CHAPTER 1

Beaumont, Texas, 1955

Booker Fayson lived in "the Pear Orchard," a "colored" section of Beaumont, while Mayor Elmo Beard resided in South Park, an area reserved for white people. Likewise for Judge Lamar Cecil and all the others, white and black, involved in the Tyrrell Park golf course lawsuit: They lived in single-race neighborhoods. The separation of blacks and whites into different neighborhoods was one manifestation of the Jim Crow caste system that prevailed in Beaumont in 1955. At that time the city had a population of 110,000 persons, 78,000 white and 32,000 black. The two races lived in the same town, but their perceptions of the place were markedly different. In the eyes of Mayor Beard and other white city officials, Beaumont was a good town, prosperous and growing, with plenty of opportunity for everyone. But Booker Fayson and his black friends saw another Beaumont: a typical southern town where African Americans of all economic and social classes suffered the discriminations and restrictions of the caste system.[1]

Mayor Beard and other civic leaders were proud of their town. Beaumont was "the keystone of prosperous Southeast Texas" and the "hub of the Sabine-Neches industrial district," boasted Chamber of Commerce publications. Indeed, Beaumont was a bustling industrial town. The seat of Jefferson County, largest city in the area, and thriving seaport, Beaumont benefited greatly from the continuing development of area refineries and chemical plants. At the southeastern city limits was Magnolia Petroleum Company, a gigantic refinery with tank farms, loading docks, and more than two thousand employees. Nearby at Nederland, Port Neches, and Port Arthur were other huge facilities—the plants of Atlantic Refining, Gulf Refining, Sun Oil, Pure Oil, Stanolind Oil, and Texas Company—where thousands of workers processed and transported vast quantities of petroleum. Taken together, plants in the Beaumont area refined more than 800,000 barrels per day, 10 percent of the nation's needs. Chamber advertising touted the benefits of the local petroleum industry: "Beaumont: Where Oil Flows and Industry Grows."[2]

Mayor Beard had strong connections to local business and industry. He was president of Tyrrell Hardware, a company that sold paint and supplies to Magnolia Petroleum and other local plants; he also was a director of Norvell-Wilder, another industrial supply company. An able and veteran politician, he had served several terms on city council before winning the mayor's office. By way of business and politics, he was a proven member of the Beaumont establishment, an all-white group of business and industry men who exercised strong leadership in local affairs during the 1950s. Often these men worked their leadership through the Beaumont Chamber of Commerce, an all-white organization dedicated to promoting tourism and advancing the interests of business and industry.[3]

Chamber leaders bragged about Beaumont's natural environment. It was a thoroughly southern town with surroundings much akin to the nearby bayou country of Louisiana. Situated on the banks of the wide, slow-moving Neches River, forty miles above the Gulf of Mexico, Beaumont was noted for mild temperatures, abundant rain, and a profuse assortment of towering trees, tangled vegetation, and lush grasses. Some visitors raved about the beautiful Saint Augustine lawns, brilliant azalea bushes, and magnificent oaks and pines; others complained about the heat, humidity, and mosquitoes. The countryside to the north and east was thickly wooded, harboring bogs and swamps, but the land to the south and west was open and fertile, well suited for cattle ranching and rice farming. Bayous, lakes, marshes, and the nearby Gulf abounded with fish and wild game, especially migratory ducks and geese. Beaumont, as the chamber said, was a paradise for hunters and fishermen.[4]

At chamber meetings, Beard associated regularly with an all-white group of establishment leaders: Roy Nelson, president, Gulf States Utilities; Donelson Caffery, district manager, Sun Oil; Frank Betts, president, American National Bank; John Newton, plant manager, Magnolia Petroleum; and E. C. Rechtin, general manager, Bethlehem Steel. Beard also worked with Howard Hicks, the chamber general manager who helped orchestrate civic and political affairs behind the scenes. Other key civic leaders were John Gray, executive vice president, First National Bank; Robert Akers, editor, *Beaumont Enterprise* newspaper; and Tanner T. Hunt, editor, *Beaumont Journal* newspaper. First National, the largest bank, and the two newspapers were intimately connected: The bank controlled the Mapes Trust that owned and published both newspapers. Working together, the bank and the two newspapers exerted great influence on local business and politics.[5]

Other whites wielded power in Beaumont because of their public offices. Judge James A. Kirkland presided over Jefferson County Commissioners Court, while Sheriff C. H. "Charley" Meyer and Constable Reagan Baker had responsibility for county-wide law enforcement. State judges included Lewis B. Hightower III, William S. Nichols, Harold B. Clayton, and Melvin M. Combs. At city hall day-to-day operations were directed by Mrs. Willie Brockman, the only female city manager in the state of Texas, while policy decisions were made by Mayor Beard and the four council members: Paul Anger, Jimmie Cokinos, Harry Mason, and J. R. Venza. Venza and Cokinos were political veterans, each having the experience of several terms on the council. Cokinos, an energetic and outspoken council member, would soon win the mayor's office and serve multiple terms.[6]

Mayor Beard and the other establishment men were solid business people; they labored to build their companies, improve their profits, and earn money for themselves. But they also assumed the mantle of city fathers, working to create jobs, keep taxes low, promote tourism, and build churches, hospitals, and schools. Charged with a spirit of boosterism, they longed for the day when Beaumont would become "Big B," in the same way that Dallas was known as "Big D." Often they touted Beaumont's assets: mild climate, strategic location, good transportation, abundant fresh water and natural gas, low electric rates, ample labor, and "excellent living conditions." Sometimes they bragged about "good race relations," but on this issue Beard and the others seemed blinded by racial ideas and practices inherited from earlier generations.[7] Like most other southern leaders, they could not imagine the real aspirations of their black fellow citizens.

The city fathers could recount a broad outline of local history, at least from the perspective of white citizens. Organized in 1838, Beaumont was a budding railroad and sawmill town at the time of the Civil War, a conflict in which most local white people sided with the South and suffered the consequences of defeat and Reconstruction. After the war, the town recovered slowly, but by the end of the nineteenth century it had developed into a prosperous lumber town with 9,500 people. With the 1901 discovery of the phenomenal Spindletop oil field, Beaumont was transformed. First it became a boomtown, then a refinery town, and finally an industrial city. A "second Spindletop" discovery at Beaumont in 1925 and two world wars pushed the expansion of local refineries, shipyards, and railroads, as well as related industrial companies. Thousands of jobs were created and the population increased dramatically, rising from 20,640 in 1920 to 94,041 in 1950. This was a dynamic and positive history, of which white leaders were justly proud. But they were largely ignorant of the history of the local African American population, a group that made up almost 30 percent of their town.[8]

Black history was different and often disheartening; it derived from the dark story of human slavery. On the eve of the Civil War, Beaumont was a slaveholding town. Black slaves, which then made up 18 percent of the town's population, were owned by white citizens and employed by them in a variety of occupations: farming, ranching, sawmilling, railroad construction, and domestic service. Slaves were advertised for sale in the local newspaper. They were subject to flogging by the town constable for violations of slave codes, ordinances that restricted their movement and activities. With the defeat of the Confederacy, black Beaumonters gained their freedom and commenced a long and still unfinished struggle to gain their share of the American dream. During Reconstruction they voted, held minor public offices, and made some progress in terms of jobs and economics. But during the 1890s and early decades of the next century, local blacks suffered the same fate

as African Americans throughout the South. They were turned back, their progress thwarted by white citizens who created the Jim Crow laws and practices that relegated African Americans to the bottom rungs of society. Blacks lost the right to vote, were denied public office, and were subjected to discrimination and segregation in virtually every aspect of life.[9]

Based on twin theories of white supremacy and black subordination, the Jim Crow laws and customs evolved over time into a complex and pervasive caste system. Historians have documented the development of this caste system in the various southern states. In the Lone Star State the all-white legislature passed a law in 1891 requiring racial segregation in railroad cars and then extended the practice to railroad stations with laws ratified during the 1909–11 legislative session. From these beginnings in public transportation, the segregation codes and practices spread to towns and cities throughout Texas. The state legislature broadened and strengthened the system in 1927, passing a law that authorized municipalities to promulgate ordinances formalizing segregation in housing and other venues. Ultimately the laws and customs of the caste system separated the races in most private and public places, including hotels, restaurants, theaters, schools, parks, libraries, and courthouses, even restrooms and drinking fountains. White Beaumonters adopted their own version of the caste system. In 1904 the all-white city council passed an ordinance requiring segregation on streetcars, a segregation that was extended in subsequent years throughout all parts of the community. By the early 1950s the Jim Crow caste system was a basic fact of life for all Beaumonters, white and black.[10]

In Beaumont and other southern cities, the caste system included an etiquette of race, a collection of customs and rituals that dictated behavior for all citizens, black and white, and of every social and economic class. In part the etiquette derived from age-old relationships that developed in Europe and arose from economic and social classes, as between medieval lords and peasants, or between aristocrats and servants; an example is portrayed in *Upstairs, Downstairs,* a British television series in which white Victorian aristocrats ruled over white servants. But in a larger part, the southern etiquette derived from racism, a belief common among Caucasian Americans that the black race was not equal to

the white. Handed down through many generations, the caste system and its race etiquette were common features of everyday life, so rooted in tradition that they were taken for granted by whites and rarely challenged publicly by blacks. Most whites and blacks followed the race etiquette with great care and usually with southern civility, being courteous to one another and avoiding sharp confrontations or harsh words.[11]

