistic tradition of the Wyeth family and the mythologized meaning of the American Revolution.
most authoritative genre of cultural construction--ethnography (whether traditional or "experimental")--in order to critique the various claims to cultural otherness I saw refracted in the native discourse of historical consciousness and at constant play in the recent political debates about the contemporary revisioning of the Island's history through the self-conscious and professionalized production of a cultural myth, imagery and identity.

With "history" representing the pivotal category through and about which culture is constructed on Galveston Island, it can hardly remain absent from the pages that follow. And, while it will not be found in the familiar chronologically narrated form, it will be encountered as part of a dialectical process that exposes what Ricoeur (1984) calls "the trace," the documentary basis or evidence that stands in the place of "the reality of the historical past." That is, it will be

11 In his 1984 lecture, "The Reality of the Historical Past," Ricoeur struggles to define the relationship between what he calls "the trace" (the documentary evidence that exists in the place of and by virtue of the absence of the reality of the past and which animates the historian to interpret and so rectify the past,) and historical thinking and knowledge, in all its constructed and contingent forms:

"What does the term "real" signify when it is applied to the historical past? What do we mean when we say that something really happened? This is the most troublesome question that historiography puts to historical thinking....A solid conviction animates the historian here: regardless of the selective nature of collecting, preserving, and consulting documents, and of their relation to the questions put to them by the historian, even including the ideological implications of all these manoeuvres--the recourse to documents marks a
revealed as it is embedded within the contemporary matrix of its commodity value and materialized status. In this instance, that matrix is Galveston's construction of its collective cultural self out of the patchworked fabric of what it takes to be the appropriate or "culturally authentic" moments of its varied historical past.\(^{12}\) What this means is that the specific figures and events that constitute what Galveston takes to be its cultural patrimony and unique historical capital will be examined in later chapters where the fragmented context in which they arise as arbiters of various cultural meanings can be demonstrated.

What follows here, where a more comfortable series of dividing line between history and fiction (p. 1).

Ricoeur notes that even Hayden White's notion of history as contending poetic constructions of imaginable pasts ultimately relies upon or implies referentiality. Citing White, Ricoeur states "I like the formula: 'We can only know the actual by likening it to the imaginable.'" But Ricoeur qualifies this remark by asserting that "If this formula is to maintain its full force, the concern with 'drawing historiography nearer to its origins in literary sensibility' must not lead us to give more value to the verbal power invested in our redescriptions than to the incitements to redescription that come from the past itself" (p. 34, emphasis in original.)

\(^{12}\) This approach is also intended to address the ethical problems that derive from the unfortunate, but growing tendency on the part of anthropologists who work in the more familiar milieu of Western society to cynicize cultural meanings and values for their contrived quality and transparency of origin. Anthropologists who work in more obviously exotic, non-Western societies would never be caught in this judgemental practice or position. Those of us who work closer to home in more familiar social realities need to remember that ethnocentric tendencies and reactions can arise in subtle and insidious ways.
authoritatively-presented historical details might once have been found, is a brief and intentionally naive ethnographic portrait of Galveston. It is written in the traditional anthropological framework of the "ethnographic present" because it describes "Historic Galveston Island," Galveston as it self-consciously apprehended, and professionally authored and represented itself—both to and as the cultural other— during the approximate period 1988 to 1990. While the specific description presented below constitutes my own (re)presentation, the narrative structure, cultural imagery, and interpretive framework mimic the touristically inspired, auto-ethnographic style of Galveston itself.

"Historic Galveston Island"

Lying two miles off the upper-Texas gulf coast, Galveston

---

The notion of the ethnographic present has been broadly discussed and critiqued within the anthropological discipline for more than a decade (e.g. Boon 1982; Fabian 1983 [in particular see pp.80-87]; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Stocking 1983). A conceptual vestige of structural-functionalist anthropology, the so-called ethnographic present refers not only to a temporal moment arbitrarily delineated by the anthropologist for the purpose of objectifying and describing the systemic integrity of the other's culture at a particular historical juncture, it also refers to the actual deployment of the present tense in ethnographic writing—a literary convention that simultaneously facilitates and obfuscates the lopsided spatial, temporal, and power relations of the observer to the observed, the fieldworker to the fieldwork, the writer to the culture written. (Hastrup 1990). It is fair to say that the discursive representations that constitute Galveston's official authorship of the self as cultural other are characterized by many of the same authoritative and totalizing pretenses as the ethnographic text and serve many of the same ends.
enjoys a nearly year-round, semi-tropical environment. Cooled in the hot summer months by a constant ocean breeze, and warmed in the winter months by its more southerly latitude, the Island's temperate climate is the envy of its metropolitan neighbors to the north.

As surely as the surf has steadily eroded its sandy shores, the gulf winds have layered the sediment of history upon enduring Galveston Island. Since Karankawa Indians first wandered its marshy lagoons in search of shellfish and prickly pear fruit, the tempestuous gulf waters have capriciously blessed and betrayed those who would make the Island their own.

Something of the indomitable spirit that Spanish chroniclers, French pirates, and the bereaved survivors of the 1900 hurricane mustered long ago in defense against the Island's once inhospitable environs, lives on in Galvestonians today. The Island is home to a heterogenous mixture of ethnic groups and immigrants who trace their ancestry back to 19th-century Germany, England, Eastern Europe, and the U.S. mainland. The same cosmopolitan character that charmed visitors to 19th-century Galveston, pervades Galveston in the late 20th-century.

A vital port-city, Galveston is a place where the East meets the West, and the Old world mixes comfortably with the New. Unlike its mainland Texas counterparts, Galveston still accommodates a pedestrian lifestyle. Artists and writers,
attracted by Galveston's casual mixture of urban culture and laid-back island character, represent but one sector of the more than 60,000 people who make their home on this small barrier island.

The rich abundance of churches, voluntary organizations, and charitable foundations reflects the strong sense of community that characterizes contemporary and diverse Galveston Island. The City's unique cooperative spirit is perhaps best reflected in the annual Christmas festival "Dickens on the Strand." Sponsored by the Galveston Historical Foundation, this yearly attraction is produced in cooperation with some 6,000 volunteers on the first weekend in December. More than 100,000 residents and visitors join in this 3-day extravaganza.

The University of Texas Medical Branch, founded in 1891, represents the largest single employer of island residents. Nevertheless, Galveston's cultural character and economy are firmly tied to the sea, with the shipping, fishing, and recreational tourism industries combining to form the Island's economic mainstay. Museums, restored Victorian homes, the tall ship Elissa, theatrical productions, the Grand 1894 Opera House, trolley-rides, and 32 miles of sunny beaches are among the variety of attractions enjoyed by natives and tourists alike. Fresh gulf seafood and specialty shops cater to regional tastes, and contribute to a resort industry which draws more than 3 million people to the Island each year.
Galveston's historic neighborhoods, along with the commercial "Strand Historic District," represent the largest, intact collection of Victorian buildings in the nation. Island residents live and work in the constant presence of the past, carefully preserving the architectural glory and cultural wealth that is the prized Victorian legacy of 19th-century Galveston.

Galveston's inimitable cultural character is the product of a rich history, played out in the context of social and geographic insularity. Its abiding ethos is one of endurance and commitment. Galvestonians will always live in a separate place and time, their present eternally shaped by the same dynamic of scarcity and abundance, devastation and recovery, that forged their Island's unique historical past.

Cultural Imaging

The essentializing myth of "Historic Galveston Island" presented above appropriates a specific set of symbols, history and islandness, and patterns them such that they fashion an integrated and culturally distinctive whole. What it ultimately seeks to promote is an image of Galveston in which the interests of residents, as well as those of both

14 My categorization of this image of the Island as mythic is not meant to challenge its currency or native meaning, but rather to draw critical attention to its social embeddedness and to the shared nuances of style, substance, and intentionality common to Galveston's self-conscious construction of the cultural self/other and that of the ethnographic enterprise, in general.
the beach/resort industries and the historic tourism entities represent shared cultural values and social space. Aggressive marketing of Galveston as this mythical place began in the late 1980s.

On May 6, 1988, The Galveston Daily News ran the following headline: "Isle to unveil its new image." Above the headline was a color photograph by a local artist of some note. The featured photo was a panoramic view of Galveston Island at dusk, carefully framed to incorporate a dramatic sunset on the upper margin and a fringe of palm trees on the lower. Centered within these poetic borders are two buildings that pose a striking contrast in architectural style and color. Above this image was the following photoline, printed in white letters on a field of red: "BEGINNING OF A NEW ERA." The caption itself read as follows: "This is Galveston, according to the Park Board’s new $250,000 image campaign, which will be unveiled tonight at Moody Center." The accompanying article discussed the marketing logic of this campaign, which follows closely on the heels of a decade and a half of historic preservation activity and more than a century of self-promotion as a beach/resort destination:

GALVESTON--Tonight opens a new era in the city’s tourism efforts with the unveiling of the Galveston Park Board of Trustees’ $250,000 image campaign....The campaign "very clearly states that Galveston is an island," said Carole Ketterhagen, director of the Galveston Convention & Visitors Bureau. "There’s a beautifully colored logo that says 'Historic Galveston Island.' That tells the
true story about Galveston."...The historical angle
is being played up especially strongly in the first
phase of the campaign. "Today more than ever people
are eagerly exploring the past and the history of
destinations, all across the country," said Ms.

The new logo accompanying the campaign cleverly and
subtly combines history and islandness: its subjects are a
couple, a man holding a beach ball beneath one arm, and a
woman at his side. Their backs are to us, as they stand before
a low, spindled railing and three columns embellished with
Victorian "gingerbread." The couple and the architectural
details are silhouetted in dark profile, and as if we too,
are shaded beneath a house porch or a covered pavillion. Our
attention is ultimately drawn beyond the couple to the focus
of their own gaze: a scene rendered, by contrast, in full
color. From left to right we see a grassy lawn lining a
sunny, sandy beach. Dotted with swaying palms and pink and
green beach umbrellas, this coastline meanders into the clouds
and horizon that line the upper border of the image. Deep blue
waves lap gently at the shore and sail boats cruise the open
waters that stretch beyond the right margin of the frame.
"GALVESTON," is printed in tall, elongated letters, on the
upper border of the logo. "ISLAND" is printed on the lower
margin of the frame in another, smaller type face. Angled off
to the upper left-side and covering the tip end of the "G" in
Galveston (almost as if in afterthought or amendment), is a
small ribbon-like banner which features the single word
"HISTORIC." The color composition of the logo's textual component, which alternates lavender letters on a field of pastel tangerine with tangerine letters on a background of lavendar, casually evokes the whimsical coloring of Victorian-era residential architecture.

Galveston's "new image" took more than a few people by surprise. On April 26, 1988, during a meeting of the Galveston Historical Foundation's Board of Directors, one of its members rose from his seat with obvious excitement:

I just wanted to announce that the Parks Board is about to launch a new campaign to promote Galveston. It's great. They're calling it an "image" campaign, not an "ad" campaign--and believe it or not, they're selling Galveston and not the beaches! They're using one of Robert Mihowel's photographs. It reads "Imagine a Romantic Island," and it really does look like a romantic island! [Fieldnotes, 4/26/88]
A subtle change is seeping through the Galveston of my youth. Like a small boy fumbling with his first sexual experience, the island is suddenly "discovering" itself. Historical societies are forming faster than oyster beds and restoration lemmings are making a madcap dash to the city's Nineteenth Century roots. Gloriously baroque old mansions, built by beserk Gothic architects a century ago, are getting facelifts after decades of sedate deterioration. Every home boasts a pedigree: scores of resurrected East End homes sport quaint little plaques attesting to their immortal place in history. Every building seems to be either the "oldest" this or the "oldest" that. At the center of this manufactured time warp is the redoubtable Strand, all gussied up like the schoolmarm in a Gene Autry movie.

--Bill Schadwell, 1979

Cultural entrepreneurship finds perhaps its most clever and youthful embodiment in the sooty-faced urchins who huddle in tattered, dirty clothes within the darkened niches and doorways along The Strand to beg farthings and sixpence from the merry-makers who pass their way. Only the gleam of shiny braces exposed behind mischievous grins, and the nickels and

---

1 My use of the term "cultural entrepreneur" in this clearly commercialized and popular culture context, follows that of Lewis Coser in his introduction to the special issue of Social Research devoted to "The Production of Culture" (Summer 1978, Vol. 45, No. 2.). Coser defines cultural entrepreneurs as those who mediate between producers and consumers, and sometimes "manipulate both" (p. 225). Paul DiMaggio (1986) offers yet another interpretation of cultural entrepreneurship (to which I will turn later in the text) which plays off the notion of "high" culture as the exclusive enterprise and domain of elites.
dimes nestled in outstretched hats, belie their otherwise successful pretense.

Farther down the street, within the interior domain one of the more popular Strand establishments, Victorian tradition and tropical island imagery face off in ironic cultural collision. Here, men in elegant tailcoats and tophats, and women in velvet and crinoline hoopskirts mill about to the beat of Reggae music beneath a canopy of thatched roofs and paper and plastic palms. Sunglasses, beach wear, panama hats, mosquito netting and other tropical paraphernalia hang suspended from wooden rafters, retail racks, and walls adorned with murals of Carribbean and South Seas imagery.


Scattered between the stalls of these seasonal shopkeepers are fortune tellers and phrenologists who will read your hand
or your head for a price. Jugglers, fire-eaters, magicians, and bell-ringers entertain awe-struck toddlers and lace-bedecked infants who peer fascinated from beneath the hoods of their Victorian wicker prams. Dickensian figures and would-be British bluebloods obligingly strike poses for the countless camcorder enthusiasts intent on documenting "history," however twice removed.

As drum rolls and bagpipes announce the approach of an official entourage, the cacophonous masses part like the Red Sea for Moses. Children are hiked onto shoulders and British bobbies form a human barrier against the thousands of onlookers straining to catch a glimpse of the parade's lead carriage and Cedric Dickens (Charles's great-grandson), who first visited Galveston in 1987 to make the astute observation that Texas grits were palatable only when topped with generous helping of liquor: "Only Southern Comfort can salvage grits!" (Williams 1988:2-9).²

Its Christmas time on Galveston Island, and this colorful scene is the street festival "Dickens on the Strand," held annually on the first weekend in December. The setting is the Strand Historic District on Galveston's East End and the

² Cedric Dickens, capitalizing on his great-grandfather's literary acclaim, has written two books relating to his own favorite pasttimes of eating and drinking: Dining with Dickens and Drinking with Dickens (1983). These books chronicle and contextualize the food and drink about which Charles Dickens wrote in his various novels. On his visits to Galveston, he autographs these books as well as a special edition of his great-grandfather's A Christmas Carol.
nation's largest in-situ collection of restored 19th-century, cast-iron front commercial buildings. This event is the linchpin of the Galveston Historical Foundation's unrivaled cultural hegemony in late 20th-century Galveston. Dickens on the Strand provides the GHF and the Island itself with thousands of dollars worth of free national television and print media exposure and publicity. "Dickens" (as the festival has come to called) brings approximately 150,000 visitors to Galveston, and plugs more than 10 million dollars into the local economy in a single 48 hour period.³

Besides administering this potent shot of iron into the economic life-blood of this seasonally anemic tourist town, Dickens on the Strand occasions the symbolic expression of Galveston's Victorian past. Each year, more than 6,000 volunteers, drawn primarily from the local population, cooperate with the Galveston Historical Foundation to ritually enact contemporary "Historic Galveston" and to institutionalize the late-19th century as the historical source of late-20th century Galveston's collective cultural self.

The Strand/Mechanic National Historic Landmark District, the physical and commercial stronghold of Historic Galveston where Dickens takes place each year, is situated well away

³ These figures relate specifically to the 1988 festival. Naturally, they fluctuate from year to year, depending upon the weather and other less critical variables. Nevertheless, the trend is toward tremendous growth in economic impact with each successive Dickens on the Strand event.
from the raucousness of the Island's crowded beaches, along the protected waterfront where the Galveston Wharves have operated since the mid-1800s. It was here that 19th-century fortunes were made in finance and commerce, and it is here, at 2016 Strand, that the GHF manages its cultural mission.

2016 Strand is not an insignificant address. It represents the westernmost surviving section of Hendley Row, a three-story red brick building dating from 1859 to 1867, the earliest structure still standing in this once-thriving commercial district. From this strategic location, the GHF runs an extensive operation in contemporary cultural production and entrepreneurship. ⁴ Exterior signage, composed

⁴ This reference to the GHF as a cultural entrepreneur squares with the use to which DiMaggio (1986) puts this term in his essay on the 19th-century Boston Brahmins, who at the turn-of-the century created an organizational infrastructure for high culture in America. DiMaggio writes: "By entrepreneurship, I mean the creation of an organizational form that members of the elite could control and govern (p.196)." In contemporary Galveston, the GHF is unarguably the principal institutional embodiment of the "high culture" in which the upper class ritually participates as an expression of its social distinction and exclusivity. The GHF is also the hegemonic producer of cultural and historical knowledge and symbolism. Because it is composed of not only a working (production) staff, but a decision-making (governing) board of directors drawn from the elite sectors of Galveston society, the GHF is able to simultaneously produce, and effect the distanciation of, high culture. Nevertheless, the "high culture" produced and marketed by the GHF is easily appropriated and consumed by Galveston's growing "middle class" and represents important cultural capital for this sector of the local population. These themes are developed more fully in the chapters that follow, and particularly in Chapter 5 where the formal political process surrounding attempts to introduce legalized gambling to the Island focused attention on the local elite's derivation of symbolic capital through support of historic preservation.
of prominent black letters spanning the breadth of the restored ground-level facade and a traditional Victorian-style shingle suspended over the wide sidewalk above the main entrance, identifies this location to the general public as "The Strand Visitors Center," run by the Galveston Historical Foundation.

French doors front the full length of the ground floor. During much of the year, these doors stand open, beckoning pedestrians into the GHF's Visitors Center with intriguing glimpses of Victoriana and maritime memorabilia. The Center provides visitors with a variety of services, not the least of which (especially during crowded weekends and festivals) is represented by free public restrooms and a water fountain. A gallery of tourist brochures offers information on local accommodations, attractions, real estate, and seasonal events. A small theatre toward the back of the Center features regularly scheduled films on Historic Galveston and its icon of local maritime history and preeminence, the tall-ship Elissa.

These peripheral facilities and services help to draw a far greater variety of individuals into the Visitors Center than the average, historically-inspired tourist. It is such casual and incidental visitors, coupled with a regular local clientele, who ensure the continued popularity and success of the Visitors Center's most visible operation—a gift shop.

Historic Galveston is marketed here year-round, in its
most consumable form: small commodities, affordable tokens evocative of Victorian sentiment, architectural exhuberance, and maritime romance. At critical play in the touristic sale of Historic Galveston is the power of nostalgia— not only as an increasingly pervasive national form of contemporary popular culture, but as an expression of a locally-imagined cultural past (Stewart 1988:227).

Besides the requisite logo-bearing souvenir mugs, T-shirts, and special event artwork, such items as Victorian paper dolls, postcards, and model ships charm the casual visitor to engage commercially with the material essence of Historic Galveston(6,10),(995,990). A large wicker bin filled with an odd assortment of antique oak spools (imported from now obsolete British textile and cotton-spinning factories) are only one of the whimsical ways that visitors are encouraged to experience Historic Galveston, at least in part, as an authentic cultural version and historical product of Victorian England.

From scholarly texts to popular fiction, books on such subjects as Galveston’s history, vernacular architecture, Queen Victoria, maritime culture, historic preservation, Charles Dickens, Gulf coast ecology, and local culinary specialties lend a convincing air of romance and authority to the presence of the 19th-century past in late 20th-century Galveston.

The second floor of 2016 Strand houses the offices of the GHF’s executive director and departments of accounting,
development, membership, public relations, events, and retail sales. The personnel employed by the Foundation's historic properties and house museums are also overseen from this central location. These off-site properties and operations include the 1839 Samuel May Williams Home (the former residence of a city founder), Ashton Villa (a restored Italianate Mansion), The Galveston County Historical Museum (a traditional museum run in cooperation with the Galveston County Commissioners Court), and the tall-ship Elissa.⁵

The residential program of the GHF, the department that continues to represent the substantive backbone and original mandate for which the GHF was first formed, is relegated to the unrestored ranks of the third floor of 2016 Strand. It operates much after the mode of 19th-century salvage ethnography, complete with the romance of fact-finding expeditions into now thoroughly charted island-territory, earnest fieldworkers, a conscientious research, cataloging, and advisory service, a "salvage warehouse" of architectural artifacts offered for sale and re-use in local restorations, and an overarching mission to facilitate the colonization of Historic Galveston. The August 1989 issue of the GHF's quarterly newsletter featured this department's work with a tongue-in-cheek photo and caption showing a pith-helmeted GHF "Endangered Landmarks Committee" about to enter greater

⁵ St. Joseph's Church is also under the stewardship of the GHF, although it is not owned by the Foundation.
Galveston one muggy Saturday morning in search, not of noble savages, but of noble structures for would-be postmodern Victorians.\(^6\)

While the paid administrative and volunteer staff of the GHF manage the day to day operations of the organization, they take ultimate direction from the Board of Directors of the GHF, which meets regularly on the third Tuesday of every month. On these days, promptly at 4:00 p.m., the second-floor board room fills to overflow capacity as this meeting convenes. It is on these occasions, and in this somewhat formidable setting, that the professional design, management, entrepreneurship, and politics of Historic Galveston is most clearly and impressively revealed.

These meetings are open to the public, and although most of the critical decision-making has already been hammered out in closed steering meetings of the executive committee, the bulk of that committee’s monthly agenda must still be brought before the entire Board for discussion and approval. The political strength of the GHF rests in the composition of its Board of Directors. Drawing upon positional elites strategically situated within the critical ranks of

\(^6\) Of all the GHF departments, the residential services are the most diverse and professionally informed by preservation philosophy and methodology. Unfortunately, these services also appear to be the least understood and rewarded within the institutional structure of the GHF, although the residential community itself, which forms the backbone and most emotionally-invested sector of Historic Galveston, fully realizes and appreciates its indebtedness to this programatic division of the historical foundation.
Galveston's social and professional circles, the Board represents a powerful cross-section of public and private special interest groups whose common aim is to further the economic efficacy of historic preservation and economic redevelopment. Reaching a consensus as to how this common goal will be met is often a protracted process, as board members and advisors lobby for the privileging of different philosophies and methodologies. This factionalism promotes lively debate and invariable compromise, but it also ensures the united front and hegemony of the GHF over a host of other players in the politics of preservation and cultural production.

In the late 1980s, when I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork, the Galveston Historical Foundation represented the cutting-edge of historic preservation. In the 1987-1988 edition of its "Orientation Booklet," a guide issued primarily to its own volunteers, the GHF explained its mission as follows:

The purpose of the Galveston Historical Foundation is to unite and support our community in the understanding, research, appreciation, preservation, restoration, care and use of Galveston’s physical and cultural heritage, to provide visitors to Galveston with a quality experience of this heritage, and to demonstrate the

---

7 My use of the term positional elites is intended to reference the notion of a "power elite" as defined in the specific tradition represented by political sociologists C. Wright Mills (1956) and William G. Domhoff (1983).
importance of this heritage to Galvestonians and Texas, both present and future. [p.1]

This statement of purpose, while specific enough in defining instrumental goals, makes absolutely no allusion to what it is that the GHF takes to be "Galveston's physical and cultural heritage." Lest one mistakenly conclude that the GHF takes all of Galveston's past to be appropriate interpretive terrain, or constitutive of "Galveston's physical and cultural heritage," some clarification is in order. The GHF's goals are operationalized strictly on behalf of "Historic Galveston."

Although its dimensions are intentionally ambiguous and malleable, Historic Galveston's temporal boundaries roughly parallel the late 1850s to the turn-of-the-century, occasionally taking in several centuries on the early side and nearly two decades on the latter. Spatially, Historic Galveston can be located throughout the modern city where the built-environment corresponds, on either an in situ or symbolic basis, to the approximate period 1850 to 1900. Generally speaking, "Historic Galveston" is interchangeable

---

8 The fluidity of these temporal bounds allows, in the first instance, for capitalization on stories of cannibalistic Native Americans (Karankawa), chronicles of Spanish explorers encountering Galveston Island as New World, and piratic tales of Jean Lafitte's encampment on the Island in the early 1800s. Inclusion of the two decades following the turn-of-the-century not only facilitates discussion of the recovery and rebuilding of the City in the wake of the massive hurricane of 1900, it more importantly brings within the material fold of Historic Galveston a critical mass of affordable "historic" homes.
with "19th-century Galveston" and "Victorian-era Galveston."

Having defined it in this rather simplistic, three dimensional way, I should add that Historic Galveston is best understood in terms of what it excludes from a cultural standpoint, rather than what it includes from a purely spatial and temporal point of view.

The Political Economy of Historic Preservation

To understand the privileging discourse and practice of the Galveston Historical Foundation (and that of the historic preservation movement at large), an explanatory detour is in order. Historic preservation operates on many levels, including the national, state, regional, and local levels of the county and municipality. Although, its historical roots are located in 19th-century assertions of nationalist legitimacy and patriotic zeal, my own concern is to show the profound effect that preservation has had on a local level. It is on this scale that the transformation of history from an elitist, scholarly, and inaccessible realm to an available commodity has been most dramatic.

In recent years, a number of histories have been written about the preservation movement as it has developed both here in the U.S. and abroad.⁹ These histories, produced both in and outside of the preservation industry, have inherent

⁹ Among these are Fawcett (1976); Glass (1990); Hosmer (1965, 1981); Mulloy (1976).
historiographic importance, as they reflect a growing trend toward self-consciousness within the field, as well as an emerging external critique. The cursory introduction to the field that follows is drawn principally from these works and is intended to serve only as a foundation for understanding Galveston Island's forays into historic preservation.

In *Keeping Time: The History and Theory of Preservation in America* (1988), William Murtagh discusses the evolution of historic preservation along a trajectory formally launched in the mid-19th century under the patriotic rubric of nationalism. By the early-20th century, historic preservation had begun to follow a transformative course guided by a philosophic and practical framework successively dominated by education, aesthetics, the environment, and finally, economics. From "associative history," or history based on people and events, preservation developed historiographically into history of, or as, architectural aesthetics (Murtagh 1988).

---


The principal social groups who lobbied on behalf of preservation naturally shifted in accordance with the animating motives. Where the earliest form of historic preservation, which Murtagh characterizes as a kind of secular pietism, was enacted by concerned citizens, primarily patrician women who sought to preserve nationally-symbolic monuments and landmarks like Mount Vernon, in the early 20th-century large scale philanthropy and patronage, exemplified by the great capitalists Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller, began increasingly to fund preservation geared toward popular education. Today, the field of architecture informs historic preservation more than any other single theory or philosophy.

These early, predominantly localized, scattered, and independent private sector initiatives would not become wedded to formal federal involvement until the mid-20th century. Prior to that time, federal participation in preservation issues was focused primarily upon diminishing natural resources and archaeological sites. The Antiquities Act of 1906 and the establishment of the National Park System in 1916 marked the first significant pieces of federal legislation directed toward historic preservation.

Scholars of the preservation movement concur that the most decisive event in the history of preservation was the chartering in 1949 of "The National Trust for Historic Preservation." Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., noted author of a massive two-volume history of the American preservation
movement (1981) recently reviewed this, and other preservation milestones for *Historic Preservation* magazine. Recounting the political drama behind the founding of the National Trust, he writes:

At the end of World War II, New York State’s legendary czar, Robert Moses, announced plans to raze Castle Clinton during the construction of the Brooklyn Tunnel. George McAneny of the American Scenic Historic Preservation Society saw in the War of 1812 fort and its site the whole history of New York City, from the Dutch presence to the arrival of European immigrants. With Ronald F. Lee of the National Park Service he blocked Moses. Their alliance led to the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings, which in 1949 was chartered by Congress as the National Trust for Historic Preservation. [Hosmer 1989:22]

The National Trust occupies an anomalous position within the federal government and the preservation industry, and fulfills a critical bridging function.

The National Trust is the only national, private, nonprofit organization chartered by Congress to encourage public participation in the preservation of sites, buildings, and objects significant in American history and culture. Support is provided by membership dues, endowment funds, contributions, and grants from federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of the Interior, under provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act. [Historic Preservation, Sept./Oct. 1990:57]

Although the National Trust represents a relatively recent development in the history of historic preservation, its contemporary influence and position within the movement is
pivotal.\textsuperscript{12} It gives the movement a national presence and legitimacy and serves a clearinghouse function for state and local groups. State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs), six regional offices, and a Board of Trustees composed of individuals throughout the U.S. form the primary infrastructure of the Trust. Together, they advise the office of the National Register of Historic Preservation, and facilitate nomination and listing of "districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture" [National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, Section 101(a)(1)(A)].\textsuperscript{13} In addition, the Trust’s two major publications, the magazine \textit{Historic Preservation} and the

\textsuperscript{12} The National Trust’s own brief history is particularly interesting for what it reveals about the partnership between the public and private sectors and its demonstration of the politics at play in elite patronage of nationalist concerns (Mulloy 1976; Wallace 1986).

\textsuperscript{13} Where the chartering of the National Trust mandated federal commitment to historic preservation, the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 facilitated its enactment on state and local levels, by circumventing federal activity of another kind entirely. Hosmer explains:

For many years preservation at the local level meant fighting federal policies harmful to historic structures, including urban renewal, highway construction and the abandonment of old federal buildings. Finally, in 1966, the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act, strongly supported by the National Trust and its then chairman, Gordon Gray, provided much needed muscle. The act created the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and empowered it to review plans for any federally funded local, state, or federal project to determine the impact on historic resources. [Hosmer 1989:23]
newspaper *Preservation News*, link the many public and private preservation groups scattered throughout the country and disseminate practical and theoretical knowledge. The Preservation Press, the publishing arm of the National Trust, is also a vital component of the preservation industry.

Contemporary historic preservation owes much of its present popularity and success to the political economy that underlies it. Where 1960s urban renewal failed countless communities across America, historic preservation moved in a decade later, armed with legislation, tax incentives, and a new rhetoric of the built environment and "adaptive use," to rescue, among many other entities, small-town downtowns from lethargy and decay. It is on this level that historic preservation has particularly popularized the past. Neatly embodied in familiar people, events, and architectural artifacts, "history" became readily accessible to the lay public, and more importantly, to residential and commercial developers.

A handful of legal and financial instruments play the most critical roles in local-level historic preservation. These include historic districts, easements, revolving funds, tax incentives, and most recently, the National Trust's "Main Street" program. Each of these is principled on behalf of preservation's late 20th-century realization that to be economically viable, historic buildings must be adapted for reuse, rather than maintained as museums or monuments at great
cost to non-profit preservation organizations and/or the tax-paying public.

Historic districting is about planning for the future, a concept that may at first seem dissonant with the notion of preserving the foregone past. The first historic district was created in Charleston, South Carolina in 1931 by the local city council for the purpose of protecting the architectural integrity of an historic neighborhood known as "the Battery." By delineating the boundaries, and defining the design and limitations of growth for this "old and historic district," Charleston became a national model for neighborhood preservation.¹⁴

Historic districts can be of two types, federally designated (which involves listing in the National Register and potential qualification for federal rehabilitation benefits) or local (created by city ordinance). Whether locally or nationally designated, the design and maintenance of exterior architectural features is controlled by the city or community in which the district is located. Historic districts are seldom created without controversy. The restrictions such districts typically impose on landowners challenge basic notions about the rights that accord with private property ownership. Displacement of low-income,

¹⁴ In 1966, under the auspices of the National Historic Preservation Act, the Secretary of the Interior was charged with responsibility for identifying, among other entities, "districts" appropriate for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (Murtagh 1988:103).
elderly, and minority individuals from residential areas, and small, struggling businesses from commercial zones has been a long-standing problem of historic districting and the concomitant process of gentrification. Nevertheless, historic districts represent a remarkably successful first step in reversing economic and aesthetic deterioration in urban areas:

Establishment of a local historic district will not by itself preserve historic buildings, nor will it alone produce an area of great appeal. Historic district establishment is an attempt to create an environment which is conducive to the preservation of significant properties. The controls on property development serve to assure property owners that investment in rehabilitating significant structures will not be negated by incongruous development on neighboring properties. With such assurances, property owners will be more willing to preserve their properties, thus reinforcing the overall character of the area. [The Environmental Law Clinic, Franklin Pierce Law Center (1980) as cited in Maddex 1983:55]

Yet another strident measure in effecting the maintenance of an area's architectural aesthetic or general historic ambiance is easement acquisition. Although easements can technically be of many types, the easements most valuable in historic preservation are scenic easements and exterior or facade easements. Easements are typically acquired through donation, although in some rare instances, they may be purchased. Like historic districts, easements are legally encoded:

A preservation easement is a legal document which regulates the use of or changes to real property, and may be given or sold by a property owner to a
charitable organization or or government body. Once recorded, an easement become part of the property's chain of title and usually 'runs with the land' in perpetuity, thus binding not only the present owner who convey it but all future owners as well. A preservation easement gives the organization to which it is conveyed the legal authority to enforce its terms. These terms usually create negative covenants prohibiting the owner from making alterations to the property without prior review, consultation and approval by the holder. Some easements also impose positive covenants that require the owner to maintain certain improvements to the property or maintain it in a certain physical condition. [Charles E. Fischer III et. al as cited in Maddex 1983:22]

First conceived and developed by the Historic Savannah Foundation, the "revolving fund" gives "the preservationist two things he seldom has: time and money" (James Biddle, in Ziegler, et al. 1975:3). Revolving funds can take many forms from a line of credit extended by a bank, to securities or actual liquid assets held by the organization itself. As it most typically operates, the revolving fund buys the non-profit preservation group time to save an immediately endangered building--time to find a buyer who will restore or rehabilitate the building. The revolving aspect of the fund is what sets it apart from other types of intervention on behalf of a structure in danger of demolition or deterioration. Through actual purchase and resale, preservation is achieved without permanent encumbrance of the building and funding remains intact to facilitate the same process on behalf of other structures. Restrictive covenants accompany the sale of the deed and easements may or may not
remain in the possession of the preservation organization.

Revolving funds have proved to be one of the most valuable financial tools of the modern preservation movement. By necessity, their creation and operation forges an alliance between preservationists, local banks, and the real estate industry. Revolving funds typically spark community-wide interest in property improvement, which in turn, makes it increasingly difficult for such funds to be purely self-perpetuating. Their replenishment by outside sources is increasingly necessitated as historic preservation gains a greater foothold in the community:

After a number of properties have been bought and restored, it is almost inevitable that this activity will attract private investment in nearby historic buildings. Banks often begin to lend money more readily to those who wish to buy property in an area. Individuals, on their own initiative, will buy and restore property which has never been in the hands of the preservation organization. The result is usually increased property values and a larger tax base for the city... The important thing to bear in mind is that the revolving fund is not a bank. Its purpose is not to make money; it is to save buildings. With increased property values caused by the revolving fund, it eventually becomes more expensive to buy property and the fund will normally become smaller rather than larger. Sometimes it is necessary to sell a property for less than was paid for it. If this means saving a building which might otherwise be lost, then it must be done (Zeigler et al. 1975:4-5).

Local-level historic preservation gained its most significant momentum in 1976, when the government adopted a program of federal tax incentives designed to encourage the
rehabilitation of historic buildings for income-producing purposes in declining central business districts. Cities and private investors have reaped joint benefits from these incentives.\textsuperscript{15} Between 1976 and 1990, almost 14 billion dollars worth of private investment was poured into the rehabilitation of nearly 21,000 historic buildings (\textit{Historic Preservation}, Vol. 42, No. 5:51). Developers and preservationists became unlikely partners and historic preservation became a new "growth industry" (Murtagh 1988:11).

Boston Bay Capital is perhaps the most visible corporation of the sort spawned by the tax incentives program. During the late 1980s, it regularly ran full center-page advertisements in \textit{Preservation News}. A photographic portfolio of historic restorations and rehabilitations facilitated by Boston Bay Capital accompanied the following solicitation:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

In 1989, Boston Bay Capital went public with "Historic Preservation Properties 1989 Limited Partnership Program," or

\textsuperscript{15} These federal tax incentives are designed to make the rehabilitation of older buildings appear equal to, if not more attractive than, the construction of new buildings. Although the 1976 credits were more generous, reformed legislation still offers developers worthy tax incentives (\textit{HP September/October 1990:51-58}).
HPP'89. A special insert in *Historic Preservation*’s 40th anniversary issue (which coincidentally featured a story on Historic Galveston) invited interested parties to write for a prospectus:

HPP'89 is a real estate limited partnership organized for the purpose of investing in a diversified portfolio of real properties which expect to qualify for Rehabilitation Tax Credits. This public real estate partnership requires a minimum investment of $5,000.[p.39]

The big business side of historic preservation is further buttressed by the National Trust’s Main Street program. Following a late 1970s pilot program in three mid-western states, the National Trust officially opened the Main Street Center in 1980 to support the revitalization of downtown areas. The Main Street project’s goal is to "encourage economic development within the context of historic preservation" (Texas Historical Commission 1988:53). Premised on the assumption that most downtown areas are comprised of now historic buildings that continue to be overlooked as prime store locations in keeping with post-WWII suburban flight, the program borrows management concepts from the downtown region’s primary nemesis: the modern shopping mall. By installing a downtown manager trained in preservation, public relations, and economic development to coordinate the revitalization of these once thriving central business districts, the program is able to refocus attention and develop community pride in the downtown region. (Murtagh 1988). An agenda that combines
building improvement and aesthetic design, merchant interdependence and cooperation, and promotional events (such as seasonal festivals) serves to build an attractive and cohesive image of the downtown region. 16

The Main Street program has recently declared itself to be a national success. Billy Parrish, the Center's director, notes that "the ten years of the National Main Street Center have shown very clearly that historic preservation and economic development are more than compatible: They need each other" (Keister 1990:46). The Center's statistics bear out his observation:

By the end of 1987, reinvestment in Main Street communities topped $1 billion. Those communities experienced net gains of more than 16,000 jobs and 7,000 new businesses. Main Street townspeople improved more than 10,000 older buildings ranging from low-cost store front improvements to thorough rehabilitations. And these figures comes from only those programs affiliated with the National Main Street Center; many other towns use Main Street-

16 The return to downtowns is clearly an idea whose time has come. A recent article in the New York Times featured a phenomenal architectural transformation: the razing of a concrete parking lot and 65,000 square foot strip-center mall and its replacement with Cape Cod's new three-block Mashpee Commons; a "downtown meant to encourage strolling." (Neighborhoods are soon to follow.)

