

Foreword

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In 1970, the US Civil Rights Commission issued a fifty-one-page report entitled *Civil Rights in Texas*. The report concluded that despite the passage of four civil rights acts and the Voting Rights Act between 1957 and 1968, very little had changed for African Americans and Mexican Americans in Texas. In short, schools were still segregated; police brutality still victimized African Americans and Mexicans Americans; voting rights for both groups were still circumscribed; and both groups faced employment and wage discrimination throughout the state. Although the report painted a very negative picture of the experience of both groups, much had changed, and the report would have been more positive if the Texas State Advisory Committee on Civil Rights had done more research on the history of race relations and the civil rights movement throughout the state. My contention is not that the report was inaccurate. It just did not address how Mexican Americans and African Americans had progressed in the state as a result of forty to fifty years of agitation for civil and political rights.¹

The report reflected the dearth of research on the state's civil rights movement that existed in 1970. When I arrived in Texas in 1981 to begin an academic career at Texas Christian University (TCU) and eventually at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA), the historiography of the civil rights movement in Texas was still in its infancy. A few books and several articles covered the subject, but much of the history still projected the idea that Texas did not need a civil rights movement, because it was "more western than southern." Thus, the state's history was characterized as being more about cowboys, ranching, cattle drives, horses, oil wells, and oil barons. One writer even wrote that Texas was a part of the "Rim South" and therefore not a part of the "Old South," with its history of slavery, racial discrimination, and the oppression of Black and Brown people.²

After completing research that connected the integration of the police department in Dallas with the civil rights movement, I wrote one of the first histories of the movement in the city. My essay built on and corrected an interpretation by the journalist Jim Schutze that insisted that Dallas had not had a civil rights movement. Schutze argued that Dallas's African American leadership had practiced the politics of "accommodation" and capitulated to the city's white business leaders, thereby forestalling the progressive activism that characterized the civil rights movement in other parts of the South. My research showed that the civil rights movement in

Dallas had developed in the 1930s and continued into the 1960s. During that time, it was moderately successful in increasing African Americans' access to housing, education, and political power. Dallas's African American leaders had definitely not "accommodated" themselves completely to white power and white supremacy.³

By the time that I published my essay on the movement in Dallas, historians generally had moved beyond the belief that Texas was exceptional and not a part of the South. Several historians had written essays on aspects of the struggle for civil rights in Houston and Austin, and on desegregation in the state's colleges and universities. Indeed, in the late 1980s and the early 1990s, research and scholarship on the civil rights movement in Texas exploded. But most of it, as indicated above, focused on large cities and the period of the 1950s through the 1960s.⁴

Civil Rights in Black and Brown not only addresses the lack of scholarly research on the civil rights movement in Texas that marred the 1970 report, but also expands on existing scholarship and provides a more comprehensive analysis of the movement in the state since 1970. While some studies have examined the civil rights movement in Texas, most of them have not gone beyond the state's major cities to examine the movement statewide.⁵

This volume is the product of two summers of oral history interviews, archival research, and the use of modern technology to analyze data. More specifically, it is the product of a statewide research project entitled the Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project (CRBB), funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Brown and Summerlee Foundations in partnership with TCU, the University of North Texas (UNT), and UTA.

In 2014, I joined with Professors Max Krochmal of TCU, Todd Moya of UNT, and José Ángel Gutiérrez, professor emeritus of UTA, to form the CRBB. Maggie Rivas Rodriguez of the University of Texas at Austin joined the project in 2016. We felt it was important to tell the story of the civil rights movement across the state, and the successes of people from all walks of life in winning major concessions in employment, housing, education, and political participation for African Americans and Mexican Americans.

Subsequently, we hired graduate students and embarked on a major oral history project that took us throughout Texas to interview Black and Brown participants in the civil rights movement. Texas is a big state, and the project required travel, accommodations, and food for all of us as we carried out this important project. The logistics alone were a major undertaking.

Over two summers, the project conducted 530 oral history interviews with people who had participated in civil rights movements. Many of the interviewees had never told their stories about participating in the movement. And the CRBB project broke new ground by adding the stories of people in smaller communities to the major narratives about the movements in Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio.

Another result of the CRBB project is this volume. It is about "civil rights in small spaces," and it introduces readers to the movement in East Texas, Deep East Texas, West Texas, and South Texas. By documenting the civil rights movement in places such as Prairie View, Lubbock, Pharr, Odessa, Beaumont, El Paso, Corpus Christi, and Lufkin, the book broadens and enhances our understanding of one of our nation's most important movements for social and political justice. It democratizes the civil

rights movement, shows its diversity, and provides future generations many models of how to win equal rights and change our nation.

I am also very proud of two important by-products of the CRBB project. First, the oral history interviews are available to everyone. Thanks to Max Krochmal and TCU, anyone with a computer and an internet connection can access topical clips from the interviews for professional and general use, at crbb.tcu.edu. The Portal to Texas History at UNT hosts full, unedited interviews, at texashistory.unt.edu. It is hoped that the interviews will shape scholarship on the movement in Texas and the understanding of it by students, scholars, and laypeople. Finally, I am especially proud of the graduate students who participated in the project, did the fieldwork, and recorded the oral history interviews. Many of them have contributed to this volume, produced dissertations from their research, and developed as outstanding historians as a result, in part, of their participation in the project. I anticipate that they will shape the scholarship on the civil rights movement in Texas for many years to come.

