

REFORM, POWER, AND THE PUSH FOR A CITY MANAGER
IN HOUSTON, TEXAS

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Political Science
University of Houston

by

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By

Rita Benoit Griffin

December 1986

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ABSTRACT

Should Houston's governmental structure be changed from a strong-mayor form to a city-manager plan? If urban government is fragmented and reactive, if metropolitan governance is enhanced by a strong mayor, and if a professional management approach to city administration is stressed by the incumbent, then why the recent push for a city manager?

I hypothesize the recent reform effort is an outgrowth of social, economic, and political changes within the city as well as a result of conflicts among political actors. I seek to prove such structural reform efforts are not unique to the city, but historically have been forced into the public arena when resources become scarce, when political values are challenged, and when a change in the ratio of power is sought.

Chapter 1 provides a framework from which to view the proposed structural changes and the political climate in which reform was introduced. Chapter 2 considers the origins, intent and consequences of municipal reform in this country. Chapter 3 focuses on a historical description of Houston, its political and socioeconomic characteristics, and early endeavors to promote a city-manager structure.

This research then shifts to the contemporary urban scene. Chapter 4 concentrates on the more recent socioeconomic environment of Houston. Chapter 5 describes the structure of city government and the politics of Houston. Chapter 6 looks at the most recent structural reform effort.

And, Chapter 7, a summary, will attempt to answer the question: In a city where business entrepreneurs dominate politics, does structure of government really matter?

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"Structural arrangements do have an effect upon the pattern of government, but they neither guarantee nor prevent the type of government a particular group of citizens might want. The forms of government are important because they affect the pattern of influence of various groups upon policy making. The specific structure in any given case helps to establish behavior patterns and attitudes toward power and the exercise of power that definitely affect the process whereby decisions are made."

Charles R. Adrian and Charles Press
Governing Urban America

CHAPTER 1: A FRAMEWORK

On January 31, 1985, three Houston councilmen approached a citizens committee studying lengths of office terms for city officials and requested the committee review certain "systemic structural changes in local government" (Citizen Committee Minutes, 1985, p. 3). The suggested changes included a form of city manager government, a separation of the mayor from council, limited terms of office for the mayor, and the creation of a president of council position. The committee, chaired by Texas Commerce Bancshares' chairman and chief executive Ben Love, refused to expand its charge of only looking at specific lengths of office terms without explicit instructions from the mayor and council.

Soon after, the councilmen's suggestions appeared in the media with one newspaper suggesting the mayor appoint another committee to study the city manager concept. The structural change issue continued to resurface throughout the year. The incumbent mayor, Kathryn Whitmire, deferred taking action on the recommendation to appoint another study committee. Yet, her opponent in the upcoming general election, who had served as mayor from 1965-1974, said, if elected, he would ask voters to approve the appointment of a manager to ease the city's administrative burdens.

Less than a month before the general municipal election, a Houston

Chronicle editorial suggested "the city manager approach to local government deserves attention. It is something the people of Houston should be thinking and talking about" (Houston Chronicle, 10/8/1985, p. 14).¹ This was not the first time Houstonians had been asked to consider a city manager plan of government--the issue was raised in the 1920s, in 1938, in the 1940s, in 1955 and in the 1980s.

Since the purpose of this research is to analyze the proposed structural reform effort--a form of city manager government for Houston--it is necessary to develop a framework from which to view this issue.

THE SYSTEM

If politics is the study of how authoritative decisions are made and implemented, and if political life is a system of interrelated activities as David Easton suggests, then each aspect of political activity must be scrutinized by itself and also in concert with other components operating within the system (Easton, 1957). Therefore, the reform strategy of specific actors must be viewed as part of the larger political unit--the city.

Using systems theory to understand the decision-making process, one must ask: What specific demands may have been placed on individual councilmen which prompted them to suggest governmental restructuring? Were the "withinputs" or internally inspired demands generated by outmoded formal mechanisms, conflicts with the mayor, self-promoting calls for efficiency, or some combination of these factors? Did political aspirations enter into the reform orchestration? What are the

prescribed, unwritten rules of the governance game and were they violated? If the push for a hybrid city manager gains momentum and is translated from an issue into a mechanism of government, what are the projected or intended outputs? And finally, who stands to gain by the changes in the structure of local government?

