

VERITIES

By Daniel Davis Clayton

Rachelle Rouse



I whisper words onto lone leaflets and leave them under my pillow for the truth fairy. Curled up in a place called section eight I can't seem to escape pink thong cardboard correspondences with Leslie and leftover lunch fables. On the corner of MLK and Christian Coalition I compare my conditional street preach with the traditional street reach of unclaimed jurisdiction.

This is the rendition of murdered missions on pre-stretched canvas compositions. I'm an artist with no medium so I express myself with alienation. Who wants to be loved anyway or overexposed? My skin is sodium chloride which chose to react with water so I cry hydrochloric acid instead; and oh how it burns to shed tears. If only I were schizophrenic, then at least there would be an answer for my innate actions amongst my peers. I didn't mean to make the piece rhyme, but it just seems to come out that way like when you can't stop bleeding. Not enough platelets in your veins but you can't stop breathing. And you hope you don't find yourself in a precarious situation which may involve any bodily injury so that you don't reveal your own anemic disposition to others. And I've placed truncates on limbs before so it's nothing new.

Word spew is cool as long as you don't insight a riot. And you can shout off rooftops as long as you stay quiet. It's time for underground gorilla tactics like writing poems in bathroom stalls, B and E into dorm room halls, or scrawling words falling mouth to walls. I began to get a tattoo. A quote from Kahlil Gibran, "He who is seared and cleansed once with his own tears will remain pure forevermore," but that would mean I'd have to walk the streets with my shirt off and my body's not very attractive.

How about I become a serial killer and in my 15 minutes of fame speak the profound words which may change the world? What if I burn down churches in a braille pattern? If I speak words that no one understands should I have even opened my mouth? There are secrets written within these margins. The context clues of jewels like fools gold," he whispered to the wind.

I breathe life into language on lungs unlearned in the way of liquid oxygen extraction. Wombs of often undisclosed considerations consuming the impurities of outside influences. There's nothing like not being heard. There's nothing like purity in thought therefore thermodynamic exchanges are sought like after nine interactions. "Jazz club cool confessions," the wind blew back.

I was perplexed so I shut my mouth and made the best of what time had to offer. There would be no social

insight into a conversation which never truly transpired. That's the beauty of it all, I thought. The wind knew the same. So I proceeded to the local coffee joint for a latte of lamentation and to arbitrarily glance through the local periodical. You know, the one in every city with all the advertisements for paid clinical trials for those who've never had a smoke in their life and drank very little. I turned the page. Ah, there's a write-up on rekindling old relationships and flames. I wonder if I can apply that to microphonical stage exchanges? I wonder if that applies to the deadline I missed? I wonder if that applies to my unread scripts and the gallery pieces still in my basement? I wonder if that applies to my style polluting the mainstream populists perception of precision writing techniques. I take another sip to clear my mind.

You know, java goes great with internet exploration and Ask Jeeves inquiries.

Perhaps I'll start an internet café where nicotine junkies can post their latest creations, no feedback please! Just read and be done. Maybe I can write a virus that places my work on your desktop every time you log into the networked system of established professionals. There's something genuine about force-feeding.

Big brother is watching through cookie connections which track my movements through unused genres. I've got to do something different. Make a mark with a distinct signature of what I've got to say. It's hard to stay sure that someone will seek out your place of sleep and check under your pillow for genius so I won't wait to be found. You've only got one chance at the big time when your margin of error is so next to none.

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Notes from the Woodshed

Paul Klemperer



A local news show announced excitedly that the TV show *American Idol* was auditioning possible contestants right here in Austin. "We'll show you where to go if you want to be a star," the breathless voice-over informed TV viewers. Now that's news!

Life as rockumentary. Sometimes it seems as though that's where we are headed. Maybe not all of us. Maybe if you live out in the hill country, have no television, never glance at the tabloids in the checkout line, and don't give a rat's ass about the lifestyles of the rich and famous, maybe you're immune to celebrity culture. But then you probably spend your evenings reading the latest installment of "Left Behind" by the light of a kerosene lantern, waiting for the mothership to arrive.

For the rest of us there is the steady incursion of mass media, worming its way deeper into the primal recesses of our brains. Don't get me wrong: I love my TV. I often think there should be a clause in Texas Common Law Marriage that allows a television to be your primary relationship. But lately, say the last 10 years, there has been a growing trend that makes me itchy all over: reality shows. We all know them, even if we don't watch them, because the other media help to promote them. I suppose it's the latest sick twist on the Horatio Alger/Great Gatsby mythos that runs so deep in the American psyche. We want to believe that any one of us can rise from humble beginnings to greatness, and similarly that we can reinvent ourselves. Perhaps this mythos is at the heart of pop culture fads. A pliable persona changes identities by slipping into the latest trendy fashion. This kind of goofy plastic Americana has been studied by psychologists since at least the 1950s.