Generally blacks were deferential and respectful to whites—nodding and smiling, averting eyes, saying "sir" and "ma'am"—not presumptuous or insolent. Black men yielded right-of-way to whites, stepping off the sidewalk, holding open the door, and doffing the hat. Black women working in white households entered by the back door, used the most out-of-the-way toilet, and seldom drank or ate from the better glasses or dishes. At the same time, white men and women played their parts in the southern etiquette of race. Assuming their superiority, they lorded over blacks, mostly calling them by their first names, often declining to shake their hands, and in a thousand other ways reminding them of their inferior position. Many whites, however, treated blacks with kindness and consideration, and some shared genuine friendships with them. Frequently whites extended a helping hand to blacks, by lending money, helping someone find a job, or arranging medical care, but often these gestures were tinged with paternalism, where care was linked with control.[12]

Americans born after 1960 may wonder how earlier generations, both white and black, could have tolerated the southern caste system that so grossly violated the democratic ideals and principles of the United States. The French historian Marguerite Yourcenar recounted the story of Louise of Lorraine, a sixteenth-century queen who was famous for her piety and her works of mercy and charity. In the company of her husband, Henri III, the young queen attended the execution of the traitor Salcève, where the man was chained hand and foot to four stallions and ripped asunder. Louise watched the horrific scene calmly, apparently finding it reasonable and natural, so utterly does custom govern our sentiment, Yourcenar remarked.[13]

In Beaumont the southern caste system created "two towns," one white and one black. The "white town" was the main town, the one advertised by the Chamber of Commerce, the one controlled

by Mayor Beard and the local establishment. Here whites held most of the economic power. They owned almost all the land, buildings, shops, stores, and factories. They had most of the political power, controlling entirely the city, school, and county governments, occupying all the elected offices, and holding all the better jobs. They had almost all the judicial power, having most of the lawyers and all the judges. Blacks on the other hand had little power—economic, political, or judicial. They had little wealth, no elected officials, few lawyers, and no judges. Black citizens worked, shopped, and traveled in the "white town," but they paid strict attention to the caste system, being careful not to cross the invisible line that zigzagged throughout society. Booker Fayson and his friends refrained from entering the front doors of hotels and cafes; they shopped in department stores but avoided the "whites only" lunch counters; and they sought out the restrooms and drinking fountains marked "colored." For the most part, they adhered to the racial etiquette, deferring and giving way to white persons.[14]

The black town, really a handful of "colored" districts, was a dim shadow of the main town, but it was owned and run by black citizens. In these residential and business districts, African Americans lived freely, with little or no interference from whites. Black citizens owned real estate, operated stores, practiced professions, and managed churches, clubs, and fraternal groups. Booker Fayson and his wife Johnnie lived and worked in the Pear Orchard. They owned a home on Harriot Street and an office building on Washington Boulevard, where they operated an insurance agency and rented office space to others. White citizens, including Mayor Beard and other establishment members, were free to enter the residential and business districts of the black town; there was no color line restricting their movements in the black community. Often whites drove along the main streets of the "colored" sections, but they rarely stopped. Generally whites did not visit in black homes or shop in black stores.[15]

The two towns, white and black, sometimes exclusive and other times overlapping, presented an agonizing dilemma for African Americans in Beaumont and towns across the nation. "One world or two?" pondered historian John Hope Franklin, an African American himself. The African American "was compelled to live

in a world apart from the dominant in the community," Franklin wrote, "and therefore developed institutions of his own in order to preserve his identity and individuality. At the same time . . . he participated to some limited extent in the affairs of the larger community. . . . The two processes went on simultaneously and imposed on the Negro a most difficult task: that of trying to live in two worlds at the same time."[16]

During the 1950s the Chamber of Commerce map depicted the city as a half circle spreading west from its historical core near the river. As there were no superhighways or shopping malls, Beaumont, the "white town," thrived in the central business district, along century-old streets: Main, Pearl, and Orleans running north and south; Forsythe, Fannin, Bowie, and Crockett going east and west. U.S. Highway 90, the main route from California to Florida, went right through the town center, following along College and Main Streets before crossing the river. The skyline was marked by the twenty-two-story Edson Hotel (for a while the tallest hotel west of the Mississippi), the San Jacinto office tower, with its stately clock visible for miles around, and the Jefferson County Courthouse, a soaring structure where jail inmates peered out on the surrounding countryside. Other notable buildings included Hotel Beaumont, the Goodhue Building, the LaSalle Hotel, the Crosby Hotel, and American National Bank, as well as city hall, the Tyrrell Public Library, and the federal building. The central business district was vibrant day and night. Stores, restaurants, and movie theaters lined the downtown blocks. Shoppers and office workers thronged the sidewalks. Autos trailed slowly along the crowded streets.[17]

White men of the Beaumont establishment controlled the central business district; they ran the businesses and presided over governmental councils. They enforced the segregation practices inherited from earlier generations, practices that greatly restricted the lives of Booker Fayson, his golfing friends, and their local attorneys. The Graham brothers, Will and Fletcher, owned and operated the fashionable White House department store; they welcomed African American shoppers, people such as Thomas and Bobbie Gene Parker, but refused them access to the popular luncheon counter and the chilled-water drinking fountains. American National Bank president Frank Betts gladly accepted

deposits from black customers, perhaps Joe and Elizabeth Griffin, but sent them to a "colored" restroom in the basement if they needed to relieve themselves. Bob Akers, editor of the *Enterprise,* happily collected subscription and advertising monies from black citizens, such as Johnnie and Ruth Ware, but would not publish their wedding photographs or obituaries in the newspaper.[18]

Downtown retailers included the Rexall and Sommers drugstores, as well as variety stores such as Kress, Woolworth's, and Neisner's. In all these establishments white managers and employees enforced a version of the "color line." African Americans were invited to shop and spend their money but not permitted to enjoy soda fountains or restrooms. But there were exceptions and variations in racial practices, in some instances class related, where white business people afforded equal or even preferential treatment to wealthy black patrons. The Fashion, an upscale women's clothing store owned by the Weiss brothers and managed by Henry C. Brooks, catered to the wives and daughters of the white Beaumont establishment, but the store also gave attentive and friendly service to Bessie Knighton, the affluent African American owner of Knighton Funeral Home. Another example of white businesses catering to certain black customers was seen at Ener & White Tire Store, where the white salesman Billy King gave preferential treatment to Ocie Jackson, the oil-rich African American rancher who habitually drove a late model Cadillac. Making an exception to discriminatory customs of the caste system, salesman King always treated the rancher with great courtesy and addressed him as "Mr. Jackson."[19]

Sometimes the color line produced confusing and humiliating situations. Mildred Campbell Yates, a white Beaumonter, remembered an afternoon in 1955 when she and her four-year-old daughter Mary were giving a ride home to Charlotte Allen, her fifty-year-old black domestic servant. In those days many African American women found employment in white homes, working as maids, cooks, and babysitters; generally they depended for transportation on their employers or the city bus lines. En route from the Campbell residence to Charlotte Allen's home, the threesome stopped to buy popcorn at the Sears store on Magnolia Street; they all liked the little bags of hot popcorn. While Yates waited in the car, Allen and the toddler Mary went hand-in-hand into

the store to buy the treats. Time passed and they did not return. Becoming worried, Yates left her car and hurried into the store. At the popcorn booth, she observed a situation that angered her. The white sales clerk was serving one white customer after another, while at the same time ignoring Allen, the would-be black customer. "What's the trouble?" Yates inquired impatiently. "Oh," the clerk said, peering over the side of the high counter, "I didn't see the little white child."[20]

The wealthy Waldo Wilson operated Hotel Beaumont, a modern upscale hotel that featured two restaurants, the Black Cat and the Kitten, and two ballrooms, the Rose Room and the Sky Room. On most days well-groomed business leaders and stylish women shoppers waited in line to lunch at the Black Cat; on Wednesdays two hundred Rotarians in business suits filed into the Rose Room for their luncheon meeting. At the hotel Wilson and his staff enforced the southern color line, declining entry to African Americans as guests and customers but welcoming them as kitchen help, janitors, and waiters. Elmo Willard, one of the black lawyers in the Fayson lawsuit, worked there as a youth; he began in the kitchen and later became a "roll boy," circulating among white diners and serving hot rolls from a silver tray.[21]

Three blocks away were other "hotels," the brothels on Crockett Street. During the 1940s and 1950s, Beaumont was both famous and infamous for its whorehouses: the Boston, Copeland, Dixie, Marine, and Maryland, right there in the center of town. Technically illegal, the brothels operated openly, peacefully, and within the framework of the southern caste system. Sexual relations between the two races were against Texas law, as was marriage, so black prostitutes did not work at the white brothels, and neither were black male patrons admitted to such establishments. Of course African Americans worked in these places as maids and porters. Nearby in the black Forsythe business district were several African American brothels, establishments that operated casually and without official names and that catered to both black and white patrons.[22]