"We think of malls as the main focus for retrofitting the suburbs," said Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, an architect and a professor at the University of Miami who founded the nation's first Master of Architecture degree program that treats suburbia as a serious design problem. "The strategy is, take a mall and make it into a downtown. Two decades ago, the popular strategy was to take a downtown and make it into a mall. [New York Times, March 14, 1991.]
style revitalization for which the center has no accounting. [Keister 1990:46]

While Reagan-era federal budget cuts and tax reforms have taken their toll on historic preservation, producing setbacks of a practical nature, the phenomenon of the public/private partnership continues to structure the theory and practice of preservation. Throughout the pages of both Historic Preservation and Preservation News (hereafter cited as HP and PN), the commercial underpinning of historic preservation is readily apparent. In addition to news stories, a variety of other features clearly spell out the dollar value of "heritage."\(^\text{17}\)

"Historic Properties" in PN features homes and other structures available for sale. The newspaper stipulates that "properties for sale or rent must have national, state, or local historic and/or architectural significance." In the February 1991 edition, a home near Middleburg, Virginia was among 23 offered for sale with individual photographs and accompanying texts expounding historic credentials and architectural virtues:

\(^{17}\) The trend of the 90s adds a new dimension to historic preservation's political economy. Officially billed by the National Trust as Heritage Tourism, the Trust is helping to develop a formal agenda for incorporating history into local tourism. As I left the field, Texas had just been selected as one of the pilot states for the new Heritage Tourism program. Galveston, and the GHF in particular, are beginning to work with the appropriate state and national entities to develop the infrastructure for heritage tourism in Galveston.
Circa 1911 in National Register, approximately 30,000 sq. ft. restored to perfection. Over one million pounds of marble in house, ballroom, 15-foot ceilings, mahogany doors, pool, tennis, formal English gardens, stable with 2 apartments, 3 cottages, 243 acres, more land available. Security gates and system; $7,900,000.00 [P. 11]

Though the asking price for historic properties does not always reach the 8 million dollar range, many properties are listed at or around a half-million dollars. Still, a historic bargain can be had. Consider another property offered in the same February 1991 Preservation News. For $15,000, one could obtain the following:

Petersburg, Virginia. Early stone house on large lot in historic district. Picture taken before fire demolished everything except first floor of house. A perfect challenge for the energetic craftsman interested in creating a unique dwelling. [P.16]

HP's "Marketplace" features advertisements for crafts, technologies, and specialty companies keyed to precisely the kind of historic restoration and rehabilitation the property listed above would require. Baudrillardian critiques of simulacra and the hyperreal (1988) come readily to mind as one browses the pages of this section where history is hawked at its simulated best.¹⁸ Consider the following sample of

¹⁸ Michael Wallace, editorial coordinator for Radical History Review, writes in a similar vein of the contrast between early preservation and its new counterpart: "The DAR and Rockefellers, for all their distortions of the past, at least had a concern with meanings; the contemporary crowd were into surfaces, styles, the historic as stage setting." He goes on to explain:
restoration advertisements:

****

Supaflu Makes Old Chimneys Better Than New Chimneys

Because Supaflu retains the original charm and craftsmanship built into so many older chimneys while providing a new margin of safety, performance and durability old chimney never knew, Supaflu gives new life to some of our most historic chimneys. That's why when historic restoration experts run into chimney problems, their solution is Supaflu. Whether your chimney is historic, or just very, very used, Supaflu can make it like new. [Emphasis added, HP Sept./Oct. 1989:77]

A droll example of this was the emergence of Facadism (also known as Facadectomy and Facadomy). In this form of Potemkin preservation, developers tore down an old building but preserved its storefront wall. This they affixed, like a historic veneer, to a high-rise condo or hotel. It was, someone said, like preserving polar bears in the form of rugs. [Wallace 1986: 195]

Galveston has its own examples of "Potemkin preservation." In 1976, Richard Hass painted trompe l'oeil murals to "restore" the cast-iron columns to the Clara Lang & Marx-Kempner buildings on the Strand. And more recently, a trolley system was developed to shuttle tourists between the beach and historic districts. The irony of its simulation has not been lost on Galvestonians. In a recent article, The Galveston Daily News noted "Little more than a year ago, Galveston's $12 million Victorian ride into the future arrived on the back of an 18-wheeler" (6/11/89). An advertisement in Texas Monthly (January 1989) was somewhat more thorough in drawing attention to the trolley's "masked inner-workings":

Another attraction is the newly built, $12 million, turn-of-the-century-style Galveston Island Trolley system....Modern self-propelled, diesel-powered cars mask the inner workings beneath the nostalgic facades of richly lacquered and painted woods, trimmed in brass and fitted with wood-framed window and hand-made reversible seats, reminiscent of the island's original nineteenth-century trolley system. [P.55]
****

Restoration Glass will change your view of history.

Why are architects specifying authentic Restoration Glass™? Because it's imperfect. Each sheet is made by craftsmen, using the original cylinder method. Yet this glass easily meets today's building codes. And its available in two levels of distortion. Once you've seen the difference Restoration Glass makes, no true restoration will look authentic without it. [Emphasis in original, HP Sept./Oct. 1990:71]

****

Need Help Restoring Historical Buildings?

If you need to replace or duplicate an existing historical building treasure, we suggest you consider using GFRC...Glass Fiber Reinforced Concrete. This remarkable advancement in lightweight concrete technology is a zirconia-enhanced alkali-resistant fiberglass that combines with concrete to produce half-inch sections of incredible strength. Craftsmen apply their molding skills to this material and create lightweight, durable, precise replicas of original ornamental work...Molloy and Associates [Emphasis added, HP Sept./Oct. 1990:76]

****

Besides demonstrating the commercial value of history and the tremendous technological industry spawned by historic preservation's commitment to adaptive use, these ads raise questions about the definition and role of the notion of authenticity in contemporary historic preservation and point out the ironic balance which must be achieved between old and new.
Preservationists are vitally aware of the criticisms their movement’s commercial embeddedness provokes. An August 7, 1989 editorial in the Wall Street Journal took a highly cynical view of the support on the part of certain representatives of the Democratic Party for the restoration of tax rehab credits as a seemingly new and suspect alliance with what has traditionally been viewed as the tax-loopholed preserve of the rich. The editorial went on to trivialize the commercial foundations of historic preservation. Outraged National Trust president J. Jackson Walters responded with hearty indignation in his own PN editorial:

The financial daily even managed to sneer at PN’s advertisements for investing in historic properties. After the shock of all this passed, we checked the date at the top of the page. Had we misread? Was it really August 7, 1969? The Journal’s portrait of preservation would have been no surprise back then, when preservation was a much smaller, more misunderstood movement. The editorial was sarcastic, clumsy, and worst of all, wrong. Trying to turn us into a cabal of greedy gentrifiers, the Journal ignored the real world. [Emphasis added, PN Sept. 1989:4]

Historic preservation works today precisely because it is able to fragment, spin off, adapt, and merchandize the desirable parts of the past from a, then jettisoned, historic whole. This process occurs not only on a materialized, economic level, but on a cultural one as well. However, where the construction and sale of the cultural past is concerned, the breaks are neither as clean nor as superficially
contested. Lived experience and popular memory confound the process of constructing the cultural otherness upon which local-level historic preservation ultimately relies. Galveston Island is an excellent case in point.

**Historic Preservation in Galveston**

"Historic Galveston" draws on the mythology of the Island’s late 19th-century financial and commercial heyday as its central, organizing theme. Remnants of this era’s material culture serve as prominent reminders of a more stable island economy and urbanity. Historic Galveston clusters spatially around these artifacts as the most obvious means of incorporating the Island’s more affluent and cosmopolitan past into its predominantly touristic and economically-depressed present. As primarily architectural structures, these artifacts provide natives and visitors alike with a concrete device for accessing the abstruse cultural past. The more difficult task of establishing actual temporal and cultural integrity between the late-19th century and the present is addressed through the ongoing construction of an official historical narrative and through the communalization and public ritualization of Galveston’s Victorian era.

The Galveston Historical Foundation is responsible for the lion’s share of the authorship, enactment, and sale of this imagined cultural past. The GHF’s role as the central interpreter of the Victorian era and sponsor of Historic
Galveston is hegemonic among the many profit and non-profit entities who now cooperate to construct, market, and benefit from this contemporary cultural image. As a community preservation organization, the GHF acts as a politically powerful, self-appointed cultural clearinghouse on private and civic matters related to Galveston's Victorian-era history. It was charged with this mandate years before it was able to effectively organize itself toward this end. In 1967, John C. Garner, Jr. (who directed the Galveston Architectural Inventory in the late 1960s) was the keynote speaker at the GHF's annual banquet meeting held in the Charcoal Gallery of the now demolished Jack Tar Hotel. On this occasion Garner challenged the GHF to rise to the community-wide cause of preservation:

Galveston is going to become increasingly visitor oriented and historical activities should take advantage of this....The GHF has conducted its business in an informal manner, with a primary center of interest the Samuel May Willimas House....By the name you have chosen for yourselves, however, you imply that your program is all encompassing and that the GHF serves as the historical body of this city....If the preservation movement is to succeed here, there must be some agency that will step into the office of leadership....One problem of the greatest magnitude is to coordinate the activities of all civic bodies as they may pertain to historic preservation. [GDN 2/3/67:B1]

---

19 Among these entities are the 1894 Grand Opera House, Mary Moody Northen, Inc.'s Moody Mansion and Museum, the Center for Transportation and Commerce, etc. (all non-profit) and countless retail and commercial establishments that capitalize on the seasonal events and general historic ambiance available for local or touristic consumption.
Today, the GHF’s engagement in the work of physically preserving the material legacy of 19th-century Galveston is in many ways subordinate to the more critical task of constructing a cohesive cultural image for Historic Galveston and a political climate in which historic preservation can continue to flourish through private interest and investment, thus ensuring an overall island economy increasingly dependent upon "heritage tourism."\(^{20}\) This has not always been the case.

In keeping with its goal of demonstrating historical continuity and contemporary connection with Galveston’s Victorian past, the GHF traces its roots to 1871.\(^{21}\) On both practical and philosophical grounds, the GHF’s affinity with this early entity is more than a little dubious; historic preservation was never its concern. The Historical Society of Galveston founded back in 1871 was a small, literary society composed entirely of men. As individual members passed away or moved from the Island, the society was abandoned and its

---

\(^{20}\) Although the concept has been around for decades, the actual term "heritage tourism" wasn't institutionalized until the late 1980s when the National Trust began a pilot project by the name, thus formally adding it to the lexicon of preservation terminology.

\(^{21}\) Although the actual history of the GHF falls outside the scope and intent of this project, the Galveston Historical Foundation’s official narrative of its historic-self serves as a telling prologue to subsequent discussions of its current historiographic theory and practice and of its critical impact on contemporary local cultural meanings and native historiography.
archives placed in storage. In 1885 these archives were offered for sale at a price intended to recover storage costs. Two gentlemen stepped in to save the archives and in 1894 resurrected the organization as The Texas Historical Organization. The records of this group were donated to Galveston's Rosenberg Library in 1931, where they remain to date. On October 29, 1942, the Friends of the Rosenberg Library sponsored a meeting which resulted in the reactivation of the Galveston Historical Society (*The Handbook of Texas History* 1952:665).

It was more than a decade later that the actual institutional precursor of the modern GHF was formed. In 1954, an organization of determined and forward-thinking women chartered and incorporated the non-profit Galveston Historical Foundation for the immediate purpose of buying and restoring the neglected home of one of the City's founders, Samuel May Williams, which was then slated for demolition by a residential developer. The former Galveston Historical Society was subsumed under the auspices of the new foundation which continued, over the years to spearhead the preservation of Galveston's early architecture through creation of house museums and facilitation of historic districting.

The GHF's logo and letterhead neatly gloss this truncated and diffuse historical past with the brief inscription "Organized in 1871, Chartered and Incorporated in 1954." Its official historical chronology neatly summarizes the 80 years
between the formation of the Historical Society of Galveston and the 1954 chartering of the GHF with the following two consecutive entries:

1871--Galveston Historical Society is founded, primarily as a literary and historical society.

1954--Early volunteer leaders save the 1839 Williams Home from demolition, and restructure the Society as the Galveston Historical Foundation (GHF). The Williams Home is partly restored and opened for tours. [GHF Orientation Booklet 1987-1988:2]

The GHF's history directly parallels the history of preservation as Murtagh characterizes it. Originally developing out of the volunteer efforts of socially prominent, civic-minded women whose central aim was to preserve symbolic landmarks, the GHF has evolved into an organization committed to preserving a turn-of-the-century architectural aesthetic through the economically viable means of adaptive use.

The process of transformation into a powerful and professionalized preservation organization began in 1973. It was in this year that the Foundation was given responsibility for managing grant monies received from two local charitable foundations, The Moody Foundation and The Harris and Eliza Kempner Fund. These funds were gained through the determined efforts of the Galveston County Cultural Arts Council and its executive director, Emily Whiteside, for the purpose of establishing a revolving fund for restoring and revitalizing The Strand. Pursuant to the mandate and qualifications with
which these monies were granted, the GHF sought professional
counsel and guidance, soon locating it in the person of Peter
Brink, a Washington D.C.-based preservation lawyer.²²

²² The GHF's official chronology notes that in 1973, in
addition to the hiring of Brink, the establishment of The
Strand Revolving fund and receipt of "key financial support,"
the "GHF is reorganized and its membership expanded." This
reorganization undoubtedly served to facilitate the
professionalization Brink's hiring necessitated. I should note
here, that my focus on the period of Peter Brink's tenure at
the GHF is in no way intended to undervalue the earnest and
sincere unpaid work and achievements of the many individuals
who preceded him and remain unnamed in this text. It is
precisely because so much of that work formed an effective
volunteer base that required professional guidance and
knowledge to be fully exploited on behalf of the Island and
the Foundation, that the need for an executive director ever
arose to be competently filled. It is a sad fact that the
professionalization of voluntary organizations effects the
alienation of some of its former leadership and membership.
This is a costly loss on many levels and one that the GHF did
not escape. Nevertheless, Brink's employment must rightly be
seen as a new direction for the Foundation, and certainly
marks the juncture at which the GHF began to build its
hegemonic base. In taking this position, I may well stand
accused of conflating Brink--the individual, with Galveston
Historical Foundation--the professional preservation
organization. If this is so, then I stand in good company.
Throughout the duration of my fieldwork I was told ad
infini tum, by many within the Foundation and the community-at-
large, that "Brink is the GHF" or "The GHF is Peter Brink." I
was also told that he hated to hear this characterization of
himself or the organization, as well as characterizations that
portrayed the GHF as the preserve of a few elites or Galveston
society leaders. Nevertheless, the power represented by his
presence in Galveston and the Foundation itself can hardly be
denied. For instance, in 1987, Brink and the GHF were
conominees (and winners) in the National Trust's yearly
Preservation Honor Awards. Jan Coggleshall, then mayor of
Galveston, submitted the nomination form along with a
recommendation letter stating: "I have no doubt that the
Galveston Historical Foundation and Peter Brink have been the
strongest single factor in the economic development of this
island in recent times." Brink was also honored in 1978 as
Inbetween Magazine's "Islander of the Year," and upon his
departure from the City in 1990, he was honored as "A Man of
Vision" at a fundraising dinner hosted by the local chapter of
the Texas Society to Prevent Blindness. Upon this occasion
Brink came to the Island as a short-term preservation consultant and "interim director" and was subsequently hired as executive director of the Foundation. To his credit, he hit the ground with a steady sprint that continued unabated until his departure in 1990. Not originally intending to stay for even one of the 16 years that followed, he apparently sold himself on Galveston while in the process of interviewing applicants for his permanent replacement. In a personal letter dated July 30, 1973, he writes:

As I have been explaining the great challenge and opportunity of the Galveston program to applicants during the past few weeks, I seem to have persuaded myself that Galveston is the frontline as far as preservation is concerned. This led me to reconsider my own situation and, finally, to arrange a one year leave of absence from my law firm in Washington. The Steering Committee of the Historical Foundation had previously offered me the position of Executive Director several times during my work as interim director. After carefully considering my decision the Committee again offered me the position, and we signed a contract last week. [RLA 87-0019]

It is in this same letter that the concept of Historic Galveston first appears in the administrative records of the GHF, when Brink makes reference to moving "forward in an effort which could be decisive in the restoration and

Brink was hailed as "A Man Whose Vision of Our Past Ensures Our Future."
enhancement of historic Galveston" (RLA 87-0019). Although Brink first speaks of "historic Galveston" as extant, as though it were waiting in the wings for mere soulgiving "restoration and enhancement," Historic Galveston, as a physical entity, temporal referent, and linguistic term or place name is a recent invention derivative of the material conditions of late 20th-century Galveston.

Historic Preservation and the Political Economy of Tourism

Historic Galveston was initially and necessarily fashioned as a foil to the cultural image that has successfully reigned over Galveston's tourist economy for nearly a century now—that of Galveston, the Island—a casual, semi-tropical vacation destination catering to traditional beach/resort goers. Although superficial gains have been made in integrating the economy of "Historic Galveston" with that of "Galveston Island," primarily through print advertising and professional media relations, each cultural identity and arena

---

23 The use of the lower-case "h" and the employment of the word "historic," as a straight-forward descriptive, signifies the then, mere skeletal, existence of Galveston as a historical entity, as opposed to the proper noun, place name, and conceptual terrain the two words were soon to become. In the intervening years, Historic Galveston would be fleshed out and buttressed by all manner of legal, financial, and cultural supports.

24 In 1964, the GHF sponsored a contest entitled "The Value to the City of an Old Galveston Quarter," an idea modeled after New Orleans's "Vieux Carre." Historic Galveston, however, is much more encompassing than a historic district or quarter.
continues to represent a threat, on both economic and qualitative grounds, to the other's critical slice of the larger touristic pie.

Tourists are surely one of the most disdained and disparaged categories of human beings on the face of the earth (MacCannell 1976, V.L. Smith 1977). Galvestonians have the following to say about them: "They come down here with a dirty T-shirt and a five-dollar bill and never change either one of them." Variations on a similar theme include the commonly-voiced idea that the Galveston Causeway should never or have been built or, at the very least, should have been outfitted with a toll-booth at its Mainland entrance. More subtle expressions of contempt are reflected in the likes of a fast-food restaurant marquee I passed in late September 1989 on 61st street (the closest route off the Causeway to the beachfront) which read "Goodbye Summer, Hello Galveston." This was not a reference to the passing of a season but a good-riddance to the end of that year's onslaught of beach-going day-trippers.

In late 1989, the Galveston Park Board of Trustees met to discuss the need for a new (that being positive) attitude toward the tourism industry. An editorial in the Galveston Daily News reported that one member of the Board complained "The problem in Galveston is residents call all tourists by

\[25\] I was told by various informants that this phrase became especially popular during the late 1960s and 70s.
their first name—'damn'" (GDN 11/19/89). Earlier that year, business owners on the west end of the Island who cater to beach tourism summed up Galveston's attitude with the succinct statement: "The problem is, this Island wants tourists' money, but it doesn't want tourists" (GDN 4/23/89).

Indeed, Galveston has long struggled against its desire to "bite the hand that feeds it." In this regard it is like many other tourist-dependent locales that must sell themselves to outsiders and in so doing, compromise their privacy and risk eroding the very quality of life and place that attracts tourists to begin with. Stephen Foster's ethnography of Asch County in the Blue Ridge Mountains gives a poignant account of the effects of tourism on the local economy and cultural self-representation:

The representation of local culture to outsiders can never be simple, objective description; rather it depends in fundamental ways on the kinds of values outsiders insist upon, the sorts of priorities outsiders enact, and the kinds of markets for products, such as quilts and dulcimers, they open to local people. Craftsmanship, like political rhetoric, promotes a particular representation of local culture that is adjusted or reworked to accommodate what outsiders are likely to comprehend and value. [Foster 1988:190]

Exploitation of the essentialized and disembodied-self leads inevitably to economic dependence upon one's continued commodity valuation by outsiders. One of Foster's cultural informants described Asch County's situation in the following way:
The tourists always want to spend money. They want local people to provide things for them to spend money on, and that's the beginning of dependency. The spiral begins and you begin to wait for the tourists, although you don't like them. The contradictions begin again. Catering to people is something you don't like to do, a certain amount of self-respect is lost. [Cited in Foster 1988:194]

Where craftsmanship embodies the authentic cultural-self by which Asche County markets itself to outsiders, semi-tropical beaches are made to embody the cultural otherness by which Galveston has traditionally sold itself to tourists.

Over the past half-century, many individuals and organizations have worked tirelessly to draw stable industry to the Island, thereby diversifying the economy and lessening its dependence upon exploitation of its public beaches. Others have called somewhat eccentrically for closing the beaches to outsiders--apparently willing to suffer with dignity the severe economic decline that would be certain to follow if only to be rid of the riffraff. Still others, far less fatalistic about the Island's eroding economic autonomy and dependence upon outsider visitors and investors, have actively striven to change the nature of the touristic hand by which the Island is fed.

The GHF has been the front-runner in this latter campaign to draw "a higher caliber tourist" to Galveston.\footnote{Qualitative characterizations of tourists abound in the archival records of the GHF as well as in more public places. For instance, in 1983, the Institute for Environmental Action...}
Foundation began to demonstrate its commitment to this goal in the mid 70s, when its dependence upon a stable local economy became critical to the maintenance and continued success of its preservation agenda. In a 1978 letter to the Parks Board published the slim volume Learning from Galveston (Longo & Brambilla) in a series entitled What Makes Cities Livable? Throughout this programatic text, reference to a different quality of tourist is made repeatedly: "a special kind of tourist--one who is interested in culture and the preservation of the city's heritage as well as its beach-front attractions" (p. 79). ..."No longer will visitors be made up only of 'those who bring their own beer and food and leave garbage for the city to clean up'" (p. 107). Developer George Mitchell is cited at length on this subject and is much more explicit about the role of historic tourism in the development of the local economy:

Galveston has enormous opportunity to draw on tourism from all over the region and especially from Houston. Houston is getting so big that people come to Galveston to get away on weekends. There are hundreds of rich people from Houston who have summer homes and spend a lot of money in Galveston. Galveston also has a great history, and its historic areas are just beginning to blossom. You don't have the age and beauty of Galveston homes in Houston, Fort Worth, or Dallas. The historical importance of Galveston in ten years could be almost as important as the tourism on the beaches. Right now, however, it doesn't have enough. The key is to have twenty more shops, a trolley, the Elissa, a small-scale Harbor-place, about 50-100 more homes restored, about 1,000 more boats stalls, 10,000 more summer homes, and you have a longer-lasting and exploding tourist season. [1983:91]

And in a newspaper article appearing the same year, Ed Protz, the former administrator of grants and programs for the Moody Foundation (which funded much of the research for Learning from Galveston,) was quoted as saying "I feel fairly certain that The Strand area is safer than the seawall because it appeals to a much higher caliber of tourist" (emphasis added; InBetween, March 1983:26).
of Trustees asking for "special assistance in promoting historical attractions and events," the GHF spoke to the general "role and potential of historic tourism in Galveston" in a 5-point statement which closed with the following consideration:

With all this potential for the tourist industry, and all that is being accomplished by these projects, dollars spent on helping these attractions by promoting them make good sense for Galveston. Such promotion helps draw visitors to Galveston when we need them; it helps draw the type of visitors who have the income to patronize our hotels/motels, restaurants, etc.; and, by helping non-profit organizations like GHF, it enables them to plow more money into beautifying our city through restoration of historic homes and buildings. [Italics added, RLA 87-0019; 7/13/78]

Between 1954 and the mid 1970s, historic preservation in Galveston had been centrally focused upon reclamation of what would later comprise the material essence of Historic Galveston. Paradoxically, this infrastructure was the legacy of a former period of urban neglect. As Brink explained in countless grant proposals and publications:

In the early 1900s, Galveston lost its commercial preeminence to nearby Houston with the construction of the Houston ship channel enabling ocean-going ships and railroads to bypass the Port of Galveston. But this very setback on Galveston’s part made possible the survival of much of the city’s 19th Century historical areas. Since that time a reduced level of new construction, and the absence of federal urban renewal, have left historic Galveston substantially intact. ["Preface" by Brink in Lazzari 1975]
In fact, the only serious exception to this, which involved the closing of downtown’s Post Office Street in the 1960s for the purpose of creating an outdoor pedestrian "mall," has recently been reversed. Barricades have been removed from the street’s entrance and a rubber-tired trolley nows winds its way on grooved tracks through these reclaimed, though still blighted, downtown blocks.

Historic preservation was thus deemed to be the silver lining to emerge from Galveston’s cloud of mid-century economic depression. Having been largely passed over for Federal Urban Renewal monies, late-20th century Galveston possessed an usual largess of Victorian-era commercial and residential structures. These ranged in style and size from the iron-front office buildings and warehouses on the Strand to opulent mansions and small victorian cottages resplendent with the decorative "gingerbread" embellishments with which this architectural period is so popularly associated.

It was toward these architectural remnants, and the establishment of community awareness of its Victorian-era past, that the Island’s earliest preservation initiative was directed. Historic districts were designated and associations formed to protect commercial and residential areas and to stimulate a broader preservation ethos among natives. Highlights of this era of preservation history on the Island include acquisition in 1954 of the 1839 Samuel May Williams House, participation in the Historic American Buildings survey

While each of these represented critical groundwork, there were other events and themes taking place and shape during the mid 1970s that would move preservation beyond its local, community-based focus and economy and launch it into full-scale competition for state and national tourist trade and grant monies. Most significant among these were the inauguration of the "Dickens Evening on the Strand" Christmas celebration in 1973; the opening in 1974 of Ashton Villa as a historic house museum; the formal decision, that same year, to acquire and restore "The Elissa," an 1877 square-rigger that called twice in the 1800s at Galveston's port; the sponsoring in 1975 of the Annual Historic Homes Tour; and involvement, in 1976, in a political battle against the Galveston Wharves to retain the local color at Pier 19--a
small boat basin where local shrimpers (collectively known as the "mosquito fleet") have been docking for generations, providing island natives and visitors alike with pleasing visual and symbolic access to the sea and the period of economic autonomy it once represented.

However historically idiosyncratic or reflective of individual passions each of these events and decisions may have been in and of themselves, what they collectively effected was preservation's serious investment in Galveston's economy. In fact, the relationship between the Island's economy and preservation was increasingly one of interdependence. Historic preservation was beginning to look like a potential growth industry for the struggling island economy--one which, unlike manufacturing, refining, and off-shore drilling, would not pose a threat to the air, the Bay, or the Gulf view.

It was at this developmental juncture in Galveston's preservation movement that the work of the GHF began to evolve into something more akin to the production of culture than the preservation of history. The self-conscious forging of "Historic Galveston" as a contemporary cultural entity and commercially viable experience had become paramount and requisite to the further restoration and continued maintenance of the material culture of the historical past.
Chapter 3

HISTORIC GALVESTON

(UPS)--Galveston voters decided to secede from the United States and join the United Kingdom yesterday by a margin of more than three to one, in what many call the most backward move in Isle politics since the Smoothy Foundation caused the 1900 storm. Victory was announced by Janie Fuss of JOBS (Join Old Britain Soon) immediately after the polls closed yesterday afternoon: the pro-colony forces had won 17 to 5...."This is a historic step," Fuss said in her speech following the announcement of election results. "England and Galveston have been alike for a long time. Both are backward economically, both have a long tradition of feudal and aristocratic rule, both have a lot of people on welfare. And finally, both are surrounded by water."

-- InBetween Magazine, March 1981

The name of our city--Galveston--originated from the Spanish Governor Bernardo de Galvez, and Texas was once a part of Mexico. Sorry to burst your bubble, but Texas' Hispanic heritage did not originate in a Charles Dickens novel.

--Amy Castro, letter to the editor, Galveston Daily News, April 18, 1990

The entity and experience of Historic Galveston as a site and source of cultural otherness is articulated by a series of constructs in which the following figure most prominently: an official narrative version of the Island's history; the ritualization of invented tradition; and the commodification and marketing of the historical past. Each of these is examined at length below.
The Historical Narrative

In 1977, Brink wrote the following narrative of Historic Galveston as part of a state and nationwide campaign to develop permanent offices and exhibits for the GHF to be located at 2016 Strand. The larger document in which this narrative is encased was structured in two parts. Part II addressed the question "What is the Galveston Historical Foundation?" Part I posed the question "Why is Historic Galveston Important?" and is cited below in its entirety.

The history and architecture of 19th century Galveston is important to citizens throughout Texas, and to the history of the United States. In the mid and latter 1800's the Port of Galveston was among the 6 or 7 largest ports in the nation in terms of tonnage handled. Cotton from throughout the Southwest flowed out through the Great Port, and manufactured goods and building materials flowed in. Immigrants landed at the port to settle in Galveston or to make their way to hundreds of inland town and cities.

Merchants and entrepreneurs were vital to this booming maritime commerce, and soon impressive Victorian structures of cotton factors, bankers, insurance and commission agents, wholesalers, and shipping companies rose up in grand style along The Strand, adjacent to the port and named after The Strand of London. Fortunes made along The Strand were evidenced by grand mansions along palm-lined boulevards, and the general prosperity of the city by handsome Victorian houses and cottages throughout the eastern end of the island.

Events of epic drama are intertwined in Galveston's history: the exploits of Spanish explorers in the 1500s and pirate Jean Lafitte in 1817-21; the Battle of Galveston in the Civil War which freed the city from Union occupation; the 1900 Storm in which 6,000 persons lost their lives as the city was inundated; and the consequent building of the massive Seawall and raising of the level of the City an average of 5 feet by pumping fill from the
Gulf floor for 7 years as a guard against future hurricanes.

By ironic twists of fate much of 19th century Galveston stands today. Opening of the Houston Ship Channel in 1911 and development of Houston as the major rail terminus brought most large-scale development in Galveston to a halt. This, and the absence of Federal urban renewal, meant that no massive clearance was done in Galveston's historical areas. Thus, the very lack of strong economic development in recent decades gives Galveston the unique opportunity to utilize her beautiful historical structures and neighborhoods.

Galvestonians are more and more realizing the richness of this opportunity. This old Gulf city is undergoing an exciting renaissance...a return of caring for her 19th century structures, a strong community involvement in efforts to refurbish them for present-day uses, and a new-found pride in the city's heritage.

Galvestonians are not alone in this effort. Many Texans trace their family roots to Galveston. Many, many others are coming to appreciate that Galveston is unique and irreplaceable to Texas because of both her historical significance and the hundreds of Victorian structures intact today. Historic Galveston, if protected and nurtured, can more and more be a special place for Texans and other citizens to visit, enjoy and learn from... and more and more an important counterpart to the dynamic modern growth of Houston, Fort Worth, Dallas and other major cities. [RLA 87-0019]

This is a classic version of the narrative history the GHF produced between 1975 and 1990 on behalf of Historic Galveston. Similar narratives can be found in press releases, tourist brochures, museum exhibits, docent guides, slide shows, documentary video tapes and films.¹

¹ Another narrative written by Brink (5/20/77) bears the title "Galveston: Dramatic History and Present-Day Renaissance." Its commences with the contact made between shipwrecked Cabaza de Vaca and the Karankawa Indians in 1528
What this historical construction attempts to do, first and foremost, is to transcend the bounds of its own spatial and temporal particularisms by stating that Galveston's 19th-architecture and history is "important to citizens throughout Texas, and to the history of the United States." The implication here is that Galveston's history is a shared historical past. "Historic Galveston," by further implication, is the glue which binds together those who share this common historical past. This representation is an essential one, since Historic Galveston is ideally conceived by the GHF as a contemporary community whose cultural identity is fashioned after Galveston's urbane and cosmopolitan Victorian-era experience and intended to supplant other cultural images of the Island.

As Benedict Anderson has demonstrated, nationalism and nationhood are vested with such "profound emotional legitimacy" because they represent "imagined political communities" (1983:13-14). And the way that these communities are principally "imagined," like the many nationalism

and follows through to the 1900 storm and construction of the protective seawall. Then, skipping some 40 years, it jumps immediately to "Galveston's Present-day Renaissance," leaving us to assume that these 4 decades do not fall within the purview of Galveston's "Dramatic History."

\footnote{In later years, Brink would make this assertion in much bolder language. For instance, in 1980, when the GHF began fundraising for restoration of the Hendley Building, Brink would write "Indeed, in many ways, Galveston was Texas in those times" (RLA 87-0019, letter from Brink to Frank O'Keefe, 8/18/80).}
fashioned in their stead, is as a set of primordial social
relations. Their ideological sanctity derives from their
perceived origin in some premodern time (1983:15).

History has long been invoked as a legitimator of social
conditions and political institutions. In his article "Notes
on Community, Hegemony, and the Uses of the Past," James Brow
reminds us of the powerful potential of history to effect the
primordialization of newly conceived social relations:

Almost everywhere, it seems, the sense of belonging
together is nourished by being cultivated in the
fertile soil of the past. Even newly established
collectivities quickly compose histories for
themselves and enhance their members' sense of
shared identity, while solidarity is fortified by a
people's knowledge that their communal relations
enjoy an historical provenience. [Brow 1990:2-3]

Few contemporary Galvestonians, and infinitely fewer
outsiders, can identify with Victorian-era Galveston through
either lived experience or popular memory. Therefore,
definition of plausible grounds for a bond of commonality for
both locals and outside supporters of Galveston's historic
preservation was particularly vital to the cultural
construction of "Historic Galveston." Two strategic moves
toward that end are at work in the historical narrative cited
above, as well as in its many successive formulations.

The first move plays off the power of kinship. Because
Historic Galveston must not only forge bonds of commonality
among contemporary Galvestonians, but also create a sense of
connectedness for those outsiders whose grant-monies and
touristic expenditures are targeted by the preservation movement, reference to Galveston as a port of entry for 19th-century immigrants (and by implication—source of common ancestry) is crucial. Brow notes the importance of this kind of suggestion in creating a sense of belonging:

Communalization is further strengthened by the conviction that what ties a group of people together is not just a shared past but a common origin....But what gives kinship its special potency as a basis of community is that it can draw upon the past not simply to posit a common origin but also to claim substantial identity in the present. Kinship thus provides a standard idiom of community for collectivities ranging from the family, the lineage and the clan to the nation and the race. [P.3]

Such statements as "...immigrants landed at the port to settle in Galveston or to make their way to hundreds of inland towns and cities" and "many Texans trace their family roots to Galveston" assert that standard idiom of community by suggesting the potential kinship of contemporary Galvestonians (and other citizens scattered throughout the nation) to 19th-century Galvestonians.³

A further strategic move, which is perhaps the diagnostic

³ In later narrative histories, Brink would frequently bolster these claims to common ancestry and historical continuity by citing the patronage of dynastic island families whose contemporary generations can, in fact, relate to and identify with the Victorian era. For instance, in the preface to Mary Clifford Lazzari paints Victorian Galveston (1975), Brink writes: "Moneyed families whose names are integral to Galveston’s former economic pre-eminence...Moody, Kempner, and Sealy...have put their weight behind efforts to save historic Galveston and have been joined by hundreds of dedicated volunteers and supporters."
feature of Historic Galveston's official historical narrative, is the marked omission of any mention (whatsoever) of the Island's so-called "Open-City" era. Historian David McComb's book Galveston, A History covers the Open-City era in Chapter Five, entitled "The Free State of Galveston." Following a discussion of the Island-city's economic decline and stagnation, McComb writes:

It became the sin city of the Gulf Coast, based upon a triad of prostitution, gambling, and drinking. All of these activities were illegal in Texas, yet they flourished in Galveston under the benign eye of the local authorities. There is no simple explanation for this phenomenon, but vice in Galveston was the chief feature of its history in the first fifty years of the twentieth century. [McComb 1986:151]

It is in the absence of this mention that the historical narrative underpinning "Historic Galveston" stands in such marked contradistinction to other histories of Galveston Island. This would make sense conceptually if the GHF's historical construction was a mere bracketing of the Victorian era on the Island. But in fact, this is not the case, since

---

4 Native islanders were well aware of the selective historicizing done by the GHF. For instance, one individual told me that "the way the GHF interprets history reminds me of the way WWII's history was written by the Allies." This GHF employee, who had earned a Master's degree in history, nevertheless cooperated in that process because the GHF offered the only job opportunities related to history in which he could earn a reasonable income. Still, he struggled constantly with the privileging notions of the Foundation and was unable to resolve this reality even after I pointed out, and he admitted to, the culturally constructed inevitability of any historical account.
chronologically, the narrative reaches back to the 1500s and forward to the mid-1970s and Galveston’s so-called "rennaisance."