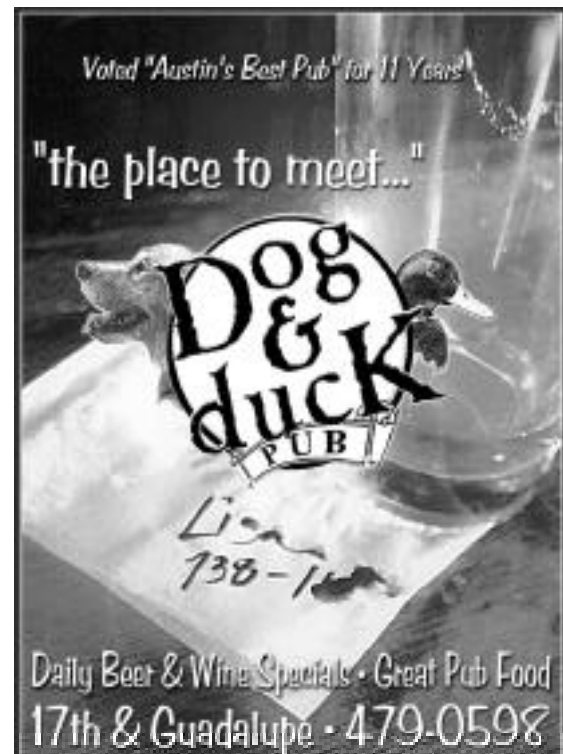
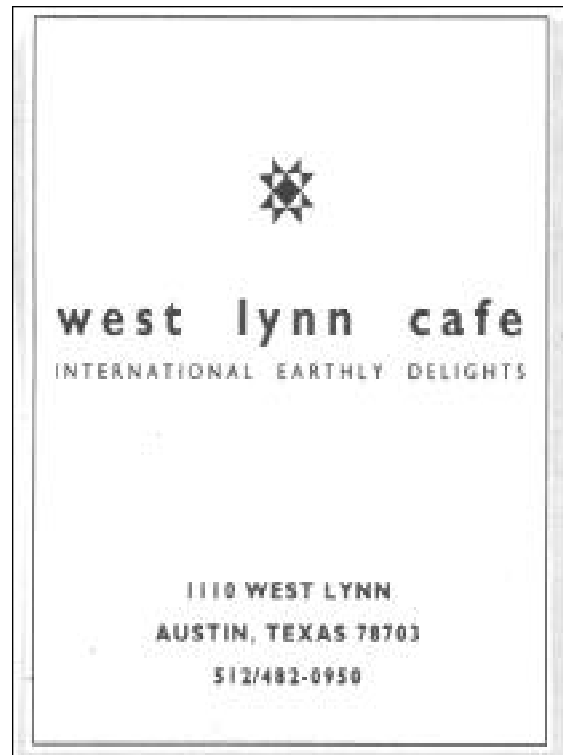
But what has evolved is the media industry's skill at manipulating pop culture. They don't just create a star anymore. They don't just dye a brunette blonde and make her into Marilyn Monroe, or teach an actor to sing and make him a rock star. They don't just coordinate all aspects of marketing, promotion and advertising to create a blitz of commodification so that a celebrity's book, movie, song, CD-ROM, magazine, comic book, figurine, trading cards, and hair product hit the stores simultaneously. Now they have shows about the process of commodification. You can watch hometown innocents compete for the honor of being commodified. Shows like *Making The*

Band and *American Idol* go one better than *Star Search* because they turn the whole embarrassing thing into a rockumentary. And we watch it. The camera goes backstage to interview contestants as they reveal their hopes and fears and, when they don't win, records their anguished tears and bravely quivering chins. And then there is the solitary winner, who is transformed by the wand of corporate power from a nobody into a superstar. Now that's entertainment!

The rockumentary approach extends to other reality shows, like the contemporary dating games. We don't just see the contestants meet each other, then talk about their dates. We go on their dates, via various sneaky cams, watch the contestants do embarrassing things, and then watch as the contestants do "backstage" interviews. They gossip, bicker and sniff like spoiled brats at a high school prom, but through the magic of television their annoying quirks achieve celebrity status.

In the food chain of American culture it seems that the rockumentary approach to life is settling into many niches. The video crew hired to film weddings often act like they're making a motion picture. Local news video crews try to emulate the handheld cam and sudden-cut approach of obnoxious TV crime shows. The most marginal existence becomes transformed into a performance, with possible star power, through a video camera. It might be high camp, like *Wayne's World*, but at some level it is seductively powerful, almost magical, to have the possibility of transforming daily life into a rockumentary.

You're walking down the street and you see someone with a video camera and someone else with a microphone. They are interviewing people. You have no idea what it's for. Local news, a student film project, they may be interviewing people about hemorrhoids. It has nothing to do with your happy, productive life. There's no reason in the world why you should want to be interviewed on camera, to be momentarily transformed from an ordinary person into a rockumentary subject. But in your heart of hearts don't you get a little twinge, a tug towards the limelight? I know I do, and I've got a thing or two to say about hemorrhoids.



SOUNDFILES

music reviews

Oliver Rajamani
Pakiam
Rajamani Productions

Reviewed by Sandra Beckmeier

Oliver Rajamani and his ensemble explore the nomadic folk music influence from many continents on his new recording, *Pakiam*. It is an exquisite recording of mythological tales that sound as though written centuries ago. The songs are written by Rajamani, and told in the native languages of Pakistan and India. Recalling a broad circle of influences, including drumming styles from India, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America, Rajamani gives credit for his style to the music of the Indian Diaspora, which is made up of music familiar to India, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe.

These artists are not exploitative of these musical influences. Easily the songs express more than the summoning of a lover's soul, or the lamenting of love lost, but of love and honor for Mother Earth, and the many faces of divinity. Lyrically and musically, the CD carries a poet's inspiration, given voice by gifted musicians. Oliver Rajamani methodically blends colorful language and chants, along with tonal inventions using only his voice and a drum. The result is an immediate connection, and magnetic mood music.

From the track "Drum":

*Retche mama where are you going
Come hither
I have forgotten love in my heart
In my mind forgotten love
And now I just beat my drum
Oh the rooster is crowing
In the morning the sound is heard
In the evening the sound is heard
It has happened the rooster have crowed.*



Many of the instruments cited are centuries old, hand-made, and frequently remain unrecognizable in Western culture. They are devotional objects to the players who compose on them, and include the sarod, flamenco guitar, tabla, dumbek, deff, cajon, harmonium, djembe, congas, violin, upright bass. The artists speak through them beautifully.

Where is the scene locally for masters of world music? Although we receive the occasional road show of internationally recognized acts, which have drawn large crowds, local acts receive occasional radio airplay, and are subjected to the singular "world" genre in a regional routine dominated by "Texas music." There is support from non-commercial radio, and several venues around town enjoy the awe-inspiring draw of audiences to artists who function outside the routine. I do wonder, however, why audiences have yet to be offered a chance to become familiar with the abundance of talent that live, create and work in Austin, including Oliver Rajamani, Madeleine Sosin, Abel Rocha, Lourdes Perez, and Les Afrodéliques, to name only a few. *Pakiam* tells a truthful story, and is an inspiring musical journey.

D I V E R S I O N S

ART



F8 Fine Art Gallery
1137 W.6th Street
512-480-0242
Tues.-Sat. 10-6PM
Four Visions of the New Year includes paintings by the Czech Expressionist Ondrej Coufal and colorist James D. Pendleton as well as nostalgic argyrotypes by Kathryn Watts-Martinez and luminous nudes by photographer Richard D. Griffin. The exhibit runs through March 13. Visit f8fineart.com.

Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art
23rd and San Jacinto
www.blantonmuseum.org
Visions & Voices is a forum for adults interested in literature and the visual arts. The theme is *Laughing at the Void: Existentialist Comedy in Mid-Century America*. One Thursday a month the group convenes in the Blanton's galleries to discuss a work of fiction and its relation to the works of art in the museum's current exhibition. *V*, a book by Thomas Pynchon, will be discussed on February 6 in conjunction with *Painting Explosion: 1958-1963* on current exhibit. For more information call 471-9880.