With the systems theory, Easton allows one to view politics, governance and private action as interrelated occurrences, both influencing and affected by external variables in the environment: "A system does not exist in a vacuum. It is always immersed in a specific setting or environment. The way in which a system works will be in part a function of its response to the total social, biological, and physical environment" (Easton, 1957, p. 385).

Clearly there are exogenous influences on city hall (regional, state, national and international inputs and pressures) as well as endogenous territorial pressures (neighborhood associations, non-governmental power groups and overlapping governmental jurisdictions).

While one speaks of the formal structure of city government as the interworkings and networks of city hall, the municipality is not governed exclusively by one but by several different political systems. For example, there are independent boards, commissions and agencies that operate as systems, although the heads of the units may be appointed by the mayor. Then too, there is the school district and the myriad special districts also viewed as political systems operating within the urban environment and impinging on other government systems. While one may assume these varied systems fall under the umbrella of city hall, such is

not the case. Usually there is no formal mechanism whereby these systems can be forced to act in a concerted fashion with a composite public interest in mind (Banfield and Wilson, 1963). Consequently, as a political system, city hall often competes with other governmental structures in the urban space for power, influence and scarce resources. Hence the system is actually a number of systems, resulting in governmental fragmentation, with public officials confronting what Douglas Yates calls "the urban jigsaw puzzle"--the frustrating business of urban management and policy-making (Yates, 1980).

THE ISSUE

Proposed to foster representativeness, increased technical competence and effective legislative and executive leadership, the recent reform effort called for a chief administrative officer (manager) responsible for day-to-day management of city business (Greanias, 1985). The plan, in part, would provide for professional management skills in the administration of city business. And it is an attempt to separate policy-making from administration.

Local government, if thought about at all, is generally perceived as a mechanism of administration, a service delivery apparatus, or as a legitimate arbitrator. Professionalism is extolled; politics downplayed. But Banfield and Wilson argue administration cannot be divorced from politics. Rather "the nature of the governmental system gives private interests such good opportunities to participate in the making of public decisions that there is virtually no sphere of administration

apart from politics" (Banfield and Wilson, 1967, p. 1).

To analyze the issue of structural reform, one must take a cue from Easton. The occurrence of demands, whether external or internal, is not automatically transformed into meaningful political issues. Some demands die at birth and some lie insignificantly on the political landscape for a time only to die a quiet death. Variables which bear on whether or not claims become issues include support from the power structure, timing, political acumen and the public mood (Easton, 1957).

THE PLAYERS

Norton Long, describing the local community as an ecology of games, does not trivialize the bargaining, negotiation, conciliation, role-playing and strategies of the participants (Long, 1958). In the local territorial system, such game-playing is serious business, produces functional results and is a vehicle by which man achieves worth, accomplishment and personal aggrandizement:

Sharing a common territorial field and collaborating for different and particular ends in the achievement of overall social functions, the players in one game make use of the players in another and are, in turn, made use of by them. Thus the banker makes use of the newspaperman, the politician, the contractor, the ecclesiastic, the labor leader, the civic leader--all to further his success in the banking game--but, reciprocally, he is used to further the others' success in the newspaper, political, contracting, ecclesiastical, labor, and civic games. Each is a piece in the chess game of the other, sometimes a willing piece, but to the extent that the games are different, with different ends in view. (Long, 1958, p. 254)

Clearly then, a political actor may create an issue to gain power, to air a grievance, or to facilitate or streamline game-playing. Another may defuse an issue to garner support, regroup, or enhance his own position.

And yet, politics cannot be equated with play, for the most important aspect of politics in respect to government is the management of conflict which is real, often brutal, and where the stakes are often the fortunes of the adversaries.