Julius Gordon directed Jefferson Amusement, a company that operated movie theaters in Beaumont and southeast Texas. During the early 1950s, before the blossoming of television, Beaumonters flocked to the movie houses, enjoying the films and relaxing in

the air-conditioned comfort of the theaters. Especially popular was the Jefferson Theater, a multimillion dollar movie palace that ran the latest Hollywood films. Gordon and his white employees enforced the color line, refusing entry to African Americans at downtown theaters such as the Jefferson and the Liberty. Films at the two theaters during June, 1955, included *The Americano*, starring Glenn Ford and Ursula Thiess, and *Love Me or Leave Me*, featuring Doris Day and James Cagney. If the black insurance agent Booker Fayson and his wife Johnnie tried to purchase tickets to see the Glenn Ford film, they were refused. But Julius Gordon made accommodations for black customers; he operated the Star Theater, advertised as "exclusively colored," and the Peoples Theater, a segregated cinema where white patrons sat downstairs and blacks were sent to the balcony. With this arrangement, whites could hear but not see the black patrons.[23]

Segregation in the white theaters was not airtight, as shown by an experience of Pat Willard, wife of the young lawyer Elmo Willard. A stylish African American woman, Mrs. Willard was born and reared in Chicago, where blacks suffered discrimination but not the segregation practices of the South. Sometime during the middle or late 1950s, she and Bobbie Johns, wife of lawyer Theo Johns, decided to test the segregation barrier at the Liberty Theater in downtown Beaumont. One afternoon they walked up to the theater box office, offered their money, and ordered two tickets. The white cashier peered at them, hesitating, and then slowly pushed forward their tickets. "You're Mexicans, right?" the woman said. Willard and Johns said nothing but picked up their tickets and hurried into the welcome darkness of the theater.[24]

Hospitals were another venue where white Beaumonters required segregation of the races but nevertheless made arrangements for African Americans. Baptist Hospital, the newest institution, accepted black patients and assigned them to special rooms or wards. But Baptist did not admit black physicians; they had to practice in "colored" establishments. Black doctors were also barred from Saint Therese and Hotel Dieu, two large and prestigious hospitals operated by the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word. Saint Therese Hospital refused service to African American patients, but Hotel Dieu welcomed them for treatment, assigning them to the Martin de Porres wing, a modern brick facility operated exclusively for black patients. On one occasion, however, the de Porres wing was pressed into service as an integrated facility. John Terry Smith, a longtime Beaumont physician, remembered the polio epidemic of the early 1950s, when for a time the entire first floor of de Porres was taken up by iron lung patients, blacks and whites lined up together.[25]

Sometimes segregation in medical care posed awkward and serious problems. Mildred Campbell Yates, a previously mentioned white Beaumonter, recalled a night in 1944 when she was single and had a date with a white U.S. Army captain. Together they were driving back to Beaumont after an evening of dancing at the Southern Club, a roadhouse in Orange County. Along the way, they happened upon a highway accident in which a black truck driver had suffered a severe arm injury, an injury they feared might cause the loss of the limb. Yates and her date picked up the driver and sped back into Beaumont, driving directly to the nearest hospital, Saint Therese. While the army captain waited in the car with the injured man, Yates hurried up the hospital steps and into the lobby. Quickly she told the white nuns of Saint Therese about the accident, the injured black man, and the severity of his injury; just as quickly, they told her they could not, would not treat the black man, that they must take him across town to Martin de Porres, the facility for blacks at Hotel Dieu. Yates and her date delivered the man to Martin de Porres, where he was well treated and his arm was saved.[26]

Jefferson County had two tuberculosis hospitals, the main one on French Road and the "Negro Unit" on Sarah Street in "colored town." The city operated one charity hospital, Beaumont Municipal, an institution on Washington Boulevard that treated whites and blacks alike, though in separate wards. Directed by Dr. William A. Smith, the hospital was staffed by both white *and* black physicians who volunteered their time. In this institution, and generally elsewhere, black doctors limited their practice to black patients, while white doctors treated patients of both races. Dr. E. D. Sprott, Jr., for example, was a black general practitioner who operated a clinic exclusively for African Americans. On the other hand, although many white doctors did treat both whites and blacks, they generally did so within the framework of the southern caste system. At the Calder Street clinic of Dr. Hugh

Alexander, Sr., black patients entered through a back door and sat in a separate waiting room. At the offices of Dr. Stuart Wier in the Goodhue Building, white and black patients entered through the same door, signed one registration book but waited in separate rooms, and then were treated in order of arrival, without priority as to race. Dr. Leonard Toomin, a pediatrician, had still another procedure, where he treated white and black mothers and their children with complete equality; they made appointments by telephone and upon arrival were escorted without discrimination directly into examining rooms.[27]

The caste system produced segregation of the races in many other venues: schools and churches, as well as fraternal, housing, and governmental organizations. The two local school districts, Beaumont Independent School District and South Park Independent School District, were controlled by white trustees and directed by white superintendents, Fred Hunter and Joe Vincent. They assigned all African American students to "colored" schools, institutions operated by black administrators and teachers. At the high-school level, white students attended Beaumont, French, and South Park high schools, while blacks were sent to Charlton-Pollard and Hebert high schools. In the environment of Jim Crow, the school superintendents probably allocated the "colored schools" proportionately fewer funds for facilities and teacher salaries. There was also a "color line" at the college level. At Lamar State College of Technology, a four-year institution with an enrollment of forty-six hundred, President F. L. McDonald and the white board of regents registered only white students and hired only white faculty. Any African Americans seen on campus would have been service workers such cooks, janitors, or gardeners.[28]

Religion was an area where both whites and blacks favored segregation of the races. During the days of Reconstruction, African Americans in the South avoided white churches and formed congregations of their own. Likewise in Beaumont, the two races went their separate ways, each developing their own versions of the Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, and other denominations. As the Chamber of Commerce proudly noted, the town had "60 churches for white people . . . [and] over 60 churches for Negroes." Prominent white congregations in the downtown area included First Baptist, First Methodist, Westminister Presbyterian, Saint

Mark's Episcopal, Saint Anthony's Catholic, and Temple Emanuel. Among the suburban congregations were First Christian, Saint Michael's Orthodox, Calder Baptist, Roberts Avenue Methodist, South Park Baptist, and Trinity Methodist. Generally black Beaumonters were not members of these congregations nor did they attend their worship services, but they were invited on special occasions. Often black domestic workers were seen at funerals of their late employers, sometimes sitting in a reserved pew, other times with white family members.[29]

As with churches, whites and blacks in Beaumont separated themselves voluntarily in fraternal groups such as the Masons, Odd Fellows, Elks, and Knights of Pythias. Both races operated lodges with similar fraternal missions: fellowship, life insurance, and public service. Rarely if ever did blacks attend meetings of white lodges, and vice versa. Also, the color line was strictly observed in white service and civic clubs, where no African Americans were accepted as members or guests. Included here were women's groups such as the Pilot Club and Sertoma, and men's groups such as the Lions, Kiwanis, Jaycees, Exchange, and Rotary, the largest and most prestigious.[30]

Rotary, a weekly forum for the Beaumont establishment, was composed exclusively of white men: doctors, lawyers, bankers, plant managers, insurance agents, real estate brokers, and others, mostly from the upper echelons of their particular business or profession. On occasion wives of members or other white women were invited as guests to the Wednesday luncheons in Hotel Beaumont. African Americans were not admitted as members or guests, but many Rotarians enjoyed friendly relations with black waiters in the Rose Room. In 1955, for example, Rotary president Ewell Strong, an insurance lawyer, and club executive secretary Lorice Buelar worked closely every week with Hughes Murdock, the veteran black headwaiter who managed the setting of the banquet hall and serving of the meal. Among Murdock's staff were Johnnie Antoine, Floyd "Buffalo" Loeb, and Earl White, one of the plaintiffs in the Fayson suit.[31]

The special relationship between black waiters and white Rotarians was played out in other settings, especially private clubs such as the Beaumont Club, Town Club, and Beaumont Country Club. The clubs were popular with many members of the Beaumont es-

tablishment, including men and women of the Beaumont elite, a smaller and more exclusive group distinguished by wealth, social connections, cultural affiliations, and family heritage. Always among the elite were representatives of Beaumont's "first" families: Broussard, Kyle, McFaddin, Phelan, Reed, Stedman, Steinhagen, Tyrrell, and others. During the 1950s, for example, Randolph C. Reed, president of the Reed Company, and his brother-in-law, U.S. District Judge Lamar Cecil, were members of all three clubs. They and their families went to the clubs frequently, enjoying their society, privacy, activities, food, and drink, especially the drink. Texas laws at that time prohibited the sale of liquor by the drink in public restaurants and saloons, so private clubs were the only legal venue where a person could buy a mixed drink. The clubs attracted members for an additional reason: Under federal income tax laws, monthly dues for the private clubs were deductible as a business expense.[32]

White men dominated the Beaumont Club, Town Club, and Beaumont Country Club. During the 1950s, men held almost all the memberships and most of the director and officer positions. Every club president was a man. The clubs discriminated against all women, female members as well as the wives, daughters, and mothers of male members. With policies and practices inherited from earlier generations, the clubs excluded women from various rooms and denied them certain privileges. At the Beaumont Club, for example, women were excluded entirely from the card room and denied entry to the main dining room until after four in the afternoon. At the same time, black waiters, male *and* female, moved freely in areas from which white women were barred. At the Beaumont Country Club, women golfers were barred from the course on Saturdays all day, but given exclusive use of the links on Wednesday mornings. In this way, the private clubs presented a microcosm of racial and gender hierarchies that pervaded and complicated the larger community.[33]