DiverseArts Little Gallery
1705 Guadalupe Suite 234
477-9438
info@diversearts.org
Tues.-Fri. 12-6 PM
The Little Gallery presents its *2nd Annual Fresh Black Paint* exhibit. Provocative visions of culture by emerging African-American artists from central Texas. An inspiring way for gallery-goers of all backgrounds to celebrate the African-American heritage being created today. Opening reception Thursday, Feb. 6, 7-9pm. Closes Feb. 28.

13th Street Heritage House
810 E. 13th
236-0644

The work of African-American artists Terence McIntosh and Jerry Thigpen will be presented by the ProArts Collective as part of the *Young Lions* exhibition series. McIntosh and Thigpen's work makes use of a broad range of media to communicate a diverse yet distinctly African-American perspective. *Young Lions* runs from Feb. 12 to Mar. 31.

CALL FOR ENTRIES

IDEA Gallery
701 Tillery
472-3349
Tues.-Sat. 12-5PM.

IDEA, an interdisciplinary arts program in Austin, Texas, is accepting entries for *Surfacing*, a nationally juried exhibition of works that address the notions and issues of gender and transgender. Works in all media welcome. Entry postmark deadline is March 1, 2003. Exhibition dates are April 18 to May 17, 2003. For a prospectus, call 512-389-9955 or write to idea_breadfactory@yahoo.com.

JAZZ

Austin Jazz Workshop
austinjazz@ev1.net
512-899-2262

The Austin Jazz Workshop, a nonprofit corporation dedicated to jazz performance and education in central Texas public schools, announces its ninth season, running now through June 2003. *Bebop, The Pulse of Jazz* is scheduled for eighty campuses in the Austin, Del Valle, and Manor Independent School Districts. For more information contact Michael Melinger in Austin at 899-2262.

MUSIC

Austin Chamber Music Center
Huston-Tillotson College
King Seabrook Chapel, 900 Chicon
Tues. Feb. 11 at 7PM

Faculty artists of the Austin Chamber Music Center and guests will perform African-American Spirituals and the chamber music of African-American composers in the *Collaborations Concert: a Celebration of Black History Month*. This concert is free and open to the public

Cowboys & Indians
The Clay Pit, 1601 Guadalupe
457-9522
www.texasmusic.org
Thurs. Feb. 27 at 8pm.

East meets West with a fusion of tablas and guitars, turbans and boots in Texas Music International's musical program *Cowboys & Indians*. A talented ensemble of performers including Bob Livingston, John Inmon, Oliver Rajamani, dancer Anu Naimpally, and others create a delightfully unpredictable harmony between classical eastern and country western music--extremely relevant at the present! \$10 suggested donation.

CLASSES

Tapestry Dance Company Classes
507 B Pressler St., between 5th and 5th Sts.
474-9846
dance@tapestry.org
www.tapestry.org

Make a fun New Year's resolution to "weave dance into your life." Tapestry Dance Company offers classes in ballet, rhythm, tap, jazz, modern, floor barre, hip-hop, musical theater, West African, and more for children teens and adults. Call to see if you qualify for a discount.

PERFORMANCE

Salute to African American Writers
Design Center of Austin
3601 South Congress
Sat. Feb 22. at 6PM

An evening of wondrous words with the art of performance. Under the theme, *From Pen to Page to Stage: An Evening of Literary and Performing Art*, will feature best-selling authors, a Readers' Theater under the direction of folklorist, Maisha Akbar. The Poetry Café will follow led by the soul-stirring voice of celebrated literary performance artist Sharon Bridgforth. The sounds of up-and-coming Dallas music duo, Common Folk promises to add the melody to the words that have already become a hit for event-goers. Proceeds will benefit WLT youth writing efforts in East Austin. The free gourmet dessert, coffee and tea event is open to the public.

Word/Jazz
Resistencia Bookstore
1801-A S. First
477-9438
info@diversearts.org
Thurs. Feb. 20 at 8pm.

Chicano poet and all-around elder of the community raul salinas will read as part of a special edition of DiverseArts' word/jazz performance series. Harold McMillan and the Lowstars provide improvised musical background to raul and the featured ensemble of poets including Valerie Bridgeman-Davis, Thom the World Poet, Ricardo Acevedo, and Ivanho.

FILM

Austin History Center
LBJ Auditorium the LBJ Library and Museum
2313 Red River
974-7499
www.ahca.net
Sat. Feb. 8 at 8pm

The Blue Bellies are in Austin: Readings from the Travis County Slave Narratives will premiere at the LBJ Auditorium. Produced by the Austin History Center and the Austin History Center Association, *Blue Bellies* tells the story of former slaves emancipated in Travis County. This free event begins with a reception at 3pm, followed by the showing of the film at 3:30.

Do you have a listing for Austin Downtown Arts? Contact us at 1705 Guadalupe Suite 234, Austin, TX, 78701 or mag@diversearts.org by the 15th of the month prior to your event. Bonus points if you provide us with a great photo!



poet on watch

by Erin Steele



It's only a few hours until P.O.W. assumes the stage for her performance in San Antonio, but she doesn't show any signs of nervousness.

It makes sense, really.

After all, here is an artist who exists soberly within the moment, an easy confidence radiating from her eyes, voice and posture. When P.O.W. smiles and says that all she wants as an artist is to tell the truth, it's impossible not to believe her.

"At this point, I'm really more improv, I really focus on making sure that everything is very representational of who I am," P.O.W. said. "The energy comes in the moment, and I just go with it. The performances are my every day script. I don't know how much more prepared I can be just for life. If you live in the truth on a daily basis, then it is kind of improvisational, instead of it being such a plan all the time. Day by day, we never know what kind of challenges we are going to get into."

Expecting the unexpected is perhaps one of P.O.W.'s greatest talents, a woman who isn't content to reside within the labels the media assigns consumers today — especially female consumers. The New York native — who now resides in Austin — considers herself a multimedia artist/media activist, someone who fearlessly tackles different forms of communication through print, TV, radio, and the Internet. She keeps her eye on the media, counteracting its visual absurdities with the beauty of her words.

"I feel as though I'm a poet for the people. And being a poet for the people, that's being a poet on watch. From that came the acronym P.O.W., which has a double meaning," she said. "The poetry is subjective, and good poetry tells stories on so many dif-

ferent levels. You know, you have a surface level and then you have three sub-levels —that's a good poem, one with layers. So that's me being a poet on watch.