The GHF's particular formulation of this alternative history is a reflection of its need to create an official popular memory of the Island's Victorian era. This represented no small endeavor since the hegemonic popular memory it sought to displace was securely rooted in the lived (and as such, publicly and privately remembered) experience of the Open-City era.\(^5\)

It is in relation to this dominant memory that the GHF's

---

\(^5\) The archives of the GHF contain a letter which is particularly valuable for the way it demonstrates the hegemony of the Open-City era as a partial function of popular memory and lived experience. The letter, dated July 3, 1975, was written to GHF member Harris Kempe, Sr. by an elderly Mrs. Mary Bess, upon receipt of a letter from her brother which included an article from the N. Y. Times about the restoration of The Strand. While the purpose of Mrs. Bess's letter was to commend restoration of the Strand to its 19th-century grandeur, the narrative structure of the letter reveals that the process by which she retrieves her remembrance of that grander time entails accessing her own experiences of the Strand in the recent past. That past was 1957, when she was living in another state but had returned to Galveston and walked along the Strand. Although saddened by the deteriorating state of the buildings, she sought out her father's old place of work. Hearing a juke box several floors up, she decided to explore and discovered that the old cotton-classing room was now a bar, complete with "girls" and a gambling operation. As she turned to leave, she was surprised to be called by name—the proprietor knew her, Bess explains, because they attended school together at Galveston's Ursuline Academy. Having made this narrative return to the past of her youth, Bess went on to recount childhood remembrances of the street's better days; among them, memories of her father's black driver, Solomon, who used to park the Model T touring car by lifting it, first one end, then the other, into its parking place on what was then a thriving Strand (RLA 87-0019, 7/3/75).
composition of an official narrative history must be examined. The Popular Memory Group (PMG) of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies notes that a relational approach to the analysis of the historical production of popular memory is especially critical to understanding the struggle for hegemony:

It has to take in the dominant historical representations in the public field as well as attempts to amplify or generalize subordinated or private experiences. Like all struggles it must needs have two sides....Memories of the past are, like all common-sense forms, strangely composite constructions, resembling a kind of geology, the selective sedimentation of past traces....It is concerned with the relation between dominant memory and oppositional forms across the whole public (including academic) field. [PMG 1982:211]

In Making Histories, Studies in History-writing and Politics (Johnson et al. 1982), a variety of sites and institutions of historical production are identified. These include central state institutions like the BBC; nation or state affiliated cultural institutions such as museums, art galleries, record and archival offices, the 'National' Trust and 'National' Theatre; the publishing industry (which includes not only academic histories, but popular fiction and glossy documentary books); 'historical tourism' (such as that ongoing in Galveston); the media in all its forms and voices; and the innumerable voluntary history associations and workshops (PMG 1982:208-209). Despite disparate origins and perspectives, these sites and institutions share a common
goal—creation of popular memory—something not easily accomplished, since these producers do not "act in concert" with each other, yet perform for and wish to persuade much the same public audience (p.209).

To make them sing, if not in harmony at least with only minor dissonances, involves hard labour and active intervention. Sometimes this has been achieved by direct control (censorship for example) and by violent recasting or obliteration of whole fields of public history. More commonly today, in the capitalist West, the intersection of formal political debates and the public media are probably the crucial site. [PMG 1982:209-210]

The GHF's struggle to institutionalize its own version of Galveston's history began without any serious or openly hostile confrontation with competing historical producers and narratives. Nevertheless, such confrontation did eventually take place, and at precisely the site mentioned above—the intersection of formal political debates and the public media—when, during the 1980s, the possible introduction of legalized gambling onto the Island threatened the cultural hegemony of Historic Galveston. But subtle acts of intervention, some more successful than others, were ongoing from the initial production of the narrative.  

---

6 This will be examined in detail in Chapter 5, "The Cultural Politics of the Past."

7 Historic preservation is particularly suited to intervene in narrative processes and contexts. On the one hand its philosophy of adaptive use calls for desecralizing the past as it manifests itself in the functional material realm. That is, it is perfectly fine to turn what was once a bank building into a restaurant for the sake of economic viability—
This is clearly revealed in the administrative archives of the GHF. Part of the work of institutionalizing an alternative history involved individually challenging contemporary representations of Galveston that played off the popular memory of "the Free State of Galveston," and supporting those images of the Island that were sympathetic to Historic Galveston. Brink engaged in the former practice with zeal and the latter with authoritative vigor.

For example in 1975, Nicholas Chriss, a staff writer for the Los Angeles Times, wrote an article entitled "Galveston Living Down Sin City Past" that appeared in syndication throughout much of the country. As the following excerpt from his letter to the editor shows, Brink took vehement exception to Chriss's representation of Galveston and its history:

Nicholas Chriss' article "Galveston Living Down Sin City Past" (September 27, 1975) is a shoddy and cynical piece of work. While the series is supposed to be about "American cities and their roles in the settlement of the nation," the writer is so mesmerized by gambling in the 1940's and 1950's that he flits over the massive impact Galveston had on the settlement and development of Texas and the entire southwest in the latter 1800's. At that time the Port of Galveston was the third largest in the country and The Strand..."The Wall Street of the Southwest"...the financial center of the state. Galveston was a major entry

—after all, preservationists will say, "the uses to which various structures are put changes naturally through time." On the other hand, in order to restrict exterior architectural and aesthetic changes (and to protect the overall contribution the new use makes to the general historic ambiance of its setting), preservation must sacralize a specific period of history, placing temporal brackets around it to prevent its continuance beyond a specific historical moment.
port for immigrants and a rival to New Orleans in the exportation of cotton. While Galveston was
deluged by the 1900 Hurricane, its response was to
build a massive seawall miles long and to raise,
five to seven feet, the grade level of the entire
City, an engineering and financial feat of epic
proportions. In short, there would seem to be rich
material for an article of this sort to explore.
It doesn't. [Emphasis added; RLA 87-0019]

A similarly downbeat portrayal of Galveston and its
historic features appeared in a Baltimore paper, The Calvert
Street Sun on May 5, 1980. Written by staff correspondent
Elisabeth Stevens and titled "Galveston, the island slum, has
redeeming architectural features," the article characterized
Galveston's beaches, motels, restaurants, and occasionally its
historic amenities, at their worst. Stevens writes, "Given
all this then, it is probably best to come out to Galveston
for the day and bring your own lunch, concentrating on the
several architectural monuments that are indeed outstanding."
She then goes on to describe in detail two structures not
within the domain of the GHF. Adding insult to injury, she
draws negative attention to the GHF's tireless work on the
1859 Italianate mansion Ashton Villa with the comment that it
"has a handsome exterior but has been tastelessly restored
within and features parlor portiers reminiscent of pink
underdrawers." And "the Strand," she notes "has a way to go."
The article ends with the comment that Galveston's potential
as a "'well-manicured Victorian restoration' lies far in the
future" (Stevens [1980] in RLA 87-0019). In response, Brink
penned a corrective to the paper's editor only somewhat more
restrained than the one he sent to the *L.A. Times*.

Galveston is a paradox....it has deteriorated areas, some seedy motels, and at its western end strip development typical of most other cities....And needless to say, one can still have a bad time in Galveston. Perhaps a few touring tips will avoid this and, indeed, turn your visit into a fascinating one....On the whole Galveston is not a "well-manicured" resort....It has, however, a richness of architecture, dramatic history, climate, and attractions which one can appreciate and enjoy. We invite you to visit and allow us to assist in showing you this treasure. [Emphasis in original; RLA 87-0019, 5/23/80]

There was no territory into which Brink would not venture in his defense of Historic Galveston. After working some time to get Galveston covered in a city-based listing of attractions in the popular state magazine, *Texas Monthly*, Brink was dissappointed to find a poor review of The Wentletrap, a Strand restaurant owned by a major investor in Galveston preservation and restoration. By way of response, Brink writes "I would ask if you would have your reviewer eat again soon at this restaurant and, in effect, review it once again." He goes on in the familiar style of the food critic to authoritatively remark that:

*[T]he restaurant is outstanding in its handling of local fish, especially snapper and trout. They are always fresh and done in a more intricate manner than any of the other restaurants in Galveston....My other favorite is the rack of lamb. The chicken and beef dishes are all good. For appetizers I suggest the mushroom salad, sherry bisque, or artichoke with hollandaise sauce. For dessert, the fresh berries in cream are especially outstanding.* [2/23/81; RLA 87-0019]
Beyond these popular public forums where Historic Galveston was culturally critiqued, were other, somewhat more exclusive, arenas that offered potentially problematic cultural and historical representations of Historic Galveston. For instance, the book, *The Galveston That Was*, first offered for public sale in 1966, and often credited with jolting the Island into preservation, gives a dim view of the Island's treatment of its Victorian legacy.\(^8\) Years of neglect and abandonment are documented in the artistic photographs that form the substantive content of the book and tactfully alluded to in James Sweeney's "Forward" wherein he notes that some of the buildings featured therein had already met their demise by the time the book went to press. And architect Howard Barnstone's "Introduction" begins with what seems a similar lament: "This book is about the Galveston that *was*. It is not about the Galveston that *is*; nor is it about that Galveston that will be" (emphasis in original; Barnstone 1966:13). Published by MacMillan Company in cooperation with the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, *The Galveston That Was* was long out of print when Brink took the GHF helm, and those few copies still available through the Foundation during his early tenure were sold out by the time Brink began to pursue its reprinting in 1974. In a letter to Texas A & M Press, which was at one point

---

\(^8\) This book had acquired valuable commodity status by the time I began my fieldwork. In reference to my queries about locating a personal copy of *The Galveston That Was*, one cultural informant stated: "Good luck, I'd give my right arm for a copy of that book!"
was poised to publish a new edition of this book, Brink once again reveals his propensity to edit history in Historic Galveston's favor:

One aspect of the new edition is of special importance to us in Galveston, and that is that an additional introduction, hopefully by Howard [Barnstone], be included to tell briefly about the turning of the tide in preservation here in recent years... really as a happy up-dating of a book written at a time of pessimism. [6/11/75; RLA 87-0019]^9

At first glance, it may seem insignificant that Brink wanted to add an introduction about "the turning of the tide" in Galveston's preservation movement. Yet because Barnstone's book had already become an historical commodity based on its origin within and witness to Galveston's mid-20th century decline and stagnation, Brink's plan to supersede a "pessimistic" characterization of Galveston with one that would document the success of the historic preservation movement represents an attempt to change the origin and attribution of the historical object The Galveston That Was. His desire to make the book less a testament to economic depression and cultural decline and more a tribute to economic

^9 In fact, Texas A & M Press did not print a new edition of this book and Brink looked to other sources, like the Far East (RLA 87-0010, 10/16/75) and the Cumberland Literary Agency (RLA 87-0089, 6/3/82) in the hope of finding a printer/publisher. When I ended my research in 1989, it was rumored that a publisher had been found for a new edition, but to date, none has appeared.
revitalization and cultural rebirth makes perfect sense in the commodifying context of Historic Galveston and in fact, would have launched the text into a new phase of what Kopytoff calls the "commodity career." The "cultural re-marking" of The Galveston That Was could have been easily achieved by the text's reprinting, since the reprinted edition incorporating a new introduction documenting "the turning of the tide" would have relocated the book within the context of Galveston's so-called "renaissance." This, in turn, would have achieved a subtle but powerful revisioning of Galveston's past, since an important historical object would no longer so concretely effect the materialization and documentation of that troublesome period of post-Victorian, pre-preservation Island history, but would instead bear witness to the era of Historic Galveston.11

10 As it is conceptualized by Kopytoff, the process of commodification turns on the continual redefinition of the commodity, such that its existence as an object of desire is the direct result of it being "culturally marked as...a certain kind of thing" (1986:64).

11 I would like to note here that some years later Brink penned his own account of his reaction to The Galveston That Was—a multi-layered one that included, finally, an acceptance of the "fatalistic view" it presented as a kind of eulogy or swan song. This is contained in the latter section of an eloquent and compelling hermeneutic of the text written for the November 1988, North American Print Conference. Brink delivered this paper (entitled "The Galveston That Was: Requiem or Inspiration?") before a public Galveston audience on May 7, 1989 as a lecture offered in conjunction with the annual Historic Homes Tour. What struck me most about Brink's talk was the distinction between the scholarly and objective persona he presented upon this occasion and that which he unflaggingly assumed as Historic Galveston's principal advocate and paid representative. In the scholarly
After much the same fashion, Brink tried editing a politically bothersome reference from a documentary entitled "Galveston: The Gilded Age of the Golden Isle," produced by the public television station KUHT. This particular event, part of a heated campaign to force the Galveston Wharves to retain Pier 19 as a small boat basin for the "mosquito fleet," occurred in the relatively recent past and involved the GHF in its most public adversarial role to date. Although this dispute was later successfully resolved, within the authoritative context of the documentary, reference to the controversy as politically and emotionally charged, and to the Galveston Wharves as monopolistic and insensitive to tradition and the needs of the local shrimping industry, jeopardized the GHF's public relations with an organization important to the continued development of Historic Galveston--particularly its plan to develop an area along the Galveston Port's waterfront

Presentation of his own independent research and interpretation he seemed fully able to eschew the confining narrative and discourse of the GHF's public history agenda. For instance, he gave a full chronological account of Galveston's recent past (i.e. he mentioned, albeit it briefly, the period of illegal gambling, bootlegging, and prostitution Galveston witnessed at mid-century), discussed the limitations of historic preservation to single-handedly effect an economic come-back for the city, and even alluded to the informal, though not insignificant political power represented by the Island's old and wealthy families in reference to their reception of The Galveston That Was in 1966: having magnanimously welcomed to Galveston architect/author Howard Barnstone, as well as Cartier-Bresson and Ezra Stoller (whose radically different artistic visions of Galveston comprise the photographic component of the text), they felt "betrayed" to discover in the book vivid imagery of social decay and a narrative that assigned to them, the ultimate responsibility for the Island's economic decline (Brink 1989).
where the Island's 19th-century maritime success could be interpreted.

In a preliminary letter requesting funding to cover the cost of editing this bit of its own political past out of the documentary, the GHF once again demonstrates its understanding of history as a cultural construct and displays its propensity to revise the past on behalf of Historic Galveston's future. On December 2 1981, Brink wrote to Ed Protz, Grant Coordinator of The Moody Foundation:

This past Sunday Channel 8 again showed the film "Galveston: The Gilded Age of the Golden Isle." This is perhaps the sixth time that the film has been shown in the Houston area. It is providing tremendous publicity for our city. Each time the film is shown, however, further damage is done to the relationship between the historic/arts interests and the Wharves interest. The film makes much of the Pier 19 dispute and does so in a way critical of the Wharves. At one point, in fact, it refers to the Wharves as the "octopus of the Gulf." This dispute is long past, and it would be nice to put it behind us. Because this film was initially funded by the Moody Foundation, my hope is that you might work with use to find a way to update the film. This would allow us to show the great accomplishments completed since the film was made in 1977 and to take out the inappropriate references to the Galveston Wharves....The film can continue to be a great educational and publicity tool for Galveston in the future and should be as constructive as possible. [Emphasis in original; 12/2/81; RLA 87-0019]

Brink copied this letter to both the president of the GHF and the president of the Galveston Wharves. The latter party responded to Brink's suggestion with great enthusiasm (see Devoe 12/7/81 in RLA:87-0019). I was told by a cultural
informant in 1990 that the film's producer (whom Brink says he will contact in a portion of the letter not cited above in order "to get an idea of [the] cost of doing an up-date") did not look kindly upon the idea of "up-dating" the film or editing into it a revisionist history of the dispute in order to soften characterizations of the Galveston Wharves' politics and business practices and dilute representations of the public reaction against them.¹²

Although "Galveston: The Gilded Age of the Golden Isle" retains its integrity, Brink demonstrated remarkable overall success where his agenda to popularize a new edition of Galveston's history was concerned. One of the ways the GHF managed to achieve this end was by ritually inscribing that alternative history into the everyday life of natives and into the touristic experience of visitors. This was perhaps the best edge it could hope to wield over the competing power of the unofficial and popularly remembered past.

The Invention of Tradition

Where the GHF's narrative history of Galveston asserts a shared past through invocation of kinship and contrives cultural continuity by omission of seemingly dissonant

¹² This information was relayed to me quite incidentally in the course of a conversation about the GHF's hegemonic grip on the production of cultural images of the Island. The individual who told me this had worked quite closely with the GHF on behalf of the Pier 19 contingent a decade earlier but had since come to feel that the GHF exercised undue control over the larger political process in Galveston.
historical clutter, the Foundation's various public events give ritual expression to the cultural identity Historic Galveston seeks to assert for the Island at large.

Historic Galveston is ritually invoked several times a year through a variety of special events sponsored by the GHF and other cultural entities. Most notable among these are the Historic Homes Tour, Mardi Gras, the Jazz Festival, and Ashton Villa's Fourth of July Picnic. But two events in particular, Dickens on the Strand and the Ashton Villa Conference on Victorian Life and Leisure, bear close examination for the critical role they play in traditionalizing Historic Galveston.¹³

To understand the critical place of tradition in the self-conscious construction of cultural identity, we need look no farther than the discourses and practices of nationalist movements, be they Israeli, Quebecois, or Jordanian (Dominguez 1989, Handler 1988, Layne 1989). These movements demonstrate how the tremendous weight of authority vested in tradition, understood as a cultural inheritance and therefore an "authentic" source of identity, successfully masks the invented and adaptive character of collective self-fashioning (Linnekin: 1983). Indeed, where the construction of cultural

¹³ The term traditionalizing was coined by John Dorst in his ethnography of Chadd's Ford, Pennsylvania, The Written Suburb (1989). Traditionalization is defined as a process "through which forces in the present legitimize current institutions by obscuring historical complexities and discontinuities" (p.129).
identity is concerned, authenticity is treated as something to be excavated from beneath the modern debris of a recent, hence inauthentic, past, rather than as, itself, a malleable construct of culture.

In its bid to create Historic Galveston as a source of contemporary cultural identity, the GHF naturally turned to the past as a model for the 20th-century expression of its 19th-century self. Nevertheless, I was more than a little surprised to read the following passage in a newspaper article publicizing a GHF-sponsored tour of London:

The purpose of the trip, according [to] the GHF president Peter Brink, is to develop as much knowledge as possible to reinforce the [Dickens on the Strand] celebration in Galveston. "In a way it is a search for authenticity, to come to an understanding of what life in Victorian London was all about, and to talk to some of the foremost scholars about Dickens," he said. [West Beach Sun, March/April 1989]

Clearly, the article’s title, "Touring London for the Dickens’ Of It," is a double entendre.

This kind of comparative reflection upon other cultures and geographic locales is part of a larger and older pattern in Galveston’s visioning of itself as the cultural other that extends to far different identities and political economies (see Chpt. 4). But the GHF’s current gaze upon Victorian England is fixed with a new and potent conceptual element: the assumption of genetic relatedness, and with it, cultural entitlement. In looking to Victorian London for cultural
authenticity, the GHF plumbs the depths of archaeological validation. For beneath the stratum of Galveston's own 19th-century past, lies the mother culture and country: Victorian England, from whence Historic Galveston derives its late 20th-century legitimacy.

Historian Eric Hobsbawn notes that the invention of tradition is "essentially a process of formalization and ritualization" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983:4). Thus, an "invented tradition"

is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. [Emphasis added, Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983:1]

To this extent, Dickens on the Strand and Ashton Villa's Conference on Victorian Life and Leisure are vital parts of the process by which Historic Galveston invents its heirship to England's Victorian tradition. The GHF envisions Historic Galveston as charged with the guardianship of a rich legacy whose cultural patrimony includes not only the material remains of Galveston's Victorian era, but the values and social practices that animated daily life during this historical period.

The annual Dickens on the Strand festival enacts those Victorian values and traditions in the powerful context of the
public event (Handelman 1990). Playing off the already celebratory spirit of the holiday season, it not only presents (to visitors and natives alike) an image of Galveston's contemporary cultural milieu as Victorian and exotic, but it effects what Victor Turner called "communitas" by drawing the entire island population into the experience of a Christmas extravaganza (Turner 1969).

Long before staff members began to travel to England in search of Dickensian authenticity, the GHF was committed to making the annual production of Dickens on the Strand a ritual expression of Galveston's historical ties to London. These historical ties are detailed each year as the occasion of Dickens on the Strand approaches. Their annual review, which typically finds form in a history of the Dickens event itself, underscores the symbolic expression of tradition the event has come to represent. In this regard, it seems particularly fitting that the tale of Dickens on the Strand, as it is told in press releases, newspaper articles, and particularly in its oral form, has an almost mythic quality, as though it were the creation story of Historic Galveston. And in many ways it is, for it was upon the occasion of the first "Dickens Evening on the Strand" that the entire membership of the GHF was initially joined together in celebration of Galveston's late 20th-century evocation of Victorian culture.

Evangeline Wharton, the GHF volunteer who conceived the event in its seminal form, is typically interviewed each year
by various media sources for the purpose of situating Dickens on the Strand within the historical context of the recent past. A classic version of her tale was contained in an article on Dickens that appeared in Galveston's InBetween Magazine in December 1980. This article is cited at length below as a representative example of the discourse of history, ritual, and tradition embodied in Dickens on the Strand and Historic Galveston, at large:

So, seven years from its inception, the "idea" of a major winter event in a predominantly tourist community has proved a creative and successful one. But what sparked the theme of an evening in Galveston dedicated to Charles Dickens, an author who lived more than a century and a continent away?

The answer is "a tale of two cities," closely linked by commercial activities, by mode of dress and by lifestyle, during the pinnacle of Dicken's career between 1840 and when he died in 1870.

In that 30-year span, Galveston--much like London, the setting for Dicken's stories and his home--built the bulk of its imposing commercial structures and bore the title of the "Queen of the Gulf." The hubbub of this seaport city was concentrated along Strand, so similar to the street of the same name in the counterpart English city. Galveston traded easily with London and Liverpool and was greatly influenced by Britain's cosmopolitan lifestyle. Photographs show fashionable well-dressed people and great activity and prosperity in the working commercial classes. Extravagance in dress prevailed--in crinolined, bell-shaped skirts, tight-jacketed bodices and bonnets; tail coats and tophats. Victorians here on the Island, like Victorian Londoners, were directly influenced by Queen Victoria and Albert from the time she ascended the throne in 1837 until the Prince Consort died. This period, called the Crinoline Era, was the longest, most composed and conforming era in fashion ever known.

"Research proved the two cities so alike in many
respects--Their Strands, their buildings, great businesses and residences, the fashion, the entire way of life during those thirty years," recalls Whorton. "Thoughts of planning a Christmas event brought to mind Charles Dickens' beloved yuletide tale 'A Christmas Carol.' Then, it all began to come together--the two cities linked by a similar commercial street of the exact same name, the common affluent lifestyles enjoyed in both places, and the vital common link--Charles Dickens, who imprinted his writings on the minds of people, not only in England and the United States but all across the world."

So in 1973, Dickens’s Evening on the Strand came alive. Each Christmas season, the event is more beautiful and more authentically Victorian than the season before; more shops, more Victorian wares and fares, more of Charles Dickens's favorite characters and more visitors enchanted with the sights and sounds and sense of a Christmas Past fill the city's streets. [InBetween #89; 1980:18-19]

Of particular note in this account are the nuanced connections and narrative transitions made between lifestyles and events in England and those in Galveston. Indeed, the distance contained in the "century and continent away" referenced in the first paragraph of this piece has virtually evaporated by the end of the article, as the reader becomes convinced that it is, after all, only time and distance that separates Victorian England from Historic Galveston.

One testament to the success of the GHF in institutionalizing this invented tradition is the skill with which the proverbial "man on the street" could recite some version of this narrative by the time I began my fieldwork in late 1987. Even Historic Galveston's detractors knew, and
vested symbolic meaning in the cultural and historic ties the GHF rallied to its cause. The self-same individuals who were fighting the inflated values and architectural restrictions to which their "historic" homes were becoming subject, could be found the first weekend in December dressed in Victorian garb, peddling roasted Chestnuts or taking tickets at the entrance to the Strand.

Much of the GHF’s work to concretize the symbolic ties between England and Galveston has been characterized by a self-conscious "quest for authenticity," as Brink himself noted it in reference to the GHF’s first tour of London, England. An important ritualizing aspect of this work began in 1976, when the GHF began to organize the "celebrity" appearance of an official English personage, preferably an actual descendant of Charles Dickens, at each year’s Dickens on the Strand event. A December 5, 1976 press release announced that Monica Dickens, of North Falmouth, Massachusetts, and great-granddaughter of Charles, would be attending "Dickens’s Evening on the Strand" as a guest of the Galveston Historical Foundation. Brink noted the significance of Miss Dickens’s participation in the event in a letter to the Park Board of Trustees:

We feel strongly that Miss Dickens participation in the event will strongly help GHF’s promotion of the event and add a stamp of authenticity which will help make the "Dickens’s Evening" the Dickens event in the whole country. In addition to being a blood descendant of Charles Dickens, Miss Dickens is a
well known writer in her own right, and has published 30 fiction and non fiction books. We sincerely believe that the involvement of Miss Dickens in the "Dickens's Evening" is a major opportunity for Galveston. [RLA 87-0019]

Since that time, Dickens has been graced with a variety of representatives from either the Dickens family, the scholarly field of Dickensian history and culture, or the official governing ranks of the United Kingdom. Besides Monica Dickens, these have included great-grandson Cedric Dickens, actor Alfred Hyslop, a native-son of Britain (as we are always reminded) whose rendition of *A Christmas Carol* is a Galveston favorite, UNC professor of literature and Dickens specialist Elliot Engel, and the Queen's consul-general to Houston, John Garner.

In addition to these representatives of English culture, Dickens on the Strand is made more British and more Victorian by a slate of related events that grows larger every year. Among these are "Morning Tea at Ashton Villa," the "Dickens Evening Candlelight Tour," and the "Dickens Victorian Costume Ball" which invites one to "Relive the elegance of Queen Victoria's London....As the romantic strains of Victorian melodies fill the air, lovely ladies and dashing gentlemen waltz the night away...."

Preparing the public to properly engage in Victorian culture has presented the GHF with further opportunities to formalize invented tradition. From its earliest inception,
both locals and visitors have been urged to dress in Victorian costume for the Dickens celebration. In fact, those who do so are offered free admission to the event. While this offer has succeeded in some instances in drawing elaborately costumed late 20th-century Victorian visitors to the Strand, other years have seen a disproportionate number of tired polyester and rayon prom dresses and ballgowns whose wearers looked more like 1970s streetwalkers than Victorian gentlewomen.

In 1989, the GHF initiated a new event designed to solve this fashion dilemma called "What the Dickens Do I Wear?: A Fashion Show and Costume Emporium." Advice on appropriate apparel still appears in the newspapers, in individual costumers' ads, and in the GHF newsletter, but "What the Dickens Do I Wear" conveniently brings together, under one roof and at one time, costume vendors, designers, and the interested public for a festive occasion that demonstrates Victorian style and heralds the approach of Galveston's biggest yearly event. An annual "Dickens on the Strand Costume Contest" further encourages elaborate and authentic costumes. For instance, in 1988, entrants could elect to compete in one of following categories: Best Dickens Character, Best Antique Costume, Best Child Costume, Best

---

14 The costuming services in Galveston grow larger and more sophisticated each year, since a late-winter Mardi Gras celebration, in addition to Dickens on the Strand, requires elaborate costumes, particularly for the social elite, who organize and attend ancillary private parties where this expensive finery must be worn as well.
Victorian Gentleman, or Best Victorian Lady.

Besides knowing how to dress oneself, one should be able to speak and understand "The King's English." From time to time, and when appropriate instructors have been available on the Island, the GHF has organized diction workshops so that participants in Dickens can better speak their parts. On occasion, the local newspapers have published articles of related interest—for example, a column featuring the British counterparts of American words likely to arise in holiday conversation—alcohol (spirits), apartment (flat), automobile (motor car), baby carriage (pram) and so forth (IBM #97).

Dickens has become such an important cultural and economic event that other entities and entrepreneurs have begun to capitalize on it. The 1894 Grand Opera House and

---

15 Indeed, Victorian culture is materialized on a commercial basis year-round in Galveston. Restaurants and hotels are especially skilled in the commodification of cultural and historical experience. For instance, one can purchase the experience of an aristocratic Victorian dinner: "COME DINE ROYALLY ON THANKSGIVING DAY WITH THE MERCHANT PRINCE....partake in a royal repast including your choice of six entrees, from exotic stuffed quail and venison stew to traditional roast turkey....The Tremont House, 2300 Ship's Mechanic Row." (Advertisement from The Galveston Daily News 11/23/88). The Tremont House, Hotel Galvez, The Flagship, and a handful of Bed & Breakfast Inns run regular ads in magazines and newspapers enticing the local and touring public to experience history and Victorian culture at their establishments. The Tremont House is listed in the membership directory of the National Trust's Historic Hotels of America. Page 69 of the 1991-92 directory includes a romantic photograph (featuring a horse-drawn carriage arriving at the hotel's entrance at dusk) and the following dramatic text:

The lavish, block-long Leon and H. Blum Building was built in 1879 to house the
the Strand Street Theatre host an annual Christmas-related production, the The Colonel Paddlewheel Boat hosts a Victorian Bay Cruise, the East End Historical District offers guided tours of many of its privately-owned Victorian homes, Ronald McDonald hosts the Dickens 10K-Run, hotels feature extravagant Victorian buffets, and commercial establishments encourage their employees to dress in late 19th-century fashion to

Gulf Coast's premier wholesale dry goods concern. The architectural landmark was dramatically reborn in 1985 as The Tremont House, named for the magnificent Tremont Hotel--razed in 1928--that was the bastion of Texas society during Galveston's Victorian heyday. It features a sunny four-story atrium, ironwork balconies and bridges, birdcage elevators and an ebony marble stairway. Most of the Victorian-inspired guest rooms have 14-foot ceilings and 11-foot windows, custom-crafted period furnishings, polished hardwood floors and European-style towel warmers in the baths.

George Mitchell, a prime player in historic (and resort) real estate and renovation in Galveston, was apparently unhappy with the idea of his luxury hotel bearing the address 2300 "Mechanic" Street. In the early stages of the building's redesign, the GHF cooperated with him to successfully petition the city council to change the name of the street to something that had a more romantic appeal: "Ship's Mechanic Row". Because Mechanic is located one street west of The Strand, the idea of appropriating a street name from the surrounds of London's own Strand was given serious consideration. (See RLA 87-0019, letter from Brink to Mitchell dated 6/22/81). Fleet Street was suggested for a time, since in London, this is the location of the press and in Galveston, three major newspapers once operated on Mechanic. Nevertheless, "Ship's Mechanic Row" was finally decided upon--it retains some of the street's original identity, while emphasizing the importance and romance of the maritime industry in Victorian Galveston. (Mitchell is currently financing the development of a Fisherman's Wharf-type "festival marketplace" along the Galveston Wharves.)
promote buying and the holiday spirit.

In recent years the GHF has itself made a concerted effort to organize related events at diverse locations throughout the city in order to spread the Victorian spirit and commercial success of the event over a greater percentage of the Island and extend the duration of the Dickens' season. Still, Dickens comes and goes in the relatively short space of two months, leaving a long year before Historic Galveston once again becomes so intensely animated with social and commercial Victorian life.

Other events throughout the year, like the Historic Homes Tour held each May, also invoke Historic Galveston's cultural tradition, but none has the potential to do so more effectively than the "Ashton Villa Conference on Victorian Life & Leisure: The Civil War to the Great Storm." Where Dickens on the Strand bolsters Historic Galveston's invented Victorian tradition by ritualizing its public enactment in a popular form, this event formalizes that tradition in an authoritative, academic forum. By bringing scholars of Victorian culture to the Island to participate in this three-day conference, the GHF is able to historicize the Victorian era and inculcate in conference participants, as well as in readers and watchers of its media coverage, those social and cultural values requisite to Historic Galveston's Victorian tradition. The GHF had national media help in this regard; as Brink noted enthusiastically in a board meeting preceeding the
first conference, there has been a renewed popular interest in, reexamination of, and return to the focus on the family and social values characteristic of the Victorian era. He submitted that the currency of the conference was made manifest in a recent issue of *Newsweek* devoted to Victorian values in contemporary American society.

The very title of the conference makes an authoritative claim to tradition. "Victorian Life and Leisure" cues us immediately to the specific cultural and historical period of the late 1800s, "the Civil War" situates us within the cultural and historical context of the U.S., while "to the Great Storm" (a reference to the hurricane credited with ending Galveston's 19th-century commercial and financial heyday) suggests a causal connection and temporal corollary between the close of England's Victorian era and its counterpart on Galveston Island.

The inaugural 1989 conference featured the theme "Victorians at Home." Literature announcing the symposium and its speakers noted that:

The period from 1865 to 1900 experienced unprecedented focus on the home: domestic economy books, household art manuals, and periodicals prescribed the "correct" manner of fashioning home interiors; expanding markets offered consumers a great new range of manufactured goods for the home that most buyers heartily embraced: American women lavished attention upon the home as the place which nurtured family life; these same women were charged with overseeing the decoration and operation of the household while men worked outside the home in order to finance it. *Victorians believed that the home revealed one's moral character and good taste;*
at the same time, the home reflected one's material achievement and consequent status in the community. [Emphasis added; an excerpt from the GHF poster for the 1989 conference.]

What better message than this could the GHF send to residents of Historic Galveston, a community in which social prestige can frequently be measured by the number of historical plaques and markers assigned one's home; and where being a moral citizen means helping to preserve and tastefully restore a cultural patrimony dating back to this period of supposedly unrivaled virtuous social character and domestic accomplishment?

A slate of curatorial and academic experts in American Studies, Victoriana, and art history spoke at the conference, "authenticating" Galveston's Victorian experience in such statements as the following, which makes reference to the women's amateur art movement: "And what you could learn in New York you could learn in Galveston, too, through magazines like The Art Amateur and Brush and Pencil that were both very popular" (Brandimarte, as quoted in GDN 5/3/89).

In its second year the conference explored "the value and belief systems which gave impetus to the Victorians' passion for self improvement, their excitement at exploration and their preoccupation with activity." The 1990 symposium offered a variety of perspectives on, and opportunities to experience, Victorian leisure:
In the setting of Galveston Historical Foundation's restored 1859 mansion, Ashton Villa, outstanding authorities will cover topics including Victorian resorts, fashion for leisure functions, sports and horticulture as leisure occupations.

Participants will enjoy an elegant Victorian picnic at Galveston's historic Garten Verein (German dancing pavilion) and be able to challenge the Ft. Bend County Museum Association's Victorian baseball team to a game! [Preliminary Program, 1990]

Although the full potential of the annual Ashton Villa Conference on Victorian Life and Leisure has yet to be realized, judging by early appearances its scholarly tone and agenda offers the perfect elite complement to the mass appeal and popularized expression of Victorian tradition embodied in Dickens on the Strand.

As components in the "ritualizing and formalizing" process Hobsbawm describes as the invention of tradition, these events, as well as a growing number of others (such as the opportunity offered recently to local children to learn what life was like for their Victorian counterparts), provide the imagined community of Historic Galveston with provenience, social meaning, and a contemporary cultural identity.

The Commodification of the Historical Past

An important facet of the GHF's struggle to establish the cultural hegemony of Historic Galveston involves the commodification and marketing of Victorian-era history as
culture. As in its other endeavors, the GHF has shown itself to be extremely skillful in this capacity—from the straightforward merchandizing of architectural artifacts, homes, and commercial structures to the more tacit sale of cultural otherness based on the mapping and popularization of Historic Galveston’s social distinction and spatial boundaries.

In the introduction to *The Social Life of Things* (1986), Arjun Appadurai argues that while "commodities can provisionally be defined as objects of economic value," the process of determining their value is exceedingly complex. Proceeding from the basis of Simmel’s contention that determination of economic value is created through the reciprocal exchange of sacrifices (in which the drive to fulfill one’s desire for an object held by another animates one’s sacrifice of something deemed equally desirable by the other), Appadurai suggests that the actual determination of value takes place in a "difficult realm, which is neither wholly subjective, nor quite objective." In order to enter into this difficult realm, he proposes that we "approach commodities as things in a certain situation" (p.3).

But how are we to define the commodity situation? I propose that the commodity situation in the social life of any "thing" be defined as the situation in which its exchangeability (past, 16 Culture, in this instance, is categorically construed as "high" or elite, and something which can be bought or "had" with residence in Historic Galveston.
present, or future) for some other thing is its socially relevant feature. Further, the commodity situation, defined this way, can be disaggregated into (1) the commodity phase of the social life of any thing; (2) the commodity candidacy of any thing; and (3) the commodity context in which any thing may be placed. [1986:13]

In order to examine the objectification and sale of the past according to the guidelines proposed by Appadurai, I will focus on those "things" most prolifically commodified by the GHF: residential properties. Their "commodity situation" can be described as follows. (1) Having proceeded through prior phases of their lifecycle wherein they were first newly constructed residences, then benignly neglected or abandoned old houses, they have now entered into a "commodity phase" as "historic homes." (2) Their qualification for "commodity candidacy" is based upon the symbolic logic that deems them embodiments of the cultural distinction characteristic of the Victorian-era in which they are broadly construed to have originated. (3) The "commodity context" in which their revaluation and commodity sale takes place is the social and historical context of the historic preservation's late 20th-century cultural hegemony.