Within the confines of the private clubs, Randolph Reed, Judge Cecil, and other white male members often developed personal relationships with black male waiters and also with black male caddies who worked the country club golf course. Among the waiters and caddies were Joe Griffin, Johnnie Ware, and Earl White, all of whom became parties to the Fayson lawsuit. Of course the men in these white/black relationships were not equals. The white men were employers; the black men were employees. One was master, the other servant. Additionally, there was a wide disparity between them in terms of education, diction, clothing, wealth, and other factors that determined economic and social class. Nevertheless, white members and black waiters often enjoyed friendly relations and sometimes more than casual banter.[34]

Black waiters played essential roles in every club activity, setting and serving the business luncheon, afternoon cocktail, weekly card game, formal dance, and wedding party. On club premises, Johnnie Ware and other black waiters witnessed every scene. They saw Randolph Reed, Lamar Cecil, and other white members at their best and worst, when they were courteous, charming, and eloquent, and when they were intoxicated, crude, and irreverent. With their proximity, the white members and black waiters developed friendships that were authentic, yet circumscribed by the customs of the southern caste system. In a sense the white member/black waiter relationships were symbiotic. Clearly many blacks needed their waiter jobs because white society barred them from many better positions. At the same time white members needed the services of black waiters in order to enjoy the pleasures of club life. Also, perhaps white members needed black waiters to witness their achievements, to confirm their high status as compared to all persons, both white and black.[35]

Chamber of Commerce literature touted various leisure-time activities in Beaumont, public events such as the South Texas State Fair and the games of the local baseball club, the Exporters; in both these venues, racial segregation was strictly enforced. Staged every October by the Young Men's Business League, the fair featured a livestock show, sideshows with dancing girls, and a midway with Ferris wheel and other rides. The annual event was an "an outstanding affair," the chamber said. It attracted "more than 225,000 persons" each year, but African Americans were denied entry to the fair except for one "Negro day." The Exporters, a Texas League team and farm club for the New York Yankees, played its home games at Stuart Stadium, "a magnificent park with new lighting fixtures." Black baseball fans were restricted to a separate section. Tanner T. Hunt, Jr., remembers attending a major league exhibition game at Stuart Stadium, when the black

superstar Jackie Robinson was playing. The baseball player drew a huge turnout of African American fans, who overflowed from the "colored" section and stood shoulder-to-shoulder along the foul lines, applauding and cheering Robinson's every move.[36]

As indicated earlier, the southern caste system resulted in segregated housing. Black Beaumonters were confined to specific areas, while white citizens had the choice of various neighborhoods, sections that varied in age and convenience, as well as in the affluence and status of the homeowners. During the early 1950s the older additions in South Park and the North End remained popular with white citizens; Mayor Beard and council members Harry Mason and J. R. Venza resided in the South Park area, while council member Paul Anger lived in the North End. But the older sections were losing favor as more affluent residents moved to newer areas west of downtown. Council member Jimmie Cokinos had a home on Hazel Street, not too far from the residences of various Beaumont elites: Anthony M. "Mickey" Phelan, E. Harvey Steinhagen, J. L. C. McFaddin, and C. Fletcher Graham III as well as previously mentioned Randolph Reed and Judge Lamar Cecil.[37]

Farther to the west, Calder Place, Calder Terrace, Caldwood, and other newer developments attracted more and more residents, including many doctors, lawyers, and additional members of the Beaumont establishment. Other affluent white families made their homes on Thomas Road, a tree-lined street noted for large houses, stately grounds, and winding driveways. Here resided close friends of Judge Cecil: James W. Mehaffy, lawyer; L. W. Pitts, architect; Mose Sampson, steel wholesaler; and Julian Fertitta, physician. In all these white sections, old and new, African Americans worked as maids, cooks, and gardeners, and sometimes they might stay in servants' quarters, but they could never rent or buy a home of their own in that neighborhood. They were excluded from white neighborhoods by state segregation laws, "whites-only" real estate covenants, and customs of the caste system.[38]

In the field of public transportation, African Americans were confronted with a variety of racial rules and customs. Eastern Airlines, Delta Airlines, and Trans-Texas Airways, serving Jefferson County Airport, posted no barriers to black citizens, but few if any African Americans opted for air transportation. Greyhound, Continental Trailways, and other regional bus companies, on the other hand, enforced typical Jim Crow rules, segregating black and white customers in their buses and terminals. Yellow Cab Company carried white passengers only, but black citizens had ready access to "colored" taxis. Both Southern Pacific Railroad and Kansas City Southern Railroad operated passenger stations, each with segregated waiting rooms. Beaumont City Lines, Inc., a private company, operated city buses that every day carried thousands of white and black citizens. Licensed by the city and paying an annual street rental, the company charged a fifteen-cent fare and served all parts of the town. No doubt with the blessing of the city administration, the company enforced segregation on their buses. Their white drivers used the notorious "White/Colored" sign that was suspended on an overhead track running the length of the passenger section. Depending upon the number of white passengers, the driver moved the sign forward or backward, always confining and sometimes crowding African Americans in the back of the bus.[39]

The city hall building, where Mayor Beard presided over council, was a handsome two-story structure, fronted by tall Greek columns and surrounded by expansive lawns and stately oak trees. Situated in the center of town at Pearl and Forsythe Streets, the building contained a large auditorium as well as council chambers and offices of many city departments. The three-thousand-seat auditorium was popular with white citizens; every spring it was the site of high-school graduations and year-round the stage for musical and theatrical shows. Graduating classes from the three white high schools conducted their ceremonies there, while seniors from the two black high schools had to find other accommodations. A local symphony orchestra and ballet company drew crowds to the auditorium, as did performing artists brought to town by the Beaumont Music Commission and other groups. During the 1940s and 1950s, classical music fans jammed the hall to see the world's finest performers: Isaac Stern, José Iturbi, Jascha Heifetz, Yehudi Menuhin, Risë Stevens, Van Cliburn, and others. Probably no black citizens bought tickets and attended these events, but certainly African American workers took care of janitorial duties for the auditorium.[40]

In Beaumont's city manager form of government, Mrs. Brockman, the chief executive officer, earned $1,000 per month,

Mayor Beard and each council member received monthly stipends of $150 and $100, respectively. Deferring to the mayor and council for policy decisions, Mrs. Brockman directed a work force of six hundred employees and managed an annual budget $2.2 million. About one half of revenues were derived from general property taxes, while the balance was raised by an assortment of rentals, fees, and service charges. No doubt white people and white-controlled companies contributed most of this income, because they owned most of the valuable property and operated all the large businesses. But of course Booker Fayson and other African Americans paid taxes too, on their homes and businesses in the "colored" sections of town.[41]

In terms of city expenditures and employee head count, the police, fire, street, and sanitation departments were largest, together taking up at least 70 percent of the totals, while administration, public health, libraries, recreation, and others made up the balance. Of the six hundred city jobs, whites held about 75 percent, including all the higher-paying and more desirable positions, from department managers to secretaries. Almost without exception, blacks occupied the lowest-paying jobs. In the waste collection department, for instance, the white superintendent earned $475 per month, while the black drivers and helpers collected about $225 for the same period. At the charity hospital, the white supervisor received $460 per month and the black porters took home $165 for an equal time. Of course these large pay discrepancies between whites and blacks resulted mainly from differences in job responsibility, but blacks had no chance of getting the better jobs. Because of the southern caste system, they were confined to certain types of jobs, and often to the most menial assignments.[42]

The city's relegation of African Americans to the lowest-paying jobs was common throughout the Lone Star State, in government as well as business and industry. Among Texas non-farm workers in 1950, more than 90 percent of all black males were employed in domestic service, labor, and service jobs, while few worked as business owners or professionals, a very small group that included doctors, lawyers, dentists, teachers, and ministers. The same was true for black females in Texas: Most worked as maids, cooks, and other domestic servants. Black Texans earned low incomes as compared to whites; their median income amounted to only about 50 percent of incomes collected by white Texans. The numbers were similar in Beaumont, where the median income for black workers amounted to 53 percent of all workers. Reasons for these low levels of employment and income were various, some perhaps derived from lack of education, experience, or expectations. But certainly the main reason was the southern caste system, as devised, handed down, and enforced by white citizens. For generations white Texans would not hire or promote black Texans for the better jobs. This discrimination in hiring must have been the most damaging of all the hardships that blacks suffered under the caste system. Without good jobs, without adequate money, African Americans had little chance to make meaningful progress in society.[43]

But the plight of African American workers in Texas was not completely static or hopeless. During the 1940s and 1950s, and especially beginning with the entry of the United States into World War II, blacks made gradual progress in terms of occupations. While most still worked in agricultural, labor, and service jobs, small numbers of black Texans found better jobs in construction, manufacturing, trucking, warehousing, retailing, government, and health care. In part these improvements were brought about by the actions of the federal government and labor unions. Presidents Roosevelt, Truman, and Eisenhower all issued executive orders aimed at ending racial discrimination in industrial plants holding government contracts. The executive orders, while important symbolically, often met stiff resistance from white workers and were not strictly enforced. In 1955, the AFL-CIO followed the federal government's lead, setting up a civil rights committee and calling at least theoretically for an end to discrimination nationwide. In Texas, the Oil Chemical & Atomic Workers (OCAW) union signed new contracts during 1955–56 with the Gulf and Shell refineries in Houston and with Magnolia Refining Company in Beaumont; these contracts included provisions aimed at reducing racial discrimination. At the Beaumont refinery about seventy members of the black OCAW Local 229 benefited by new "line of progression" rules that prohibited the confinement of black workers to segregated departments and provided them with plant-wide seniority and in-plant training.[44]