"And as a black woman in America, I'm a P.O.W. every day. Cause black women are really dying — women in general, but particularly black women — they're dying from depression, from our images being assassinated on a daily basis through music and videos. By calling myself P.O.W., I took that whole concept of being a prisoner of war in America, and confronting who is warring on women in America. It's kind of an aftermath of our daily wars, domestic wars, wars through our jobs, wars with trying to raise our kids, people trying to tell us that we should have kids or we shouldn't have kids," P.O.W. said.

P.O.W.'s poetry confronts the idea of what it means to be a prisoner in America, enslaved to the images we see in the media and the perception people have of us. Her book, entitled *Poet on Watch* was printed in 1999, and her CD *The Spoken Word Project*, is currently available in local Austin music stores, such as Waterloo, Book Woman, Tower Records and Music Mania.

"I think the most important role as a writer is to tell the truth, to be as truthful on the page as possible, and to live in a state of consciousness," P.O.W. said. "I think the most important thing as a performance

artist is to take that truth that the writer has produced on paper — whether it's your truth or someone else's truth — and project that truth through performance.

"Because sometimes the writer isn't the one taking their story to the public. They can be, if they're getting published, but they're not always being published. So in order to take that story from the page and embody it into my body — to take that story into my body and put it out into the larger community — it's a process. On a daily basis, I ask myself, am I performing or am I just living? So, that's one question that I have for myself always," she said.

She also inspires questions in others, as evidenced by the foreword in *Poet on Watch*, written by her friend and fellow poet Darian Ward. Of P.O.W., Ward writes: "She makes us examine our souls, our daily regiments, own hidden passions and prejudices. Where do we stand, or do we even take a stand on serious issues. Do we play the game like mindless pawns? Or are we the masters of this chess game, called life."

P.O.W. encourages women to not only examine their souls, but also the way that their images are exploited in the media. "Too many women are afraid to ignite change," she said.

"In Texas, there hasn't been a feminist movement since 1976. So, I think that women need to get a grasp on their voice in the media, be it negatively or positively.



"I feel as though I'm a poet for the people. And being a poet for the people, that's being a poet on watch."

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We need to construct the images we see regarding who we are, instead of having it come from the dominant culture," she said. "If you want to say what you are, you have to dig inside, find what the truth is, and divulge the truth on a piece of paper. That's where it starts — once we start analyzing what our true voice is, then we can attack larger problems. But I think we need to start within our own communities, and say 'Okay, what is the truth?'

"More women need to sit in rooms and make change happen. We don't make change by going 'rah, rah, rah, rah' — we make change through underground movements. So writers, poets, musicians, filmmakers, activists, scientists, scholars, they all need to come and get together and figure out what's really happening with us and the media and how we're being projected: how women's images are being projected," P.O.W. said. "I think that we need to make another feminist movement toward empowerment of our images. A lot of us are destroyed through the images that people portray us as on a daily basis."

Though P.O.W. considers herself a feminist, she does not feel that she should be pigeonholed as a feminist artist. She feels that the myth of feminism — that of the man-hating female — must be dispelled.

"Not every feminist is a lesbian and not every lesbian is a feminist, so that myth of what feminism is has to kind of go out the window," she said. "I wouldn't consider myself as a feminist artist, I would just consider myself an artist that focuses on what's important to me. And that's being a woman, young, and intellectual. And to get more particular, that's me being a black woman, feminist, and conscious."

"I'm a feminist because I love myself, and I love the fact that I can put dollars into pockets that can feed other people," P.O.W. said. "Because women are running families now. It used to be a myth that the man was the head of the household, but if you look at the statistic now and what's going on today, more women from single households are raising two or three kids."

But our income hasn't raised to the level where we can support two or three kids by ourselves. It feels good to me to empower women to think about raising their income and cleaning up their images. And a lot of that work we have to do on our own — we can't expect other people to do that work for us."

P.O.W. said that artists should not expect other people to do their work for them, either. She utilizes various mediums in order to promote her work, including print, television, radio and the Internet.

"As an independent artist, you have to hustle every day to get up and say, 'This is what I want to do.' Because no one is going to do it for us," she said. "That's why the Internet is so important. Old school writers are always like, 'The pen and the paper, the pen and paper, I've got to get published, I've got to get published.'"

But P.O.W. advocates other ways to get the word out.

"The publishing is happening in so many different ways these days. You know, publish your thoughts on greeting cards, publish your thoughts on walking t-shirts. It's an amazing thing to see your poem on the back of a person's shirt living and walking. There are so many different ways to publish, without getting stuck on the fact, 'Oh, I've got to publish a book.' Often times, on those pages, our thoughts die."



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The Real Gone with the Wind

Slave narratives
at UT's Center for
American History

by Imani Evans

The gap-toothed grin of the old black man, gaudily decked out in the plumage-covered military chapeau, tells the story. His name is Allen Carthen. Born a slave near Manor, Texas, by the time this picture of him is taken in 1937, he is some twenty-three years removed from what he feels were the best years of his life: the twenty years (1894-1914) that he was the coach-driver for one Col. Edward M. House, a wealthy Texan who made a name for himself as a behind-the-scenes political heavy, first as a member of Gov. Josiah Hogg's staff, later as a key advisor (by some accounts, *the* advisor) to President Woodrow Wilson.

From an ex-slave to a man who ingratiated himself with the Kaiser of Germany; this would turn out not to be the last of the imponderable historical linkages which lay in wait for me during my two weeks' worth of research at UT's Center for American History, located in the center unit of the long, rectangular portion of the LBJ Library known as Sid Richardson Hall. "We are the best-kept secret on campus, given the stature of our collections," says center director Dr. Don Carleton, who has been with the center since 1979, when it was known as the Barker Texas History Center, now a sub-component of the Center for American History. From his PhD thesis on the Red Scare in Houston for which there was no established paper trail and he had to essentially "go out and find these people to collect their papers," to his subsequently being asked to set up an urban history archive in Houston when otherwise "the chances of me getting a job in this were miniscule," Dr. Carleton beams at the thought of the coup he pulled off in becoming the director of one of the most important Southern history collections in the U.S.

I was brought to this inconspicuous locale by my nascent interest in what Dr. Carleton suggestively refers to as "the real *Gone with the Wind*," which I of course took to mean the violence, repression, and rigid social hierarchy which formed

the adamantine foundation of the genteel South. Or in a word: slavery. The Center offers a tantalizing assortment of primary sources for anyone interested in the "peculiar institution," the most fecund of which are its substantial collection of plantation documents (roughly 13 feet of material on the Perry family's "Peach Point" plantation alone), and its collection of Texas slave narratives.