At this point, the qualifying character of history, deserves brief discussion, particularly as it gets played out in the GHF's actual commercial sale of the past. What is centrally at stake in the work of commodifying the material remains and cultural character of the past is the persuasive defining of what is and is not "historical." The preservation
industry at large has traditionally utilized 50 years as a qualifying benchmark. Without going into the official rationale behind this arbitrary number, it is important to remember that Historic Galveston, while predominantly taken to be an entity and experience reflective of the Island’s late 19th-century history, freely subsumes both the pre-Victorian history of Galveston as well as the early post-1900 hurricane, pre-Open City years into its spatial and temporal definition. Thus, what becomes important in defining Historic Galveston’s contemporary multi-dimensional boundaries is not so much preservation’s text-book definition of "historical," as the ability to establish the significant relationality of otherwise extraneous events, peoples, and structural artifacts to the Victorian-era and its cultural tradition—a task in which the GHF excels. And while the merchandizing and determination of a commodity value for those things deemed to be appropriately "historical" is a complex process mediated by the politics of historic preservation, until such time as they are challenged in the sphere of formal politics in greater Galveston, the definition of "historical" and determination of an object’s candidacy for this category are not regular a matter of critical scrutiny for either the GHF or investors in the preservation movement.\(^{17}\) Nonetheless, there were

\(^{17}\) When such debates do reach the level of formal political process, as was the case for the Pier 19 controversy, a discourse of authenticity usually prevails. This was certainly the case of one editorial which appeared in the Galveston Daily News on March 21, 1977, wherein the GHF is
occasions and instances where the GHF became self-consciously engaged in open discussion of such issues while conducting typical Foundation business; these provide an important window onto the ironic and ambiguous process of historical definition and commodification.

Several of these instances occurred within the context of meetings of the GHF's Board of Directors at which I was present. One, particularly memorable for the fact that its subject matter fell well outside the traditional purview of historic preservation, took place on July 26, 1988, and involved the potential placement of a jackup drilling rig at Pier 19, near The Colonel excursion paddleboat and GHF's 1877 iron barque, The Elissa. As the local clearinghouse on matters deemed cultural and historical, the GHF had been asked to lend its name to a feasibility study and to consider serving as the umbrella fundraising organization for what was envisioned as an Offshore Oil Rig Museum. Discussion quickly became humorous as various members of the staff and Board bemoaned the severity of the oil industry's recent decline such that it might actually become legitimate to consign its

accused of practicing 'pop' history and promoting propaganda by setting up a "make-believe Mosquito Fleet consisting of shrimp boats in the old slip at the foot of 21st street as a tourist attraction." Headlining as "Keeping Local History Authentic," the writer quotes an elderly resident who has different recollections of the original use of Pier 19, and who calls for "honesty and integrity" where the Island's history is concerned. Chapter 5, which details the gambling controversy of the late 1980s, contains further examples of this discourse of cultural and historical authenticity.
technology to such an obsolete status. As Brink framed the project in context of the depressed regional economy: "an offshore oil rig...that would be a museum." Others commented that oil rigs were certainly "cheap now." One party raised the question of how it would be interpreted, only to have another person sarcastically comment that oil rigs "already have historical status."

Conversation became more serious when Board president Harris "Shrub" Kempner steered the group back to the business at hand: "The question is whether we as the Board are willing to lend our name to a feasibility study...the alternative is to not have any input at all...it could be a quick process, it will be placed nearby so it would in some way fit into the waterfront area..." Various members noted that the Wharves Board would have to approve the project and retain ultimate control over it as a permanent fixture in the bay while others continued to debate the merit of an offshore oil rig cum museum placed so close to the heart of Historic Galveston. Discussion then became self-conscious and stilted as the group began to seriously grapple with the "historical" limits and possibilities of the idea. Finally, Kempner suggested "it depends on how you define the GHF's business--as strictly history or broader community development." This seemed to offer no real solution to the group, which fell strangely silent, apparently sensing that this latter issue was even more complex and potentially troublesome than determining a
historical context for the proposed museum. A decision was eventually made to table the item entirely until the actual content of the feasibility study could be discovered and subjected to careful analysis.

Following immediately on the same meeting's agenda was another piece of new business which dealt somewhat more directly with the question of historical worth and related commodity value. The GHF had reached a decision to make an offer on a property known as the Menard House. During the course of my fieldwork I had encountered a great deal of mythology surrounding this house: it was the oldest house in town, built by one of the founders of Galveston and later Houston; it had been purchased years before with the promise of extensive, tasteful restoration; the current owner, after testing the limits of "restoration" with the addition of a large jacuzzi-style bath and other inappropriate interior lavishments, ran out of money, abandoned the house, and moved out of state. At the time I commenced fieldwork, it looked like an abandoned fire hazard, displaying that ethereal kind of beauty that once-gracious old homes often do when they are hidden behind a curtain of moss-draped oaks and peeling paint.

Kempner introduced this item of business with the statement that seeing the Menard House properly restored has been "a dream of ours for a long time." Brink then outlined the financial details: the owners placed the house on the market at $1.2 million a number of years before and had since
lowered their price to $450,000.00. This price was still preposterous, according to Brink (as well as many others), who noted the owner had purchased the house for a mere $60-90,000.00. Taking into consideration the amount of work still left to do on the house, the GHF was prepared to make a firm offer of $250,000.00, with 6 months to close—an amount considered to be well above "market value."¹⁸ If the GHF did acquire the property, Brink stated, they "would impose strenuous deed restrictions, inside and out, and resell it." While he was not ruling out altogether a possible GHF restoration, he was "not anxious [for the GHF] to own another house museum."

Having established the fact the house was extremely overpriced and could be an economic liability if the GHF had to own and operate it as a museum, Brink then changed gears entirely by noting that in reaching the decision to make an offer on the property, the steering committee had taken into consideration the fact that the Menard House was "if not the

¹⁸ The struggle to balance "historic" value with "market" value has long plagued the GHF. In a letter to the editor published in InBetween Magazine (May 1986:7), Brink responded to an article the magazine had recently run criticizing the "deplorable condition of some historic Galveston structures," including the Menard Home. Defending the position of the GHF, Brink stated "The owner of the 1838 Michael B. Menard House is asking a very high $500,000.00 for this landmark (just reduced to $429,000!). In our best judgement this is far above market value. We do not feel it is in the best interest of Historic Galveston to yield to exorbitant prices or attempt to convince donors that they should help us yield to it. Giving in to exorbitant prices will come back to hurt landmark after landmark in the future..."(IBM #233; June 1986:7).
most, one of the most important houses in Galveston."

Heads nodded all around as everyone seemed to be in unanimous agreement of the property's inestimable value and of the GHF's move to acquire it. Ironically, a number of individuals went on to refer to the house as "priceless"; and surely it was this kind of popular appraisal that influenced the owner's original $1.2 million asking-price. But as Appadurai (1986:19) aptly notes in reference to the different valuation of commodities in industrial and non-industrial societies, in the spheres of economic exchange characteristic of the former, "pricelessness is a luxury few commodities can afford." 20

The case of yet another endangered property demonstrates the full cycle of commodification, from the initial creation of an historical narrative legitimating a high dollar value, to the labored search for a qualified buyer, to the eventual abandonment of the restorative process, to the final fragmentation of its value as the house becomes dismantled and

---

19 This same appraisal was made by Brink as early as 1977 when he wrote to Ron Durst at City Hall with the news that "the Galveston Historical Foundation, based on the recommendation of our consultant, Ellen Beasley, does not object to the demolition of [the] detached garage at the rear of 1605 33rd Street. Our position is based on the fact that the garage was built at a substantially later time than the main structure of the Menard House. Please keep us informed of any other proposed demolition regarding the main house since it is one of the most valuable in the City of Galveston." [7/25/77, RLA:87-0019]

20 The GHF finally acquired "the 1838-39 Menard House" in June of 1992 (with the help of loans from the National Trust and Moody National Bank in Galveston). A campaign to raise capital to repay the loans and a search for a private owner were launched almost immediately.
its "preservation" reduced to an empty lot and the sale and
reuse of its architectural parts.

The "1886 Darragh House" was brought to my attention
during the first week of my fieldwork by an employee of the
GHF in reference to the process by which the Foundation
ennobles otherwise unnoteworthy individuals by calling the
houses they intended to preserve after either the original
owner or some owner in the property's lifecycle for whom a
case of historical interest can be made. This is precisely the
kind of process to which Kopytoff refers when he speaks of
"doing the biography of a thing" in order to disclose the
cultural salience of its value at any point in its commodity
"career." (Kopytoff 1986:66-67). Because this privileging of
select aspects of an object's social biography is a critical
part of the way commodity value is created and politically
mediated in Historic Galveston, Kopytoff's explanation is
worth citing at length:

Biographies can make salient what might otherwise
remain obscure....The biography of a car in Africa
would reveal a wealth of cultural data: the way it
was acquired, how and from whom the money was
assembled to pay for it, the relationship of the
seller to the buyer, the uses to which the car is
regularly put, the identity of its most frequent
passengers and of those who borrow it, the
frequency of borrowing, the garages to which it is
taken and the owner's relation to the mechanics,
the movement of the car from hand to hand over the
years, and in the end, when the car collapses, the
final disposition of its remains. All of these
details would reveal an entirely different
biography from that of a middle-class American, or
Navajo, or French peasant car.
One brings to every biography some prior conception of what is to be its focus. We accept that every person has many biographies—psychological, professional, political, familial, economic and so forth—each of which selects some aspects of the life history and discards others. Biographies of things cannot but be similarly partial. Obviously, the sheer physical biography of a car is quite different from its technical biography, known in the trade as its repair record. The car can also furnish an economic biography....The car also offers several possible social biographies: one biography may concentrate on its place in the owner-family’s economy, another may relate the history of its ownership to the society’s class structure, and a third may focus on its role in the sociology of the family’s kin relations, such as loosening family ties in America or strengthening them in Africa. [Kopytoff 1986:67-68]

In the case of historic preservation, the construction and analysis of a structure’s social biography is a critical part of the research process whereby a case is made for its historical worth in order that it can receive legal protection or landmark status of any kind. This might involve associations with renowned architects, elite families, or specific historical events—such as the hurricane of 1900 that devastated Galveston Island.

In this instance, the privileging of John Darragh’s 19th-century ownership of the home over its subsequent use as a boarding (and later, a fraternity) house is a function of the distinction it could be made to embody as a Victorian-era structure. This, in turn, is a reflection of the political economy of historic preservation whereby what Bourdieu (1984) calls cultural capital can be accumulated through contemporary
ownership of a home built during that period of the Island's history that the GHF consistently characterizes as wealthy, urbane, and cosmopolitan. (This characterization can be seen in the countless discursive representations of Galveston's Victorian-era culture found in the Foundation's archives: RLA 87-0019.)

The construction of an accommodating social biography for the Darragh house effected the valorization of John L. Darragh. Apparently, this was facilitated despite the fact that, as my informant phrased it, "everyone in Galveston knows he was an eccentric nut case. His history is being rewritten, including his social standing, because his house is being preserved by the GHF." Even though "everyone in Galveston" may not have known this, it quickly became clear to me that a great many Galvestonians did. Several months later another individual stated cynically "If the Darragh House burned to the ground tomorrow, Mr. Darragh would once again be as historically obscure as he deserves to be."

My own biography of the Darragh House begins with the GHF's initial public demonstration of interest in the home. The Darragh House first appears in the archival records of the GHF in 1975 when the Foundation issued a press release announcing "1886 Darragh House Sold for Sensitive Rehabilitation." This press release reads:

The Darragh House dating from 1886 gained wide publicity when it was featured on the cover of The Galveston That Was....The Darragh House lies within
the East End Historical District. Its purchase by a person committed to saving its architectural character is another example of the quickening tempo of restoration work in both the East End and 24th Street Historical Districts. The Darragh House even aside from the fence is both a representative example of 19th century Galveston structures and is also of very unusual architectural note. Howard Barnstone in *The Galveston That Was* provides a good description of its style...."[RLA 87-0019]

Barnstone's description, which is then cited in its entirety, credits John L. Darragh with the building of the house, which was apparently accomplished by joining together two existing smaller houses. Barnstone notes that Darragh was president of the Galveston Wharf Company at the time of the construction. This latter fact has become an important historical launching point for much that has been written about the worth of the Darragh House over the many years it has been targeted for preservation (as is the involvement of two renowned architects--Nicholas Clayton, who is credited with designing its fence and Alfred Muller, who oversaw the structural additions). The Galveston Wharf Company, a major political player in the Island's early economic development, has a well-known and popular, some might say notorious, history of its own. The historical importance of the Darragh House thus rides easily on the coattails of that already established notoriety by virtue of its association with a one-time Wharf Company president. The fact that this association was first made in what is taken to be the authoritative reference on early local architecture (and what was a
historical commodity in its own right by this time), *The Galveston That Was*, and was in fact featured on its cover, gives this social biography of the house more historic currency and imbues the home itself with increased symbolic capital.

Interestingly enough, extensive research conducted by Diana Rasmussen in the mid to late 1980s and reported in a lecture to the Houston Archaeological Society on January 10, 1989, reveals that it was actually Darragh's third wife, whom he married at some eighty years old, who oversaw the joining of the two pre-existing structures and the addition of two towers and a cupola. John Darragh apparently played no known role in the commissioning or supervision of the structure's redesign. By this time, Laura Darragh had obtained his power of attorney, had him declared insane, and "had him shipped, along with his carriage, to property she'd bought in Massachusetts and New York." He was clearly out of the picture and off of the Island by the time the house was being built.

Despite the 1977 GHF's optimistic press release announcing the pending purchase and restoration of the property, by the mid 1980s the Darragh House had become the object of vandalism and was in such eminent danger of destruction that the GHF felt compelled to purchase it with Residential Revolving Fund monies. The home, which had lost its roof to a fire in 1985, represented a major economic liability and tremendous restoration project when it was
purchased by the GHF in 1986 for $58,000.00.

That year a unique fundraising project was initiated on behalf of the Darragh House, which besides facilitating much of the house's repair, successfully institutionalized the structure as a endangered landmark and focused important media attention on the residential work of the GHF. The 1988 invitational brochure for "Dinners for the Darragh House" tells the story of this annual autumn event, which features volunteer hosts from throughout Historic Galveston who cater an evening of dining in a unique environment of their own choosing--be it a personal yacht, historic home, the Tall Ship Elissa, or an antique railcar at the Moody Center for Transportation and Commerce. Fees typically range from $30 to $100 dollars per person, depending upon the formality and exclusivity of the setting:

Dining for The Darragh is why Galveston's preservation volunteers are sharpening their cutting knives, drying their garden herbs and seasoning their skillets. This intriguing 1886 Darragh House in an architectural masterpiece that has inspired the Galveston Historical Foundation to save this landmark and preserve its prominent features until a new owner claims her for total restoration, and the funds revolve again to save other endangered Galveston landmarks. The proceeds from these distinctive Darragh Dinners set in beautiful private homes of volunteer hosts help benefit the restoration of this landmark.

Please join us for an exquisite evening of cuisine and ambience on any of our unique dinners. This is an opportunity to enjoy the finest cooking and hospitality Galveston has to offer, and a chance to play an enjoyable part in preserving an extraordinary landmark....
By the time the issue of further capital improvements to the Darragh House was brought before the Board at its December 20, 1988 meeting, the GHF had poured $136,613.84 into various critical repairs on the main house and its adjacent structures. An attachment to the meeting’s agenda, entitled "Darragh House Porch Restoration," stated that the GHF Residential Committee and Steering Committee recommended the approval of a $27,500 contract for the Darragh House porch restoration. The monies for this improvement were to be drawn from the Residential Revolving Fund. A bullet list informed those of us present why the committees approved the expenditure of these funds on what was an ever-growing liability:

* Improve Saleability
* Make safe access into the property for showing buyers
* Put on the 1989 HOMES TOUR, porch improvements required
* Initiate a comprehensive marketing campaign to sell house

This was to be an investment in "history," not a purely rational business decision. In the face of the obvious disregard for the bottom-line, dollar-value this further expenditure represented, Residential Committee Chairman Hildegarde Johns clearly felt it necessary to defend the decision in principal. "We can’t ever recover the $136,613.84
that is already in the house." Nevertheless, they had decided to continue with this set of repairs, she informed us "because we think it's our duty....Preservation means just that....We've got to do it, it's a number one priority."

The property had been appraised by a real estate expert a year and a half before at a value of $65-70,000 and the GHF had been running ads in the National Trust's "Heritage News" asking $101,000 for the property. With a view to intensively marketing the house on the upcoming Homes Tour, the Board approved the expenditure and the repairs were completed in time for its showing in May of 1989.

The 24-page guide to the 1989 Tour featured, in addition to photographs, extensive text describing the home and its history. It begins by revealing that "John L. Darragh was more than 80 years old when this large modified Queen Anne style home was completed for his family in 1887."

Incorporating and capitalizing on the detailed research conducted by Diana Rasmussen, the text goes on to note that "The story of Judge Darragh and the history of his home read like an intriguing novel..."(GHF 1989:22).

The next five paragraphs comprise a biography of John Darragh from his birth in Ireland to his arrival in Galveston in 1839 when "there were no docks or wharves for discharging either passengers or cargo....he arrived at The Strand on the shoulders of a waterman for a one dollar fee." A description of John Darragh's many civic contributions concludes with the
valorizing statement that "Under Darragh's leadership many important improvements were made to increase Galveston's harbor facilities....In the twenty-five years since Darragh was carried ashore...the city of Galveston had progressed rapidly" (p.22).

Only after paying this historical homage to the man does the text then get down to the business of describing Darragh's three marriages, his state of "mental dementia" during the actual construction of the Darragh House, his third wife's apparently autonomous supervisory role in its design, and the GHF's long-standing involvement in preserving the home as an important landmark. A mimeographed insert to the program describes the property and reveals that it is for sale by the Galveston Historical Foundation for $120,000.00.

The Homes Tour and the interior designers and decorators who volunteered their services to furnish the home for viewing between May 6 and 14, 1989, were successful in making the home look attractive to potential buyers. A couple from Richmond, Texas finally closed on the Darragh House in August of 1990.

But the GHF's troubles were not over. A color, front-page article in the Galveston Daily News (1/29/91), which read much like a eulogy, bore the following headline: "Darragh House to be Razed." The house had suffered badly from three recent arson attempts. Contractors estimated that it would take $150,000.00 to bring the house up to the condition it was in when purchased in 1990. This, in addition to the estimated
$250,000.00 needed for restoration, was too great a financial encumbrance for the new owners. The house was reeded to the Foundation and the downpayment the GHF had received from its 1990 sale was returned to the buyers. Faced with this depressing and disastrous situation, the Foundation had voted to demolish the house.

Board member Hildegarde Johns noted that this decision was not reached easily: "It was the most somber meeting the residential committee ever had....It was a very emotional decision, but absolutely necessary. We don't have the funds or the volunteer resources to reconstruct the Darragh House."

The article went on to note that "The foundation was developing specifications for 'sensitively demolishing' the house, which would preserve the architectural components and historic construction materials" (emphasis added). This reverential treatment was also extended to the lot itself. "'This is a very important corner in the East End Historic District,'" stated David Bowers, residential committee vice-president. "'GHF's residential committee and board of directors are considering several options for the property, including moving a historic house onto the lot or developing the space as a park.'"

The Darragh House would thus finally be "preserved" and its historic value redistributed and eternally embodied in both a fragmented set of architectural components and a hallowed spot of earth at the corner of 15th and Church
Streets. It is a certainty, given the process by which values are fixed in Historic Galveston, that the commodity worth of a "new" historic house moved onto this lot, as well as the commodity value of every residential project that incorporates even a single architectural component of this "sensitively demolished" home into its restoration, will be further enhanced by its symbolic connection to and partial material embodiment of the Darragh House. As fragmented aspects of the former whole, the home's architectural artifacts will find expression in the cultural biographies of other commodity forms—as works of art are rendered more valuable by virtue of their pedigreed record of private ownership and public exhibition. The Darragh House itself, meanwhile, will enter a new phase in its own commodity career, in which the story of its tragic demise will attain mythic status, thus further empowering the local discourse of historic preservation.

The commodification of residential properties like the Darragh and Menard houses takes place within the framework of

---

21 The Darragh House, as a preservation project and symbol of the commodification of history, can only be outdone in expenditure of funds, time, emotional energy and marketing effort, by the restoration of the Tall Ship Elissa. A letter written by Walter Rybka (restoration director) and dated March 17, 1977, states: "This restoration has long since become a rebuilding and qualifies as 'long and bloody war' ...."(Rybka to Brink, RLA 87-0019). That "long and bloody war" would last longer and cost far more than even Rybka could foresee at this early moment in the project's duration. The final "cost" of the Elissa restoration was eight years, close to $5 million dollars, and the alienation of many members of the preservation community who believed that this kind of expenditure of time and funds should be devoted to revitalizing the Strand and restoring residential properties.
an elaborate partnership between the historic preservation movement and the private sector. The infrastructure for this partnership is overseen by the GHF’s Residential Program. As previously noted, the Residential Program represents the most professionalized department of the Galveston Historical Foundation. Its services and responsibilities are many. A non-exhaustive list would include (1) identification and preservation of endangered residential structures; (2) researching Victorian-era architectural aesthetics and construction technique; (3) dissemination of free advice to homeowners; (4) support of historic neighborhood organizations; (5) cooperation with local banks and governmental agencies to offer low interest loans for the rehabilitation of homes; and (6) coordination of donated paint and volunteered labor for properties owned by elderly and low-income Galvestonians (an extremely successful set of programs known as "Paint Partnership" and "Paint Pals").

Its success and many invaluable contributions to local preservation notwithstanding, it is the least glamorous and (by all accounts) most internally unrewarded department of the GHF. A former staff member commented: "The residential program is the very heart of what the GHF is about. If Galveston didn’t have its historic homes and neighborhoods,

---

22 Here, what qualifies as "historic" is made quite explicit: homes must be located in "the city’s historic neighborhoods and built before or during 1920" (Galveston Daily News 5/90).
the GHF would have no real basis for existence." Bemoaning the proliferation of marketing jargon and mentalities, such as reference to historic homes as "products" and the need for the department's projects to be "sexy" (in order to be saleable to financial donors), this individual went on to note that the in-house push to make each department of the Foundation economically self-sustaining would eventually undermine the program's professional services, and compromise the very preservation principles upon which the GHF was originally founded. Nevertheless, the department continued to evolve in the late 1980s from a necessarily dependent, non-profit program into one that was increasingly expected (perhaps impossibly) to be run like self-sufficient business. It was during this latter period that yet another GHF employee noted that although the Residential Program's projects were in the vanguard of historic preservation (e.g. targeting minorities, elderly, and the poor as participants in residential preservation), no one within the Foundation itself seemed fully able to appreciate this or provide the professional support needed to push non-income producing preservation projects through the process of Board approval despite the fact that they were critical to the infrastructural maintenance of Historic Galveston.  

The organization's apparent failure to realize the

---

23 By this time, Brink had moved on to the National Trust for Historic Preservation.
centrality of the residential program to the GHF's overall operation is both ironic and short-sighted. Historic homes offer the GHF their most dependable source of emotional and financial long-term investment in Historic Galveston. Moreover, as the most easily commodified components of Historic Galveston, architectural artifacts and residential homes represent the most straightforward route by which individuals can gain year-round access to the cultural tradition it inverts. Two programs of the GHF exemplify this reality: the Salvage Warehouse and the publication of listings of historic homes for sale on the Island.

The Salvage Warehouse serves as a repository and point of resale for old building materials to be used in on-island restorations and remodeling projects. The excerpt below is taken from a brochure that publicizes the Salvage Warehouse. This brochure lists items available, as well as their prices, which I was told are designed to allow the operation to "break even":

### PRICE LIST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Price</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DOORS</td>
<td>$20-$50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WINDOW SASHES</td>
<td>$15-$35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHUTTERS</td>
<td>$35-$50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCREENS</td>
<td>$10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRANSOMS</td>
<td>$10-$15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIDELIGHTS</td>
<td>$25-$35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OLD BRICK (decorative) .........................$.50 ea.
WOODEN COLUMNS .........................$35 ea.
CAST IRON COLUMNS .........................$100
NEWEL POSTS ...............................$10-$35
SPINDLES ....................................$2 ea.
PLINTH BLOCKS ................................$50 ea.
SCREEN DOORS ................................$15
WAINSCOT (ft.) ...............................$.30
BEADBOARD (ft.) ..............................$.30

The pamphlet from which this list was excerpted, and advertisements (which appear with some regularity) in The Galveston Daily News, represent the principal means by which the GHF disseminates information about the Salvage Warehouse.

The GHF also publishes a guide to "Historic Real Estate For Sale in Galveston, Texas" which is compiled in cooperation with the local realtors. This listing is updated bimonthly and provides the following information for each available property: address, asking price, listing realty company, realtor’s telephone number, estimated date of construction for the property, and a brief description of architectural style. Included in this latter category are significant historical details, such as the property’s location within a designated historical district, any historical markers or commemorations it has received, and any associations with noteworthy architects, prominent local families, civic leaders, et
cetera. The property list is organized by street and block so that prospective buyers can drive from one end of the Island to the other and survey each available historic property. As the 1988 listing for June and July reveals, property values in Historic Galveston may range anywhere from $750,000 (for an 1880 Romanesque Revival at 1602 Postoffice) to $14,000 (for a 1910s Queen Anne cottage on Avenue L).

The Residential Department also cooperates with Galveston College to conduct classes and workshops like "Know Your Home’s Family: Tracing its History" which invites participants to "Enjoy a real Galveston uniqueness, the ability to trace a lengthy heritage and history of your home" (Galveston College’s Division of Community Education Fall ‘89 Schedule, p. 15). Other courses play a more direct role in commercially marketing Historic Galveston. For instance, in the Spring of 1989, Galveston College’s Community Education Division offered a course entitled "So...You Want To Buy An Old House?" The course description, cited below, provides an excellent overview of the many problems and angles involved in purchasing and restoring older homes.

The first evening series covers "First Things First" such as selecting a house, the purchase process and the legalities of buying and owing an old house. The second series, "Dollars and Sense," covers the financial process and tax aspect and incentives. The third series "Design and Research Workshop," offers an exciting hands-on opportunity for the homeowner to benefit from the advise of local historical and architectural professionals. The fourth series, "Get to Work," covers the various methods of contracting for construction,
selecting contractors, and the importance of an involved neighborhood association. To top off our program, the fifth and final series will be another exciting design workshop to address landscaping and interior design. These hands-on workshops are an opportunity for property owners to bring in their photographs, floor plans and site plans, fabric swatches and historical information for a night of individualized consulting.

Whether you are contemplating purchasing an old home, own one now and are thinking about making improvements to it or are in the middle of a restoration project and need encouragement and inspiration, this program covers a variety of old house issues....Many homeowners and prospective buyers are taking advantage of new financing incentives and will find this course a good way to acquaint themselves with the purchase and rehab process...[Galveston College's Community Education Division Spring Non-Credit Schedule, 1989:4]

This course was attended by approximately 40 students who ranged in age from mid 20s to 60s. A GHF employee who helped coordinate the various seminars and workshops stated that its popularity was a direct function of "old house fever" that is sweeping Galveston Island in the late-20th century.

Other aspects of this "fever" are demonstrated in such things as the local critique of the so-called Galveston "suburbs," which are considered to lie west of 45th street. The homes located in this much disparaged area range from modest 1960s' ranch style houses to extravagant multi-million dollar postmodern showplaces. What they all have in common is their provision of modern amenities not found in, or easily incorporated into, older and typically smaller, houses. And, more importantly, they lack the rehabilitation problems that
accompany their older counterparts.\textsuperscript{24}

One measure of the GHF’s success in formalizing the cultural distinction of Historic Galveston can be seen in the way real estate brokers market their properties in print advertising. For instance, "The House Company" categorizes many of its listings under headings designated as either "Vintage Homes" or "West End Executive Homes" (emphasis added; \textit{GDN} 2/6/88 and 1/22/89). Zapp Realty, which also lists properties on both ends of the Island, typically purchases separate advertising space for its "historic" properties. In this way, West End property does not require qualification as somehow the exclusive domain of the well-off nor is it jeopardized or degraded by mere juxtaposition. Moreover, Zapp is able to further capitalize on the commodified status of local history by advertising its older properties with the slogan "Let the Oldest Real Estate Firm Take You On A Tour of the Past" (\textit{GDN} 11/20/88).

By the late 1980s, the sale of older properties had evolved into a specialized business that played off the GHF’s success in cultivating imagery of 19th-century Galveston as the cosmopolitan domain of a gentrified elite. This is well demonstrated in the following property listing, originally

\textsuperscript{24} In fact, one GHF staffer suggested that perhaps the failure of the Board and the Foundation at large to understand the magnitude and importance of the work faced by the Residential Program had to do with the fact that with the exception of only two individuals, all the Board Members [at least that year] lived "west of 45th."
accompanied by a photograph of an estate home and its grounds, labeled "Sleeping Beauty."

Imagine yourself waking this sleeping princess which has lain hidden, unchanged for half a century, screened from the common eye by its own private forest. Return life to the home which once entertained Galveston's elite. Discover, nurture the exotic plants which still haunt the once elaborate gardens. Enjoy the privacy offered by this small estate.

This three story Victorian mansion was built in the last years of the 19th-century as the family home of Sealy Hutchings and Mary Moody Hutchings, one of Galveston’s first families. The home and gardens occupy over 5 city lots. Three stories of large sun-lit rooms. Original pine floors. Views of the gulf. Room for children to roam. Incredible detailing of original woodwork. Shady porches in the summer breeze. A showplace for entertaining. Christmas as it used to be. Shade trees. This home has it all. It is in need of modernization and restoration. UNBELIEVABLE PRICE! The Shelton Co. [Emphasis added, GDN 2/23/91]

The institutionalization of Historic Galveston's social boundaries and cultural distinction is also expressed in official arenas not directly related to preservation. For instance, in November of 1988, the Chamber of Commerce sponsored the fourth annual "Island Wonderland Galveston Illumination Competition"—a call to light up the city in honor of the holiday season. In addition to entry categories for commercial properties, restaurants, hotel/motel/resort properties, and entire residential blocks or neighborhoods, awards were to be given in two categories designated for individual homes: "Best Historic Home--Pre-1920" and "Best
Home--Non-Historic."

Those individuals who make the choice to live in the "non-historic" suburbs are frequently portrayed by residents of Historic Galveston as "cultureless." The popular contrast between the "West End vs. East End" found form in a set of (not altogether tongue-in-check) dueling essays published by InBetween Magazine in the late 1970s. Gordon Haire, who wrote on behalf of the West End, criticized the "east end elite, whose favorite sport is the Grant Scramble," for relying on government (primarily federal) tax dollars to redevelop the East End rather than on the kind of enterprising entrepreneurship and spirit that made Galveston a vital economic entity in the 19th century. Pete Frederikson, who sang the virtues of life in the East End, was equally cynical about West Enders:

The beautiful Victoriana and 19th-century architecture prevalent in the East contrasts with the fad architecture in the West End which spans the spectrum from Yucco to Early Aluminum Siding. Rumor has it that some West End culture mongers are going to host a Home Tour this year....A sense of neighborhood is non-existent in the west. No one lives down the street from his ancestral home. [Emphasis added, IBM #20:29-33]

The idea that historicalness confers automatic neighborhood status and lends a distinctive cultural quality to its surroundings that cannot be matched in the suburbs has been canonized in Historic Galveston. Richard Ferguson, a member of the City's Residential Historic Review Board, and a
past president of the Silk Stocking Historic District Association spoke on behalf of this mentality in a guest editorial that appeared in *The Galveston Daily News* in 1989:

Historic residential structures...small clapboard shotgun homes, raised cottages with Doric columns and lattice trim, stone mansions with gargoyles and Gothic towers, Queen Anne houses with double galleried porches and fish scale walls. Are they important to Galveston?

*What if we didn’t have any houses built earlier than...oh say 1950?....Would it make a difference?* David G. Woodcock is a professor of architecture at Texas A & M University....According to him, Galveston would be a less enjoyable place to live without its historic architecture....

Mayor Jan Coggeshall echoes Woodcock, saying *"Without our historic buildings, we’d look like the typical cities with suburbs....There are certainly people who wouldn’t buy here if there weren’t historic homes, particularly people who come down for the weekends and holidays."*

Capt. Julius W. Jockush, who lives in an east end home built in 1894-5 and whose grandfather came to Galveston in 1845 agrees: *"...The historic structures are cultural; they bring more people to the island...."

So, there we have the answers of three dissimilar individuals....*The historic neighborhoods add an irreplaceable charm, a connection with the past, a lure to home owners and tourists, and they add to the city coffers. Our historic structures in Galveston are indeed important both for our economy and our enjoyment of life. [Emphasis added; GDN 10/29/89]*

Nonetheless, many natives are not happy over the economic realities of "old house fever." It has inflated home prices to such an extent that many individuals can no longer afford to "live down the street from their ancestral home," and feel
decidedly disenfranchised. In December of 1988, as I sat in the ballroom of Ashton Villa waiting for a young dance troupe to begin their performance of "The Nutcracker," two women seated nearby began discussing their places of residence. One woman noted that after she'd married, she'd lived with her mother and husband in the large house in which she'd grown up on 20th Street. When it became necessary to acquire their own home, she and her husband moved to the Mainland where they continue to live. "We want to move back home [to the Island]," she stated, "but we can't afford to because of all the doctor and lawyer types from out-of-town who come down here to our city and buy up all the older homes for summer houses. I don't think it's fair and I resent it."

These "doctor and lawyers types from out of town" are also negatively characterized by residents of Historic Galveston, who see them as part and parcel of the West End's sterile atmosphere. Still, the totalizing contention of East Enders that West End residents are unappreciative of the finer things in life (in which the charm of Historic Galveston is believed to figure most prominently) could not be farther from the truth. The suburbs are occupied primarily by two categories of people: physicians and other health care professionals who are employed at the University of Texas Medical Branch and wealthy Houstonians and Dallasites who have purchased vacation homes on the Island. Many of this latter group are well-known in elite (albeit mainland) social circles
for their cultural and philanthropic contributions.

In recent years the GHF has made a special effort to integrate these individuals and their cultural patronage into Historic Galveston through membership drives directed exclusively at the "West End" and through such events as the "Landmarks of the Future Tour." This tour demonstrates the ingenious ability of the GHF to interpret almost anything as relevant to Galveston’s Victorian era. "Landmarks of the Future" was held on November 4, 1989 and billed as "A tour of five architect-designed resort homes on West Galveston Island, benefitting Ashton Villa, a project of Galveston Historical Foundation." Brink penned a special invitational letter to GHF members encouraging them to participate (at the cost of $50.00 per person) in this special event:

In recent years we have seen the design and construction of outstanding contemporary second homes in Galveston’s West End. In Landmarks of the Future, the owners of several of the finest of these architecturally designed homes will open their doors and share their homes with a very limited number of guests during this special tours and cocktail party. These modern showplaces remind us, as preservationists, of the grand homes that were built in Galveston’s East End more than 100 years ago. It is these historic homes, already landmarks, which Galveston Historical Foundation is working to preserve for our and future generations. [Emphasis added; 10/9/89]

Despite its democratic effort and desire to integrate all neighborhoods and communities into the psychic fold of Historic Galveston, the GHF has suffered from a measurable degree of public hostility and suspicion, beginning in the
late 1970s and continuing throughout the 1980s. In part, the contempt with which the Foundation came to be regarded by many Islanders was due to their perception that it was run predominantly by outsiders on behalf of a limited social elite. (Brink himself was from Washington, D.C. and many staff members were non-natives as well.) As old houses became cultural commodities and properties value shot up drastically, "historical elitism" became so rampant and self-conscious that it constituted a regular source of material for the local literati.

During this time, InBetween Magazine was a virtual gold-mine of cultural criticism relating to historic preservation's commodification of history and Victorian culture and the concomitant dichotomization of the citizenry into those who lived in Historic Galveston and those who did not. For example, "The Ten Commandments of Living in Historical Galveston" read:

I. Thou shall own an old house.
II. Thou shall know when that house was built and if possible the history of it.
III. Thou shall spend lots of money restoring the house and buying antiques.

25 One example of this attitude was expressed in 1982 by Mary Asbell in a letter to Peter Brink. After registering a complaint about the slick, expensive brochure produced to publicize an up-coming event, Asbell went on to say "I would like to take part in the events of the GHF, but it has become so elite and almost 'snoopy' (as a friend of mine said), that I cannot afford much more than the membership fee. Please don't let the GHF events exclude Galvestonians. Not everyone has the money, but we can enjoy things as well as the rich" (RLA 87-0019; 1/15/82).
IV. Thou shall not have a chain link fence or Aramco blinds. [Note: these blinds provide important protection against hurricane damage but their addition to homes in designated historical districts is disallowed by the Historical Review Board.]

V. Thou shall know the names of the old buildings and more important homes in the city.

VI. Thou shall know who Mary Moody Northen is.

VII. Thou shall go to Ashton Villa for the 4th of July.

VIII. Thou shall volunteer to help at "Dickens’s" and "Homes Tour."

IX. Thou shall have a copy of Mary Clifford Lazarri Paints Galveston.

X. Thou shall love Oleanders.

Signed,
Peggy Long, or an Outsider trying to be in.

[IBM #157: July 1983]

Other critiques of the GHF and the preservation industry were also featured by InBetween. For instance, "A Glossary of Island Terms" included "Restorative—Reclaiming and remaking what cannot be rebuilt. Galveston’s newest industry." And "Five Anagrams to Memorize" provided the following definition: "GHF--The Galveston Historical Foundation. A club for carpetbaggers."

It is on this theme of carpetbagging and territorial invasion that discussion now turns to "islands as symbols of otherness."\(^\text{26}\) For it is not Historic Galveston that many natives see as the source of their cultural identity, but rather the history and meaning of their islandness.

---

\(^{26}\) This phrase is borrowed from the title of a paper on this topic delivered by Susan Parman at the 1989, annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association.
There were no such nostalgic carryings—on a quarter of a century ago when Galveston was the eternal anachronism—out of place in any time. We had only a passing acquaintance with our mottled heritage. We knew that Dick Dowling had held off the Yankees at Sabine Pass. We went to school with the heirs of the carpetbaggers who carved out business empires and plastered their names all over the city. We knew about the 1900 storm and relived it in Carla. We knew that Phil Harris had married Alice Faye at the Galvez Hotel. We knew the gamblers, pimps, and prostitutes who created Sin City and the endless caravan of immigrant sunseekers who trekked to the Port and Playground of the Southwest. We knew all of these things, but paid homage to none of them.