In terms of living conditions, African Americans in Beaumont were making slow but steady progress. For several decades the local NAACP, Negro Goodwill Council, Black Ministerial Alliance, and other groups had worked to ameliorate the conditions of black citizens. African American leaders such as Pauline Brackeen, Rev. G. W. Daniels, Rev. Charles Graham, O. C. Hebert, Rev. William N. McCarty, Dr. Laddie L. Melton, Edward C. Moore, Cleveland Nisby, Maudry Plummer, Leantha Redd, Dr. E. D. Sprott, Jr., and others lobbied white governmental officials for better schools, improved streets, and more public services such as parks and libraries. In some instances white officials answered their pleas, granting changes and improvements, but always within the context of the southern caste system. In June, 1954, Mayor Beard boasted in a *Beaumont Enterprise* article about the "good relations" between the city government and the black community. "For several years," he noted, "city officials have been meeting regularly with a Negro goodwill council to discuss current matters of mutual concern." These words may sound empty, but they were genuine, at least within the customs of the time. Funds from a recent bond issue were in fact being spent for extension of water and sewer lines into "all parts of the city, bringing more conveniences to Negro as well as white residents."[45]

In the *Enterprise* story Mayor Beard went on to enumerate other improvements bestowed on the black community by the white city government. "During recent years," the mayor explained, "the city has built two new Negro parks, . . . established a Negro library, [and] . . . employed four Negro police officers. The city late last year also placed in operation the first Negro scout car." The city was remodeling the swimming pool at Liberia Park and also providing a summer recreation program "directed and staffed by Negro supervisors." The new parks, library, police officers, and recreation program were significant advancements for the black community, but ironically they worked to enforce segregation and perpetuate the southern caste system. African American police officers would patrol only in the "colored" sections of town. Black families would picnic at "Negro parks." Black students would read books in the "Negro library" on Wall Street. The library was new, opened with much interracial fanfare in 1950, but it was strictly third rate compared to the whites-only Tyrrell Public Library in terms of facilities, collections, and budget. For the year 1955, when library salaries amounted to forty-nine thousand dollars, a sum of only two thousand dollars was allocated for the Wall Street branch.[46]

Mayor Beard's upbeat comments about good race relations probably carried a second and more subtle meaning. In recent years there had been no significant incidents of race violence: no riots, no killings, no cross burnings. This was good news, because violence was an ever-present danger in the southern caste system. Only a few days before the mayor had made those comments there were ugly incidents just twenty-five miles away in Orange, Texas. According to a story in the Beaumont newspaper, the "Moonlight Gang," a white supremacy group, burned a cross in "a Negro section of Orange" and posted "anti-Negro" signs around town. White city officials in Orange strongly condemned the racist actions, vowing to arrest and jail the perpetrators. No doubt Mayor Beard breathed a sigh of relief, thankful that this time his town had escaped the contagion of violence.[47]

Earlier Beaumont had not been so fortunate. During the boom days of World War II, the town suffered a horrible race riot. On the afternoon of June 15, 1943, white workers at Pennsylvania Ship Yard heard a rumor that a black man had raped the wife of one of their fellow workers. Enraged and bent on revenge, several thousand white workers marched out of the shipyard, paraded through downtown streets, and invaded the police station. Unable to get satisfaction there, the mob broke into smaller groups and rioted through the night, roaming wildly and terrorizing the area of black-owned businesses along Forsythe and Gladys Streets. Armed with guns, axes, hammers, and other tools, the rioters burned automobiles, destroyed shops and stores, and assaulted black citizens. The next day Beaumont police officers along with Texas Rangers and Texas state guard troops restored order, but great harm had been done. Much property was damaged and several hundred persons were injured. Three people—two black and one white—lost their lives.[48]

But the 1943 riot was an aberration, an exception to the normally "good relations" between the races that Mayor Beard

liked to mention as a community asset. Generally the two races coexisted quietly in Beaumont, with both groups adhering to the laws and customs of the southern caste system. Each group had its own territory, the white majority reigning supreme in the "white town" and the African American minority keeping to its place and practices in the "black town."

CHAPTER 2

Black Beaumont

Forsythe, Gladys, and Irving Streets and Washington Boulevard formed the backbones of four districts that thrived with businesses owned and operated by African Americans. These districts were the home territories of Beaumont's black middle class, a small group of business and professional people who evolved out of the southern caste system. The caste system that produced black communities also created economic opportunities for a limited number of African Americans who prospered moderately by providing goods and services to their fellow black citizens. These sales and professional people, along with certain other workers, qualified as members of the middle class or bourgeoisie, a group distinguished by education, income, occupation, and social position. All in all, about 10 percent of African American workers in the South held middle-class jobs and positions.[1]

In Beaumont and many other southern cities, the black middle class included doctors, lawyers, dentists, pharmacists, and undertakers as well as preachers, schoolteachers, realtors, insurance agents, and property owners. Others were business people who operated bars, cafes, cleaners, tailor shops, barbershops, beauty parlors, and service stations. Also included were clerical workers and other white-collar employees, such as postal clerks and letter carriers of the United States Postal Service. Many members of the black middle class had attended colleges such as Fisk, Hampton Institute, and Prairie View A&M. Having advantages of education,

they provided leadership in the black communities, helping develop churches, fraternal organizations, social groups, and civic associations. In some instances they worked to foster racial pride and racial solidarity, urging fellow African Americans to read black newspapers and favor black merchants. On occasion they provided tactical connections with the white establishment, working quietly to resolve racial problems or lobbying discreetly for improvements in the black community. Also, some middle-class blacks joined the NAACP and pushed openly to defeat the southern caste system.[2]

Forsythe was the premier black business district in Beaumont, having the greatest concentration of commercial and professional activities. The district's main thoroughfare was Forsythe Street, which came directly from the white central business district and thus tied the two areas together. After passing City Hall, Tyrrell Public Library, and the White House department store, drivers heading down Forsythe Street would cross Park Street and then be in the "colored" portion of Forsythe Street, which led to and formed the center of a six-block commercial district. Other streets in the black section were Wall and College, also running east and west, as well as Neches, Trinity, and Jefferson, going north and south. There were some white-owned businesses in the area, however, such as the Texas Storage Company at the corner of Forsythe and Neches; also, some Forsythe area landlords were white, among them Carliss Lombardo Carey.[3]

The Forsythe district featured no tall office buildings, modern hotels, or grand stores. But Forsythe was still a vibrant commercial and civic district, with more than fifty business and professional establishments operated by African Americans, many of whom qualified as members of the middle class. Mike Gant had a photography studio; Everett Johnson, a men's clothing store; Allen Fowler, a pharmacy; and Joseph White, a fish market. Both Willie Gaines and R. V. Hebert operated dry cleaners, and Hebert also ran a barbershop. Others engaged in barber and beauty businesses, as well as related shoeshine activities, were Ruth Minix, Cherry Edwards, George Washington, Helen Sorrell, and Elmo Maple. Two men, Allen Hawkins and Charles Wilson, managed liquor stores in the area, and Wilson had multiple interests with locations elsewhere in town. Using the name Chaney, Wilson operated three liquor stores, one lounge, and Chaney's Auditorium on Irving Street in the South End. Chaney's Auditorium was a popular nightclub that often featured shows by traveling bands.[4]

Everett Johnson, the haberdasher mentioned above, had multiple businesses interests; he and his wife Marguerita operated two other enterprises: Marguerita's Coffee Shop and Marguerita's Tap Room. Other eating and drinking establishments included Harrison Joseph's Shorty's Tavern, Alphonse Conner's Eagle Rock Bar & Café, and Maurice Simpson's Barbeque & Steakhouse. Another was Ed Long's Café & Barbecue, a well-known restaurant founded by the late Ed Long and carried on by his widow, Georgia Long. Hotel accommodations in the Forsythe district were very limited, with no facilities comparable in any way to Hotel Beaumont and the finer white establishments. Several individuals, such as James Oliver and Pearl Starks, rented out furnished rooms, but only two operated facilities that might qualify as hotels. Hannah Phillips had the Phillips Hotel & Restaurant, a two-story frame building, while R. Nelson Whitney managed the Hotel Theresa, also a two-story wooden structure.