The narratives are oral history interviews of former slaves conducted from 1935 to 1937 as part of the Works Progress Administration's "Federal Writers Project," a federal program that aimed at collecting cultural, historical, geographic, and sociological information on every state in the Union. Interviewers and field researchers were assigned to specific "districts" in given states for the purposes of gathering data in narrative form, which would then be edited and typed up at a state office before finally being sent to a central clearinghouse at Washington, D.C. for further editing and eventual publication.

The fruits of this long labor, as it turns out, are compact enough to sit on a table in the CAH's reading room. I spend a great deal of time with an archive box marked "Works Progress Administration: Slave Stories." Of particular interest are those folders marked "District 9," which refers to Travis County. It is here that the story of Allen Carthen can be found, among others. To thumb through any of these folders is to be struck by the disarmingly simple presentation of what is, at least potentially, explosive, myth-shattering history, the sort which underscores the working mantra of scholars like Dr. Carleton: that a good archive aspires to be more than "a dead storage facility where history goes to die." To put it another way, it is inside the dingy gray archive box that master narratives are forced to contend with those more marginal, and that historical memory becomes the active livewire that it was meant to be.

The ongoing effort by some historians to restore the discordant nature of their discipline to public consciousness was exemplified in the Center exhibition "To Whom Was This Sacrifice Useful?: The Texas Revolution and the Narrative of José Enrique de la Peña," which ran through the middle part of 2000. Peña was a lieutenant colonel in the Mexican Army under General Santa Anna and a participant in many of the important events of the Texas Revolution, including the Siege of the Alamo, which is virtually synonymous with Texas history and forms the key part of our state's origin myth. Peña's controversial narrative, which makes the startling claim that Davy Crockett survived the Alamo siege and was in fact executed on Santa Anna's order was the centerpiece of the exhibit.

"The whole issue about the Alamo is still radioactive," says Carleton, so much that Peña's narrative was examined during a one-day conference entitled, "Eyewitness to the Texas Revolution: José Enrique de la Peña and His Narrative," which took place on the UT campus in April of 2000. Such topics as the manuscript's authenticity (at least two amateur historians have argued that the

manuscript is, in fact, a twentieth-century forgery), to retracing the story of how it wound up in the hands of the University of Texas, to examining the anthropological and social meaning of the Alamo, including the problem which Alamo remembrance--at least at its most chauvinistic extremes--poses for Hispanic Texas, were covered.

I learned that the true scholar must be willing to commit months, even years, of his life to doing research in order to tell a complete history completely. For a dabbler like myself, it seems that the best that can be come up with are suggestive leads, just so many intriguing entry-points connecting to larger information trails that may or may not be there. In spite of the initial thrill that comes with breaching realms of inquiry and understanding that had been closed, at day's end I always come away with a rueful awareness of just how unequal I am to the task of telling the stories of Allen Carthen and others that does justice to their dignity, their strangeness, and their horror.

Even about Allen Carthen I have only been able to learn this much: that he was born on September 9, 1863 near Manor, TX. His master was *John Townsend*, son of *Judge John Townsend*, Sr. His parents were *Gabriel Townsend Carthen* and Lucinda Carthen. He married *Liza Ivory* and together they had one child (that died in infancy) and adopted another. After years of working at what I can only imagine was every job under the sun after Emancipation, he finally lucks into a cushy (for a Negro) job as a coachman for E.M. House, residing at the House residence from about 1894 to 1914, his tenure ending at roughly the time Col. House began his remarkable, if shadowy, career as Woodrow Wilson's confidante. At the time of Carthen's WPA interview he lived at 1160 Leona Street, in Austin.

Why the italicized names? Each one represents a historical lead that either goes nowhere or that I haven't yet had time to sufficiently investigate. It's likely that neither Allen Carthen nor E.M. House

is sufficient unto himself for the telling of the large, encompassing history suggested by these few clues, and that a wider net will have to be cast. So it is with practically everything that my eyes have encountered since these investigations began, not limited to the slave narratives.

A good example would be the "missing" information about the work which took place at the old limestone quarry known simply as the "Old Quarry Site," stones from which were used in the construction of the second state capitol building, which stood from 1853 to 1881 (when it was destroyed by fire). I know quite a bit about this place in the Northwest Hills area, considering I have never seen it in person (there now stands a district park near the old site, and--appropriately enough--the Old Quarry branch of the public library nearby). I have reason to believe that the men who labored at this quarry were slaves, black convicts, free black laborers (which surely would have included some former slaves), or any combination of the three. At this point I'm not sure, only because the information is so scarce, and oral history may be all we have to go on.

Or take the Insurrection Panic of 1860 which gripped the entire state, and produced many a fulminating editorial in Austin's own *Texas State Gazette*, our fair city's contribution to the canon of unabashedly pro-slavery Southern newspapers. The panic was initially caused by a rash of fires throughout the state, widely believed to be the work of black and abolitionist "incendiarists." Coming out of this same research tangent, I am especially bedeviled by a news blurb, mentioned only in passing by another scholar, which appeared in an issue of the *Galveston Weekly News* from that same period. Reportedly sent in by that paper's "Austin correspondent," it gives news of an 11 year-old black girl who confessed to setting fire to at least one building, in retaliation for the lynching of her father in Missouri. The girl's name isn't given, neither is that of her master. Such a story is incen-

diary indeed, which is why I hope to pursue it more fully.

The WPA narratives are not a perfect, indubitable source of history, it should be noted. They have limitations which are characteristic of oral histories in general. Most crucial is the fact that the interview subjects were both very young during the time of slavery and, in almost all instances, very aged at the time of their interviews, a combination which can make for less-than-perfect recollection. There's also the issue of what sociologists call "situated social power": the interviewers were all white, the interviewees black. Moreover, the interviewers almost certainly would have identified themselves as government employees (and conducted themselves accordingly). These factors, combined with the stultifying social climate of the period (with rigid Jim Crowism still being the law of the land), may or may not have affected the openness of the exchanges and the frankness of the ex-slaves' responses.

Were the former slaves intimidated, however unintentionally, by the interviewers? Did they therefore feel the need, however unconsciously, to edit their responses in order to give only the most perfunctory descriptions of slavery life, muting any visceral feelings they may have had toward the institution as they experienced it? Indeed, when strong feelings of any sort are expressed they are often disconcertingly positive, taking the form of "Master was real good to us slaves...he didn't [even] allow no overseer on his place."