--Bill Schadwell, 1979

Natives regularly make two broad claims about Galveston's collective cultural-self: that its essential character is one forged of the consequences and remembrance of its unique historical experiences; and that it is scarcely awake, or pays little tribute, to the vagaries of time. There is something seemingly contradictory about the claim to both a strong historical sensibility and a simultaneous quality of timelessness. If history marks time, bracketing specific people, places, and events for periodization and meaningful reference, and timelessness connotes an ageless or immutable
quality, how is it that both are simultaneously apprehended as constitutive elements of cultural character?¹

For natives, the claim to both a strong sense of the past and an essentialist tenor of timelessness is a claim to the geographic contingencies and cultural meanings of islandness. This chapter examines those claims to island culture in both their commercially constructed and indigenously apprehended forms and discusses the latter in terms of the relationship of historical consciousness to the maintenance of a cultural identity grounded in the symbolism of island geography.

Commercial Claims to Tropical Island Culture

According to at least one public source, Galveston Island is situated on the extreme northwestern fringe of that continuum of islands called Carribbean. A work of clever cartography, rendered as a mural on the wall of the popular establishment Yaga Ragz, documents this subtle geographic assertion. As a purveyor of beachwear and accessories, and the indisputable stronghold of tropical island mystique, Yaga Ragz represents cultural entrepreneurship in its most commercial form. The company’s logo is represented by the

¹ Of course, in many cultures and societies, history is neither perceived as a linear march of time (i.e. "progress") nor equated with the narration of extraordinary epochs or events. My observation is that Galveston’s native Islanders can be counted among those groups for whom history holds a different set of meanings and values. The latter part of this chapter addresses those meaning and values, as well as their foundation in a more constellatory structuration of history.
mythic "Yaga Man," whose aboriginal image is reproduced on T-shirts, decals and clothing tags. "The Legend of Yaga," cited below in a late 1980s edition, tells the story of a "wild man" who lives on an "outer island...deep in da' tropical growth."²

As da' story goes...There was an outer island inhabitant that lived deep in da' tropical growth. Occasionally this man would come out to da' beach and boat landings when ships would anchor near da' island. Da' old sailors would always watch for him; wild man of da' island, and would offer bottles of wine to him. After drinking wine, he would always sing and zouk (dance) to da' Reggae with da' Rasta kidz! They would call him by da' name they had made up from what they knew of da' strange man—his wild and untamed partying (zouking...). They all would chant, "YAGA, YAGA, YAGA," which means to always "go for it and parti up." [The Legend of Yaga, 1988]

The suggestion being made here, is that this "outer" island is none other than the tropical outpost of Galveston.³ While some promoters of Galveston's islandness might consider a claim to actual Carribbean membership to be carrying things

---

² I was told that "The Legend of Yaga" was inspired by a homeless Rastafarian who once wandered the Strand, although Yaga Ragz has a different account.

³ Ironically, Yaga Ragz (formerly known as Hot Tropics) was born and lives on deep in the commercial heart of Historic Galveston in a restored Victorian warehouse only one block west of the GHF's headquarters. Although its cultural imagery clashes rather loudly with the Victorian mystique the GHF tries to foster, it is one of the Strand's most successful businesses and in recent years it has become a strong supporter and sponsor of such traditions of Historic Galveston as Dickens on the Strand. Yaga Ragz has expanded from its Strand District store to retail centers in the Houston metropolitan area. Its tremendous success is based on the merchandizing of colorful tropical clothing and paraphernalia and parallels popular culture's recent appropriation of Rastafarian culture and Reggae music.
a bit far, few would find the appropriation of Carribbean or even South Seas cultural myth and imagery to characterize the local mystique, dissonant with the more subtle realities of Galveston's own insular character.

***

The popular image of tropical islands as preserves of primitive sensuality and unspoiled exotica is brilliantly embodied in the international travel magazine Islands. Although Islands' feature stories range geographically from Thailand to Stockholm, the preponderance of consumer product ads and real estate listings reference tropical locales. Nevertheless, the ability of any island, regardless of clime or cultural setting, to touristically exploit the romantic mythologies and desires that travelers associate with islands is well demonstrated in this magazine, particularly in the advertisements that grace virtually every page. An ad for "Ten Lyon Street Inn" on Nantucket, "A romantic island retreat in the old Historic District," comfortably shares a contiguous border with an invitation from "Air Niugini" to "Discover Papua New Guinea" where "village life is timeless, untouched by the 20th century....time forgotten WWII wrecks offering superb diving [apparently notwithstanding!]") (March/April 1990:46).

The magazine's regular "Departments" reveal other glimpses of island imagery. These include Photographer, Letters (wherein three different readers extoll the virtues of

Escape Artists, found on the last page of each issue, encapsulates in both title and text the romance and mystique attributed to island life. The March/April 1990 issue features a nearly full-page photo of a balding, silver-haired, shirtless, European male whose hips are loosely swathed in batik fabric. He is standing at the water's edge where a cliff looms in misty relief. The caption reads as follows:

As a child, Kolka Muller lived on the Marne River, near Paris. There was an island in the river, and he remembers paddling there in a canoe with his dog. In the South Pacific he made textiles, later turning to the hotel and restaurant business in New Caledonia and the Solomon Islands. He and his wife of 25 years, Josy, live in a bungalow on the lagoon in Bora-Bora, where for the last two years he has been general manager of the Hotel Marara. Now, when his children come to visit, he takes them fishing in a canoe, one with an outrigger. [P.160]

The Rolex watch on his wrist and a personal quotation set in violet-colored italics across the edge of his portrait provide a more intimate picture of Kolka Muller's lifetime career in island-escape artistry: "I was 19 when I came to Tahiti. It was better than any dream. Visitors would walk down the street and people would say, 'Are mai tamaa. Come
home and have a meal.' What was it like? You can't imagine" (p. 160).

****

Island romance has been the economic mainstay of Galveston Island for more than a century, and in this regard one can say with certainty that the city's tradition of constructing the collective cultural-self for touristic consumption has been nothing if not self-conscious and professionalized. Long before the GHF gave birth to Historic Galveston as a culturally distinctive entity and experience, Galveston was exploiting its geography and climate for its touristic potential. In fact in was in the heady days of Victorian wealth and urbanity the GHF now seeks to invoke that Galveston first began to market itself as a balmy island resort.4

It is this other 19th-century legacy (Historic Galveston's growing touristic appeal and prolific production of cultural knowledge and tradition quite aside) that continues to underpin the corpus of Galveston's commercialized self-representation. Currently, the Galveston Parks Board, the Galveston Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Galveston Chamber of Commerce, and the Galveston Independent School

---

4 Post cards proved to be an excellent source of archival documentation for this touristic phenomenon. In this regard, I owe Richard Eisenhour a debt of thanks for allowing me to view his personal collection of early Galveston post cards.
District each bill Galveston in a way that capitalizes on the exotic settings and cultures associated with tropical islands.

The Galveston Parks Board's "Imagine a Romantic Island" entreaty stands out from its contemporaries in the sense that it incorporates an emerging historical component into an already institutionalized image of tropical mystique; nevertheless, it remains but one variation on an ever constant theme. The cover of a 1990 Chamber of Commerce brochure features a photo of the Gulf coast at dawn, with sails skimming across the pastel horizon: "Stop Dreaming," it reads, and "Start Living!" This latter suggestion is found on the interior of the brochure and photographically depicted through the image of a fishing pier in full daylight with bikes, sailboats, and fishermen basking in the sun. The final paragraphs of a lengthy text suggest:

If you’re tired of simply dreaming about living as Galvestonians do, perhaps it is time to consider the island life. Do what others have done. Make the dream a reality! Once you get sand between your toes, you’ll be glad you stopped dreaming and started living. [Emphasis added; GCC information packet, June 1990]

Such references to "the island life" are routine in Galveston. Recently, the Galveston Independent School District developed a glossy brochure as part of a national campaign to recruit teachers to the Island. Its symbolic

---

5 The "Imagine a Romantic Island" campaign is discussed in the Introduction and again in Chapter 1: "Galveston."
imagery captured the attention of Kathy Thomas, a writer and managing editor for the Galveston Daily News and an Island-City resident of several years. Ironically, in singing the praises of the GISD's recruitment campaign in an August 1, 1989 editorial entitled "Where do I sign up for a job in paradise?," she underscored the disparity that exists between the reality of Galveston's "island life" and the tropical mythology by which it is marketed to outsiders:

The other day I got something in the mail that really caught my eye....On the cover was the invitation, "Consider a career on the coast." Printed below those words was a beautiful photo of palm trees with fan-shaped fronds, an incredibly azure blue sky and deep blue water. Opening the brochure, I saw more enticing photos of this tropical island and its inhabitants....The brochure is urging me to consider a career in this community. My only question is, "Where do I sign up?" [GDN 8/1/89]

Thomas goes on to note that, surprisingly enough, "the brochure is describing Galveston." "Such a deal," she writes at the close of the editorial, "I wonder if they need any journalism teachers?," as though is considering a move from the Galveston she inhabits to the one portrayed in the brochure.

Such disparity runs far deeper than the stylistic interpretation of island life. The cover image that inspired Thomas's editorial is a perfect case in point. Despite the brochure's invitation to "consider a career on the coast," the accompanying photo was not an image of the Galveston
coastline, nor for that matter, any coastline along the entire Gulf's Yucatan to Key West arc. It was a photograph of "Palm Beach" at Moody Gardens, a multi-phase, $118 million-dollar convention center and tourist development located along the inland shores of the West Bay at Offatt's Bayou.⁶

In a style that befits this postmodern era of creeping simulacra, Palm Beach is a facsimile of tropical paradise as evanescent vision--a state-of-the-art tropical "beach" as none has ever existed. Several weeks prior to its 1988 grand opening, Palm Beach's general manager offered the following preview:

Palm Beach is part of a world class facility .... Our beach will have a controlled and safe environment that will give guests the feeling of being at a tropical South Seas Island resort. Palm Beach will be the only beach in Texas that has

⁶ It is worth noting here that Galvestonians have great disdain for those who do not make the proper distinction between the beaches and the bays, as the following excerpt from IBM's "Glossary of Island Terms" conveys: "Bay--What tourists call the ocean. Islanders will point out quickly that it is not an ocean, but a Gulf on one side and a bay on the other" (# 157).

On several occasions, I personally witnessed Galvestonians demonstrate incredulity over outsiders' lack of geographic knowledge where Galveston's islandness was concerned. During my stint as a volunteer in one of the GHF's house museums a group of college students from a midwestern university revealed to the docent guiding their tour that the reason they had decided upon Galveston as a Spring Break destination was because they had never seen the Atlantic Ocean and proceeded to express their excitement at having first glimpsed it on their drive across the Causeway. After a few seconds of shock, the docent recovered herself and managed to respectfully inform these eager young men that the body of water they had just driven over was Galveston Bay, that the Island was situated in the Gulf of Mexico, and that the Atlantic Ocean was several days' drive to the East!
tropical palms growing right on the beach.... Visitors will be able to park free in a paved and security-patrolled parking area, and trams will provide transportation to the main entrance area. [Emphasis added. West Beach Sun, Vol. III, No. 3, May 1988.]

Production of that South Seas "feeling" was grounded in serious market research. A Galveston Daily News article entitled "White sand being imported to Galveston," heralded the imminent arrival of two ocean barges bearing cargo from Orlando sand mines and revealed far more than the source of Palm Beach's tropical quintessence; by implication, it challenged the legitimacy of Galveston's long-standing tropical claims:

Moody Gardens administrator Ralph McPheeters said the choice of white sand over the hometown variety was easy. "What do most people think of when they think of beaches?" he asks. "White sands." He pointed out that for years people have complained about Galveston's murky beach water and brown, narrow beaches. "We can't do anything about the water but we sure can do something about sand," he said....Developers looked for sand in the United States and abroad that was the right color and the right consistency for making sand castles. [Emphasis added. GDN 3/17/88.]

Palm Beach embodies all the contradictions inherent in Galveston's commercial presentation and sale of the collective cultural-self. In its bid to address, through surface simulation, those tropically symbolic elements considered to be deficient in the local environment (e.g. white sand and palm trees "growing right on the beach"), Palm Beach abandons
critical aspects of Galveston's coastal context: salt water, surf, dolphins, schools of jumping fish, seaweed, shells, driftwood, and the uninterrupted view of the Gulf coast horizon.

Palm Beach's promotional literature invites visitors to "Discover a Tropical Paradise on Galveston Island" and bills itself as "Texas's Only White Sand Beach." It hardly bears stating the obvious, but the fabrication of Palm Beach explodes the myth of Galveston as an island paradise, even as it simultaneously moves to provision the city with a tenable basis for such claims. Galveston's island authenticity is now born witness by the tropical "hyperreality" contained in a manmade, fresh-water, concrete-graded lagoon, architecturally landscaped with waterfalls, palms, and pristine sand (cf. Baudrillard 1988).

The irony of Palm Beach's design and construction was palpable to more than the local cultural critics. Islanders complained about the hefty entrance fee, the exhorbitant food costs (all food must be purchased from concessions), and the "controlled environment" that extends to the maintenance of an aesthetic in which personal beach furniture and coolers do not figure. In short, it was counted as yet another example of

---

7 During the beach's first season, lifeguards for the Galveston Beach Patrol (a youthful elite whose ranks are frequently filled by natives with a family legacy of guarding Galveston beaches) were particularly vocal about their disdain of Palm Beach--not only for its artifice of nature, but also for its pretense of safety, which has all too often led parents to permit children free rein to dive from slippery
city boosters and developers privileging outsiders at the expense of local residents. Beyond this, the idea of "improving" upon Galveston's natural beaches was perceived by many natives to be a slight of the Island at-large, too great a repudiation of the cultural meaning and sense of self vested in the bounded totality encompassed by the beaches and bays.

Indigenous Claims to Islandness

By their own account, native Galvestonians have never doubted their cultural distinction, nor the significance of island geography as the ultimate source of that distinction; yet the particular substance and meaning of their cultural difference seems always to be subject to debate. This eternal quandry over the symbolic meaning and value of native islandness gets regularly voiced in a range of rhetorical discourse that runs the gamut from naive self-reflection to playful satire, to caustic cultural criticism.

Islanders like to talk about Galveston being "frozen in time" or "sealed in amber"; they speak with chauvinistic pride about anachronism; they joke, half seriously, about seceding from the state of Texas and the nation, they reference rock waterfalls into dangerously shallow, concrete-bottomed "lagoons." That first year, several members of the Beach Patrol began to complain about assignments at Palm Beach where their disgust for the simulated environment was outranked only by their anxiety over the perilous possibilities it produced. Moody Gardens now supplies its own lifeguards to Palm Beach, trained by a former, longtime Beach Patrol member.
psychiatric studies of island populations. What is more, they reference anthropological literature as well. For instance, in 1985, *InBetween Magazine* published an opinion piece written by Ken Shelton, Jr., entitled "Cargo Cultists and The Witch Doctor." Shelton's essay drew an analogy between the cargo cults that arose in the post-war context of the South Pacific and Galveston's late-20th century commodification of the collective cultural-self as other for outside consumption, identifying the Galveston airport manager as the local shaman, and city boosters and developers as native cultists awaiting economic salvation in the form of a touristic onslaught not likely to arrive at all, but most certainly not by air transport onto runways at Galveston's Scholes Field:

On an island in the South Pacific, unclad natives huddle around the rusty fuselage of a B-45. The area around the plane has been cleared and a crude altar has been built from the pilot's seat. On it natives have piled offerings of papayas and mangoes which rise in a rotting pyramid. A miniature air force carved by the natives hangs in the banyan trees surrounding the replicas of the squadrons that once, during the second great war, flew into the island disgorging, with their military cargo, the staples of American civilization, Coca Cola, and bubblegum....By emulating the actions of the GI's whom the natives perceived calling down from the sky vast wealth merely by marching in formation and talking into metal boxes, the natives, by

---

8 For instance, local writer Joe Murphy suggests that Galveston's failure to thrive economically may be related to the psychology of island populations and proceeds to offer up such characteristic findings as "lower societal orientation and a higher self orientation" (*IBM* April 1, 1978; #17:36).
similar magic, seek to produce the return of the cargo....

If one were to travel halfway around the world to a sandy island in the Gulf of Mexico, one would see a similar occurrence. Although the natives are more completely clothed, dressed in polyester cut to the latest fashion, and profess to be of more sophisticated religions, if one were to look carefully, one would find that a large portion of the island, a onetime military airbase know as Scholes Field had been dedicated to the nefarious practice of the local cargo cult. Its use for other purposes taboo. One would find ill maintained runways and an unmanned control tower that even FAA flight service has abandoned. A dreary terminal built in the fifties, rusting quansethuts [sic], and the general disrepair and dilapidation would give the impression that one were in a depressed outpost in the third world, rather than on the Texas Gulf Coast....

In Galveston the intonation of bureaucratic gibberish and anagrams of initials--RADAR, FAA, ILS, ETC, would replace the more entertaining and exhuberant nonsensical ejaculations of the witch doctor. The purpose would be the same: to convince the cultists, regardless of the facts, that one day large airships would return to the airport disgorging a cargo of Coca Cola and bubblegum, in the case of Oceania, and of tourists in the case of Galveston, and that it was worth tithing, to support the airport and the airport manager....the analogy is so strong...that I cannot see the airport manager without imagining him sporting a bone through his nose and wearing a grass skirt. [InBetween #213, September 1985]

Despite the proliferation of such candid critiques of self-objectification and of the concomitant political economy of tourism, Galveston's representation of the collective-self as the islander-other is more than simply a commercial contrivance or corpus of essentialist symbolism. And while the Island's "32 miles of sandy beaches" clearly anchor Galveston's commercial claim to cultural difference, sand is
vested with far more than the multivariant symbolism of
tropical paradise and exotica. As a central metaphor for
islandness, sand anchors native sentiments of island longing
and belonging.

These sentiments are given everyday expression in the
phrase "I guess I've got sand between my toes." Though its
cliche status is undeniable, this phrase nevertheless
represents an important figure of local speech and retains
critical symbolic value for natives. It is usually inserted
into a conversation or written text rather simply—and with no
further qualification—as an excuse for behavior or attitudes
that others might perceive to be odd, illogical, or a little
out of step with the 20th century. It was put to me on a
variety of occasions: as the basis of a general aversion to
"progress" or change of any kind (including the preservation
of "the past"); as an explanation for reluctance to
participate in the unseating of a clearly corrupt but native
politician; as legitimate grounds for suspicion of
"outsiders." This list could be extended considerably.

One individual resorted to this excuse to explain what he
saw as pathological behavior on his part—an inability to keep
a series of jobs off the Island despite the fact that they
were, at least in theory, more personally fulfilling and
certainly more lucrative. He found himself continually drawn
back to the Island, as if it were some magnetic field, outside
the bounds of which he was unable to properly function. By
the late 1980s when our conversation took place, he felt he had finally come to terms with this befuddling reality, and was resolved to living out the rest of his (many) years on Galveston Island in a state of "contented complacency and ambivalence."

The presence and strength of cultural meaning vested in Galveston's islandness was not something I was prepared to encounter when I began fieldwork in Galveston. While I knew that Galveston exploited its beaches touristically and vested meaning in its geography for commercial appeal, I initially resisted seeing how completely and deeply islandness was woven into Galveston's cultural fabric and social reality--perhaps precisely because of the prolific production of commercial claims to island romance and exotica; images of palm trees and sunsets are pervasive and used to market everything from family dentistry clinics to apartment complexes.

I was very quickly and thoroughly disabused of my cynicism and naivete through the unconscious subtleties of everyday conversation. A number of examples come to mind, such as the time I was discussing a local industrialist with a group of Galvestonians when the speaker was suddenly interrupted by a fellow Islander who asked in a moment of cognitive dissonance, "Well, what is he doing in the Galveston Rotary Club anyway? He lives on the Mainland!" as if this breached a social as well as geographic boundary. On another occasion, when roles became reversed and I was made to play
the informant, I was asked by a native Islander, "Tell me, how
do you find Galveston; do you find it clannish and closed?"
To my reply "I guess I'd have to say yes," came the somewhat
self-satisfied rejoinder: "Well, you know that Causeway hasn't
always been there." And more than a few individuals made
comments to me along the lines of "Well, I guess I'd better
let you get finished with your work, I forgot you've got to go
back to the Mainland tonight," as if the two-mile trip across
the Causeway represented a long journey through time to an
entirely separate and internally undifferentiated space. For
Galvestonians, one is either an Islander or a Mainlander--
other categories of "Mainland" membership or belonging are of
incidental, if any importance at all. It is this simple
distinction between the Island and the Mainland that is the
most common expression of cultural identity and difference in
Galveston today.

---

9 I suspect that had I answered "No, I don't find it
clannish or closed," this person would have responded "Well,
that's what the Causeway has done to us," as if it were the
source of cultural pollution and degradation, for this too was
a popularly voiced sentiment on the Island. In the late
1980s, the Galveston County Historical Museum developed an
exhibit documenting the construction of the Galveston
Causeway. The former director of the museum told me that for
the duration of the exhibit, a day didn't pass without some
individual grumbling about the catastrophic ramifications of
its construction. An amateur historian, with whom I was
speaking about this very subject, responded to my comment that
"outsiders from the Mainland" had certainly visited Galveston
by boat before the vehicular causeway was built by saying
"Yes, well, I guess that's true. But...those were mostly truck
farmers who pulled up to the wharves and the exchanges were
done right there. They never really got to come ashore."
**BOIism in the Eighties**

Contemporary islander discourse of the indigenous self and the outsider other is most frequently carried out in a system of shorthand which assigns or assesses such matters as cultural membership and authority on the basis of native status. This system of ready reference turns on the acronym BOI (for "born on the Island"), and is a phenomenon of cultural assertion, resistance, and credentialing.

While the symbolism and referencing of BOI status became particularly popularized in the late-20th century when island tourism was rebounding and Historic Galveston was experiencing rapid colonization, the sentiments embodied in the acronym were at play in Galveston more than a century ago. In 1881, Alexander Sweet, a witty Texas journalist who had recently moved from Galveston to Austin (after an apparently unsatisfying two-year stint with *The Galveston Daily News*) became editor of a new paper entitled *Texas Siftings*. It was in this removed forum that he expressed the discomfort he had suffered in Galveston's insular society.\(^{10}\) Appearing on May 21, 1881, in a column bearing the heading "The Standard of Respectability," Sweet provided a late-19th century perspective on what it meant to be without BOI status:

---

\(^{10}\) The book *Alex Sweet's Texas: The Lighter Side of Lone Star History* (Sweet 1986) contains a variety of Sweet's columns. The volume is edited by longtime Galvestonian Virginia Eisenhour.
In every city in the world there is a certain standard of respectability and gentility, and the man who cannot come up to the standard or be measured in the local peck measure, is not regarded as any better than a tramp. In Boston a man may be wealthy, wear fine clothes, and otherwise appear like a gentleman, but if he has not the Mayflower to bring over his ancestors in, he might as well shut up shop. In New York he has to provide himself with old second-hand Dutch ancestors, or the people say he is no better than if he was a Bostonian. In Galveston the man who sighs to be looked up to with awe and reverence has to be an old inhabitant. The longer he has been on the Island the more he is regarded as a saint, although he may otherwise not be a fit person to associate with the inmates of the penitentiary. If a man has lived on the Island five years, they say: "We can't tell anything about him until he gets here." If he has lived on the Island ten years they say: "He only got off the cars yesterday. Give him a chance to vindicate himself." After a man has lived in Galveston fifteen years the boys quit throwing brickbats at him and tying dead cats to his gate, but he is not yet looked upon as anything better than a Houston emissary. It sounds so strange to hear Galvestonians ask a man who has lived there twenty-five years, when he is going home. [Sweet 1986]

This century-old editorial is cited on a regular basis as a form of historical legitimation and authentication by Islanders and the outsiders who would characterize them. It is celebrated and assigned mythic value for its ability to bear witness to islandness as a cultural form clearly indigenous to early Galveston, despite its cliched and self-conscious role in contemporary assertions of cultural distinction, be they indigenous claims or commercial constructions.

The brand of BOIism that dominated public consciousness in the Eighties actually began taking shape in the mid 1970s.
It was during this time that jewelry bearing the acronym first made its appearance on the popular culture market, enjoying wide appeal among a primarily youthful crowd. More than a decade and a half later, BOIism is the hegemonic mode of claiming nativeness—a stalwart standard bearer of Island culture and membership. In the late 1980s, it was not all uncommon to see reference to BOI in obituaries or other personal announcements appearing in the Galveston Daily News. During the recent Gulf War, a native son’s service in Desert Storm was commemorated in the GDN. Accompanying his photograph, ship assignment, and address were the boldface initials BOI, followed by a brief genealogical exposition.

In a particularly clever appropriation of the BOI symbolism, St. Mary’s Hospital began a program in the late 1980s to celebrate the native status of infants delivered at its facility. Toward this end, a "Born on the Island Childbirth Preparation Program" was begun and a monthly listing of birth announcements appeared in the Galveston Daily News under the rubric "BOI at St. Mary’s."

11 While many of my younger informants (mid 20s to 30s) could not recall the use of the BOI acronym before this time, they all wished to be certain that I understood the "historical origins" of the Islander attitude BOI expressed—most of them citing the Sweet column as a reference. Yet BOI was a prevalent expression of indigenousness well before the 1970s and 80s. For instance, in 1963, native Galvestonian Ruth Kempner is described as "A BOI (chauvinistic term for people born on the island)" in an article appearing in the Houston Chronicle (6/30/63). Moreover, several senior citizens informed me that they could not themselves remember when the acronym had not been in use, but remarked that (for instance) "it [had] certainly caught on" in recent years.
BOI mythology was so institutionalized by this time that commercial plays were occasionally made on the acronym. For example, Trans Western Publishing, which produces alternative yellow page listings, appealed to local business and consumer interests with a full-page ad which began "BOI, BETTER ON THE ISLAND" (GDN 7/10/88). Morris Moore Chevrolet, similarly, invoked the acronym to remind Galvestonians to shop at home for cars, citing happy customers who had BOI—"Bought on the Island" (GDN 11/20/89).

Eighties BOIism was more than a phenomenon of symbolic investiture; it marked a period of heightened self-consciousness that saw natives and outsiders alike reflecting upon the meaning and content of the Island’s claims to an indigenous culture. Representations of the collective cultural-self were regularly flagged with BOI explication. Local realtor Bill Cherry, who specializes in "historic" commercial properties, produced a "Special Edition" Newsletter to acquaint visitors with real estate opportunities in Galveston. In characterizing the Island, he noted that "about 65,000 people live on the Island, with those of us who were born here being members of that prestigious stock called 'BOI’s' for 'born on the Island'" (emphasis added, Vol. 2:1).

In its most contemplative and auto-ethnographic moments, InBetween Magazine grappled diligently with the symbolic meanings and values of BOI, and with issues of islandness in general. And while the persistent intonation of levity—IBM’s
unmistakable literary hallmark--may have superficially masked the seriousness of such self-conscious musings, the amount of copy the magazine devoted to issues of Islander consciousness clearly registered a significant level of popular interest on the part of its readership.

As early as 1979, the BOI phenomenon was being interpreted by the local literati as an indigenous cultural form. In an essay entitled "The Anatomy of a BOI," writer Joe Murphy suggested that "BOI is the last urban class of Texan still resisting the new order of the 20th century" (IBM #38:27). Interestingly enough, more importance was vested in the cultural uniqueness of the BOI than in the terms or object of resistance the BOI was presumed to embody:

[Some] believe there is a precedent for this homegrown hero. They believe he is the Texas Cowboy gone Islander; he is the frontiersman breaking new ground across the Old West; he is the Pilgrim colonizing America; above all he is a pioneer not afraid to be different.

But the difference between the BOI and those typically frontier stereotypes is that Galveston is not like the rest of frontier America. The Island had pirates and bootleggers running contraband on the beach instead of cavalry heroes dying at the Alamo. Our fortune builders made their money in trade--cotton and grain--not in minerals and cattle like the rest of Texas. We are an island with a heterogeneous population while the tidal wave of the American frontier was mostly white.

Because of these cultural differences we cannot transform the folklore of the American western frontier or even Texas into our own experience. This is why other Texans have a hard time understanding Galveston and why BOI's [sic] have never tried to understand Texas. [IBM #38:26]
The BOI may defy comparison, but certainly not recognition or characterization. In 1982, IBM assembled the "BOI Trivia Quiz....If you can answer at least 45 of these correctly, consider yourself a Galvestonian!" (July 1982, #130). In 1983, the magazine identified BOI as the first of "Five Anagrams to Memorize" and offered outsiders the following working definition and advice:

1. BOI--Born on the Island. These are a special breed and they are proud of their title. They were raised to the Island lifestyle and if you're very pleasant and ask them nicely, they will coach you in how to kill time." [IBM #157]

The following year InBetween published a "guide for Galveston visitors who want to blend in" entitled "How to Pretend You Live Here:"

If you observe these simple B.O.I (Born on the Island) guidelines, you should never be approached by a timeshare condo salesman. Follow these rules and he'll think you are an Islander (and all Islanders have already said "No!" to all the condo salesmen).

1. Don't feed the seagulls from the bow (front) of the ferry.
2. Treat the red lights on Broadway like a stop sign when you are caught in the middle of the esplanade.
3. Call it "The Gulf" (not "The Water" or "The Ocean").
4. Refer to anything west of 61st Street as "Down the Island."
5. Refer to everything between 45th and 61st as "The West End." (If you are over 40 start with 34th Street.)
6. Don't ask where Ave. B is.
7. Never wear socks with your thongs.
8. Laugh (don’t honk) at a tourist who does something really stupid while driving down the Boulevard.
9. Use tap water only for bathing, no drinking.
10. Think of Oleanders as a nuisance, not as nice flowers.
11. On weekends, never drive down Seawall Blvd. to get anywhere. (We would tell you the Islanders’ alternative routes, but we would never hear the end of it.)
12. Drink coffee at Gaido’s, read Les Daughtry’s editorials in the News, listen [to] Larry Sanville on KGBC (1540 AM) and reminisce about the old gambling days.
13. If you go to the beach, bring lighter fluid for the tar, Adolf’s Meat Tenderizer for the men-o-war, and a tea box for the garbage. [Emphasis in original, IBM #181, June 1984]

By the mid 1980s, BOIism had become a form of cultural resistance. A resurgent tourist industry was bringing day-trippers and vacationers to the Island en masse. Organized spring break activities aggressively marketed on college campuses and a campaign to attract "Winter Texans" (with or without the ubiquitous Winnebago and from points of origin as far north as Canada), as well as historical tourism (not yet dubbed "heritage" tourism, but including such events as Dickens on the Strand) fostered the tremendous influx of outsiders whose individual presences may have been only momentary, but contributed nevertheless, to the full impact of the touristic collectivity and a quality of life Island residents perceived to be increasingly diminished.

Beyond its role in bolstering the significant economic base tourism has always represented in Galveston, historic preservation played a more permanent role in changing the face
of island socio-political demographics. Its rehabilitation of old homes and neighborhoods attracted many outsiders (not a few from nearby Houston) seeking to make Galveston their primary residence, and it fostered the movement of seasonal Galvestonians from the fairly circumscribed territory of the West End's resort neighborhoods into the urban center, bringing year-round residents face-to-face with typically affluent "part-time islanders." The seasonal aspect of this latter group's island-residency meant houses were either wholly empty or leased out during Galveston's off-season, detracting either way from the overall quality of community vitality and continuity.

The colonization of Historic Galveston by outsider investment in commercial and residential real estate changed more than the composition of Island-City neighborhoods. As would be expected, many of these new residents moved to protect their financial and emotional investments in Historic Galveston and the larger island economy by entering into the public policy-making arena, whether on a neighborhood or municipal level. In a xenophobic community where the status quo and voter apathy are so legendary that they constitute a self-conscious source of cultural identity, outsider engagement in the local political process, whether formal or informal, represents just cause for the incitement of native concern.
Not surprisingly, native Islanders resisted the cultural thinning this rapid and intensive colonization represented by refusing to let outsiders assimilate. In fact it was the fear of their own assimilation into the amorphous culture of the encroaching other that animated this posture of impregnability. In the face of a perceived human wave of cultural pollution, the symbolic meanings and values of BOI became amplified. Islanders began to qualify their own and others' opinions, values, public personae, and private lives with reference to BOI. Natiiveness was promoted as the criterion sine qua non for islander membership.¹²

As a strategy of native resistance, BOI was invoked primarily as an exclusionary symbol, albeit it one that clearly entailed emblematic assertions of cultural identity and distinction. BOI claims of singular entitlement to island land and cultural membership were intended to directly challenge the legitimate access of outsiders (read tourists and colonists) to the same.

Outsiders wasted little time in taking up the gauntlet. In zealous pursuit of islander status, outsiders (and City boosters who wanted to demonstrate support for those outsiders

¹² During this time, the expression "having sand between one's toes," a previously acceptable means of expressing island belongingness, lost some of its ground--it lacked the concrete benchmark BOIism was able and determined to establish. While this had no effect on the islander status of Galvestonians whose "sand between the toes" condition was firmly established and had been fondly remarked upon for many years previous, it seriously diminished the ability of late-20th century newcomers to successfully claim the condition.
whose leadership or capital was deemed in the best economic interests of the Island) originated variations on the BOI theme and found loopholes for islander membership. Pam Diamond, a regular contributor to IBM, was among the first outsider-writers to suggest an alternative embodiment for native islandness—one that would shift the locus of cultural belongingness from the concrete circumstance of birth to the abstract realm of affect. The substance of this affective register is supposedly conveyed in the oft-heard expression that serves as the title of her tongue-in-cheek essay, "Well...that's Galveston":

Galveston authentica is something as stubborn, deep rooted and colorful as the oleander. Once you have weeded out the false or the would-be, what you have left is citizens who may feel different [sic] about one another but who nonetheless feel the same about the island. [IBM #123:19; April 1982]

Not surprisingly, Diamond followed this definition with a newly formulated (and greatly expanded) taxonomy of islander membership. "Despite dozens of subgroups, cliques, tribes, and undeclared fraternities, true island residents belong to one of three large categories":

1) BOIWNLBC--Those Born On The Island Who Never Left by Choice
2) BOIPS--Born on the Island Prodigal Sons
3) BAOI--Born Again on the Islanders. [P.19]

Diamond offers a lengthy explication of each category. She notes that while BOIWNLBCs are so confident of their
status they have no need to proclaim it, BOIPS are so happy to be back on the Island that they, by contrast, must proclaim it: "These people may be found any afternoon at Cafe Torrefie, their gold BOI charms refracting the candlelight, chanting, 'Aunty Em, Aunty Em, there's no place like home.'"(p.20). And finally, turning to the category expressive of her own longing, Diamond insists that BAOIs can (and deserve to) be recognized by virtue of their having survived—a persistent theme in Islandness and BOIdom, in particular. In the case of the BAOIs, what they have weathered may go well beyond hurricanes and economic decline, for they have born the brunt of BOIism. The prize for their hard-won endurance, she suggests, ought to be islander status.

Although Diamond's essay undoubtedly conveyed for many outsider-residents the paradoxical condition of simultaneously suffering from both BOI envy and irreverence, her acronymic mutations stood little chance of becoming institutionalized. BOI's profane counterpart, the IBC or "Islander by Choice," was too deeply entrenched in the popular consciousness.

The early emergence of the acronym IBC was a predictable response to BOIism; the prevalence of its use in conventional forums is somewhat more surprising. For instance, it was not at all uncommon to see the Galveston Daily News make off-handed use of the acronym IBC, as in the headline "'BOIs' and 'IBCs' Cite Quality of Life Here" (2/26/89). And while the prevailing socio-political climate of Galveston necessitated
the origination of some equivalent "Standard of Measure" for
civic and community-minded "island-transplants" (as they were
sometimes called), IBC was a significantly less holy status.

IBM recognized this early on. In its 1983 column, "Five
Anagrams to Memorize," BOI was immediately followed by IBC
and an appropriate admonition:

IBC--Islander by Choice. That's for when you get
a t-shirt printed up at the souvenir shop on
Seawall and 13th St. Keep in mind though, if you
weren't born on the Island, you'll never really
fit in. [IBM #157]

And in fact, BOIs steadfastly refused to yield their
resolute claim to ultimate distinction, maintaining that the
BOI mythology itself mandated the rejection of such earnest
attempts to "go native," since by their very nature, they
ran against the grain of laid-back islandness. Quite
simply, overt claims to IBC were considered by BOI standards
to be bad island-form. As one informant stated in a sincere
but unsuccessful attempt to quell his BOI condescension:
"We don't hate outsiders, we just hate it when they try to
be one of us." In fact, BOI mythology maintained that
trying to be one of "them" was a "certain kiss of death":
"Too often I've heard a newcomer say, 'What do you have to
do to be accepted here?' You can bet your last buck that he
will not be accepted in 100 years." 13

13 This quotation is taken from a 1979 article entitled
"Which is Better? Galveston or Texas City," in which Gordon
Haire wrote on behalf of the Island and Melvin Thorpe made
The emergence of IBC is but one register of BOIism's resistant posture; another measure is the degree to which the already low status of Mainlanders was diminished during this period. Counted among this group were not only tourists, but the rather large number of daily commuters who comprised a significant sector of Galveston's work-force. In the context of BOIism's effect on non-natives, the diminishing status of Mainland commuters was particularly inevitable, since they now suffered at the hands of not only BOIs, but island-dwellers of less celebrated natal stock. After all, Mainlanders offered these resident-outsiders legitimate grounds for claiming islander status, where it was continually denied them by their indigenous neighbors.