Nelson Whitney, obviously an ambitious and energetic man, had a second job that demonstrated white and black connections in the world of business. He worked as a radio announcer for KJET, a broadcast station that targeted African American audiences. Owned by white investors and directed by a white manager, KJET advertised its special niche: "Sabine Area's Only Station Programming to Over 184,000 Negroes." Probably Whitney and other KJET disc jockeys filled the airwaves of southeast Texas with rock-and-roll music, in 1955 a relatively new style combining rhythm and blues, hillbilly, and "race" music and in which African Americans soared to stardom. La Verne Baker, Ruth Brown, Chuck Berry, Fats Domino, and Little Richard were among the black artists whose soulful and earthy music was heard on the radios and record players of many young Beaumonters, both black and white.[5]

Ray Pike was another African American who worked for a white-owned business that catered to black patrons. He was manager of the Star Theater, a cinema operated by Julius Gordon's Jefferson Amusement Company. Advertisements for the Star carried the words "Air-Conditioned" and featured a cartoon-like frosting of snow, the comforts of modern air-conditioning being important to all movie patrons, black and white. The movies shown at the

Star were similar to those offered at the white theaters: white films starring white people produced by white people for white audiences. In June, 1955, the fare included John Ireland in *Combat Squad* (1953) and John Wayne in two films, *The Cowboy and the Girl* (1943) and *The High and the Mighty* (1954).[6]

At the corner of Forsythe and Neches, Frank Lea and Felix Normand operated a service station where they pumped gas, fixed flats, and washed cars. Nearby were dispatch offices for two taxi companies: Busy Bee, owned by Welton Hawthorne, and Sunbeam, operated by Rufus Kempt. Sunbeam advertisements promised "Convenient, prompt taxi service to any place in Beaumont and Jefferson County [with] courteous, careful drivers." Also providing transportation services was Willard & Willard, Inc., a funeral home that operated a fleet of hearses. Elmo Willard, Jr., was a prominent black business leader and property owner; he managed the undertaking company profitably for many years but died suddenly in 1954. This event prompted his son, Elmo Willard III, a recent law school graduate, to return to Beaumont the next year to oversee the family business and, coincidentally, to take part in the Tyrrell Park desegregation lawsuit.[7]

Social service organizations in the Forsythe district demonstrated interaction between the white and black communities. The white-controlled city government operated the Beaumont Venereal Disease Control Clinic, directed by the white physician, William A. Smith, as well as the Wall Street branch library that was managed by the black librarian, Dorothy Robinson. The YMCA and YWCA had separate branches catering to African American youths. Funded in part by donations from white community members, the well-known Frances Morris branch of the YWCA was directed by Exie Clement, an African American woman. The Dorcas Community Center provided a home for needy children. Managed by its African American president, Roberta L. Smith, the Dorcas Center received partial funding from the Community Chest and was governed by a board composed of black and white citizens.[8]

The YMCA building on Neches Street provided meeting space for black organizations, including the Dorie E. Miller American Legion Post 817. Composed of African American military veterans, Post 817 raised funds to construct a lodge building on Fourth Street. During June, 1954, Dr. Laddie L. Melton, Terry Charlton, and Wheeler Middleton canvassed the black community and sold special one-dollar tickets for admission to Stuart Stadium on June 19, when the local Beaumont Exporters played a regularly scheduled doubleheader against the Dallas Eagles. This fundraising event demonstrated how blacks accommodated themselves to the caste system: Even though they were relegated to "colored" seating in the stadium, they were avid baseball fans and proud of African American ball players who were making their way in the game. They readily purchased the one-dollar tickets and attended the "Juneteenth" event, June 19 being the day that black Texans annually celebrated the official end of slavery in 1865. During intermission of the second game, Dr. Melton spoke to the large but segregated audience, praising two World War II African American veterans: the late Dorie Miller, who won the Navy Cross for heroism at Pearl Harbor, and James Buster "Buzz" Clarkson, a wartime stevedore who was playing ball for the Exporters in 1955. A former star at Wilberforce College, a school for blacks in Ohio, Clarkson was described by the local newspaper as "Beaumont's heavy-hitting infielder" and praised for his .336 batting average. The Dallas Eagles had broken the color line in the Texas League in 1952 when they hired the black pitcher Dave Hoskins, five years after Jackie Robinson played his first game for the Brooklyn Dodgers.[9]

During October, 1954, American Legion Post 817 conducted another fundraising event, this time in conjunction with "Negro Day" at the South Texas State Fair. Co-sponsored by the Young Men's Business League, an all-white civic group that produced the fair, this event highlighted working relationships between black and white groups. Directed by post commander O. V. Williams, the African American program included an hour-long "Patriotism" parade of bands, cars, and floats, as well as a contest to select a queen for the fair. Young African American women were nominated for queen and underwritten by local black businesses, with the girl raising the most money being crowned queen. Booker Fayson's nominee, Mary Alice Williams, finished as first runner-up, while Olivia Guather, sponsored by James Armstrong Café, won the queen's title. Winners in the parade contests included the Blessed Sacrament School band, the Charlton-Pollard High

School majorettes, and the Blanchette Junior High School drill team.[10]

"Negro Day" at the fair culminated in the evening with a speech by Jack Brooks, the white U.S. Congress representative from Beaumont. Having entered Congress in 1953, Brooks was facing his first reelection bid in the coming month. A staunch Democrat aligned closely with Rep. Sam Rayburn and Sen. Lyndon Johnson, Brooks cultivated the support of labor union members and welcomed the votes of African American citizens. Introduced by black legionnaire Harvey Thomas to "a record-smashing Negro day crowd," Brooks declared, "Negroes are Americans first." They are not interested in "special privileges," he said, but in "equal opportunities to participate in the American economic life guaranteed under the Constitution of the United States." He continued, "You are devoted to our democratic principles . . . but like the Democratic Party, you are dedicated to raising our standard of living . . . so that all Americans can have better jobs, better homes, and better schools."[11]

The Forsythe district featured a number of black churches, institutions that were very important in the African American community. In Beaumont and throughout the South, the churches were the exclusive property of black people—created, owned, and managed by African Americans, without any interference from white people. They were centers of religious and social life, sponsors for education, assemblies for civic and political action, training grounds for leaders, and forums for fundraising. Most of the black congregations were Baptist or Methodist, with these groups accounting for more than 90 percent of the total in Texas. But in coastal towns with significant migration from Louisiana, including Beaumont, Port Arthur, Ames, Galveston, and Houston, black Catholics built viable congregations.[12]

On Forsythe Street near Park, at the very entry to the black business district, was Antioch Baptist Church, an imposing three-story masonry building that featured a monumental brick façade with cast stone finials and a triumphal stairway ascending to double entries at the second story. Led by the Reverend Richard E. King, Antioch Baptist traced it beginnings to 1894. Other important congregations in the downtown neighborhood were Rev. G. W. Daniels's Sunlight Baptist, Rev. Mason Pinkney's East Mount Olive Baptist, Rev. Clarence Davis's Ebenezer Baptist, Rev. Allen M. Mayes's Saint James Methodist, and Rev. William Carr's Saint Paul's African Methodist Episcopal. Saint Paul's AME on Wall Street was the granddaddy of all local black congregations, having been founded in 1868 during the days of Reconstruction.[13]

Leaders in the Forsythe community included doctors, lawyers, dentists, pharmacists, undertakers, and insurance agents. These were men of the middle class, mostly college-educated, well dressed, owning automobiles, and living with their families in comfortable homes. They and others in the town made up a "black establishment," a group that exerted influence on social, civic, and political affairs. Dr. James C. Wallace and his son, Dr. Charles R. Wallace, rendered medical care to African Americans at their Central Hospital Clinic, an institution that also offered the dental services of Dr. Joseph W. Smith. Thomas Brackeen, M.D., had offices that included two dentists, Dr. Charles B. Charlton and Dr. Henry Jones, Jr., as well as life insurance agent Horace Chatman, a representative of Watchtower Life. Other life insurance agents in the neighborhood were Sam Clarence, Golden State Mutual; P. H. Willard, Atlanta Life; and Elton Davis, Excelsior Life. The number and apparent success of insurance agents testified to the viability of life insurance companies founded and operated by African Americans. Across the South, and throughout the nation, life insurance companies were the largest and most successful of black enterprises.[14]

Pauline Brackeen, Dr. Brackeen's wife, was a leader in the black community who, during the 1950s, served as secretary of the local NAACP. Another African American leader was the already mentioned Laddie L. Melton, a dentist who had offices on Trinity Street. Born in Louisiana and educated at Howard University, Dr. Melton began his dentistry practice in Beaumont in 1926. Active in the black community long before the modern civil rights era, Melton worked "within the system," observing the rules of the southern caste system and avoiding harsh confrontations with white leaders. "You had to push without upsetting the applecart, without creating a scene," he once said. "You didn't irritate anybody and you had to be careful about your remarks or you'd be branded a 'smart nigger.'" The efficacy of his tactics was proven during the aftermath of the 1943 race riot, when he emerged as a

leader on a biracial restitution committee that appraised property damage and raised money to pay for black properties that had been burned and otherwise damaged by rioters.[15]

Sol White and his brother, George White, Jr., were prominent members of the Forsythe "establishment." Perhaps also they qualified as members of the black elite. They practiced professions, owned property, and resided with wives and children in comfortable homes on Houston Street in Beaumont's most prestigious black neighborhood. Sol White was a pharmacist and real estate owner, while George White was an attorney, in all likelihood the first African American lawyer in town. A native of Beaumont and a World War I army veteran, George attended Prairie View Normal and Industrial College before enrolling in Howard University, where he took his law degree. He earned an additional law degree from New York University and in 1930 returned to his hometown to commence a long legal career.[16]

Sol White owned the White Professional Building, no doubt the largest commercial property in the Forsythe district owned by an African American. Standing at the corner of Forsythe and Trinity, the two-story red brick building comprised almost six thousand square feet. High in the air, facing both streets, engraved signs tastefully displayed the property owner's name: WHITE. On the ground floor White presided over the Sol White Pharmacy and rented office space to Recordall, a fire and casualty insurance agency run by Samuel Berry. Upstairs White collected rents from various professional and business tenants: his brother, George White, lawyer; Dr. Peter Byrd, physician; Dr. Mitchell Normand and Dr. Sonnie Pernetter, dentists; John Carter of National Health & Accident and Betty Nichols with Standard Benefit Life, insurance agents.[17]