But as with everything else, the encomia given by some of the interviewees to their former masters requires a critical detachment on the part of the scholar. First, the ability of the bondsman to feign love for his master serves an adaptive function in slavery (and even a slave with a realistic awareness of slavery's depredations will still have compelling reasons to believe his own master to be above average). Second, the general wretchedness of the slave's condition makes any act of borderline humanity by the slaveholder remarkable and praise-worthy; that a slave's definition of bliss is a life free of beatings, humiliation, starvation and being

wrenched from one's family only gives ironic proof of his completely circumscribed existence. To make an analogy, some prisons are demonstrably cleaner and better run than others; to simply point this out is not to say that one prefers prison over freedom.

Even so, I don't doubt that there could be genuine affection in the relationship between, say, an Allen Carthen and an E.M. House. One can understand how a subterranean ex-slave would feel validated even beatified by the avuncular attention of a dignified (white) man of society. But we mustn't suspend critical judgment here, either. What are we to think of the fact that the imperious Col. House stood a mere 5 feet, yet was still in a position to pat Allen on the head and say to him, "Good boy, Allen, good boy," as Carthen tells us? In the opinion of this writer, we mustn't forget that the easy familiarity between master and servant is regulated by the rationalized, hierarchical nature of their relationship, however much we may not want to deny to Mr. Carthen what he feels was an edifying experience. The condescending pat on the head is also the legitimizing touch of a white man who was, after all, a mover and shaker within his sphere.

This little piece of reporting is my first humble contribution to the surpassingly large effort underway at universities and research institutions around the country: to reclaim from historical oblivion stories which make tangible the sterling, unassailable humanity of a people whose experience was otherwise that of social and cultural annihilation. Our solemn work demands that we part company with those who argue that we should "get over" the past. Never mind the shallow sensibility bespoke by such a suggestion the important point is that to follow it does the enslaver's work by abetting the obliteration of the obliterated. With slavery, we are either collectively engaged in continuous reclamation or continue the silent slaughter of history's victims. There really is no third option.

The Center for American History is located in Sid Richardson Hall at the LBJ Library.

Excerpts from Allen Carthen's slave narrative

His life in slavery

"My name is Albert Allen Carthen, but folks have always called me Allen. I was bawn on September 9, 1863, on de Johnnie Townsend cotton fahm, about two and a half miles east of Manor. De old Townsend fambly Bible had dere names in it, and de names of dere slaves. De Bible got burned up, but I kin still remembah de date and year dat I was bawn.

"Poppa's name was Gabriel Townsend Carthen. De folks always called him Gabe. He was workin' on de Johnnie Townsend cotton plantation, about two and a half miles east of Manor, Travis County, when I was bahn. Johnnie was de son of Jedge John Townsend, Sr.

"Poppa was de jedge's waiter durin' de Civil War. He didn't do no fightin', but jes' waited on de jedge. When de war ended, dey come on home.

"My grandpoppa, Jack, was de carriage-driver on de place. Dat's de only kind of work dat he done. Grandma Dicey was de cook on de place. She had long, straight black hair, high cheekbones, and a light color. I think dat she must have had Injun blood in her.

"Poppa was black lak me, but he had long, straight hair. He done a lot of fahmin' after slavery; den he was a porter on de Texas and Pacific railroad fo' about thutty years. When Poppa died, about seven-teen years ago, he was 'way up in de nineties.

"Mama's name was Lucinda Carthen. She was a housewoman on de Townsend place. She had ten chillun, but she raised only four, and de rest died when dey was babies. One of my brothaw's, Henry, left us about forty years ago, and lived in Indianapolis, Indiana. I don't think dat he is livin'. Me and Jack is da only ones livin', I believe. I heard from Jack not long ago, and he was workin' in a saloon at San

Angelo. Mama died about eighteen years ago, jes' a little while after poppa died.

"I kin remembah how dat old Townsend fahm was laid out. Some of de long turn-rows was about a half a mile long, and it went in a straight path to de nawth. De jedge had two big black greyhounds, and many was de time dat I saw dem dogs chasin' de jackrabbits up dem long rows. Dem dogs run lak lightnin', and dey'd catch dem rabbits, too.

"Grandma Dicey used to do de cookin' on de place, and I used to go to do log-cabin kitchen, dat was set apart f'om de two-story frame house where de mawster lived, and put my hand through a crack in de wall and ask fo' a little bread. Dat outside wall had de holes daubed up wid clay and hog-hair, but I put my hand in dat hole.

**"Br-mammy,
give me some
bread,
I'd beg.**

"I couldn't say de word grandma, so I called her Br-mammy. I was her favorite grandson, 'cause I was around her more den de others. I jest took up wid de old folks, and have always been dat way. Grandma Dicey was good to me and she'd give me some bread. I sure would take my hand out of my pocket, dat was as greasy as a rat-hole, and push it through dat hole in de wall.

"We stayed on de Townsend fahm fo' about three years after de break-up. Den pappam rented a fahm f'om Dave Upright, near Manor. We lived in a log-cabin wid a stick-chimney. De fireplace was so laghe, dat I could crawl in and sit by de hobs fo' awhile. Sometimes my brothaws would put some 'taters in de fire to bake, and dey wouldn't know dat I was near. Then some of de 'taters was baked, I'd grab 'em and eat 'em.

"When I got older, dere was many a day when I picked five and six hunnert pounds of cotton a day, and den I didn't pick all day. Yassah, and I got f'om seben-

ty-five cents to a dollah-fifty a hunnert fo' pickin. I know dat one time I picked cotton up till three days before Christmas. It wasn't even cold at dat time.

On his time with E.M. House

"It was sometimes in de nineties when I was lookin' fo a job. I saw a ad in a Austin paper. I took de street car and went to 1704 West Avenue and ring de door bell. A fine-lookin' lady, kind of heavy-set, came to de door.

"I see where yo' want a carriage driver.'

"'Yes, I do – I want a good driver,' she said, 'I am Mrs. E.M. House.'

"'Well, I think day I kin do it. I used to work fo' Condit and Davis. I was dere porter.'

"'Oh, if yo' worked fo' dem, den dat's de only recommendation dat yo' need. Come to work Monday mawnin'.'

"Dat was on a Friday afternoon. On Monday mawnin', I went to work as de carriage-driver. I drove and made de fire in de sittin'-room.