The Mainland, "all landmasses across the causeway [including] Texas City, Detroit, Kansas, Canada, and Nova Scotia,"\(^{14}\) has long served as the disparaged oppositional entity in the binomial formula by which Galveston calculates its cultural superiority. As I noted earlier in this chapter (see fn. 9), "the Causeway" is the principal trope by which the Mainland and its inhabitants are variously dismissed or maligned. When interviewed about this matter, an informant offered the following comment, which, if read

\(^{14}\) Here again, we have InBetween to thank for this comic clarification. This characterization of the Mainland, which rings resoundingly true to the indigenous conception of all that lies on the other side of the Causeway, is taken from the "Glossary of Island Terms" (IBM #157).
closely, reveals the traces of a class consciousness that is deeply embedded in the Island's discourse of the Mainland:

Until the late 1880s, when they finally built a wagon bridge, there were only two ways to get on this Island--by train, which cost money or in a boat, which also cost money. Galvestonians were outraged when they built the Causeway and people could get on their Island for free!

Add to this sense of indignation, the oft-expressed notion that a toll-booth would have diminished the problem of cultural pollution posed especially by the tourists "who come down here with a dirty T-shirt and a $5 bill and never change either one of them" (by permitting only the passage of those Mainlanders whose class membership placed them on at least some reasonable socioeconomic par with culture-owning Galvestonians,) and one gets a candid picture of the islander perception of Mainlanders as a cultureless lower class.15

Of course, the Mainland is neither cultureless nor socioeconomically homogeneous. Certainly nearby Clear Lake, with its upper-middle class proscriptions, flies in the face of a thoroughly blue-collar Mainland. One Mainlander informant protested such class characterizations by pointing

---

15 Expounding upon the reasons why Galveston ought to secede from the state of Texas, one writer noted "Galveston Islanders are a unique group, in-bred and cantankerous. They have a hard time dealing with the Mainlanders in their own city, much less those in the whole rest of the state.... 'Mainlanders are uncouth, unwashed, and unlettered'...." (IBM Vol.1, No.3:19).
out that "Galveston's closest real middle class is on the Mainland." Even so, he then added in ironic support of the characterization he had just disputed, that it was nevertheless important to locate a "working class" somewhere nearby, since Galveston's significant poverty-stricken and mostly unemployed resident underclass hardly comprised a stable class of "workers" under any rubric. "Galveston," he remarked, "is a lot like the Middle Ages; there are the rich people and the poor people who work for the rich people."  

Although he was a young professional working among the ranks of Galveston's cultural elite, he identified with his middle-aged suburban mainland neighbors, many of whom were skilled laborers employed in the Island's service industries. After noting that affordable housing for middle income workers forced many professional and managerial people employed on the Island to commute from the Mainland in order to maintain their lifestyle, he submitted that much the same scenario held for the Island's wage workers. Then

---

16 I am struck by the similarity between this informant's comment and the following excerpt from "Five Facts to Face Up Front," published nine years previous: "The Galveston social strata is roughly divided into two parts of the Upstairs/Downstairs variety, with a few twists. There are the ultra-rich, the rich, those who work for the ultra-rich/rich, a smattering of students, those on the hustle and those who have not. Marx would be proud. It is impossible to tell who's who by what people wear or where they live. After all, the wealthiest woman in town [the late Mary Moody Northen] lives next door to the Dairy Queen" (IBM #75:26, May 1980). The role IBM played in the reproduction and amplification of islander myths is incalculable, since the magazine regularly offered newcomers virtual recipes for conversion to the islander sensibility and behavior.
as if in partial retraction he shook his head and said flatly: "You know, there really aren’t even blue collar jobs to be had on this island." When I glanced pointedly at the longshoremen eating at a table nearby, he conceded with a great deal of qualification: "Sure, maybe the Port contributes a small slice to the class pie but it’s all really poor and really well-off people. You know," he continued, returning to the subject of the Islander’s essentializing depiction of the Mainland, "my next door neighbor works for the Galveston Sears store servicing washing machines and dryers. He tells me that he hates the drive a lot less than he hates the way people treat him when they find out he’s a Mainlander."

My attempts to unpack the mythology of Island/Mainland class distinctions and of Galveston’s truant middle class met with remonstrance even among the Island’s so-called (and undeniably) "emergent middle class." The entrenchment of this mythology was evidenced by the fact that even the possibility of an Islander middle class seemed to threaten the very core of the collective cultural-self--so much so that natives in white collar professions had difficulty admitting their own existence as such.17 A Galvestonian who works in the local banking business once began a charming

17 The importance of maintaining this Island mythology of marked class distinction is explained in Chapter 5, where the relationship of Galveston’s elite families to Islander claims of cultural distinction is demonstrated to be central to the cultural politics of the past.
synopsis of the Island with the statement: "Galveston is hyperbolic. There is no middle class in Galveston." When his wife objected "Yes there is! We’re in it!," he attempted to maintain the integrity of the myth with the dismissive aside "Well, of course, but there is not much of one."

Mainlanders, then, were caught in the contradictions of islander mythology—caught in a struggle to negotiate an accurate cultural representation of themselves by Islanders who would in one breath deny the existence of a middle class on the Island and in the next refuse the possibility that one might be located on the Mainland. To admit of the latter would eschew the Islanders' totalizing conceptualization of the Mainland as peopled by cultureless working-class masses.

BOIism drove Mainlanders to new heights of cultural consciousness. Tired of being defined in opposition to the Island’s thick culture, mainland residents sought a less disparaging identity in general, and more importantly, Islander recognition of mainland diversity. Grounds for the latter cause seemed always to elude them. As the following excerpt from Jim Higgin’s essay "We are the Mainland"

---

18 Both husband and wife were fifth generation BOI Galvestonians, had reproduced themselves by giving birth on the Island to both a son and a daughter, and could not have been less class conscious. In this case, the woman (who, in fact, acted as my informant on a more regular basis than her husband) made the distinction for my benefit, not out of concern for her own social standing.
demonstrates, they wandered a quagmire of cultural nebulosity in search of the holy grail of identity:

I've been a Mainlander for five years. Before that I was an Islander By Choice (IBC). And before that, a Houstonian. I had no trouble identifying as part of each of those well defined communities. But I still haven't figured out what a Mainlander is....In "Hawaii Five-O," the Mainland meant the West Coast. That is hardly the case around here. If it weren't for an island off shore, we might be more recognized for our individual towns whose names sound like stops on a stage right out of a Louis Lamour western: Alta Loma...Santa Fe...Hitchcock...Texas City?...La Marque? (We ran out of Western names before we ran out of trail.) [IBM #213; September 1985]

Interestingly enough, as this same writer notes, mainland communities have facilitated the institutionalization of their amorphous identity by naming their businesses "Mainland this or Mainland that." "And soon," he goes on to lament "the MALL OF THE MAINLAND (here we go again) will capitalize on our reluctant identity by bringing Islanders over the causeway and into our shops...", an ironic indignity to be sure.

While Mainlanders define themselves in contradistinction to Clear Lake, Houston, and Galveston, the Clear Lake/NASA area cannot count on escaping the scorn and derision of the Islander's sweeping discountenance of the Mainland. In 1985, Galveston and Clear Lake squared off in another round of dueling identities--the literary genre for which Inbetween Magazine was infamous. Jim Thomas, who
pleaded the case for Clear Lake delivered an appropriately ethnocentric critique based on the idea that although "the ghost of civilization past may dwell in Galveston, the present and future [i.e. space technology] is alive and well in Clear Lake."

In years to come the people who live and work in the Clear Lake [area] will become the colonists of space, the explorers of distant planets. They will live in the worlds dreamed by Heilein, Herbert, and Burroughs. From these very shores will arise figures which will reduce [Galveston’s oft claimed pirate] Jean Lafitte to an historical footnote. [IBM #213:9; September 1985]

And while Thomas was able to concede to Galveston some momentary advantages ("Culturally we may be somewhat lacking compared to the Island [though] even here we are evolving rapidly" [p.10]), Pete Frederiksen delivered a classic islander anti-mainland diatribe, beginning and ending his essay on Galveston’s superiority to Clear Lake not so much with critical reference to Clear Lake, as with disdain for "the Mainland," as it is boundlessly conceived in islander mythology:

Reasons to cross the Causeway, the physical bascule span linking the Island to the mainland of Texas, are different for every hard core Islander, but invariably few in number. Mine are (in no particular order): Renaissance Festivals, Bruce Springsteen Concerts and Force Five Hurricanes....

[and skipping to the final paragraph]...Arriving back on the Island on a Sunday afternoon is proof positive that living here beats the hell out of visiting. "Is that a parking lot, Daddy?" asks my daughter pointing to the northbound side of the
Frederiksen (perhaps unwittingly) demonstrates that in the final analysis, at least from the islander perspective, the Island/Mainland opposition does not accommodate the conceptualization of mainland sociocultural or geographic diversity.

This is not to say that Island boosters do not understand the economic ramifications of alienating Mainlanders or the competition for Island businesses and markets posed by aggressive development on the Mainland. They do. But appealing to Galvestonians to "be nice to" Mainlanders (whether they be tourists from Terre Haute, Indiana or mainland residents of Galveston County) is tricky business indeed. It matters a great deal who does the asking and how. Former Mayor Janice Coggeschall, for instance, was an unabashed IBC with tremendous support from natives and newcomers alike. As the one "outsider" that BOI informants regularly admitted must have "sand between her toes," she managed to remind her constituents, without offending them, that Galveston's economy depended upon its successful engagement in the larger context of the county, state and nation.  

---

19 Coggeschall was not only involved in the Houston-Galveston Council, but ultimately resigned as Galveston's mayor to run (as it turned out, unsuccessfully) for the
Her approach stands in somewhat stark contrast to that of another city-booster, Dolph Tillotson, the editor and publisher of The Galveston Daily News (from the late 1980s through the present) and a strong proponent of integrating the Mainland into Galveston's political process and economy. Tillotson naturally used the GDN as a forum for promoting Galveston’s economic growth, and in an editorial appearing in the News' annual "Horizons" edition (themed in the 1990 year: "Agenda For a Decade," ) called, as he regularly did, for the development of "a county consciousness as opposed to an Island-Mainland consciousness" (GDN 3/4/90).

Tillotson, however, did not enjoy the widespread popularity of Coggshall. Despite his civic mindedness, the only rubric natives had for contextualizing Tillotson was that of "outsider," no qualifying acronyms followed his name. Certainly, he did not fit the category IBC. An editorial assault on islander assertions of cultural distinction made clear to all that he had none of the islander-envy natives hated but insisted outsiders demonstrate.20 Having thoroughly dismissed Galveston's

---

20 This editorial, entitled "First Year on Isle Stirs Memories," appeared in the August 12, 1988 edition of the GDN. Tillotson regularly reproached Galvestonians for being their often ambivalent islander-selves. See, for instance, "Why don't islanders like the Isle?" (GDN 5/29/88). By all my informants' accounts, Tillotson's "First Year on [the] Isle" was nothing to envy. Everyone seemed to acknowledge that the GDN needed new leadership, but was offended immediately by Tillotson's youth and perceived arrogance,
islander-otherness in a critical and authoritative (some might say self-righteous and condescending) fashion rather early in his Island-City residence, Tillotson's regular insistence that Galveston overcome its insularity for the sake of economic development seemed to incite retrenchment among natives. My informants' reactions to Tillotson could be divided into two categories: angry or patronizing. One individual whose sentiments fit the latter category commented to me that it is, nevertheless, "outsiders like Tillotson, who don't even understand the differences between the Island and the Mainland, who do this City the most insidious damage."

Clearly, admonitions to overcome the Island/Mainland opposition on behalf of the Island's economy had to be tempered with contradictory assertions of the ultimate impossibility of such an endeavor. Especially during the period of eighties BOIism, the idea that economic cooperation might successfully transcend sociocultural differences was deeply threatening to islander mythologies of otherness. Contexts for economic cooperation with the Mainland (whether formal ventures or simply a matter of treating Mainlander tourists or working commuters with respect) had to be posed in terms that affirmed, rather than denied, the Island/Mainland opposition.

---

and later by his discounting of the island's sociocultural distinction.
As outsiders like Coggeshall, Tillotson, and GHF director Peter Brink increasingly gained sway in Galveston, BOIism countered the threatening trend their outsiders' influence represented by challenging the legitimacy of any and all outsiders' cultural knowledge and competence to act in Galveston's best interest—that is, on behalf of and in the general spirit of islander consciousness. Under this rubric, BOIism represented an incontrovertible cultural credential that signified a level of authority and expertise attainable only through indigenousness. As a credentialing mechanism of sorts, BOIism provided a platform from which to respond critically to issues of cultural knowledge, access, and advocacy and to contest representational authority and authenticity.

BOIism's credentialing capacity functioned in a number of ways and contexts: spoken and written, informal and formal, individually and collectively. One context in which I personally experienced the evocation of BOI as a cultural credential involved my own fieldwork. Informants regularly identified themselves to me as BOI. Alternatively, those who were not BOI seemed always to be qualifying their own perspectives in relational terms—that is, by stating to what degree they might be able to speak on behalf of the BOI position based upon length of island residence or an IBC attitude or kinship to BOIs by birth or marriage. The fact that this information was always volunteered to me says much
about the authoritative weight BOI is perceived to carry. The presumption commonly revealed by my informants (and even individuals to whom I spoke only momentarily) was that BOI status would authenticate the information or opinion I was asking or being offered.

Informants also cautioned me against sources of cultural information which they felt were authoritatively inadequate. Thus, while I was often given referrals, I was more frequently warned against speaking with certain parties. Interestingly enough, more often than not, those individuals who steered me away from non-native sources were themselves, non-natives, rather than BOIs dismissing IBCs or outsiders in general. My sense of BOIism, as it found explicit form in the late 1980s, was that it provisioned natives with a tremendous sense of cultural authority and confidence.

This is not to suggest that natives were so certain of their superior status and knowledge that they did not recognize when it was threatened in the public sphere of cultural production. One BOI who worked for the GHF commented regularly about the lack of BOI employees in the Foundation and more than once queried the authenticity of the perceptions these outsider museum and preservation professionals had the power to institutionalize in their various capacities as producers and organizers of exhibits, texts, and public events. The solution put forth by this
individual was to engage natives who were professionally trained as museologists and historic preservationists. This idea makes sense only when one is reminded that BOI ideology holds that all sensibilities remain subordinate to an islander consciousness that, by implication, glosses all native perspectives on island history and culture as uniform.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{21} In this regard, BOIism is certainly not a polyphonic expression of native social or multi-cultural experience. BOI is currently a category of cultural meaning principally among white islanders of Euro-American descent. Their diversity and immigrant experience is fully recognized and capitalized upon in the mythologies of both Historic Galveston and Islandness, each of which fully embraces Galveston's turn-of-the-century role as port of entry for European immigrants, and Jews in particular (see Hyman 1990). Very rarely did I hear or read of a black or hispanic native Islander claiming, or being referenced as BOI. (And here, Doug Matthews, Galveston's City Manager during the late 1980s, who was often cited as a BOI, is one of the few notable exceptions. Yet, if one reads between the lines of an interview with Matthews published in Longo and Brambilla [1983:13], one gets the feeling that perhaps minorities understand all too well what is at stake for the dominant classes and race in Galveston's BOI ideology.) My own sense is that Galveston is still years away from seeing Blacks, Hispanics, and or feminists begin to fight for their right to voice and representation within the mythology of either Islandness or BOIism (although the seeds of this kind of consciousness were at play in the gambling controversy to be detailed in Chapter 5). Moreover, this kind of conflict will likely emerge first in the more straightforward context of Historic Galveston's privileging of the patriarchal and cosmopolitan culture of the Victorian era, wherein the oppressed social conditions and experiences of women, members of the working class, and Blacks (i.e slaves) are either totally elided or only superficially represented (as in the highly glossed and contained context of Dickens' on the Strand frivolity). A former member of the GHF once told me that dead silence followed his own mention in a GHF Board Meeting of the need to restore and interpret one of the "shotgun" houses that were home to so many of the Island's poor Blacks. Likewise, this individual was concerned that Blacks who wanted to serve as docents in the Island's Victorian house museums had to deal with the contradictory presentation of self involved in dressing like a member of
Other contexts for the deployment of BOI as a cultural credential are plentiful, but none represents a more striking or earnest evocation of indigenous cultural authority than the letter written by real estate broker William Payne to The Honorable Hugh Gibson of the U.S. District Court. Dated March 8, 1990, this document references a legal battle (Fritiofson et al. v. Alexander-No. G-78-188) surrounding the development of further resort properties in the environmentally sensitive wetlands area.

Galveston's elite Victorian culture. There was, at least at the time of my fieldwork, no serious context or forum for interpreting the poor or working class or slave experiences that were clearly a component of Galveston's Victorian-era past (cf. Gable, Handler and Lawson [1992] on Colonial Williamsburg's problems in this regard.)

When the mythology of Historic Galveston as the contemporary experience of an homogenous elite Victorian past is successfully dislodged, then it is probable that Islandness as a competing and similarly homogenous representation will be challenged as well. This, in turn, will necessitate BOI recognition and accommodation of native (including prehistoric, pre-contact) diversity. At the present moment, BOIism's emergence as a counter to outside encroachment and its current struggle for cultural hegemony necessitates the privileging of native solidarity at the expense of potentially divisive issues of diverse social and cultural native experience. (I refer those who are interested in some of the ways ethnicity and multiculturalism confound nationalist objectifications of the collective self to [Handler [1988], Dominguez [1989], Herzfeld [1991], Williams [1988]. The preservation movement in the U.S. is presently being transformed by issues of ethnicity and the need to represent the full sociocultural spectrum of local and regional historical experience. By the early 1990s, the multi-cultural politics of historic preservation in large metropolitan centers such as Los Angeles were being regularly discussed in both Historic Preservation magazine and Preservation News.)
known as Mitchell Ridge, located adjacent to Eckert’s Bayou.\textsuperscript{22} In what is clearly an attempt to establish himself as uniquely positioned to speak on the issue, Payne identifies himself as both a Galvestonian and a broker of West End properties—that is, someone who professionally would have much to gain from the resort home development of the Mitchell Ridge site, but whose islander sensibility necessarily overrides concern for his own material gain. He begins his letter with a paragraph underscoring his respect for, and personal knowledge of Houston-based businessman George Mitchell, making special reference to his "personal relationship with The Developer [who has] been materially helpful in furthering my own business career." Amenities out of the way, he then quickly gets down to the matter at hand:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{22} This property, located on the Island’s West End and encompassing an archaeological site known as Mitchell Ridge (after the landowner, developer George Mitchell), is considered by many Islanders to represent the last vestige of Galveston’s undeveloped natural shoreline. Mitchell’s development of the property has been tied up in court proceedings for more than a decade, during which time he agreed to a number of expensive courses of action intended to mediate environmental destruction. Among the most extensive of these was the relocation and rebuilding of a significant oyster reef endangered by this resort project. Nonetheless, archaeological and historical meanings attributed to the property continued to present formidable problems for Mitchell, since a local contingency disputed the environmental impact findings of the Galveston Corps of Engineers, suggesting that Mitchell had used his wealth and influence to, in effect, "buy" favorable cultural resource assessments and thereby obtain the necessary permits.
\end{flushright}
Nonetheless, my conscience and my role as a responsible citizen compels me to speak out in the strongest possible terms against the destruction of what is, without doubt, the most important, single piece of the Island's early history in both Archaeological and Historical terms. That is, in my opinion, far too great a price to pay for anyone's purely commercial gain.

...In addition to the possible destruction of this Historic Site, an attempt is being made to "Privatize" Eckert's Bayou, which is directly adjacent to, and in fact, part of the Site....I trust you are aware Sir, that this Bayou is a navigable body of water with continuous public usage for hundreds of years. It is also one of the very last publicly available natural shorelines on the West End of the Island....The development plans call for dredging along the western shoreline of Eckert's Bayou, which is, without doubt, the most scenic part of our Island [and] contains one of the largest and best shallow water oyster reefs anywhere on the Island.

In short, the Historical loss, the environmental consequences, and the possibility of the citizens of this Island being denied access to and enjoyment of one of our last natural shorelines on this Island weigh so heavily against allowing this development to occur that I trust you, as a reasonable man, will do everything possible to protect our heritage....[Emphasis in original; Payne to Gibson, 3/8/90]

This opinion is clearly intended to serve as "expert testimony" from a West End real estate authority. But more significantly, it is intended to carry the weight of a broker who is first and foremost a native Islander. Lest the Judge miss this point, Payne signs his letter:

Respectfully,
William L. Payne, B.O.I.
While this is surely one of the most self-conscious applications of BOI's credentialing capacity ever witnessed, it nonetheless serves to make an important point about the authoritative weight Islanders assigned to indigenousness during the late-20th century. BOIism expressed the unabashed chauvinism of nativeness in such an emphatic way that it could actually be meaningfully deployed, as though it were a professional credential equivalent to "C.P.A," "M.D.," or "Ph.D."

As an agent for cultural vouchering or endorsement, BOI could be invaluable. On the other hand, BOI did not always constitute automatic license. A good deal of BOIism's immediate credentialing efficacy depended upon the native status of the party to whom the credential was being offered. Naturally, self-identifying BOIs were the least likely party to question its authority. Even they, however, occasionally probed the parameters of BOI's legitimating power. The case of Houston-based businessman and developer George Mitchell provides a ready example. Although he is an active and longtime financial player in the Island's commercial and residential development and has emerged within the last decade and a half as a strong investor and backer of Historic Galveston, his local

23 And certainly the ramifications of the native critique of "one of their own" was far more profound than any outsider critique or offhanded dismissal of the BOI credential as simply an occasional source of comic relief.
standing is frequently subjected to scrutiny and reinterpretation and considered to be a source of ambiguity and debate despite his commonly agreed upon status as a wealthy and successful "island son." It is his BOI allegiance that is critically at stake—something to be either affirmed or contested by the locals, depending upon the cultural politics of his latest financial dealings with the Island. This contentiousness arises in large measure as a function of Mitchell's wealth and political influence, but seems inevitably to be translated into a more fundamental issue revolving around his permanent residence in Houston and his maintenance of active social and professional connections there.\(^{24}\) One crucial islander sensibility that BOIism expresses, but elides in its shorthand form, is the idea that nativeness compels island residence. The BOI category can accommodate "prodigal sons" who return to the Island to live, these individuals bolster BOI mythology; but

\(^{24}\) I cannot count the number of times Galvestonians complained to me about Mitchell's infusion of Houston elites into Galveston's social system. These complaints typically arose in the context of Galveston's annual Mardi Gras celebration, which Mitchell revived in 1985 (at no small cost and with the considerable help of the regionally unrivaled public relations master-mind, Galvestonian Dancie Ware) after completing the rehabilitation of an old warehouse in the Strand Historic District now known as "Tremont House"--a luxury class "historic" hotel.
a BOI who can realize a happy existence elsewhere is a contradiction in spirit if not in letter.\textsuperscript{25}

The amplification of the acronym's meaning in the increasingly colonized context of late-20th century Galveston, and its elaboration as a mechanism for cultural credentialling, acted in concert to facilitate the expansion of BOIism's scope of agency and influence beyond the largely informal level (at which the previously discussed strategies of cultural assertion and resistance tended to operate), to engage the more formal arena of cultural politics. As a more corporately conceived and institutionally embodied entity, BOIism exercised significant strength.

One site at which the power of BOIism writ large is particularly visible is in the works of outsider-writers who regularly qualify their representations of Galveston with regard to the BOI benchmark of cultural knowledge and authority. Consider the following excerpts:

\begin{quote}
I have been a part-time resident of Galveston for twenty years. This is long enough to learn the difference between being in Galveston and being a Galvestonian. I write as an acknowledged outsider. [Miller 1983:xvii]
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{25} Mitchell's brother, the late Christy (of Christy Mitchell's Beachcomber restaurant), was an Island legend. Christy's indubitable BOI status and kinship to George provided Islanders with reasonable and convenient grounds for overlooking the wealthier brother's "errant" ways when they deemed it to be beneficial--and so, of course, did the money Mitchell poured into Galveston's ailing economy.
Although I lived for short periods in various parts of the city of Galveston and "down the island" at Jamaica Beach during the twelve years of research for this study, I could never be considered an insider. I am neither a BOI (Born on the Island), nor an IBC (Islander by Choice). Galvestonians tend to judge people on that basis. Worse, I grew up in Houston, the great rival and bete noire of Galveston history. [McComb:1986:1] 

I can't claim to have been BOI (Born on the Island), but, like Jimmy Carter at the gates of the Potomac, I have surely been born again.[Davis 1986:9]

BOIism forced professions of inadequate representational authority from outsiders by the very nature of its symbolic content and meaning. Characterizing their own positionality in such apologetic and confessional terms was, paradoxically enough, the only way that outsider-writers could demonstrate the depth of their knowledge. This was an acknowledgment of not only the symbolic value and ontology of BOI and islander-otherness, but of their own inability to fully access cultural meanings in the absence of lived BOI experience.

By cornering the market, as it were, on the authentication of cultural experience and representation, BOIism ensured not only the hegemony of native over outsider (read any non-BOI) characterizations of the collective cultural-self, but its own reproduction as a dominant cultural form. Short of a cultural ethnography, it is difficult to conceive of a more commanding context for BOIism to flex its cultural muscle for the masses than the
sort epitomized by outsider-writers who, within the body of
their representations, acquiesce to the mythology of their
own authoritative inadequacy--be they academic historians or
journalists of regional renown.

Islands, Boundaries, and Identities: Historical
Consciousness and the Cultural Meanings of Timelessness

The cultural ramifications of island existence have
been examined in a number of ethnographic settings and
historical contexts (e.g. Cohen 1986, 1987; and Parman
1989). These works construe islandness as a special
category of cultural otherness amplified in the extreme by
the meanings attributed to boundedness. The actual
geographic realities of distance and discreteness matter
little over the long course and to be sure, de facto social
isolation is fleeting in the 20th-century context of any
island.26 What is important in the islander apprehension
and construction of cultural difference is the symbolism
vested in boundaries and distance, or as Cohen states, "the
powerful sense of historically-founded discreteness" (Cohen
1987:11). It is this powerful sense of discreteness that

26 Parman (1989:3) notes that isle and island have
different etymologies. Island is Anglo-Saxon in origin and
means "watery land or water-land," while isle is derivative
of Old French and the Latin root word insula. Nevertheless,
Western culture currently attributes to the word Island
those meanings more directly associated with isle:
principally the notions of insulation and isolation.
informs Galveston's intense historical consciousness, and in turn, legitimates its sense of cultural otherness.\textsuperscript{27} Although the naturalizing potential of history is called forth in virtually every instance of collective identity construction, its foundational role in the production and maintenance of islander mythologies of otherness is particularly critical.\textsuperscript{28} In an essay entitled "Islands as Symbols of Otherness" (1989), Parman reviews various Western interpretations of islands. What each of these interpretations appears to invoke, from the writings of Pliny the Elder in the first century A.D. to the contemporary travel industry's touristic construction of islands, is the structural schematic of the binary opposition—the island as economically peripheral to large industrial centers, the island as the locus of romantic idealism, the island as the preserve of untamed nature, and so forth. Surprisingly enough, such interpretations continue to flourish in late-20th century society, though the integrity of their structurally-based opposition has been dubious for more than a century and clearly needs

\textsuperscript{27} Ricoeur defines historical consciousness as the condition of "being-affected-by-the-past" (1988:227) and argues that the "mastery of history" ultimately resides in a hermeneutics of the relationship of past to present, rather than a problematization of "the sphere of knowledge" (as in a critique of historical documents as correct or unbiased interpretations of "tradition" or "heritage" (pp. 228-229).

\textsuperscript{28} Bhabha (1990) offers a series of collected essays that explore the role of narrativity in the cultural construction of the modern nation state.
buttressing by a symbolic logic that goes well beyond physical contingencies. Certainly, a mythology of difference claiming economic peripherality or premodern seclusion cannot be sustained today on the basis of geographic remoteness alone. Perforce, history is made to shoulder the burden distance and boundaries can no longer carry. Past experience, as something equally unique and contingent, must be invoked to counter the continual threat of sameness posed by the homogenizing potential of contemporary public culture's global dimension.

In order for history to serve as a bulkhead for the symbolic logic of geographic boundedness, it must be perceived as the passive and predictable product of the circumstance and conditions of islandness. This subordination of agency to received structure works to deny the transformative component of history's hermeneutic potential. Continuity of historical experience and meaning therefore gets privileged as part of a broad defense against the possibilities for cultural change or dilution that might emerge from a narrative that read linear progression, rather than constellatory repetition into the character of the historical past. Once agency has been removed, the particularisms of the past can be placed in the prescriptive service of cultural reproduction (Sahlins 1985).

This is precisely the way that the past gets pressed into the service of Galveston's islander identity--through
the reading of cohesion into the cumulative grain of historical experience. This process of attributing the cultural meanings of islandness to the experiences of the past reveals the critical place of timelessness in the indigenous interpretation of local history. Once the past has been molded and fit into the contingent spaces of the Island, and its transformative capacity made subordinate to the work of boundary maintenance, the only realm in which history can "take place" or find form is in the abstracted dimension of timelessness.

In *Making Histories*, Bommes and Wright explore the notion and uses of history as timeless:

This paradoxical sense of timelessness is in part a measure of endurance, of having "come through" the trials of centuries. However it also reflects the immobility which descends on the present when history is stylized and worn self-consciously over the social body. [1982:290-91]

The immobilization of the present (and future) is precisely the point of indigenous historical interpretation in Galveston. History is worn "self-consciously over the social body" in the form of an historical consciousness that claims for and from the past the same structures of meaning assigned to island geography. Apprehended as a process of stasis—history becomes the ironic embodiment of immutable time. Phenomenologically synonymous with nature, it serves as a metaphor for the shifting shoreline, which though continually wrought by the ongoing geologic processes of
accumulation and erosion, nevertheless remains constant in its eternal provision of cultural definition.

Hurricanes as Metaphors of Islandness

Galveston's particular islander hermeneutic of historical experience thus attributes a distinctive ethos of endurance and tenacity to Island culture based on what is perceived to be the legacy of a bounded and discrete existence. Among the Island's most powerful and consistently invoked historical metaphors of islandness are hurricanes and the handful of family dynasties indigenous to Galveston for a century or more, who comprise the core membership of a business, cultural, and philanthropic elite (and as such, the variously loathed and adored embodiments of a mythic island oligarchy). These families, whose dynastic formations began in Galveston's Victorian era, are the Moodys, Kempners, and Sealys. In the next chapter I will argue that these dynasties provide Galveston with an important historical sense of structural continuity, thereby bolstering the symbolic logic of islandness. For now, I want to demonstrate how historical consciousness performs this task by invoking hurricanes as metaphors of islandness.

Entire books have been devoted to chronicling the onslaught, aftermath, and long-term recovery of the 1900

---

29 Marcus has written extensively about these families as examples of business elites and American family dynasties (1980, 1983, 1986). See also Hyman (1990).
hurricane (Lester 1900, Weems 1957). Galveston Island made national headlines on September 8, 1900 and continues, in claiming the hurricane as a kind of cultural capital, to reference "The Great Storm" in the context of its national standing as this century's worst natural disaster. On the occasion of the 89th anniversary of the hurricane, the Galveston Daily News celebrated the longevity of this status in an article entitled "Bets Are On," written by the late Maury Darst.

In a dimly lighted house north of Broadway, bets are being taken. Bets on whether 11 years from now the 1900 storm, which roared across the island 89 years ago today, still will rank as the greatest natural disaster to strike the United States during the 20th century. It is only a game, they insist. And it is only one of several ways people remember that fateful day when an unnamed storm killed more than 6,000 people, wrecked more than three-fourths of the city and stacked accumulated debris—remnants of houses and barns—15 feet high in many sections of the city. [Emphasis added; GDN 9/8/89]

The 1900 hurricane is the subject of a tremendous oral tradition on the Island.\(^{30}\) Where Historic Galveston invokes

\(^{30}\) Although it will undoubtedly continue to be the subject of an elaborate oral tradition, a historicizing trend currently seeks to purge the folklore surrounding the storm of the more dramatic misconceptions that have proliferated in the event's telling and retelling over the years (e.g. that the storm's tidal surge literally swept the Island bare). Several museum curators and preservation proponents engaged me in lively discussions about "the mythology of The Storm" and interpreted their own desires to separate fact from fiction as witness to their professionalizing influence in the sphere of Island historical and cultural knowledge.
the Great Storm principally as a temporal marker for the end of the Island's cultural and regional preeminence—

islandness construes the 1900 hurricane as a more encompassing temporal marker and a potent symbol of a shared cultural and historical past. It is difficult to pass a day on the Island without hearing or seeing some reference to it—whether it is a permanent exhibit documenting its destructive forces for Island visitors, a church cornerstone marking post-storm reconstruction or grade-raising, or simply the passing of one of the many crowded and ethnically diverse cemeteries that seem to dominate the landscape and signify for Islanders not only their territorial circumscription, but the intimate relationship with the morbidity (foregone and presaged) into which they enter by choosing to live their lives on a hurricane-vulnerable barrier island in the Gulf of Mexico.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{31} In fact, a series of public lectures addressing this very topic, and entitled "Living on the Edge: Life Along the Texas Coast" (organized by Texas A & M University at Galveston and funded by the Tx. Committee for the Humanities, the Harris and Eliza Kempner Fund, and the Rosenberg Library's Wortham Fund), were offered in the Spring of 1990. A standing room only crowd and the audience's emotional response to academic renderings of Galveston's particular predicament and historical trajectory bore dramatic witness to the remarkable degree to which Islander consciousness suffuses Galveston's social sense of self. One lecture (2/7/90) featured historian David McComb's research on the Great Storm. The audience spilled over the steps of the crowded auditorium and into the library's lobby, requiring the microphone to be adjusted to accommodate the tremendous overflow. Using the 1900 Storm as a case-study in disaster sociology, McComb variously enchanted and offended Galvestonians. It was obvious to all who attended that the objectification of personal lives and
IIronically, Galveston's old and crowded cemeteries--material reminders of the Island's immigrant histories, ethnic diversity, marked class distinction--reference the hurricane only indirectly, for those who died on September 8, 1900 did not receive the dignity in death acquired through proper burial. Much of the folklore of the Great Storm involves the remembering and retelling of the traumas associated with disposing of 6,000 bodies in mass burial efforts. In the late 1980s, nearly 30 survivors of the 1900 hurricane were alive to recount their own experiences of the storm, which brought with it not only high winds and rain, but a tidal surge that flooded the urbanized east end of the Island. The horror of their aged remembrance is not the product of embellished re-imagination.

losses raised ire among a few Islanders even as it seemed to validate the sense-of-self to which most collectively subscribed. Many older members of the audience inquired into historical specificities, such as when the last train of evacuees left the Island (often referring to family stories, passed through several generations, of attempts to flee the tidal flood), indicating the ongoing process, both individual and collective, of reconstructing the personal and communal connection to this critical piece of the past.

Several informants told me that poor descendants of those buried prior to the 1900 hurricane often could not afford to pay for the proper re-marking of grave sites after the Island's grade was raised above sea-level as a means of demonstrating to me the centality of extreme class division to Galveston's social past and present. Needless to say, the psychological and social implications for countless poor Island families of the literal disappearance of this material trace of their ancestral pasts could easily become the subject of an entire dissertation in its own right.
Water-logged, rotting corpses were weighted and floated out to sea only to return to the shore where they were all too frequently identified as next-of-kin by the survivors who had been charged with disposal of the dead. This latter task was accomplished at immeasurable human cost, as mass funeral pyres burned weeks on end. Work crews were kept drunk to accomplish the task. And although these crews were composed of both Blacks and Whites, they were segregated according to the customs of the time. I want to note here that the heritage of Black Islanders will not be fully apprehended until the account of their forebears' dispatchment at gunpoint, as couriers of the dead, is finally understood to be their unique and unenviable legacy. David McComb's history of the Island offers a worthy point of beginning in this regard. I cite his recounting of the burial efforts at length because this aspect of the hurricane represents a critical window onto the particular human condition Galvestonians attribute to their islander-sense-of-self:

The crews worked with handkerchiefs soaked in camphor over the noses, and were given whiskey to ease the gruesome task. Father James M. Kirwin, the local Roman Catholic leader, commented, "It soon became so that men could not handle those bodies without stimulants. I am a strong temperance man...but I went to the men who were handling those bodies, and I gave them whiskey. It had to be done."

Kirwin, who helped direct this task, had trouble getting volunteers, but the police and military units rounded up workers at bayonet point and
forced them. At first, the burial details tried to dig trenches for mass disposals, but the ground was so saturated that the holes filled with water. Next, they decided on burial at sea. By Monday evening the crews had collected seven hundred bodies, mostly naked, enough for three barges. A gang of fifty black men were forced on board at gunpoint, and the barges were towed eighteen miles into the Gulf. The corpses had to be weighted and dumped; the next day the barge workers returned, ashen in color. Two days later the body of a woman buried at sea with a two-hundred-pound rock attached to her was discovered on the beach. Others shortly began to float ashore on the west end of the island. Following that grisly episode, workers burned the bodies where they found them.

The dead were uncovered at a rate of about seventy per day for at least a month after the storm....It was a hard situation, but the human fortitude was remarkable. In mid-September, for instance, a gang of black laborers uncovered the body of a small negro. One of the crew identified the body as his own child and broke down in tears. The men shared his grief and offered to bury the body rather than cremate it. The father refused to violate the orders and walked along as his fellows carried it to the bier on a plank. He then turned and went back to work. [1986:130-131]

Is it any wonder that a speaker from Baltimore brought in by the University Area Association in 1988 for a community development seminar observed "too much crepe hanging in Galveston"(fieldnotes 9/23/88)? The fact that he further saw fit to admonish Galvestonians for their particular lack of optimism can only be attributed to his presumption that what the community was mourning was simply its economic decline. What his commentary reflects most emphatically is his own failure to fully understand the symbolism of human morbidity translated into a socioeconomic
context. A community that has survived the kind of watery holocaust September 8, 1900 wreaked on Galveston Island, cannot simply lift a veil of mourning. This would entail a fundamental denial of the collective self that Galveston is neither prepared, capable, nor desirous of effecting.