A leading professional in the black community, Sol White helped host a convention in Beaumont for black physicians, dentists, and pharmacists from across the Lone Star State. Meeting June 9–10, 1954, the group honored a number of doctors who had practiced for more than forty years, including Dr. G. P. A. Ford, Houston; Dr. Arthur K. Shirley, San Angelo; and Dr. Peter G. Byrd and Dr. E. S. Craven, both of Beaumont; another was Dr. Lawrence Nixon, the El Paso physician who earlier sued the Democratic Party of Texas for the right to vote in all-white primary elections. Because African Americans were not welcome at local hotels and other such gathering places, the group conducted its meetings at Hebert High, a black school. Dr. Melton was in charge of convention arrangements, while Sol White offered a welcoming address. In a program that demonstrated a measure of interaction among black and white professionals, an otherwise all-black luncheon featured a white speaker: Dr. Grant Taylor, dean of the University of Texas Graduate Medical School from nearby Galveston.[18]

Obviously Sol White and George White were successful citizens. They earned money and lived well, if within the confines of the southern caste system. Exactly how they accommodated to the system is not known. Did Sol deposit his money in Frank Betts's American National Bank? Did George buy his suits from Fletcher and Will Graham's prestigious White House department store? Did they patronize white businesses and yet risk the indignities of the caste system? Imagine George White, army veteran, New York University graduate, and lawyer, going into the White House to buy dress shirts. How would he deal with the white sales clerk? Would he experience slights and insults? Would the white floorwalker ask him not to sit at the whites-only lunch counter? Probably Sol and George found ways of accommodation, the means of getting what they wanted and at the same time avoiding racial confrontations. Probably they worked "within the system," in the same way that Dr. Melton did.[19]

Margaret Phillips, an African American, knew Sol and George White and remembered them fondly. "They were the kindest people I've ever worked for. They were really concerned about black people," she said. Phillips also had good memories of Forsythe, an area called "the heart of the black community" by Albert Harrison, a black citizen who studied local history. Forsythe "provided a safe, happy meeting place for families," Phillips recalled. "It was the kind of place where people could meet and forget their problems. Especially on weekends, it was wall-to-wall people. People from communities like Cheek and China would come to town and do their marketing and take in a western movie." Loretta Oliver, another African American, had similar recollections. "The area was full of life," she said. "I have fond memories of spending hours at the [Wall Street] library. I remember my mother telling me to wait right there. I felt safe and comfortable."[20]

Margaret Phillips recalled some unsavory aspects of Forsythe, mentioning "the usual taverns and hoodlums," but concluded that "the area was safe or my family would not have allowed me down there." Having worked a stint as librarian at the Wall Street branch, Phillips recollected some of the realities of the southern caste system. "When we needed reference books, we would have them sent over [from the white Tyrrell Public Library]. You must understand," she said emphatically, "blacks were limited, you weren't allowed to go to the white businesses." Phillips's memories are partially correct. Black citizens were indeed excluded from the main public library, but they were welcome at many white businesses, so long as they observed the rules of the caste system. Whites wanted their money, but many would not grant African Americans the courtesy of equal treatment.[21]

Dorothy James, a black Beaumonter, recalled the crowded scenes of the Forsythe district. "It was just the place everybody went," she said. "Kids could walk to town at night and they were safe." When James said "everybody," she meant African Americans only. Generally white people did not frequent Forsythe nor did they patronize the businesses there; they did not buy medications from Sol White, seek legal advice from George White, purchase insurance from Sam Clarence, see a movie at the Star Theater, or stop for lunch at Alphonse Conner's Eagle Rock Bar & Café. In many cases whites would have been welcome, but Forsythe was a black district almost exclusively. No doubt white firefighters worked the area, as did white police officers, though probably in the company of one of the four black officers. White business leaders might stop from time to time at Simpson's Barbeque & Steakhouse or Ed Long's Café & Barbecue to pick up orders of brisket, chicken, and sausage, all items popular with both whites and blacks. Or white hunters might bring in their freshly killed ducks and geese to be barbecued. While awaiting their orders in the smoky cafes, the white men might have a beer or soda water and exchange pleasantries with the black proprietors and workers. Probably the black business people were happy to have their business and eager to please them.[22]

Gladys Street, Irving Street, and Washington Boulevard formed the centers of the three other primarily black business districts. All were smaller than the Forsythe district in numbers of business and professional establishments. They were also different; whereas Forsythe was a mostly commercial area with relatively few residential inhabitants, the other three districts were associated closely with large and well-known residential neighborhoods. Each commercial district served a different neighborhood: the Gladys district, the North End; the Irving district, the South End, and the Washington Boulevard district, the neighborhood known to African Americans as the Pear Orchard.[23]

The Gladys commercial district, about fifteen blocks north of downtown, boasted approximately twenty-five black-owned businesses and professional establishments. Among these were barbershops, beauty salons, bars, and cafes. Others were the dental offices of Joseph Herbert, D.D.S.; Copasetic Newsstand, owned by Lige Rogers; and Fleming's Funeral Home, owned by Mack Hannah, a black entrepreneur who resided in nearby Port Arthur, Texas. Not all business in the immediate area was conducted by African Americans. Two grocery stores were operated by Italian Americans: Sunset Grocery & Market by W. M. Angelo, and Crescent Market by A. S. Fertitta and Sam Maida. The presence of Italian American grocers in this and other black neighborhoods represented a significant violation of the southern segregation system. Mostly second-generation immigrants from southern Italy and Sicily, they operated stores and some even resided in areas considered off-limits by most white southerners. In many instances, they had good relations with their black customers, often extending them credit for grocery purchases.[24]

Served by the Gladys commercial district, the North End neighborhood was a large residential area for blacks. It included streets such as Evalon, Ashley, and Long, as well as Pine Street, a curving road that ran north for more than twenty-five blocks. Noted for its tall sycamore trees and gently rolling terrain, Pine was a historic thoroughfare that served both the white and black communities. White funeral-goers traveled the street to attend burial services at the century-old Magnolia Cemetery, and white business leaders used the route to get from their downtown offices to the Beaumont Country Club. But really Pine was a "colored" street, lined with homes of African Americans and intersecting with many other "colored" streets, including Isla, Plum, Simmons, Lethia, and Pollard. During the 1950s, thousands of African Americans

lived along these streets, many in modest brick or frame cottages, others in simple shanties. Among North End residents were three of the black golfers who joined the Booker Fayson lawsuit. Joe Griffin and Earl White resided on Plum Street, while Johnnie Ware lived on Simmons Street.[25]

In the North End and the other predominantly African American neighborhoods, housing was different from and often inferior to housing for whites in the city. In terms of home ownership, for example, 55 percent of white householders owned their dwellings, while only 43 percent of black residents were homeowners. Racial differences were also seen in property values. The median value for all Beaumont houses was $6,791, while the median value of houses occupied by blacks was only $3,273. The same was true for household conveniences such as private toilets and hot and cold running water. Of all Beaumont residences, 93 percent featured these modern conveniences, but only 75 percent of black-occupied houses were so equipped. Some African Americans lived in so-called "shotgun" dwellings: small frame houses, frequently identical, usually painted green, sometimes single-family and other times duplexes, and often owned by white landlords.[26]

Irving Street formed the backbone of the South End, a large and historic black neighborhood located about fifteen blocks south of downtown Beaumont. Sometimes the area was known as the Lower Woods. Containing more than ten square city blocks, the area was home to thousands of black Beaumonters, including William Narcisse, one of Fayson's fellow plaintiffs, and Theo Johns, the young lawyer who worked on the Fayson suit. Irving Street, starting at Buford Street near the Port of Beaumont, ran about a dozen blocks to the south, along the way providing spaces for more than forty businesses that made up the Irving commercial district. Among the black enterprises were barbershops, beauty salons, shoe repair shops, cleaners, and liquor stores. Others were Flanagan's Taxi, Knighton Funeral Home, and Hotel Gilbert, an establishment that advertised "Air Conditioned Comfort," "Private Shower Baths," and "Reasonable Rates." Two Italian Americans, Coley Saleme and Leonard Bruno, operated grocery stores in the center of this African American district.[27]

Leonard Bruno ran Bruno's Food Store in a building that doubled as his residence. In the front section he sold groceries, and in the rear he lived with his wife, two children, his mother, and his father, the elder Bruno having immigrated to America from Sicily. On Irving Street, Bruno worked and lived in the midst of a black community. He knew many of the South End residents and was known by them. He purchased advertisements in the Charlton-Pollard High School annual and hired a black youth, Russell Sutton, to work as a butcher. But his friendly business relations with black neighbors did not extend to religious or social settings; for example, he and his family did not worship at the nearby Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church but traveled across Railroad Avenue to attend mass at Saint Joseph's Catholic Church, an Italian American parish. Bruno's store was profitable; he had many customers and extended them credit when needed. "Giving credit was the only way I could compete with the big stores," Bruno recalled. He enjoyed good relations with his black customers. "They were good neighbors, good people," he said. "We treated each other with respect."[28]