"I'd drive Mrs. House to the opery-house at night. I'd take her back home about eleben o'clock. Next mawnin' Colonel House would give me a dollah or two. But I never knowed him to go to dat opery-house. He didn't care to go.

"Colonel House was a man dat didn't lak no big fripperies. He was a small man of about five feet. If yo' wanted to see him, he wanted you to come on in and whut yo' had to say, and not tell a lot of funny jokes first. I worked fo' him fo' about twenty years, and not once did he really tell a funny joke, while I was around.

"Some of de friends of Colonel House knowed President Wilson.

"'Dere is a man in Austin day yo' ought to know.'

'Den Colonel House met de president. Dey shook hands, and become friends f'om dat day. Colonel House used to tell me dat he never wanted to hold a public office. He said dat he could do more good out dan he could stopped up in an office. I do know dat when Colonel House name a man fo' governor, or any other office, he generally got him into office.

"Colonel House used to tell me dat I could have been smart, if I'd went to school. I went to school fo' only about three months after slavery. I'll tell yo' de reason dat I stopped goin', de folks of dat day didn't have much interest in education. Later in life, I used to study at night. We didn't have no good lamp, but jes' one of dem iron grease-lamps dat was made in a blacksmith shop. De light was so bad, dat I almost ruined my eyes. I was pretty fair in arithmetic, but I didn't go much fo' spelling.

Later years

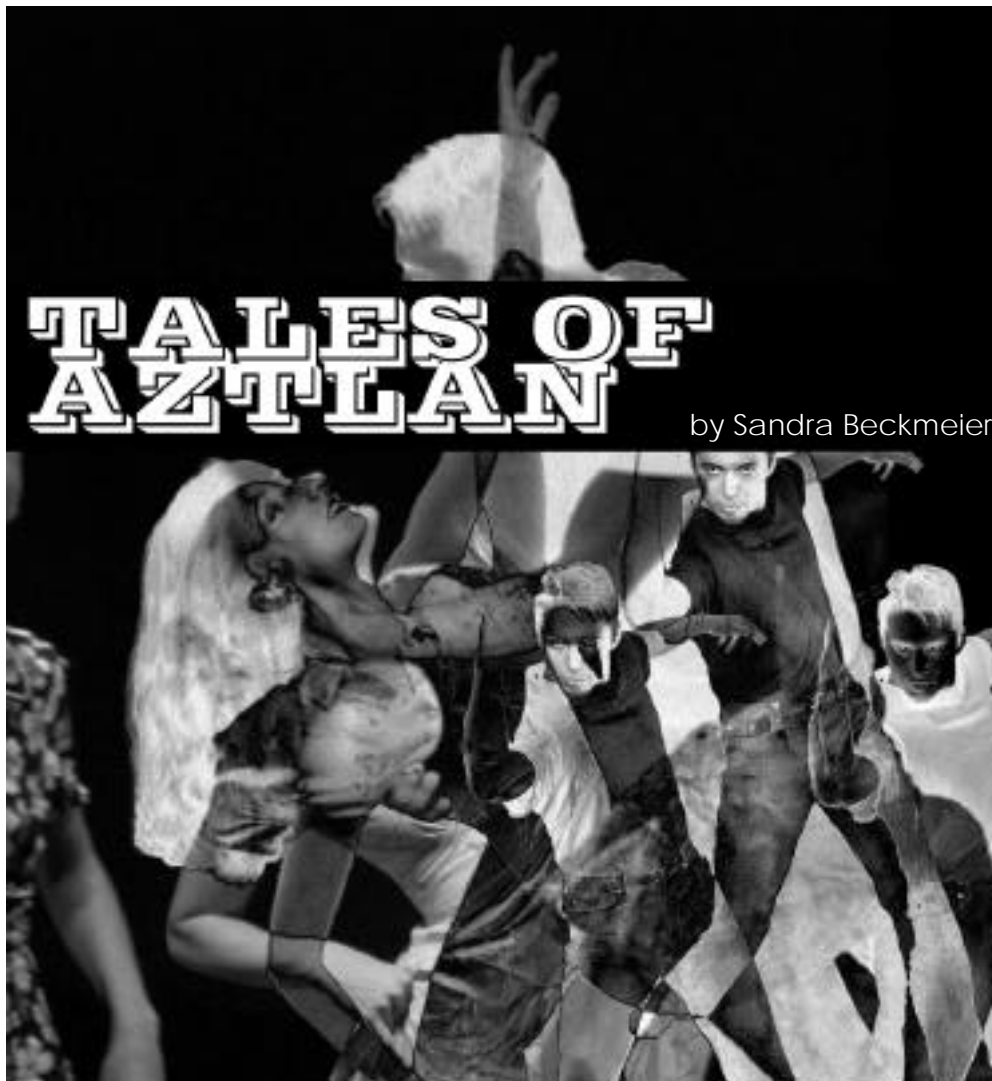
"Dis last summer, I had a light stroke, and I can't do much work. I still owe about six dollars rent here. De pension money of twelb dollahs ain't enough to pay fo' everything. Dis is a three-room house, and we pay ten dollahs a month rent.

"Why, I owed one colored feller only fifty cents, and he come into my house and wanted to take somethin' fo' whut I owned him. He took our Victorola, but de law got it back, 'cause it belonged to my wife.

Works Progress Administration: Slave Stories Center for American History. The University of Texas at Austin.



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Aztlan is the mythical homeland of Native American forefathers. It starts with the extension of land that begins in Alaska, runs down along the Pacific coast of the United States, and then into the valley of Mexico. In recognition of the oppression of their forefathers, Chicanos, as part of their search for identity and awareness as a group, maintain ties to this cultural, psychological, philosophical, and political nation.

Locally, there are few dance companies who claim indigenous influence and inspiration in everyday life, and that have also been existing and touring since 1974. Aztlan Dance Company, inspired by this struggle for identity, creates artistic snapshots of the Latino community. Artistic Director Roen Salinas charges that although there are expectations of dance audiences in Western

culture to simply sit and observe, shamanic cultures make dance an integral part of life. Salinas goes on to explain that dance for him means involving cultures across the spectrum, where people dress in traditional costume and participate in key ways, maintaining a third dimension of the discipline.

"I have had the privilege to be associated with folks who create the indigenous form in the valley of Mexico." Salinas said. "I've been at ceremonial centers where art and life is not separated, so my heart pulls from that tradition." Salinas speaks for the entire company when he maintains that they are careful in how they collectively define their work, which encompasses everything from Folklorico de Flamenco, to Latin Jazz.