My personal understanding of this was dramatically enhanced by various circumstances surrounding my research in the archives of the Rosenberg Library. On a daily basis, visitors, as well as native and newcomer residents came in to research family genealogies and house histories. Who did and did not die on September 8, 1900, which families or businesses did or did not permanently depart the Island during the hurricane’s aftermath, as well as what structures did or did not remain standing or intact, was forever their point of reference—a temporal marker permanently inscribed upon the collective body.

I was also present in the archives on September 13, 1988, when a massive hurricane, Gilbert, entered the Gulf of Mexico and appeared to be bearing directly down on Galveston Island. While the archivists busied themselves with plans to protect historical records, library employees and patrons flowed in and out in a strange mood that fused confidence and excitement with a sense of impending doom. Several people made comments such as "We’ve been waiting for this," (that is, for history to repeat itself). There was an obvious air of heightened belongingness arising out of the
possibility of wide-spread devastation, as if the familiarity of being decimated by a force-five hurricane was amplifying the Island's sense of self. This was not the parodic performance it may sound in the retelling as though it might have been, but a compelling performance of islandness.

Although the seawall (which directs tidal surges upward and back into the Gulf) and the grade-raising (which elevated the East End of the Island well above sea-level) now preclude the possibility of a tidal surge wreaking upon the Island the same degree of devastation experienced in 1900, hurricanes like Carla (1961) and Alicia (1983) still claim occasional lives and destroy millions of dollars worth of property. But hurricanes have been visiting themselves upon Galveston Island for centuries and will certainly continue to do so.\textsuperscript{33} It is a paradoxical fact that in their comings and goings, hurricanes simultaneously bolster and threaten the communal psyche.

One can see this not only in the convention whereby hurricanes are made to serve the symbolic logic of geographic boundedness, but also in the more subtle way in which they are called forth to buttress the symbolism of islandness as a distinctive socioeconomic condition. In

\textsuperscript{33} Historical narratives regularly cite the destructive force of various hurricanes that have struck Galveston Island, including the one that claimed ships belonging to the pirate Jean Lafitte, whose home, nevertheless survived the winds and flooding (McComb 1986:27).
contemporary Galveston, economic loss, hardship, and triumph is always translated into the language and context of hurricanes. The Island's recent loss of a contract for a naval port, the costly, long-term restoration of the Elissa, the slow but steady success of the historic preservation movement in the face of economic stagnation and decline, and even the siphoning off of Galveston's port activity in the wake of Houston's construction of a deepwater ship channel in the early 1900s, have all been likened to the challenge of rebuilding the City in the aftermath of the 1900 storm. As a metaphors for islandness, hurricanes are invested with rich symbolic value and incalculable interpretive potential.
Chapter 5
THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF THE PAST

More than one-quarter of a million excursionists visited Galveston during the past twelve months. Among Texans, this leading seaport on the Gulf of Mexico has always been a popular week-end playground, but not until the past few years has its attraction as an ideal winter resort become widely known. Today, Galveston is beyond question, the Atlantic City of the South. Accommodations can be found, simple or luxurious. Life can be lived in flannel shirt and khaki camping outfit, or in white flannels and dress clothes. The finest surf bathing in the United States is here, and the fishing is known by experience and reputation to anglers from all parts of the world. The forty miles of level beach provide a natural speedway for automobiles, where the only speed limit is imposed by the driver or by the powers of his machine. The sea wall boulevard itself, four miles long and girdling the side of the city that faces upon the gulf, is daily the scene of an animated gathering that rides, drives, rolls along in the family machine or takes life at a more leisurely gait in the comfortable roller-chairs that have a far better and more comfortable route to travel than do their famed prototypes in Atlantic City. Past the bathers and the beach resorts, past the colony of the tented city on the beach, listening to the beach music supplied by the Galveston city government, the long line of promenaders moves nightly, making a brilliant and picturesque gathering peculiar to evenings in Galveston.

--Agent's Bulletin, 1911

There was a time when Galveston was flattered to find itself compared to New Jersey's Atlantic City. The year was 1911 and Galveston Island was the featured destination in Pullman Sleeping Car's October issue of the Agent's Bulletin. An article entitled "Galveston: The Atlantic City of the
South," sung the many virtues of this southerly resort island.  

In the mid 1980s, comparisons of Galveston with Atlantic City were once again being drawn, not for the purpose of selling the Island to travelers, but as a means of acquainting Islanders with the virtues and vices of the casino gambling industry. Both Donald Trump and his fleeting financial empire, based in part on the redevelopment of Atlantic City as a gambling resort, were still enjoying mythic renown. There were those, both on and off of the Island, who wanted Galveston to enter the 21st century as once again "the Atlantic City of the South"—this time, as an island gambling mecca capable of sustaining Galveston's tourist-dependent economy on a robust and year-round, rather than seasonal basis.

When historians begin to write the history of Galveston Island during the 1980s, the noteworthy success of the preservation movement will likely be eclipsed by the political debates that arose in response to the possibility that legalized gambling might be introduced to the Island. During a single decade, Galvestonians went to the polls four times to vote on gambling related issues. The political campaigns that ushered voters to the ballot box were emotionally charged and deeply divisive. This is particularly true in the case of

---

1 This document is contained in the Pamphlet File of the Rosenberg Library's Archives.
third vote, which took place in mid 1988. I followed this campaign closely during the course of my fieldwork and it clearly represented not only the most strategically designed, professionally managed, and amply funded of the four, but the most politically volatile—fully embodying the emotional legacy of the two prior campaigns and the five foregone years of experience and expenditure they entailed.\(^2\)

This chapter examines the battle for and against casino gambling as a case study in the politics of the past. The gambling debates, as I witnessed them, were far more revealing of the tensions between official constructions of history and popular memories of the past, than they were of sentiment toward casino gambling per se, from either an economic or moral perspective. The debates forced Galvestonians to grapple self-consciously with the cultural and political implications of nostalgia and patronage as they were demonstrated to profoundly influence the historic preservation

\(^{2}\) My approach to this component of my fieldwork was to remain as removed as possible from the central individuals and entities involved in the debates so as not to become politically involved or intervene in any way in the process by which those for or against casino gambling came to understand the symbolic aspects of the debate. Toward this end, I followed the campaigns primarily through the media, meetings of GHF Board of Directors, official campaign literature, and by retaining as informants those individuals (both for and against casino gambling) with whom I had already become engaged on the basis of other research interests. I understood the implications of my potential involvement quite clearly, having already been approached to serve as a possible expert witness and media informant for an altogether different battle on the basis of what was understood to be my research into the commodity value of Galveston's history and culture.
industry, the business of touristic self-representation, and the process of identity reckoning in general. And while the democratic process proved to be unarguably successful in sounding a death knell for the casino gambling forces of the 1980s, the vote against gambling, and the means by which it was gained, speaks to matters far more complex and fundamental than the socioeconomic ramifications of casino gambling.

Although I want to focus on the cultural politics that came to define the terms of the gambling debates, certain facts can be established up front. The first three trips to the polls on behalf of the casino issue were non-binding referendums forced upon the City by gambling proponents following successful petition drives. These referendums were intended to rally support for two causes: 1) introduction to the Texas Legislature of a bill legalizing casino gaming on a locally approved basis, and 2) the subsequent development of casino gambling on the Island. Battle lines were officially drawn in 1983 when a group calling itself the "Greater Galveston Beach Association" organized as a PAC (political action committee) and began circulating a petition (partially excerpted below) in order to collect enough signatures to force a non-binding referendum:

AN INITIATIVE PETITION:

Calling for the Election of the Galveston City Territory To Be An Adult (Over Age 21) Resort City Legalized by the State Of Texas To Have Commercial Gambling: Pari-mutuel Horse/Dog Betting on Pelican Island & City Ordinance-Designated Las Vegas-Styled
Gaming Rooms

TO: The Honorable Governor & Legislature of the State of Texas

BY: The Council of the City of Galveston, Galveston County, Texas

OF: The So Qualified Majority Elector on Galveston Island

WE, The undersigned qualified voters of the City on Galveston Island do hereby petition the above named governing bodies to provide for a special local-option election to be called at the earliest possible time allowed by the laws of the State of Texas to effect certain local legislation commensurate/tantamount to those economic, public safety and employment relief measures now know and enjoyed by the adult resort city of Las Vegas, in Nevada laws, to wit:

WHEREAS, the majority of qualified resident electors of the Island City of Galveston have long chosen theirs to be a Home Rule City, but must face their tax support of far greater than fifty-percent (50%) of exempt properties government and industrial, a severe crime element brought largely upon them by an unstable work force so employed through a limited or restricted public hospitality industry accommodating [sic] island visitors, they desire to explore their tourism potential through their choice to the fullest guarantees and conditions provided by the Constitutions and Law of the United States and, permissively, of the State of Texas. [Emphasis in original; RLA 87--0019]

This petition was brought to public vote on January 21, 1984, whereupon it failed to rally a majority show of support with 7,992 voting against it and only 4,632 in its favor.

Reorganizing under the new name BET (Businesses Encouraging Tourism), the pro-casino contingent forced another non-binding referendum on January 17, 1987. On this date, voters again registered their lack of support for legalized
gambling on Galveston Island: 7,301 to 4,891. Once more, gambling proponents refused to yield. In 1988, they began circulating yet a third, slightly revised petition. Using the new name "Galvestonians for Economic Development" and a logo that consisted of the word "JOBS" outlined in block letters and patriotically embellished with Old Glory's stars and stripes, gambling proponents forced a third non-binding referendum. Although a record number of voters, 5,162, registered their support for limited casino gambling, 7,360 still voters opposed it.

Whereas the pro-gambling contingent changed its name (as well as some of its leadership) with each referendum, the opposition retained throughout the debates the identity it established in the earliest days of the battle: "Galvestonians Against Casino Gambling" (GACG). Not against either economic development or beach/resort tourism per se, this group, led by Harris "Shrub" Kempner, and supported principally by local membership and money, refused to see casino gambling as an economic savior. Their own logo, consisting of a circle and slash framing a pair of rolling dice, clearly reflected the object of their opposition. For this group, the 1988

---

3 Galvestonians Against Casino Gambling raised all its funding locally until the third referendum, when Ross Perot was successfully approached for a contribution. Agreeing with GACG that casino gambling was merely a quick fix rather than a viable approach to long-term economic recovery, Perot donated $10,000 toward the fight against Galvestonians for Economic Development.
referendum marked a turning point. Regardless of the fact that none of the forced referendums had gained majority support, Galvestonians Against Casino Gambling were taking no chances. In late 1988, in a calculated response to the apparent relentlessness of the pro-casino forces, GACG designed a proposition of its own—one that would prohibit any future non-binding referendums on casino gambling, at least until such time as casino gaming was made lawful by the Texas Legislature.⁴ On January 21, 1989, following several months of political debate (the discourse of which had principally to do with issues of fairness and constitutionality), this proposition was approved as a charter amendment by a margin of 2,989 to 1,449.

While these electoral results seem straightforward enough, they are only part of a much larger controversy in which Galveston’s own history of illegal gambling and the political influence of its dynastic families figure prominently. From the very beginning, the gambling controversy raged on two levels. Pitted against each other on a superficial plane were the symbol systems of two collective self-representations commercially masquerading as communal identity: the Victorian-era cultural other and the tropical

⁴ Charter Amendment No. 6 reads "No election shall be called on the issue of casino gaming unless casino gaming is first made legal under state law. This provision shall apply notwithstanding any other provision in this charter."
islander-other. On a more crucial and submerged level, what was centrally at stake were two radically different ways of knowing and relating to the past. Here, the construction of an official, public history (as exemplified by the GHF’s interpretation of Galveston’s cultural authenticity and sense of the collective self as exclusively derivative of the cosmopolitan, Victorian-era past) was shown to be a privileging practice potentially antagonistic to the ideology of the indigenous islander-other, whereby historical consciousness is called upon to weave together the often incongruous historical experiences of Galveston’s past (and present) into the seamless cloth of a coherent and timeless whole.

Beach/Resort Tourism & Casino Gambling: Symbolic Associations

It was no coincidence that the spectre of casino gambling and of Galveston’s other, unofficial past emerged at precisely the moment Historic Galveston was enjoying a long-sought and well earned cultural hegemony. It was likewise no accident of circumstance that the rubric under which it emerged was an oppositional one, symbolically at odds with the particular cultural image and tourist market which the GHF and other

5 The fact that components of both the exotic islander-other and Victorian-era other also inform indigenous apprehensions of the collective cultural-self further complicated these debates, since these two sources of commercial identity could never be fully disentangled from more fundamental questions about the role of history in identity formation.
history promoting entities had so vigorously cooperated to create. This image and climate catered to a clientele that was by definition more exclusive than inclusive. Whether or not these particular tourists were also interested in Galveston’s natural amenities, they were first and foremost attracted to the ambiance, sites, events, restaurants, and lodgings broadly referred to as "historic."

The tourist market’s changing nature and "quality" (to borrow the GHF’s terminology) represented serious competition to the Island’s traditional beach/resort industry. The locus of anxiety about the shifting cultural imagery of the Island and the undercutting of beach-related touristic expenditures was not so much official entities like the Chamber of Commerce, City Council, or County Parks Board as it was smaller businessmen and wage workers employed in the hospitality industry and its support services, whose livelihoods depended upon the promotion of Galveston as a party island and tropical paradise. These entities and individuals were particularly intrigued by the possibilities that the casino gaming business seemed to promise, especially in view of the Island’s lack of success in broadening its tax base through the attraction of light industry. And in fact, the success of the history industry may simply have been too singular and exceptional in relation to the rest of the Island’s economy to be either celebrated or congratulated by
those who stood outside its immediate fold.6 For this collectivity, the tables had turned.

Where in the mid 1970s the historical sector lacked a market for its particular touristic product, a decade later it was the beach/resort sector of the tourist industry which was suffering from decline. And while a broad range of economic factors (including the "oil-bust" of the early 1980s and the state and nation-wide recession) were implicated in this decline, the relative success of the GHF and its allies in building a market for what would later be called heritage tourism made them an easy target for a broad-based and growing discontent. Exacerbating the Island's more general economic malaise was the explicit association of a handful of Galveston's elite families with the GHF and other preservation entities; and here the Moody and Kempner dynasties (the latter even more so) loomed large in the public consciousness.

As commercially constructed sites and sources of cultural identity, "Historic Galveston" and "Galveston Island" (i.e. tropical paradise) rival one another on both economic and symbolic grounds. Where the former fosters a tourist trade geared to a more educated and affluent travel market, the latter continues a pattern well established by the late 1960s,

---

6 There were in the late 1980s any number tourism entities, both public and private, who were beginning to integrate the commercial aspects of both the beach and the historic sectors very effectively. The problem was by and large defined by those entities who had no way to sufficiently capitalize on or appropriate the Island's heritage tourism.
of attracting middle to lower income day-tripping beach-goers (typically characterized as younger families of limited means, teenagers, and college students) whose patronage is principally confined to fast-food restaurants, convenience stores, seaside souvenir shops, and the more affordable hotel/motel chains.

Historic Galveston deploys the rhetoric and symbolism of Victorian England, urbanity, wealth, architectural grandeur, dynastic families, and regional preeminence grounded in a vigorous economy of shipping and finance. The Island-City’s late-19th and early-20th century status as a seaside resort for the wealthy—precisely the aspect that earned it comparison with Atlantic City—is decidedly absent from the historical narrative and cultural mythology of Historic Galveston.\textsuperscript{7} Instead, the discourse of Historic Galveston as

\textsuperscript{7} This is especially puzzling since it could offer an effective counter to the middle-brow and lower class associations of beach/resort-based tourism the preservation movement has worked hard to overcome in its creation of Historic Galveston. The failure of the GHF to appropriate to its own ends this aspect of the Island’s early historic identity is one I can only speculate upon. Perhaps it is simply a matter of the benign neglect of the turn-of-the-century’s more touristic components. My own conclusions, based in part upon indirect probing and the observation of peripheral reference to this theme (principally, a postcard exhibit mounted by the Galveston County Historical Museum in 1988) is that the possibility for effective historical interpretation of the early resort industry in Galveston is too fraught with the very elements of tourism—part-time residence, subordination of resident to tourist interests, and a historic trajectory that begins with elite, monied associations and moves through bawdy and illegal terrain, to a beach industry that catered, until very recently, to a decidedly non-elite sector of the tourist market—that threaten the hegemony of Historic Galveston as a culturally distinctive
a contemporary cultural entity and experience draws on a series of nicknames (coined in the distant as well as the more recent past) for which the referent place and time is explicitly cosmopolitan, culturally elite, economically autonomous, and temporally bounded: Queen City of the Gulf, Wall Street of the Southwest, New York of the Gulf, Gateway to the Southwest, Ellis Island of the South.

The beach/resort industry, on the other hand, is a long-standing entity responsible for the development of an extensive and more historically continuous lexicon of colorful placenames. While Queen City of the Gulf might be just as appropriate to the commencement of a chronology of beach/resort industry placenames as it is to the characterization of Historic Galveston, semiotic similarities end here as quickly as they have begun. Following in the wake of The Queen City's titular reign were such popular nicknames and perjorative labels as Playground of the Southwest, Pleasure Island, The Free State of Galveston, Sin City, Shady community, for which tourism is merely an aspect of its political economy, rather than an expression of the whole.

Virginia Eisenhour reveals an interesting fact about the process by which this particular placename came to be—one in which she continually found reference to the Island as the Wall Street of the West or Wall Street of the South and, thusly, combined the two for the sake of compromise and economy in her guide to Galveston. Never, she claims, is there a historic reference to Galveston as Wallstreet of the Southwest, yet official texts and narrative histories now reference this mythic title as a matter of course.
Lady, Open City, Houston’s Backyard.  

These placenames stand apart as a group from those appropriate to Historic Galveston not only because they reference Galveston’s history as a tourist attraction, and by implication, its island geography, but also because they resonate with cultural meaning grounded in a popularly remembered past and an experience far more collectively lived than the aristocratic Victorian-era experience to which Historic Galveston aspires and to which only the City’s descendant elite can fully relate or lay claim. Thus, placenames that evoke the Island’s other heyday have the capacity to seriously challenge the currency and sense of cultural authenticity Historic Galveston seeks to assert.

In this respect, the GHF’s official narrative history of the Island has a decidedly politicized meaning, since it not only privileges the Victorian-era experience of Galveston, but purges or purifies the past of the popular cultural experience represented by more than three decades of illegal economic activity. Although rum running and prostitution were critical components of the Island’s economy during this period, it is gambling that figures most prominently in the popular historical consciousness.  

---

9 Not to be overlooked in this evolutionary trajectory is "Historic Galveston Island"—the late 1980’s placename promoted by the Galveston County Parks Board as a melodic merging of Victorian history and sand, sun, and surf.

10 For a recent historical account of the bootlegging and rum running business in Galveston, see Greene (1989).
Galvestonians draw on the gambling era to bolster their islander sense-of-self. They claim island geography made them particularly suited to the activities that earned the Island its Open-City nickname. On a purely practical level, being situated out in, and fully bounded by, the Gulf of Mexico made Galveston especially suitable for (and some might say vulnerable to) the importation of liquor during Prohibition. Moreover, the City’s island geography seemed to justify the mentality of being legally autonomous, outside the law, the law unto itself—which held local sway until 1957, when the Texas Rangers shut down the Island’s (and all of Galveston County’s) casino operations. And finally, the romantic imagery and mystique associated with island resorts clearly helped facilitate the success of Galveston’s legal entertainment industry. Based on Big Bands and big Hollywood stars, the glamorous nightclub scene of the period provided a natural cover for the illegal gambling operations that went on in the backrooms of such popular establishments as the Hollywood Club, Turf Althetic Club, and Balinese Room.

The power of the shared past, as it is embodied in the lived experience of this popularly remembered past and variously laid claim to in commercial and indigenous constructions of island-otherness, became clearly manifest in the fight to legalize casino gambling. In the face of the history industry’s cultural and economic success, the gambling era came to symbolize beach/resort tourism’s own moment of
unrivaled economic prosperity and urbanity—a worthy foil to Historic Galveston’s Victorian era. Indeed, the late-20th century scramble for tourist markets and dollars set the perfect stage for Historic Galveston and Galveston Island—the resort destination—to emerge on the political scene as potent distillations of competing histories and cultural identities.

Casino Gambling as Economic Development

Although the cultural meanings attached to casino gambling multiplied and changed over the course of the debates, economic arguments and issues remained essentially the same throughout, with some concessions being made toward the end of the battle on the part of the pro-casino contingent to the apparent need for limiting casino operations to specific districts. The proponents’ major claims were that casino gambling would make Galveston a year-round attraction, provide steady employment for Island residents, and give the City a sound tax base. The opposition countered that casino gambling would introduce organized and petty crime, decrease the quality of family life for residents, reverse the important work historic preservation had accomplished, and take control of Galveston’s economy out of the hands of Galvestonians, since casino hotels would be funded and operated principally by non-Islanders. Moreover these hotels would act as economically autonomous units—provisioning gamblers with food, entertainment, and sundry items all under
one roof—meaning that the Island's small businesses would suffer, not reap the benefits of this brand of tourism. The many jobs casino gambling might introduce would be filled, not by local residents, but by outsiders. This, opponents noted, was the case in Atlantic City.

Although the first referendum petition (circulated back in 1983 by the Greater Galveston Beach Association) had promoted Las Vegas and the State of Nevada as the gambling entities after which Galveston ought to model itself, comparisons of Galveston with Atlantic City began almost immediately, in large part because the anti-casino coalition that formed in opposition to the GGBA, understood this to be a more apt comparison than one that cast Galveston in the same light as Las Vegas. This was made abundantly clear to them in a report they commissioned on their own behalf. Entitled "Summary of anti-gambling arguments and facts," the report reads:

**Atlantic City, not Las Vegas, is the real model for Galveston to look at. When gambling began in Las Vegas, it was mafia-originated and controlled, there were no other legal gambling states in the nation (it had a monopoly), it had infinite room to grow (in the desert), and it had no real existing population to worry about (pop. was 8,422). Atlantic City is a barrier island (like Galveston) with limited room to grow (like Galveston). A.C. already has a large population in place (40,000 like Galveston), is a resort area, and has large numbers of poor, elderly, and minority citizens (like Galveston). The state controls the gaming (as it would in Galveston). [Emphasis in original; December 1983, RLA 87-0019]**
This summary goes on to note the recent publication of The Twentieth Century Fund Report, The Atlantic City Gamble (Sternlieb and Hughes, 1983), an independent study of the gaming industry's record in Atlantic City. This text was to have a great impact on Galveston's gambling debates, not so much because the figures it presented changed anyone's mind, but because both sides found in it (and later, in trips to the New Jersey resort city itself and in personal interviews with its various representatives) the arguments they sought to make. In a January 1984 interview immediately preceding the first non-binding referendum, IBM publisher Steven Long made note of this ironic fact:

Both sides are quoting from The Atlantic City Gamble. Both sides appear to me to be extracting information from this book which they interpret to their own ends. I find it amusing. I see Mr. Kempner here holding the book in his lap, while getting ready to respond to Mr. Teachworth. Mr. Kempner, what would you have to say about all this? [IBM #169/35]

Harris "Shrub" Kempner (who became the patriarchal head of the Kempner clan upon the death of his father, Harris L. Kempner, Sr., in 1987) emerged early on as the leading spokesman of the anti-casino forces and remained its central figure. But before the battle was out, Steven Long would himself become a public personality in the fight against casino gambling--one of a small party of respected local citizens who would travel to Atlantic City as a fact-finding
task force and whose discoveries would appear in vivid text and imagery in the pages of the Galveston Daily News. Pro-gambling forces would counter the opposition’s photo essays of the delapidation and urban decay hidden behind Atlantic City’s glitzy Boardwalk with images depicting Galveston’s own urban blight, publishing them as ad copy in the News. One particularly enterprising proponent of casino gambling purchased a two-page spread featuring a series of Galveston locations, many of which could easily rival Atlantic City’s most impoverished vistas and offered a prize of $100 to the first person who could label each with the correct address (GDN 8/11/88). Galvestonians Against Casino Gambling responded with their own political ads, consisting of crime-laden headlines excerpted from Atlantic City’s local paper, juxtaposed with recent Galveston Daily News headlines citing the Island’s continued economic growth. In the end, Galvestonians for Economic Development lost out on the bid to make Atlantic City appear a viable mentor city. Their final references to this northern island-city, appearing just before the August 1988 referendum, were almost comedic:

Galvestonians,
Let’s get two things settled:

1). Galveston’s wealthy and powerful people are the force behind the deceptive ‘Anti-Casino Gaming’ Campaign. If they are to remain ‘all powerful,’ Galveston must stay like it is. They will stop at nothing to preserve their quality of life.
2). The reason for all the horror stories heard about Atlantic City can be summed up in just two words:

NO PLANNING

They simply did not know how to plan for the coming changes and they made terrible mistakes.

We, on the other hand, have analyzed each and every mistake, and we now know WHAT NOT TO DO. Actually, Atlantic City has provided us with an excellent "Textbook for Success," and we're going to use it! So, FORGET ATLANTIC CITY! [GDN 8/9/88]

The Cultural Politics of the Economic Past

As an oppositional entity, one that challenged the cultural myth, imagery, and economy of Historic Galveston, and ultimately, the dominant sociopolitical system it came to symbolize, the pro-gambling forces made strange bedfellows of an otherwise disparate group. This contingent drew specifically upon the ranks of small businessmen, Blacks, Hispanics, senior citizens, wage workers and salaried middle managers in the hospitality and service industries, as well as on the very poor and a handful of wealthy hotel and casino developers headquartered as far away as Dallas and Las Vegas, who viewed the introduction of casino gambling to the Island, at least in part, as a way to become wealthier.

From the beginning, casino gambling promoters played on the nostalgia the elderly and much of the lower and middle classes have for the Islands's gambling era. They likewise preyed upon the desperation of the indigent poor and the
instability of the working class, for whom the gambling era represents by-gone days of steady employment and economic prosperity. This was a critical strategy, for it targeted two general categories in which a significant number of Island residents could claim dual membership. Most notable among these were senior citizens on a fixed and often meager income. Consider the following excerpts from an ad for casino gambling entitled "Memories of My Home Town" and featuring a fictional letter (dated December 28, 1986) supposedly written by an adult son now living in Omaha, Nebraska, to his mother who remains in residence on Galveston Island:

Dear Mom,

Sorry I couldn't be with you during the Holidays. Hope they were not too lonely for you with all of us kids living in different cities and many miles apart. Too bad about Aunt Jane and Uncle Henry closing their business last month. Did the neighbors...ever find a job? Gosh, Mom in your last letter you said the Downtown Merchants did not decorate for Christmas, are there any stores at all open in the downtown area?...

The last Christmas I was home in Galveston everything was missing, it just wasn't home anymore. What happened Mom? Did all the young people leave? Did the "rich folks" really and finally take over my hometown?

They said three years ago that to bring in Casino Gambling to our town would be bad. Mom, you remember last year my good friend Harold being mugged on the Seawall, all the drugs users gathered around at certain parks, peddling their wares and poor Granny's house being broken into and everything she had stolen. Gosh Mom, this couldn't be my hometown?

The opponents to Casino Gambling say Galveston has an economic base for a small town. Where Mom? Taxes are higher than in big cities and the standards of living lower for most of the population. Your streets have "pot holes" the size of a car, and no night time entertainment. Gosh
Mom, this is not my hometown.

You told me Mom in your last letter, on January 17th the people of Galveston have another chance to Vote for Casino Gambling, but again the "rich folks" are fighting against it. Mom, I hope it passes...so my brothers, sister and I can maybe come home next year to find a decent job. Mom, don't let the "rich folks" scare you, vote YES. I want to come home to my hometown and my memories to be able to find a job to support my family and let them have the same memories of my hometown. [Pd. Pol. Adv., IBM #248, 1/8/87]

This letter, although more melodramatic than most of the propaganda put forth by the various gambling proponents, nonetheless represents standard fare where its appeal to the poor and the elderly's nostalgia for what represents a more prosperous and lively time is concerned. Indeed, the reference to Galveston's lack of nightlife was echoed by many of the senior citizens favoring casino gambling with whom I spoke. One woman reminisced at length about the "old days" when Galveston had "real culture and there were places to take your out-of-town friends at night." She professed to being

\[11\] InBetween ran a series of articles during the late 1970s and early 1980s that commemorated Galveston's nightclub heyday. An article by Henry David entitled "A Time Past: Gambling in Galveston," suggests that "Galveston, Texas was the hottest resort city in the United States. Galveston was big time, big time entertainment, big time gambling, and big time money. Life magazine called the Balinese 'one of the best nightclubs in the nation' "(IBM #29:23). Another article, penned by Emilio Courreges is worth quoting at length, not only for its documentary contribution, but also for its reflexive character:

Whether the shutdown was a good thing has long been disputed. One side claims the island has less crime, less corruption, and better government now because of the shutdown. The other claims that the
not only disappointed, but embarrassed that the Island no longer had the kind of entertainment that made it a nightclub mecca during the 1940s and 50s. And in fact, I was party to the romance, glamour, and economy of Galveston has gone to hell because of the lack of gambling. Behind the argument is a part of local history that has gone unrecorded because of its extra-legal nature. The Galveston that was in the 30s, 40s, and 50s to this history we now write, not to glorify, but merely to record:

Galveston hosted the 1st Miss Universe beauty pageant....A 2cd place contestant...was Louisianan Dorothy Lamore. At the the tender age of 16, a dancer by the name of Ginger Rogers quit the Kit Kat Club on 61st street to run off to California with a clothes salesman from E. S. Levy's....Guy Lombardo pulled 20,000 customers to the Hollywood Club during a three week stand...After the Texas City disaster in 1947, Sam Maceo gave a benefit performance for the disaster victims. The stars he brought to Galveston indicated his status. Among the cast were Frank Sinatra, Jack Benny, George Burns, and Gracie Allen....Many considered this time period as Galveston's golden era. Others had less complimentary things to say about it. Its passing is almost complete now: The 3rd generation Maceos are moving off the island. Others are too old or ill to care. [P. 23]

Appearing in the same issue was another article, "Only in Galveston Isle," which payed tribute to what the author saw as IBM's journalistic precursor: "InBetween is not without predecessors in print....although the publication only ran from 1947-1951, the magazine [Galveston Isle] managed to reflect all the glitter and glow that was Galveston then. Each issue was full of the events that earned Galveston the title 'Playground of the Southwest.' Political as well as Hollywood celebrities submitted 'guest star' columns in which they touted the Island's virtues." Accompanying this piece were three pages of photographs documenting the Island's popularity. Among those featured were Johnny Weismuller, Charlie McCarthy, Jane Wyatt, Peter Lawford, Notre Dame Coach Patrick Leahy, Peggy Lee, Phil Harris, and Jack Benny.

Her daughter, who was present at this conversation and an active volunteer for Galvestonians Against Casino Gambling, simply dismissed her 70 year-old mother's remembrances as...
to several casual conversations that took place completely outside the political context of the referendums wherein older Galvestonians fondly recalled the gambling days for the nightlife they offered. For this group of Galvestonians, political ads entreatiug voters to imagine being able to "Rub Elbows with the Stars," see "Top Hollywood Stars and Entertainers," and "Just Enjoy The Shows!" (GDN, 8/7/88) made a persuasive case for casino gambling.

By appropriating the Island's popular memory and its politically disempowered, the platform and rhetoric of the pro-casino forces catalyzed an unlikely exercise in alternative history writing—one in which "The Queen City of the Gulf" might easily symbolize an altogether different place and time. By mid 1988, even the Galveston Daily News, having been charged with biased representation, became a tool for the elaboration of popular memory, and as such, an unwilling participant in the historical construction that materialized as its byproduct. While continuing to hold selective. "Of course she remembers the fun, but those were not such great times overall."

13 This was not lost on Galvestonians for Economic Development. Despite losing the third referendum vote, they were as determined ever in late 1988 to return Galveston to its days of more recent glory. An advertisement in the News asked supporters of casino gambling to "work together to help make Galveston the 'Queen of the Gulf' again!" (GDN 10/20/88).

14 I want to make careful note here that Galveston's period of illegal gambling has been written about extensively by historians, both amateur and professional. InBetween Magazine furthermore devoted a significant amount of copy to pondering the failure of the Island to institutionalize this
fast to an editorial position condemning casino gambling, the News began to devote multiple pages per issue to publishing the countless expressions of nostalgia for the halcyon days of gambling-based economic prosperity that took form as "Letters to the Editor":

When I was a little girl, I can remember a whistle that blew at 9 p.m. All children were off the streets, safely at home. I also can remember casino gambling, which was illegal, but as the years passed I can also remember people walking the streets all times of the night....We always slept with the windows open and only the screen door locked...[Maura K. Bagby GDN, 8/10/88]

As a BOI who was practically raised in the Balinese Room and Turf Grill and Studio Lounge, may I say I heartily approve your efforts to bring back the casinos. My father, Yock Adams was a Maceo partner for many years and even as a child I can remember being impressed by the decorum and elegance of the people and places. Hopefully, you will be successful in bringing back wonderful memories of my past--too long gone. [Rindy Adams Hetherington GDN, 6/8/88]

My father was a BOI, and gambling existed in an orderly fashion during my very tender years. Galveston prospered and the wharves were in full swing. We talk of increase in crime, slums, corruption, and cringe at the words "increased traffic," associated with gambling....A shot in the arm is not what we need. We need quality period of its past as culturally unique (for instance the previously cited issues of IBM [#14 and #29], as well as #56, Alan Waldeman's "Isle of Illicit Pleasures," and #126, publisher Steve Long's commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the shutdown of gambling in Galveston.) The difference between these discussions and accounts and the one popular memory elaborated in the wake of Historic Galveston's success is that the latter arose as a political challenge to the cultural authenticity and sense of the collective-self vested in the Victorian era.
resortism, be it gambling or wholesome teen activities. Not once is mentioned the by-products of casinos: the quality restaurants, top entertainment, "great" entertainment. Even now, the bingo parlors are not to be stopped be they in religious or private interests. Whether we have an Atlantic City or a Monte Carlo depends on the astuteness of the city council....I see a Monte Carlo potential. We already have the slums, maybe casino dollars can clean it up...we sure haven't been successful over the last 20 years plus...[Katy Lane GDN, 8/10/88]

Never thought I'd write, but one gets tired of seeing the negative on gambling....I'm a senior citizen and BOI. I grew up realizing that everything that was allowed in the city came with the OK of the few with the wealthy...Our city will not lose by casinos. Tourists will still visit the beaches and Strand, etc. Again we could have nice entertainment for adults at night which we don't have now....If any of you remember the "Hollywood Club," you know how glamorous it was to be able to be taken there, even once, on a date, to see top stars. With all the gambling on the Island now, I hope this time, we get the glamour! [Italics in original; Vivian Semmelrogge GDN, 8/3/88]

I was a chef for the Maceos in the gambling days and I don't know what the fuss is all about. Jobs were everywhere and everyone made a good living. We were better off when we had gambling before--at least people had some pride....[Adolfo Zamora GDN, 8/11/88]

Of course, the News was well-positioned to counter these remembrances with other letters that characterized "the Maceo Era" (after the brothers Sam and Rosario "Rose" Maceo who pioneered illegal gambling during this other heyday) as an experience not worth reviving, whether as nostalgic recollection or as a facet of the Island's future economy.

Nonetheless, the power popular memory offers to those
outside the official history industries to collectively inscribe the cultural landscape with their own vision of an "authentic" past was readily apparent on Galveston Island during the late 1980s. This particular example of popular memory becoming an instrument to challenge dominant historical constructions is especially interesting for its having arisen in the context of competition between two capitalist entities rather than one involving ideologically opposed political and economic systems, as is more typically the case (see Popular Memory Group 1982: 205-252). Make no mistake, the pro-casino platform that catalyzed the counter-symbolization of the Island's historical heyday may have struck its most resonant chord among the Island's racial minorities, working classes, and financially insecure (whether retired seniors or the outright indigent), but neither the capitalist motivation animating the campaign (large-scale tourism and development of taxable industry) nor the political strategy (nostalgic appeal and the promise of economic abundance) originated among this collectivity. And although popular memory served, in this instance, to counter a hegemonic historical representation, it was neither originally conceived, nor intentionally drafted into service, as a tool for interpreting that history as such. It was nevertheless part and parcel of a political practice of subversion--one that turned finally to the critique of Galveston's dynastic patron families as a means to swell the pro-gambling contingent's grounds of support.
Patronage and Preservation of the Ancestral Milieu

The complex politics of patronage, politics which are by no means inseparable from nostalgia for any period of the past, became the decisive grounds on which the gambling debates took place and were ultimately settled. The historical presence of Galveston's old monied families, and the cultural tradition their patronage represents, as both a pattern of social relations and a principal source of funding for Historic Galveston, became key to both sides of the gambling controversy.

