March 6, 2013, HOUSTON - The Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs at Texas Southern University (TSU) is spearheading the Invisible Houston Revisited Three Decades Later: The Black Experience in Boom and Bust Policy Summit and Book Project. The initiative follows up Invisible Houston: The Black Experience in Boom and Bust (Texas A&M University Press 1987), a groundbreaking book written by Robert D. Bullard, who now serves as Dean of the BJML School of Public Affairs, that critically examined Houston’s African American population through the 1980s. Scholars will examine Black-White inequality trends in Houston over the past two decades. The day-long conference will take place on November 7, 2013 in Houston on the campus of Texas Southern University. MORE

CALL FOR COMMISSIONED PAPERS

Houston was described as "Boomtown USA" and the "Golden Buckle of the Sunbelt" in the 1970s, growing through tremendous in-migration of people and frequent annexation of outlying areas, and always boasting from city hall and the Houston Chamber of Commerce of its low-cost no-zoning, pro-business methods of operation. But in the shadow of the high-rise “petropolis” was another city, ignored by and invisible to Houston municipal boosters and the national media. Black Houston, the largest black community in the South, remained largely untouched by the benefits of the boom but bore many of the burdens. The economic downturn and oil bust era of the 1980s hit Black Houston especially hard.

In 1987, Texas Southern University sociologist Robert D. Bullard documented lingering social inequality in Houston in his groundbreaking book, Invisible Houston: The Black Experience in Boom and Bust (Texas A&M University Press), where he explored the major demographic, social, economic, and political factors that helped make Houston the “golden buckle” of the Sunbelt. He also chronicled the rise of Houston’s black neighborhoods, the first of these being the settlement of emancipated slaves in Freedmen’s Town, an area which later became the Fourth Ward. Invisible Houston tracked the expansion of the city’s mostly African American neighborhoods in the 1950s, 1960s and during boom era of the 1970s and the dwindling economy and diminished government commitment to affirmative action in the 1980s.

Using case studies drawn from interviews, household surveys, archival records, and census data, Invisible Houston presented data on and discussed a wide range of social indicators of well-being such as health, education, employment, business and economic development, wealth creation, housing and home ownership, environmental quality, law enforcement, leadership, while relating these issues to the larger ones of institutional racism, poverty, and politics. The book reported on the 1979 Bean v Southwestern Waste Management Corp. case, the first lawsuit to use civil rights law to challenge environmental discrimination, and the Houston solid waste study, one of the nation’s first environmental racism case studies. Invisible Houston is both a rich cultural history of the South’s largest black community and a sociological study of inequality. The book also offered strategies for black Houston to become visible to itself, to the larger Houston community, and to the nation.

This is a call for proposals for the writing of fifteen commissioned thematic papers on various aspects of Black Houston. Topics of interest include (proposal ideas that extend beyond these thematic areas will also be considered):

- Economic development and Black businesses, access and participation in the green economy, green jobs
- Housing (affordable housing, public housing, home foreclosures, predatory lending, redlining, displacement, gentrification, residential segregation)
- Transportation (regional transportation, public transit, METRO)
- Employment, unemployment, underemployment, livable wage, spatial mismatch, job sprawl
- Environment and environmental justice (air quality, water quality, solid waste, brownfields, etc.)
- Income, wealth creation, and poverty
Houston Then and Now

Houston is the fourth-largest city in the United States, and the largest city in the state of Texas. In 2010, the city had a population of 2,090,545 people of which 23.7 percent were African Americans. With 514,217 African Americans in 2010, Houston’s black population was the largest of any city in the South and ranked fifth in size of all U.S. cities—behind New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit.

Houston is a global city with a broad industrial base in energy, manufacturing, aeronautics and transportation. It has the world’s largest medical center, Texas Medical Center, and the Port of Houston Authority which ranks first in the United States in international waterborne tonnage handled.

Houston is a different city today than it was thirty years ago. The city’s demographics and neighborhoods have undergone dramatic change. Nowhere is this change more striking than in Houston historic Freedmen’s Town—Fourth Ward, a neighborhood settled by newly freed slaves and their families. Today, time is running out on the last full block of ten row houses in Freedmen’s Town. The neighborhood is quickly being converted to lofts and condos.

Over the past several decades, Black Enterprise has consistently tagged Houston as one of its “Top 10 Cities for African Americans,” coming in first in 2001, fifth in 2004 and fourth in 2007 (the last year ranking compiled), just behind Washington, DC, Atlanta, and Raleigh. Houston largely escaped the Great Recession of 2010. In 2011, Forbes declared Houston as a boom town again. The city chalked up an impressive list of number one ratings and rankings on economic development in 2012, including cities where a paycheck stretches the farthest (Forbes), cities with fastest growing wages in the U.S. (Business Insiders), top U.S. manufacturing cities (Houston Business Journal), top destination city (U-Haul International), and the fastest growing millionaires city in the U.S. (Forbes).