Aaron Jefferson had offices on Irving Street where he handled real estate sales and acted as distributor for the Beaumont *Informer,* a local edition of the Houston *Informer* newspaper. Carter Wesley, an African American lawyer and NAACP leader, published the weekly *Informer* in Houston and distributed customized editions for black readers and advertisers in Austin, Galveston, Beaumont, and other Texas towns. Readers in Beaumont saw a standard fare of state and national news supplemented by a handful of local stories. Also publishing the *Dallas Express,* Wesley used that newspaper and the *Informer* chain to advance the interests of black Texans, promoting African American businesses and spreading the news about the NAACP and its activities.[29]

The South End was home to Charlton-Pollard High School, one of Beaumont's two high schools for black students. Though controlled and funded by an all-white school board, Charlton-Pollard was an all-black establishment with African American administrators, teachers, coaches, and students. Like black churches, Charlton-Pollard and other such schools were important institutions in the black community. Charlton-Pollard was also a province of the black middle class, an institution where college-educated African Americans found dignified employment and where black Beaumonters embraced middle-class American

values. The principal, Harvey C. Johnson, had a faculty of twenty-two women and eight men, all with bachelor's degrees and a few with advanced certificates. The administration and faculty dressed professionally: men in coats and ties, women in dresses. Charlton-Pollard's yearbook, the *Rice Shock,* in 1955 indicated a conventional high-school program: academic courses, including English, history, algebra, science, and Spanish; vocational courses such as cosmetology and homemaking; athletic teams, including girls' basketball; marching band; class favorites; student council; honor society; and parent-teacher association. Underwriters for the yearbook included both black and white advertisers: black businesses such as Willard & Willard Funeral Home, Fowler's Pharmacy, and Busy Bee Taxi, joined by white-run operations, including the Fashion, Gem Jewelry, Gulf States Utilities, and Coca-Cola. During the academic year, Principal Johnson hosted an American Education Week program: "Good Schools Are Your Responsibility." The program panel included Mrs. Willie Brockman, the white city manager; Mildred Sprott White, a black teacher; Father Edward Bowes, a white priest from Blessed Sacrament; and Elmo Willard III, the black lawyer.[30]

Obviously parts of the South End were laid out to attract black citizens. Some of the residential streets were named for national leaders dear to the hearts of African Americans: Lincoln, Grant, Sherman, Porter, and Stanton. Porter, named for the Union admiral at Vicksburg, was an important street, being the site of Blessed Sacrament, one of Beaumont's two black Catholic parishes. Founded in 1915, Blessed Sacrament forty years later was led by the Reverend Joseph M. Schmirtz, a white priest. Blessed Sacrament carried out its mission from impressive facilities; the church, convent, and school were housed in handsome masonry buildings, all well laid out and situated on ample grounds. The school, staffed by white nuns and black lay teachers, demonstrated a strong commitment by the Catholic Church to serve the needs of its parishioners and the local black community. The church itself featured handsome stained-glass windows, some bearing names of donor groups such as "South End People," "North End People," and "Pear Orchard People," names that evidenced a marked sense of neighborhood identity. Congregation members included two of Booker Fayson's golfing associates: Joe Griffin and Thomas Parker.[31]

Washington Boulevard was the main east-west thoroughfare in the southern part of Beaumont. Beginning at Railroad Avenue, the broad street ran west for about thirty city blocks. Half of Washington Boulevard was exclusively "white," serving the white neighborhoods of South Park. But after fifteen blocks, past the Southern Pacific railroad tracks, Washington became a "mixed" street, where white and black business people operated in proximity to one another. Five Italian Americans—Frank Barranco, Cecil Fontana, Dominic Gallo, Paul Lucia, and Frank Pavia—managed grocery stores in the same area where a dozen African American business owners and professionals had their offices. Among the black establishments were a barbershop, beauty salon, liquor store, dry cleaner, drugstore, auto repair shop, tavern, and nightclub. Others were James E. Powell, a physician; Marie Nelson, a music teacher; and Beatrice Moore, who operated a nursery school. There were also four insurance agents: Alvin Daniels, Marion Lewis, Alvin Randolph, and Booker Fayson. With offices at 2370 Washington, Fayson rented office space to Theo Johns and Elmo Willard, Beaumont's newest black lawyers. Willard and his wife Pat lived in the next block in a four-unit brick apartment building. Other tenants in the apartment building were a high-school teacher, Louise Taylor; Texas Company seaman Joseph Paige and his wife Agnes; and a Baptist minister, the Reverend T. F. Simmons and his wife Ethel.[32]

Washington Boulevard formed the northern boundary of the Pear Orchard, a large neighborhood that dated back to the nineteenth century. Comprising more than ten square city blocks, the Pear Orchard was home to thousands of black Beaumonters. Booker Fayson and his wife Johnnie lived on Harriot Street, as did Dr. and Mrs. Brackeen. Not far from the Fayson and Brackeen homes was Liberia Park, a city facility named for the African nation founded in 1821 by American abolitionists; the park included a swimming pool managed during summer months by Clifton Ozen, a black teacher at nearby Hebert High, Beaumont's other black high school. The Hebert High principal, Archie Price, also served as pastor of West Tabernacle Baptist Church, one of the area's older congregations. Close by was Our Mother of Mercy Catholic Church, with adjoining convent and school, headed by the Reverend Charles Hanks, a white priest.[33]

The Appomattox Club, a men's social and civic club, was located in the Pear Orchard. Founded in 1923 and consisting mostly of business and professional men, the club held weekly meetings that were occasions for fellowship and as well as civic and political discussion. Other civic and fraternal groups operated by black Beaumonters included men's groups such as Elks Lodge Number 593, Masonic Lodge Number 291, Omega Psi Phi, and the Knights of Peter Claver, as well as women's sororities: Alpha Kappa Alpha, Delta Sigma Theta, and Sigma Delta Rho. In Beaumont and throughout the South, these civic, fraternal, and social groups, like black churches and black schools, provided means for African Americans to enjoy life and otherwise accommodate to the caste system; they also furnished venues for the development of the middle class and the exercise of black leadership. Dr. Melton, for example, served many years as leader of Masonic Lodge Number 291.[34]

Just across Washington Boulevard from the Pear Orchard was another black residential area, the Cartwright Addition. A small area of only about eight city blocks, it contained many of Beaumont's better black-owned residences. Often the houses were well designed and set back on roomy, landscaped lots. The Cartwright Addition was situated in between and immediately adjoining white neighborhoods. On the east side of the Cartwright Addition, the tracks of Southern Pacific Railroad provided clear separation from a white neighborhood; in this case, the blacks lived literally "across the tracks" from the whites. But on the west side of the Cartwright Addition, black and white neighborhoods were contiguous, distinguished only by an alley that separated the backyards of black-occupied houses on Houston Street and white-occupied houses on Amarillo Street. Here black and white families, mostly middle class, lived in proximity and on apparently peaceful terms with one another.[35]

Sol White and George White, the Forsythe business leaders, lived in comfortable homes in the Cartwright Addition on Houston Street. Other middle- and lower-middle-class residents of the area included James C. Wallace, physician; David Baker, pharmacist; and R. V. Hebert, dry cleaner; as well as schoolteachers Carrie Clark and Hugh Fowler; and U.S. Postal Service letter carriers Harold Goodman, James McGovern, and Oliver Sprott. Members of the Sprott family were among the most prominent of the neighborhood residents. Dr. Ed D. Sprott, Jr., and his two brothers, Dr. Curtis Sprott and Dr. Maxie Sprott all resided in the area and operated a modern medical clinic exclusively for black patients. Situated on Cartwright Street near Houston Street, the Sprott clinic was housed in a spacious brick building fronted by shade trees and manicured lawns.[36]

Dr. Ed Sprott, Jr., emerged as one of Beaumont's most effective leaders in the early stages of the modern civil rights struggle. In 1952 he was elected president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a group that was leading black people away from long-standing policies of accommodation and into newer tactics of confrontation. Sprott energized the local NAACP, building its membership, establishing chapters in Orange and Port Arthur, and helping orchestrate the federal lawsuits that desegregated Tyrrell Park golf course and Lamar College. Other local officers were Marion Lewis, Mrs. Wesley Cormier, and Pauline Brackeen, the branch secretary who handled voluminous correspondence with NAACP offices in New York City and Dallas, Texas. Sprott and his fellow officers worked hard to strengthen the local chapter, distributing manuals, placards, and pins; touting *The Crisis* magazine; and soliciting memberships and donations.[37]

Minimum annual dues for the NAACP were $3.50, but many contributed more. Dr. L. L. Melton, Dr. James Wallace, and others paid $25, while Ocie Jackson, the wealthy rancher, bought a life membership for $200. Also among the contributors were a number of organizations, such as Delta Sigma Theta sorority, Omega Psi Phi fraternity, Starlight Baptist Church, and Letter Carriers Local 842. Members and contributors included a handful of white Beaumonters, all business leaders of the Jewish faith. Ben Rogers and I. B. "Butch" Hoffer each donated $25, as did the Fair Store, Inc., a company owned by Sheldon Greenberg, Sigmund Greenberg, and Albert Klein. Rogers and the others received formal acknowledgments from Lucille Black, membership secretary in the NAACP New York office. "We are happy to include you," she wrote to Rogers, "among those who believe in our cause and who want to help in the fight for full democracy for all Americans."[38]