Both the Moody and Kempner families were participants in the early phases of historic preservation and most Galvestonians are well aware of the various capacities in which each fostered the preservation effort. The Moody Foundation is known to have been a major player in restoration of the Strand and a generous contributor to the GHF, in terms of operating capital as well as in-kind donations (including office space and professional/legal assistance like grant procurement) well into the 1980s, when the development of The Center for Transportation and Commerce and various facilities at Moody Gardens became the principal institutional recipients of Moody Foundation energies and monies.15 Also receiving a

15 The Moody's entrepreneurial motivations also came to clash with those of the GHF, particularly with regard to the GHF's intention to have the Strand designated as a historic district, thus effecting restrictions upon the nature of future development in that area. As Foundation trustee Robert L. Moody put it in an open letter to then Mayor Jan Coggeshall "We do not want the Shearn Moody Plaza [seat of the Center for
considerable amount of Moody family and professional attention in the late 1980s were the historically-oriented operations of the private foundation Mary Moody Northen, Inc. Although several projects related to Moody family history and business fall under its auspices, the primary work undertaken by Mary Moody Northen, Inc. during this period was overseeing restoration of the Moody Mansion located at 2618 Broadway Boulevard.

The Kempner family entered the preservation arena in an equally committed, though perhaps less financially flamboyant fashion. The Harris and Eliza Kempner Fund consistently provided the GHF, as well as other local (and regional) arts and cultural institutions, with important seed money. The family itself, moreover, was well-known for its history of cultural patronage, civic leadership and vision, and

Transportation and Commerce], the adjacent parking garage, nor the four lots that we own on 25th & Strand to be included in that district. What could possibly motivate us to grant large amounts of money for the Strand and simultaneously make it extremely difficult for us to develop tastefully our remaining properties in that area?" (from letter on Moody Fdtn. letterhead and reproduced in full in IBM 193/59, December 1984).

The Moody Foundation sponsored the production of a slim volume (Longo and Brambilla; 1983) entitled Learning From Galveston, the third in a series called "What Makes Cities Livable?" (Institute for Environmental Action). This volume serves two purposes relevant to my own discussion. First, it provides a fuller account of the role of local foundations in reviving the economy of late 20th-century Galveston. Second, it demonstrates the Moody Foundation's apprehension of itself as the major financial facilitator of the Island's historic preservation movement.
volunteerism. Besides Harris "Shrub" Kempner who became the GHF’s board president in 1988, just before the third non-binding referendum on gambling was brought to a vote, a number of equally talented family members have served the GHF as Advisors or members of the Board of Directors. Among them, Leonora K. "Nonie" Thompson, Tim Thompson, Ruth Kempner, and her husband, the late Harris Leon Kempner, Sr., figure most prominently.17

Gambling advocates launched their attack on Galveston’s old money in large part because Harris "Shrub" Kempner was the opposition’s very committed and persuasive spokesperson. It was enough that he was a member of one of Galveston’s dynastic families, but he was also BOI, and known by virtue of both his profession and his personal style as "an intellectual among social elites" (to use the actual phrase one of my cultural informants employed). In this regard, he was truly a force with which to be reckoned. Not only could he rationally and consistently deconstruct the economic mythology of Atlantic City’s gambling industry, as a native islander he could authoritatively invoke critical aspects of islander-consciousness. And here, the discourse of colonization—the threat that the Island might lose its autonomy at the hands of outsider casino interests—was powerful rhetoric. The fact that Galvestonians Against Casino Gambling was successfully

17 "Peaches" Kempner is a major patron of Galveston’s cultural arts.
fighting an almost entirely locally-funded and run battle against casino forces financed in large part by off-island developers reinforced the reality of classic islander fears of boundary failure and outsider encroachment.

By all appearances after the fact, casino gambling proponents had only a partial understanding of the role Galveston's dynastic elite played in Island history and consciousness, but they rallied it to their cause with a fair measure of effectiveness. For instance, old arguments that Galveston's elite families were responsible for the Island's economic stagnation were dragged to the fore in general attacks on "the rich." Gambling advocates also took every opportunity to point out that those elite families opposing casino development by non-Islanders in the 1980s had certainly not opposed it in the earlier days of its illegal operation on the Island. In fact, the pro-casino forces claimed, not only did these families turn a blind eye to gambling--the Moody family in particular was charged with capitalizing on the illegal gaming industry. Kempner, however, was able to answer such charges of elite hypocrisy in a manner that spoke directly to islander-consciousness by noting that in by-gone days gambling operations were run by native Islanders. Although further explication was given, it was hardly needed--Islanders looked after Islanders and out for the Island

18 See, for instance, the comments of Walter Teachworth (a principal spokesman for the gambling contingent) contained in IBM #177.
itself. The non-natives who would control Galveston if casino gambling was introduced would, by definition, have neither the Island nor its residents' best interests at heart. This was an argument no self-respecting Islander would dispute. By implication, moreover, anyone who moved to do so could not truly be counted as an Islander. The argument may have been circular, but it addressed islander sensibilities in a powerful way.

Clearly the native status of the local "rich" had to be turned against them; here, the islander mythology of Galveston's dynasties as a minority "ruling class" became a strategic foil to the opposition's discourse of outsider colonization. The following passage, taken from an open letter to Galveston Daily News editor Dolph Tillotson and published in full as a paid political ad, demonstrates one approach to this attack:

You talk mainly about the bad effects that we can expect if gambling were to be legalized, the quality of life that would be affected. What do you mean by that? Does it mean that the people who are now presently big fish in a little pond would then become little fish in a big pond? Does that mean they wouldn't be able to get their own way anymore because they would not be the "power structure" that they now consider themselves to be? [Emphasis added; Ruiz GDN, 8/4/88]

"The rich," according to this argument, were selfishly protecting their own political influence and financial interests.

Other proponents of casino gambling evinced a fuller
understanding of the significance of Galveston’s old money battling casino gambling on the basis of its threat to their dynastic identities:

The handful of rich and powerful might lose a little of their power in controlling Galveston and its future. That’s pretty scary. But the most frightening thing about casino gambling is that they didn’t think of it and they don’t need the economic benefits. That’s right. If they can’t make all the money that’s to be made in Galveston, then it must not be good for us. After all, it’s been like that for more than a century and controlling the island has always been part of some folk’s heritage. But what about the heritage of the "commoners" and the working (or non-working) folks in Galveston?...Isn’t it time we stood up for our own future and quit letting a few people treat Galveston as if it were their own personal treasure island? [Emphasis added; Ritchard Castrol, GDN guest column, 6/12/88]

These comments are indeed insightful, for they reveal common sense knowledge of the symbolic connection between the patronage-like role these elite families historically fulfilled on the Island (both as major providers of employment and as managers of civic affairs and welfare) and the contemporary capacity in which they practice cultural patronage by underwriting the preservation of a past that represents their own ancestral milieu.

As active backers of Historic Galveston, Galveston’s old and monied families are engaged in what amounts to preservation of the historic self. While this is the case for any number of elite Island families who trace their ancestry to Victorian-era Galveston, it is particularly true for the
Moody and Kempner families, who by supporting the GHF and other preservation projects, are bolstering the dynastic identity by which they have come to be known and to understand themselves in late-20th century Galveston. This is a classic move in the later stages of dynastic evolution.

Dynastic formation and perpetuation has historically followed a fairly regular pattern, beginning with a family-run enterprise facilitating the accumulation of capital which is then transferred, along with the family name and business, through several generations (Marcus 1980:867-68). Dissolution of the dynastic structure usually results from the failure of the patriline to reproduce itself or from the loss of the collective ownership of the family wealth:

As organized entities, dynasties are rarely stable structures in American capitalism, and they generally dissolve after three to four generations of evolution. Extended family members give priority to their own projects and gradually lose touch with family organizations....In turn, family capital becomes less a dominant influence in the operations of ancestral businesses or corporations. In the end the most durable parts of a dynasty are the fiduciary-managed organization of the patrimonial capital itself and the lingering public mystique of the family name. The duration of organized life for a dynastic family--typically about a century, reflects the legal limits imposed by the rule against perpetuities on the main resource of dynastic organization--the testamentary trust. However, one form of the trust--the charitable foundation--is permanent and well designed to achieve indefinite perpetuation. [Emphasis added; Marcus 1983:226]

Cultural patronage most frequently manifests itself in the waning years of the dynasty as the principal "family business"
among fourth and fifth generation dynastic heirs. It is at this point in the evolution of the family structure that perpetuation of the dynasty becomes a largely symbolic enterprise achieved through the institutionalization of the patrimonial wealth. In this sense, family foundations have the very real capacity to function as dynastic heirs—institutional descendants and embodiments of ancestral identity, culture, and generativity (Castaneda 1987, Hall 1992).

Dynastic motivations can be interpreted readily enough in the substantial contributions of time and money made by the Moody and Kempner family foundations and individual family members to the GHF over the past decade and a half. But the fact is that these dynasties are actively preserving what the gambling proponent cited above calls their uncommon "heritage" not only through the interpretation, restoration, and touristic sale of a cultural and built environment which shares its temporal provenience with the early days of their family formation, but also by ensuring the perpetuation of their individual dynastic identities. For instance, The Moody Mansion and Museum, which opened to the public in 1991 after years of intensive and elaborate restoration, is a classic embodiment of dynastic intent and identity.19 Promotional

19 The late 1980s represented a particularly critical moment to ensure the institutionalization of the family’s elite standing in Galveston’s early 20th century society, since the Moody family name and public image was being dragged through the courts on a weekly basis as the State of Texas
literature for the Museum explains:

Entrepreneurs in the cotton trade and in banking, the Moodys were among the most accomplished families of nineteenth-century Texas, and went on to establish one of the great financial empires of the twentieth century, with added interests in insurance, banking, hotels, and ranching. Through the Moody Foundation and Mary Moody Northen, Inc., a private foundation, the family has made many contributions to education, health care, the arts, and to historical and cultural institutions as well.... The restored Moody Mansion captures the turn-of-the-century optimism and prosperity of Galveston. It also represents the aspirations and achievements of the era’s entrepreneurs. The Moodys were among the businessmen who put their stamp on the economy and politics of the western states....Their house is both a mirror of the age and an intimate portrait of the Moodys themselves—a wealthy family who declined to indulge in extravagance, who enjoyed the pleasures of a quiet home life, and who knew the value of preserving the fine things of the American past. [Leaflet; The Moody Mansion and Museum]

It is worth noting here that as a museum conceived and endowed by an aging daughter, the late Mary Moody Northen, this symbol of family wealth, identity, and entrepreneurial success represents a break with the traditional pattern wherein dynastically-motivated activity originates among the male members of the patriline.

The Kempner family’s dynastic history and identity also became institutionalized quite recently, although in a more traditional narrative form. In the early 1980s, in successfully prosecuted Shearn Moody, favored nephew of Galveston’s grande dame of cultural patronage, Mary Moody Northen, on charges of defrauding the Moody Foundation.
cooperation with the GHF (which acted in a brokerage capacity regarding the project's funding), the Kempners commissioned and financed a family history to be written by Harold Hyman, professor of history at Rice University (detailed in GHF Steering Committee minutes for 11/3/81 and in letter from Brink to H.L Kempner, Sr., 12/14/81, in RLA 87-0019). Entitled Oleander Odyssey, The Kempners of Galveston, Texas, 1954-1980s, this text was published in 1990 by a university press with wide regional distribution. And while it represents an important and exhaustive case study in American family business history, it has far more profound historical implications for having originated within the context of the family's late-20th century apprehension of their own cultural significance not only as inheritors of an ancestral legacy and identity, but also as heirs to Historic Galveston--a role they have been made to self-consciously embody (and sometimes symbolically or ritually enact) on contemporary Galveston Island.20

20 Perhaps the most telling demonstration of the Kempner family's dynastic self-consciousness is revealed in an advertisement run in the annual "Horizons Edition" of the Galveston Daily News for the year 1989. Sponsored by Imperial Holly Corporation of Sugar Land, Texas, a Kempner family enterprise (see Hyman 1990), this half-page advertisement bears the bold-face headline "The Galveston Kempner Family" and is followed by a four-column, condensed historical narrative which begins and ends with the paragraphs cited below:

The cast of player's [sic] in Galveston's colorful history is heavily populated with five generations of Kempners, a family whose impact began in Galveston and spread far beyond....
The dynastic motivations and symbolic associations of these elites with Historic Galveston would have far less import on Galveston Island today if they were one-sided—that is perceived only within the folds of these families. But,

1957 marked the 100th anniversary of Harris Kempner business enterprises. Continuing examples set by him, second and third generation Kempners became well known for their philanthropic generosity. In 1961 the fourth generation began to assume responsibilities in the Kempner enterprises. Ike Kempner was honored as "Mr. Galveston" with a Texas-sized birthday celebration on his 88th birthday. When this generation, Pat, Dan, Lee, Ike, Gladys, and most recently Fannie died, Galveston lost several of the island's most distinguished citizens. Their achievements spanned three quarters of a century...and the Kempner legacy, a very real and vibrant part of the histories of Galveston, the State of Texas and the U.S., continues unabated. [GDN 2/26/89]

This same advertisement also appeared in the 1990 "Horizon Edition" of the Galveston Daily News.

The Sealy family, whose patrimony was by the late 1980s principally vested in the Sealy and Smith Foundation (the major benefactor of Galveston-based University of Texas medical school), could also relate to Historic Galveston as their ancestral milieu. They were, moreover, beginning to demonstrate dynastic concerns for preservation of the historic-self during the period of my fieldwork. For instance, they were beginning to investigate the possibilities for underwriting a professional family history along the lines of the one Hyman produced as the Kempner family scribe. One of my cultural informants who was working closely with several family members on an entirely unrelated matter, noted to me that the Sealy descendants were disappointed by what they perceived to be the failure of historians to fairly represent the comparable commercial, civic and philanthropic contributions the Sealy's (as Moody and Kempner dynastic peers) had made to Galveston. In fact, a number of occasions arose in which I was encouraged to devote, in what many people clearly believed would be a cultural history of the Island, a substantial amount of discussion to the Sealy's and their philanthropic motivations toward the development of John Sealy
in fact, these dynasties are popularly constructed and symbolized as sources of cultural capital and metaphors of islandness. Dynastic members from generations past are frequently invoked as temporal markers and signifiers of particular cultural or economic conditions, in much the same way that the 1900 hurricane is metaphorized. As a distinctive collectivity, variously mythologized as either the Island's paternalistic overseers and protectors or as its controlling patriarchal masters (e.g. the pro-casino position on "the rich"), the Sealy, Kempner, and Moody dynasties are perceived much after the fashion of the classic patron landlords who articulate and control the systems of social relations on which traditional peasant economies are based.

Although I was familiar with this mythopolitical representation of Galveston's old money families on an intellectual level long before I began my fieldwork, it was brought home to me quite emphatically in late 1988, as I sat in the mid-rise office of a shipping-related company, scenically overlooking the restored Strand and the Galveston Wharves. Issuing forth quite unexpectedly from the margins of a conversation about what it was like for this particular

Hospital and the University of Texas Medical Branch. As of the late 1980s, the Sealy family history was for the most part contained in a sentimental family portrait and house history of "The Open Gates" written by Sealy descendants Jane and Rebecca Pinckard and rather straightforwardly entitled Lest We Forget (1988), and in various (often negatively characterized) historical discussions of the Sealy family's role in developing and controlling the Galveston Wharves.
individual to be have been so long employed on the Island, though not in residence per se, came what can only be described as a genealogical treatise, wherein the ties of various prominent and not-so-prominent citizens to the Sealy, Moody, and Kempner dynasties were sketched for me. The details became so abundant and the relations so extensive that I abandoned the process of note-taking as skepticism gave way to total astonishment. It was not until several hours afterward that I realized that although many of these connections were based upon marriage or distant descent, most were relations of "fictive kinship" (Kenny 1960:15). More surprising yet, was the realization that although these fictive kinships derived in the majority of instances solely from employment in dynastic family firms and/or foundations, they were characterized to me almost as if they had been inherited by these clients from their own kin, as though these affiliations with one or the other dynastic family were intergenerationally transferred.

This conversation shed new light upon many others that had come before, in which informants from a broad range of personal and professional backgrounds had pointed out individuals to me with the comment "That's a Moody man" or "That's a Kempner man." What was implicit in these comments were intangible relations based on personal trust or political loyalty, rather than upon more direct employ. In fact, "That's a Kempner man" is a phrase I heard regularly during the course
of the final referendum campaign. It was used as a reference to various individuals I already knew to be politicians, newsmen, radio journalists, lawyers, city leaders, and civic volunteers. What it began to signify to me was that Galveston's sociopolitical affairs did in fact operate much along the lines of a patron/client system as it has been traditionally defined in anthropology:

Patronage as a cross-cultural pattern may be defined as an informal contractual relationship between persons of unequal status and power, which imposes reciprocal obligations of a different kind on each of the parties. As a minimum, what is owed is protection and favor on the one side and loyalty on the other. The relationship is on a personal, face-to-face basis, and it is a continuing one. [Silverman 1965:176]

Silverman goes on to note the critical importance of the local origin of patrons (p. 181). Certainly in Galveston's case there can be no doubt as to role indigenousness plays in the influence these dynasts are able to wield and the loyalty they win from Islanders in return.23

---

22 Countless Galvestonians told me Peter Brink was a "Kempner Man" as a kind of summary statement that by virtue of supposedly contextualizing Brink's presence and purpose in Galveston, would require no further explanation of the man's ideas or actions. Having attended more than a dozen board meetings of the GHF in which both men were present, I was well aware of their very distinctive intellects and political styles. Nonetheless, on a nuanced level, the power relationship that existed between Kempner and Brink that Galvestonians ultimately sought to express in the phrase "He's a Kempner man" was apparent in these meetings as well.

23 The fact that Galveston's politics take place quite literally on a first-name ("face-to-face") basis, in major contradistinction to larger communities where political
There were many other occasions where upon cultural informants noted to me their own connections to the various elite families, in what was either a reserved or seemingly bashful fashion. One particularly engaging, though entirely unassuming individual went so far as to remark that he "was not bragging," though he knew "it sound[ed] that way." "But really," he went on, "I grew up in that building--I played marbles on the floor outside his office." Many similar conversations bolstered this image of patronage. Most notable was the manner in which dynastic family members were talked about in the casual course of daily living. For instance, one evening as I sat in the living room of a house in Galveston's unlikely suburbs, catching up on my fieldnotes during the lull that preceded an evening dinner with a friend, her husband returned from the market, to remark from behind his bags of groceries that "Peaches" Kempner (who is married to "Shrub") had preceded him in the check-out line. My friend responded "She has a new hairstyle doesn't she? I think she's gotten her hair cut." The two of them went on the discuss "Shrub" and "Peaches" Kempner as if they might be personal friends, when in fact they make no claim to knowing the Kempner family in any manner other than that in which most

activities tend to be more anonymous and formal, further supports the characterization of Galveston's sociopolitical system as one of classic patron/client relations.

24 I refer those who desire to be enlightened as to the origins of the Kempner family nicknames to the recently published history of the family (Hyman 1990).
average Galvestonians "know" them—as public figures. Realizing that I had tuned into this conversation, they began to laugh self-consciously and then proceeded to discuss with me the way in which Galveston's dynastic elite are variously admired, feared, patronized, scrutinized and cast in the role of local royalty.

One notable feature of this conversation was the emphasis on the Kempner's lack of pretentiousness. This particular characterization of the family was echoed over and over during the course of my fieldwork, not only as a means of contrasting them with other dynastic families, but as a way of rationalizing the particular kind of patronage they practiced. For example, on the occasion of an act of vandalism to "Shrub" Kempner's car on the night of the final gambling referendum, a native Galvestonian commented rather passionately to me "You know, these attacks on their wealth are just totally out of line. He could drive a Mercedes or Porsche, instead he drives a Toyota convertible. That tells you something right there!"

One individual remarked to me in mid 1988 that this lack of pretension was part of the Kempner family culture. Specifically referring to "Shrub" Kempner, he commented knowingly, "His Daddy brought him up to move among the people." And in fact, the argument has been made that part of the legacy transferred to third and fourth generation dynastic heirs along with the family wealth and identity is a sense of themselves as public fiduciaries (Marcus 1983).
The Politics of Patronage and the Maintenance of Islandness

Kempner's commitment to Historic Galveston and the GHF, as well as his ability to appropriate the preservation entity as a broker for the anti-casino position, can be seen as functions of his ability to successfully enact the dual aspect of the family's dynastic tradition: that of Island patriarch/protector and that of cultural patron. This was made remarkably clear upon the occasion of the GHF's July 13, 1988, annual business meeting of the membership, held exactly one month to the day before the final referendum election. It was on this night that Kempner, who for five years had been fighting the pro-casino forces as both a leader of the GACG and a GHF advisor and board member, officially became president of the Foundation. In his address to the membership, he formally called upon the GHF to recognize it's role as "a player in the community" and to empower itself against those who would destroy Historic Galveston with casino gambling. Easels positioned around the perimeter of the Ashton Villa Ballroom displayed dreary images captured by Galveston photographer Robert John Mihovil on a recent GACG-sponsored trip to Atlantic City and forcefully echoed Kempner's anti-gambling plea. Yet for all this straightforwardness, it was a subtle act that effected the most impressive display of his capacity as an Island patriarch to influence public opinion. This gesture was performed without any apparent self-consciousness when out-going GHF president David Barker
received from Kempner, in exchange for the Foundation’s official gavel, congratulations and two bottles of wine "from our [the Kempner family] cellars," complete with advice on which would typically be served with a main course (the French) and which as an accompaniment to dessert (the German). More than simply a performance of his social position, this act of patronal reciprocity drove home the interconnectedness of Kempner’s personal and political patronage, and made his stature as family dynast cum GHF president seem far more profound.\textsuperscript{25}

As the leader and principal spokesman of the anti-casino position, Kempner was in fact enacting precisely the "heritage" pro-gambling forces charged was the exclusive domain of the "controlling...rich." What the pro-gambling forces failed to understand or work out in their political rhetoric was the import of that elite "heritage" to the process by which Galvestonians reckon the Island’s cultural

\textsuperscript{25} The August 1988 edition of the GHF’s newsletter, "Membership Update," featured a front-page statement concerning the casino vote. Besides the headline "GHF Board Urges You to Vote Against Casino Gambling Sat., August 13," a resolution unanimously passed at the May Board Meeting formally stating the GHF anti-casino position (and authorizing its board members to act on its behalf) was printed along with a summary of Kempner’s membership address: "At the July Membership Meeting newly elected President Shrub Kempner cited casino gambling as a grave threat to GHF’s mission of Galveston being the finest, most livable, historic community in the Southwest. Kempner strong urged Galveston voters to reject casino gambling in Galveston in the August 13 referendum" (p. 1). This was but one of several occasions over the course of the three referendum votes upon which the GHF had officially voiced its opposition to the casino referendums.
distinction and engage in the critical business of boundary maintenance. To put it another way, what the gambling contingent overlooked in its class consciousness-raising attacks on the local "rich" was the centrality of these dynastic elites to the indigenous apprehension of islandness. Galveston's dynasties link history and islandness in a fundamental way, by serving not only as historical metaphors, but as metaphors for islander consciousness—a consciousness that interprets the patriarchal presence and marked class distinction these elites represent as an enduring component of the Island's cultural otherness.

Indeed, for those Galvestonians who registered their majority opposition at the polls what was truly at stake in the gambling issue was not casino gaming per se, but the threat of boundary failure, cultural thinning, outsider encroachment, and colonial penetration. Galvestonians demonstrated this in trenchant performances of islander ideology—not simply in repeatedly defeating the gambling referendums, but in the specific way they formulated their anti-gambling sentiment. The key words and phrases invoked

Further laying bare the cultural foundation of anti-casino fears was the fact that even as on-Island gambling was being repeatedly voted down at the polls, "cruise ships to nowhere" that would originate at the Island's new cruise ship terminal and feature casino gambling were being courted by or lent the support of a number of prominent GACG members. Galvestonians for Economic Development were deeply frustrated and confused over this. While they recognized the principal distinction as one of on vs. off-island gambling, it never seemed to fully penetrate their consciousness that this was an act of cultural, rather than moral or local money,
to oppose legalized gambling gave little expression to concerns for economic issues. The classic statement repeated throughout was one or another variation on "It makes me furious to realize that those people think they can come in here and buy this Island!" This kind of statement was usually followed with a defense of Harris "Shrub" Kempner, such as "Sure, his family has a lot of money and power, but they send their kids to school on this Island— that's something they don't have to do. Do you think [the outsider rich] are going to do that?" Or "They're not going to live here! They just want to come in here, take over, and ruin this Island." The case of one developer in particular, whose family once lived on the Island but left when illegal gambling was shut down to develop casino operations in Las Vegas, became a vivid metaphor for the equation of islander-ideology with the anti-casino position: "They didn't live here through the thick and thin, they left as soon as the going got rough....You can't say that about the Kempners— they stuck it out like the rest of us— they didn't have to, but they stood by us."

The gambling debates became translated into a cultural polemic about islandness and the politics of the past because they engaged not only contending periods and symbolic representations of the historical past, but different ways of relating to the past as a source of identity and cultural practice. In this respect, what the vote against casino protectionism.
gambling ultimately signified was a vote in favor of maintaining the particular sociopolitical conditions by which an indigenously-perceived cultural otherness can be claimed. And although it is true that the GHF and Historic Galveston came to be conflated with Kempner and the anti-casino forces, the vote against casino gambling cannot, by converse logic, necessarily be equated with a vote in favor of Historic Galveston’s hegemony or the GHF’s mandate to privilege the Victorian-era past. Nonetheless, the vote to defeat casino gambling was a move informed by historical consciousness and it clearly reflected the ongoing process by which Galveston reads cultural meaning and continuity into the Island’s mottled socioeconomic history and experience. As such, the gambling debates offer a rare and remarkable window onto the apprehension and performance of islandness as a premise and expression of cultural difference that overrides more exclusive sources and claims to distinction, be they grounded in the romance of resort island identity or the wealth and urbanity of Victorian-era otherness.
Chapter 6
CONCLUSION

Galveston is my attempt to write the profile of a place. I've written a lot of profiles of people using place as a substratum to put the subject in perspective and give it texture; but in this book I'm reversing the process. The place is the main character. I want the reader to understand the way it looks, how it feels, what it represents, the many ways it has been used and misused over the years, and how it has responded. This place is different from other places, and it was my mission to examine and explain why this is so.

--Gary Cartwright, 1991

In the opening lines of his narrative history of Galveston Island, Gary Cartwright, who for nearly a quarter-century has written Texas culture and politics as a poetic encounter with characters of gigantic proportion, cues his readers to the fact this "in this book...the place is the main character" (emphasis added; 1991:vii). If I am reading Cartwright correctly, his foregrounding of place was not so much a choice, as an imperative. I want to close my own musings upon the Island on a similar theme, by contending that "place" is, in fact, the main character in the historical consciousness Galveston embraces as its own narrative of the collective cultural self.

At the end of the preceding chapter, I suggested that Galveston’s recent gambling referendums opened a window onto the apprehension and performance of islandness as a premise for cultural otherness and belonging that supercedes other
sources and claims to distinction; and here I cite Victorian-era otherness and resort island exoticism as the primary competitors in a bid to interpret and construct different historical pasts as the source of a contemporary cultural authenticity. While it is clear how beach/resort island culture references islandness as a condition of being subject to the characteristics and contingencies of place and space (i.e. by drawing upon the mythology of the island paradise), it is not so apparent how preservation, the most prolific producer of cultural texts and imagery in Galveston today, serves the symbolic logic of "the island" (particularly in light of the fact that it is consciously constructed in symbolic opposition, and as a commercial foil, to popular representations of island culture).

The issue at stake in the answering of this question also lies at the heart of the dialectic that animates a whole series of contentious, yet vitally interdependent, relations: those of historic preservation to the beach/resort industry; of the BOI to the non-native; of the patriarchal, dynastic elite to the dependent and domesticated community-at-large; of the colonized resident-Islanders to the colonizing tourist economy, of the postcolonialist discourse and agenda of the preservation movement to the colonial conditions of the Open-City era; of the Victorian-era past that claims Galveston as a virtuous and moral woman to the Open-City past that marks Galveston as a glamorous, but loose and immoral lady-of-the-
night; and of the Island as an exoticized and femininely-engendered space to the penetration of the Island's geographic, cultural, and psycho-social boundaries by the outside, masculine world-order.¹

I would submit that Galveston's preservation movement owes a large measure of its success to the fact that its interpretation and representation of the Victorian era embodies a subtext that draws upon a conceptualization of the island that is other than the island of exotica, paradise and touristic colonization. In an era that finds Galveston's economy increasingly dependent upon the commodification of the collective cultural self, historic preservation secures a more profound or satisfactory symbolization of Galveston's islandness by promoting an image of the Island at a time when it enjoyed unrivaled socioeconomic autonomy and preeminence—a time when its geographic boundaries were not encroached upon

¹ The complete development of the symbolic and material aspects of these dialectical relations will be addressed in a revision of the dissertation, but I wish to cite here, those works which have influenced my own understanding and identification of these sets of relations: Williams (1986) on the symbolic connections between femininity, islands, and colonization; Enloe (1989) on the gendered politics of international tourism; Buck (1993) on the political economy and touristic sale of essentialized island culture and on the indigenous discourse and performance of hula as a political history, countersymbolization, and repatriation of native culture and politics; Sider (1988) on colonial conditions as the crucible in which indigenousness becomes both a commodity and self-conscious fact; Galtherecole and Lowenthal (1990) on the postcolonial politics of the past; McGregor (1985, 1993) on landscape and communities as engendered space and place; and Beer (1989) on scientific and literary discourses of the Island, and (1990) the Island as femininely engendered.
by outsider interests and its grounds for claiming cultural distinction not perceived to be rapidly deteriorating and in danger of total disintegration.

The Social Construction of the Island as Space and Place

The notion that geographic boundaries can somehow delimit and define cultural borders is not a new one in the history of humanity (Chartier 1988). For example, a central tenet in the formation and naturalization of the modern nation-state is the analogous idea that politico-geographic boundaries equate with zones of cultural affinity and distinction (Anderson 1983, Gellner 1983, Segal 1988).

The island constitutes one site where equations and ideas such as these are variously (and regularly) constructed and collapsed. In the fields of both biology and anthropology, islands (e.g. the Galapagos and Trobriands) represent loci of watershed theory-building (Beer 1989)." Historically, both disciplines envisioned the island as a naturally-occurring site of scientifically-controlled space. Islands were conceived of as fully autonomous life-zones, isolated and cut-off from the rest of the world—offering up "nature" as it was uniquely manifest in the perfectly closed biological or social system. But as Gillian Beer eloquently demonstrates in her essay on "Discourses of the Island" (1989), the grand theorizing of the island as a seemingly unequaled setting for the laboratory-study of life upon which much of late-19th and early-20th-
century natural and social science was founded, was premised on a rationalization of earlier literary and philosophical constructions of the Island as a mythopoetic place and metaphor of psychic space. For Beer, the Island embodies the complex field of interplay and influence that characterizes the relationship between literary and scientific theory.

Discursive practices are not autonomous zones, nor do we operate within any single one of the alone. We habitually shift linguistic registers without any difficulty. The island we set off for on holiday is other than the one we may inhabit, other again than the island economy of the Galapagos, or the theoretical zone generalized in population studies, other than Huxley’s Island (1962) or Bacon’s New Atlantis (1627), nor is it the place where Ariadne was abandoned. Each Island is held within different discursive expectations. We are practiced in such transformations. One of the singular powers of the mind (less often praised than its capacity for proliferating significations) is its power at will of excluding significations. But writers may choose to jar that easy passage across registers or open up the closed-off alternative meanings. Swift brings out in Gulliver’s Travels (1726) how each new island requires a reconceptualization of the self for his hero. The island-idea is itself then isolated in that floating signifier, the flying island of Laputa. [Beer 1989:4]

The discourses of the island accessed by Galveston’s historical consciousness and by its sundry promotions of its Victorian-era self and/or its tropical-island self are layered, coupled, and juxtaposed in the same fashion as the literary and scientific constructions of the island coursed in the passage above. Self-conscious attempts to separate the strands of the island as autonomous space from the fibers of
the island as a tropical place are likely continue in Galveston. But as the gambling referendums revealed, such efforts can never effect a complete catharsis, because Galveston invariably invokes its past as, above all else, the past of one or another island place.
Rosenberg Library Archives (RLA), Galveston, Texas

Acc.No. 87-0019, Uncataloged administrative records of the Galveston Historical Foundation (cited as RLA 87-0019).

Pamphlet File

Newspapers and Magazines

Calvert Street Sun, Baltimore
Galveston Daily News (GDN)
Historic Preservation (HP)
Houston Chronicle
InBetween Magazine (IBM)
Islands
Los Angeles Times
Membership Update, Newsletter of the GHF
New York Times
Preservation News (PN)
Spirit Magazine
Texas Monthly
Wall Street Journal
West Beach Sun, Galveston

Books, Articles, and Manuscripts


Barnstone, Howard

Baudrillard, Jean

Beer, Gillian


Bhabha, Homi K. (ed.)

Bommes, Michael and Patrick Wright

Boon, James
1982 Other Tribes, Other Scribes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre

Breen, T.H.

Brink, Peter

Britton, J. C. and R. Morton

Brow, James
Buck, Elizabeth
1993 Paradise Remade: The Politics of Culture and
History in Hawai‘i. Philadelphia: Temple University
Press.

Cartwright, Gary
1991 Galveston, A History of the Island. New York:
Atheneum.

Castaneda, Terri
1987 "Families and Foundations: Explorations in
Philanthropy and Patronage as Dynastic Phenomena."
Unpublished ms. Masters Paper, Department of
Anthropology, Rice University.

Clifford, James
1988 The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century
Ethnography, Literature, and Art. Cambridge, Mass.:
Harvard University Press.

Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus, eds.
1986 Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of
Ethnography. Berkeley: University of California
Press.

Cohen, Anthony
1986 Symbolising Boundaries: Identity and Diversity
in British Culture. Manchester: Manchester
University Press.

1987 Whalsay: Symbol, Segment, and Boundary in a
Shetland Island Community. Manchester: Manchester
University Press.

Coser, Lewis
1978 "Editor’s Introduction" in Social Research.

Davis, Rod
1986 "Galveston: Views of a Lifetime Visitor" in
InBetween Magazine. # 222 (January).

Dickens, Cedric
1983 Drinking with Dickens. Goring-on-Thames,

DiMaggio, Paul
1986 "Cultural Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century
Boston: The Creation of an Organization Base for
High Culture in America" in Media, Culture, and
Domhoff, William G.

Dominguez, Virginia
1989 *People as Subject, People as Object.* Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.

Dorst, John D.

Eisenhour, Virginia
1983 *Galveston: A Different Place, A History and Guide.* Copyright by V. Eisenhour.

Enloe, Cynthia

Fabian, Johannes

Fawcett, Jane (ed.)

Fornell, Earl

Foster, Stephen William

Gable, Eric, R. Handler, and A. Lawson

Gathercole, Peter and David Lowenthal

Gellner, Ernest
GHF (Galveston Historical Foundation)  

Ginsburg, Faye D.  

Glass, James A.  

Green, Casey  

Hall, Peter Dobkin  


Handelman, Don  
1990 Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Handler, Richard  

Hastrup, Kirsten  

Herzfeld, Michael  

Hobsbawm, Eric, and Terrence Ranger, eds.

Hosmer, Charles B., Jr.


Hyman, Harold

Johnson, Richard & G. McLennan, B. Schwarz, D. Sutton (eds.)

Keister, Kim
1990 "Main Street Makes Good" in Historic Preservation. Vol. 42, No. 5:44.

Kenny, Michael

Kopytoff, Igor

Layne, Linda

Lazzari, Mary Clifford

Lester, Paul
Linnekin, Jocelyn

Longo, Gianni and Roberto Brambilla

Lowenthal, David
1986 The Past is a Foreign Country. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MacCannell, Dean

Maddex, Diane (ed.)

Marcus, George E.


Marcus, George E. and Dick Cushman

Marcus, George E. and Michael M. J. Fischer

McComb, David G.
McGregor, Gaile


Miller, Ray

Mills, C. Wright

Morrill, Dan L.

Mulloy, Elizabeth

Murtagh, William J.

Neuman, Loretta

Parman, Susan

Pinckard, Jane and Rebecca
1988 Lest We Forget: The Open Gates. Copyright by by Jane and Rebecca Pinckard.

Popular Memory Group (PMG)
Press, Nancy
1985 Cultural Myth and Class Structuration in
Department of Anthropology, Duke University.

Ricoeur, Paul
1984 The Reality of the Historical Past. Milwaukee:
Marquette University Press.
1988 Time and Narrative, Vol. 3. K. Blamey and D.
Pellauer, translators. Chicago: University of
Chicago Press.

Sahlins, Marshall
1985 Islands of History. Chicago: University of
Chicago Press.

Said, Edward

Schadwell, Bill
1979 "Return of the Native" in InBetween Magazine
# 54 (August).

Segal, Daniel
1988 "Nationalism, Comparatively Speaking" in Journal

Sider, Gerald M.
1988 Culture and Class in Anthropology and History: A
Newfoundland Illustration. Cambridge: Press
Syndicate of the University of Cambridge.

Silverman, Sydel F.
1965 "Patronage and Community-Nation Relationships in
Central Italy" in Ethnology 4:172-189.

Smith, Valene, ed.
1977 Hosts and Guests. Philadelphia: University of
Philadelphia Press.

Sternlieb, George and James W. Hughes
University Press.

Stewart, Kathleen

Stocking, George
1983 Observers Observed. Madison: University of
Wisconsin Press.
Sweet, Alexander Edwin  

Texas Historical Commission  

Thurber, Pamela (ed.)  

Traweek, Sharon  

Turner, Elizabeth Hayes  

Turner, Victor  

Wallace, Michael  

Weems, John E.  
1957 *A Weekend in September*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press.

Williams, Brett  

Williams, Rosemary  

Williamson, Judith  
Ziegler, Arthur P, Jr., et al.
1975 Revolving Funds for Historic Preservation.
Pittsburgh: Ober Park Associates, Inc.