"I have been asking myself what would I label it. I ask my dancers, and my dancers are tremendous people. I think the latest incarnation of what we describe our work as is Contemporary Expressive Latino Dance Forms. Contemporary, in that we kind of embody the dance forms that you typically see; expressive, in that we hope to be able to pull that expression of culture; Latino, because that is the context of the work. Put it all together and it is quite involved. Its vocabulary and the vernacular used in each project is extreme. Each one of our projects is terribly unique."

The company uses a non-traditional approach that shatters every model that exists for dance. Aztlan doesn't audition, maintaining the importance of accessibility for artists with the raw passion to tell a story. "It shouldn't have to be exact," Salinas explains. "I don't think audiences are really into how exact things are; it has its wow effect, but what people really go to see dance for in my opinion, is to absorb what the artisan is trying to share, and for me that is the magic in the work that we do. It is more about making the connection, creating that wonderful panorama of diverse movement, from the sharpness of a powerful trained dancer to the novice that still has a little bit of quirk. You develop that quirk, and that is the

expression of the individual that can blossom in and of itself. All of these dancers are youngsters and their ages range from 15 to 33. The beauty of it is they don't view themselves as dancers. They are such modest people. Each one of them is unique. In contrast to the classical ballet and other dance forms that distance themselves, ours are meant to connect with the audiences that are there to appreciate it."

The Santa Cruz Center for Culture in East Austin sits inside a small building that reminded me the first time I saw the space of a gathering lodge. The easily accessible building faces East Sixth Street, with a fenced-in communal area. During the 1993 increase of artists and producers in Austin's arts community there became a shortage of space. The large venues became difficult to book, which prompted the company to find their own space, as booking two or three years in advance wasn't conceivable for the company. The Santa Cruz Center was revived when the company moved in and created a dance studio.

"We used to perform at the Paramount and Bass Concert Hall, and all of a sudden these spaces were unavailable. We decided, 'why do we need to look downtown?' We chose to look in our own community, reinvest the dollars into our own space, and build one that can be used as a studio and convert into theater space," Salinas explained. "We're very privileged to be able to share it with other companies, who use the space and walk out of it saying, 'you know this place has a little bit of magic in it.' I think it's just the spirit of the community that uses it and works in it."

The company has toured the world, receiving awards and critical acclaim. Salinas maintains his appreciation for Central Texas, as much for the audiences as for the aspiring artists. The company offers dance classes to the general public in folklorico, Latin, tango, and indigenous forms, and hopes to expand its roster. Aztlan hopes to continue touring as part of the Mid-America Arts Alliance, and The

Heartland Touring Fund.

"Austin is a very unique city, and it thrives with different art forms," Salinas said. "Traveling into other communities, seeing so many different expressions from different cultures, everything is different. We're right on the fence as it relates to having a real regional impact. There are a couple of national programs that are looking at us to tell these stories on a much larger scale. I also have to approach things very cautiously. I don't want the company to lose its character or its format in how we develop work. I like the open-ended approach that we have and the natural ability to infuse the flavor of the participants."

In November, the company produced a vintage collection, *Reflexiones '02*. This contemporary piece is presented in segments, reflecting the immediate past. *Xicano Blues*, set during World War II, tells the story of the pains of the war, and the difficulty for soldiers who fell into the draft, forced to leave their loved ones, juxta-

posed with their loss of identity in America when returning from battle, inviting the legendary Zoot Suitors.

"There is a very true cultural spirit that drives us all and I know in the end Austin is an arts capital not just because there is a proliferation of art, but because there is an artistic spirit," Salinas offered. "I always tell folks we go through this time and we are here today and folks walk our way. There is no doubt that time tells the truth, we are all in it together and we all define it together."

In February, Aztlan Dance Company will present its winter production of *JALISCO Now & Then*, a romantic life story. Feb. 14 Special Valentine's Gala Night (dinner & show). Telling folk stories through dance, utilizing Folklorico, modern and expressive dance movement, Aztlan recreates a romantic love story set in Jalisco of yesterday. \$12 Adults/\$10 students & seniors/\$6 children. Tickets at the door and through AUSTIX 512-454-8497. For Gala Night information contact 512-478-971.



"There is a very true cultural spirit that drives us all..."

Changos

Cesar Diaz

We cling like *changos*
from a half-broken branch
on late October afternoons,
stiff with the boredom
of our short attention span.
brisk, salty breeze soothing
the back of our knees,
our heads dizzy with the shades
of blue, orange, purple
from a deep dusk sky

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outstretched limbs.
catch me if you can!
when you do,
you smile, give me a
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You, my monkey friend

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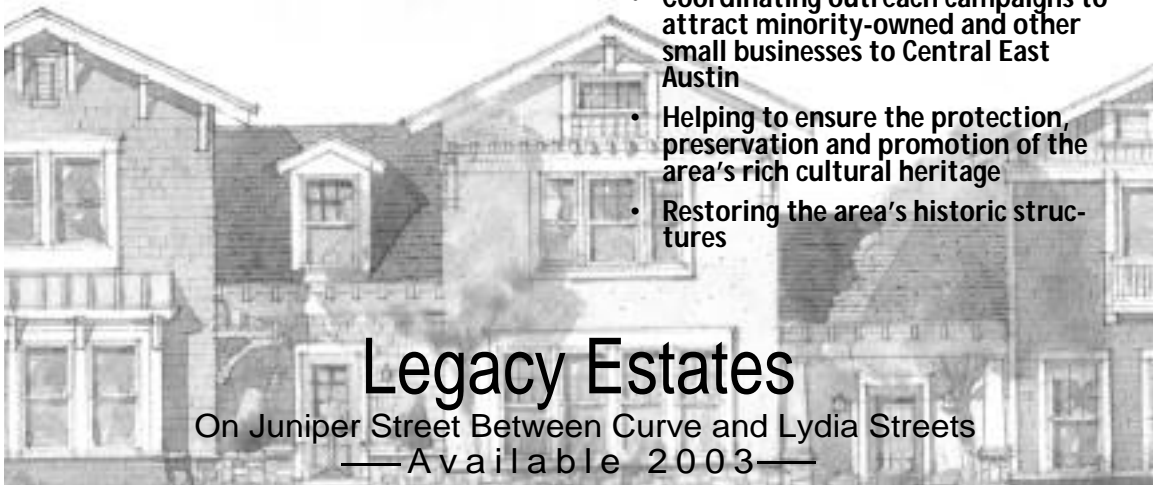
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