In 2010, several divisions within Texas Southern University (TSU), including the Earl Carl Institute of Social Policy at the Thurgood Marshall School of Law, the Mickey Leland Center at the Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs along with the Houston NAACP and the Houston Area Urban League held a roundtable and produced The State of Black Houston Now report, that provides a “snapshot” of aggregate demographic trends in the Houston African American Community. The report and accompanying conference highlighted a number of challenges that face Houston’s African American community.

A recent Manhattan Institute for Policy Research report found racial segregation in the U.S. has declined over the past century. Of the top 10 metropolitan areas, Houston and Dallas were the least segregated in 2010. However, a 2012 Pew Research Center study found residential segregation by income increased over the past three decades in the nation’s 27 largest metropolitan areas, with the greatest increase
occurring in Houston. These increases are linked to long-term rise in income inequality and the shrinkage in the share of predominately middle-class neighborhoods. For example, 37 percent of the lower-income households in the Houston metropolitan area are situated in a majority lower—income census tract, compared with 26 percent of the households in the Atlanta area. Only New York and Philadelphia metro areas have a larger share of it poor households concentrated in low-income census tracts.

The Houston metro area led the nation in its share of upper-income households residing in majority upper-income census tract at 24 percent. Overall, the Houston metro area Residential Income Segregation Index (RISI) of 61 topped the nation’s ten largest metro areas, compares with a score of 60 in Dallas, 57 in New York, and 51 in Philadelphia. The RISI for a metropolitan region is computed by adding the share of low-income residents of that area who live in a majority low-income census tract to the share of upper-income residents who live in a majority upper-income census tract. Houston also experienced the greatest residential income inequality over the past three decades, with a RISI of 31 in 1980 and 61 in 2010, a 29 point change.

Process and Timeline (Call for Papers Extended)

If you are interested in preparing a paper you will need to submit a 500-word proposal abstract sent electronically by May 15, 2013. Abstracts will need to include paper title, name of the author(s), affiliation(s), brief description, and an email address and telephone number for correspondence purposes. The papers should be 6,000-8,000 words in length, in English, and aimed at a general audience by summarizing current evidence and then producing best practice strategic recommendations. Draft papers are due by September 15, 2013. Final papers are due December 31, 2013. Authors will also need to submit a short biography (200 words maximum) and digital photo.

Authors will receive an honorarium of $1,000 per paper. The honorarium is intended to cover reasonable transportation expenses. Authors are expected to attend and participate in the full duration of the Summit. If more than one author attends the Summit, the honorarium or travel reimbursement will be divided equally between the attending authors. The final copy of the paper will be published as part of a book to be produced in 2014. Authors are expected to produce a draft version of the thematic paper, followed by a final version that acceptably meets quality requirements following draft review of comments. We will also seek authors’ input in revising the proposed book.

Submit all documents via e-mail to:

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POLICY SUMMIT

Invisible Houston Revisited—Three Decades Later Policy Summit

The Barbara Jordan-Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs will host the Invisible Houston Revisited, Three Decades Later Policy Summit on the campus of Texas Southern University on November 7, 2013. The one–day Summit is an interdisciplinary forum for scholars, researchers, practitioners, planners, educators, policy analysts, health professionals, elected officials, faith leaders and others from a wide array of professional fields who share an interest in social equity and policy actions needed to address this problem of social inequality in a holistic cross-disciplinary way.
Authors of the commissioned papers will be invited to attend and present at the Summit. The Summit seeks to shed light on a number of questions. What is the state of Black Houston today? To what extent has Black Houston closed the economic and well-being gap with its white counterpart over the past three decades? Now that Houston has regained its boom town status, the question remains, is Black Houston booming? Are Black Houstonians reaping comparable benefits from the city’s economic growth? Are there structural impediments that block opportunity? What policy changes are needed to address current and emerging challenges facing Black Houston?

The Summit extends and synthesizes relevant social science research and develops public policy solutions to many of the challenges facing Black Houston—some of which have stubbornly persisted for decades. It employs a multidisciplinary frame that cuts across various fields and perspectives through which participants can address the fundamental issues of social inequality.

BOOK PROJECT

The BJML School of Public Affairs welcomes submissions of chapter-length papers, as well as work-in-progress for the Invisible Houston Revisited Three Decades Later Book Project. Accepted papers will be published as a book in 2014.

Suggested Chapter Outline: We encourage authors to organize their chapters using the following outline: (1) Introduction; (2) Problem, General Thesis and Questions Posed; (3) Discussion, Facts, Trends, and Findings; (4) Challenges and Opportunities; (5) Policy Recommendations; (6) Conclusions, and (7) References.

Length: Full papers must be approximately 6,000-8,000 words (inclusive of all figures, references and appendices).

Style: The preferred style is The Chicago Manual of Style. Use the Author-Date citation documentation system. Also use Times New Roman 12-point font in MS Word format, double space. Notes should be grouped together as Endnotes at the end of the paper.

Full Papers Due: December 31, 2013