THE DECISION-MAKERS AND POWER

Some argue the real power in decision-making lies outside the structure of government, the public arena and the squabbles of public officials. Such power lies in the non-governmental political participation of businessmen who set agendas, create issues, formulate policy and resolve political disputes. Using the reputational approach in his power study of Atlanta, sociologist Floyd Hunter found that of forty community influentials only four were public officials, the rest being business leaders who held informal power, acting outside the public arena. Government was subordinate to the interests of policy-makers operating in the economic sphere because government, like other social institutions and associations, drew sustenance from local economic resources (Hunter, 1953). The elite theory of power developed from his study and similar subsequent research.

In studying the decision-makers of Dallas, Carol Estes Thometz found that structured formal city government played only a minor role in resolving controversial issues and tackling urban problems; the real decision-makers were the business influentials, members of the Civic Committee. Participating in the political process--but discreetly--these influentials used unofficial, unenforced action to open political

declaration. Council decisions came only after solutions had been crystallized by the real community leaders--bankers, developers, insurance magnates. While the position of the mayor did not, in and of itself, afford top decision-making power, the person who held that office could increase the burden of the decision-makers task (Thometz, 1963).

Conversely, Robert Dahl holds there is no one elite group of influentials but a plurality of interests the politician as broker must deal with. Not a mere agent of a single elite power, the gifted politician, like Mayor Richard Lee of New Haven, can dominate the democratic process via political and entrepreneurial skills within the formal political system (Dahl, 1961).

That public officials listen to the business community or sound out upper-strata interests and accordingly form their alliances, make their decisions and plan their political futures has been a much discussed topic in the literature (Stone, 1979; Petersen, 1981; Wood, 1968; Angel, 1980; Schumaker and Getter, 1983). One of the most important theories in the field, however, is E.E. Schattschnider's theory of the organization as a mobilization of bias. He argues "the business or upper-class bias of the pressure system shows up everywhere" and postulates:

The notion that the pressure system is automatically representative of the whole community is a myth fostered by the universalizing tendency of modern group theories. Pressure politics is a selective process ill designed to serve diffused interests. The system is skewed, loaded and unbalanced in favor of a fraction of a minority. (Schattschnider, 1960, p. 31)

In Schattschnider's view, the players may be public officials, but the business community can wield its influence and resources as political leverage; a non-decision via cues can be translated. On the public

political stage a class bias exists, fostered by the political culture of the audience as well as by the politization of public officials.

Others, however, argue business power as a theoretical concern is not as significant as the growing structure of community leadership whereby the city, as a political subsystem, now has decentralized leadership arrangements with more power centers, providing access, needs identification and higher levels of policy outputs (Clark, 1968; Aiken, 1970).

THE AUDIENCE

Whether an initially disinterested public or an easily mobilized influential group, the audience determines the outcome of the game (Schattschnider, 1960). If a conflict gains momentum and is forced out into the open, the audience never remains neutral; the original adversaries can lose control.

Yet, elites resist yielding private power in solution-seeking to a non-elite public (Van Til and Van Til, 1970). And, along with this, the high mobility and heterogeneity of city dwellers, a distrust of local politicians and a general apathy toward city government--all impede public mobilization around political issues (Adrian and Press, 1968).

In looking specifically at Houstonians, one could characterize this audience as individualistic and traditionalistic as well if one uses Daniel Elazar's political subculture models (Elazar, 1966). Houstonians can be described as individualistic because politics is generally perceived as just another business where certain entrepreneurs ply their

trade, seeking personal advantage. And they can be described as traditionalistic due to the emphasis placed on family, community traditions and established social institutions. One such tradition is fostering a climate for economic growth devoid of political instability.

And too, the city's non-partisan electoral system impedes non-elite mobilization. As William Collins explains "by imposing differential information costs, non-partisan electoral settings are viewed as reinforcing the political importance of class differences which exist in the ability to process and to structure incoming political cues and information" (Collins, 1980, p. 332). However, with the increasing diversity of urban life and changes in ethnic composition, social status and lifestyles, a political actor can mobilize an initially passive audience to action. Or he can completely miscalculate his influence and the saliency of the issue.

GOVERNMENT AND THE SETTING

Scott Greer has called the city "a maze, a zoo, a mass of heterogeneous social types" which "teems with conflict and hums with tension" (Greer, 1962, p. 25). Yet Houston in comparison is low-keyed, for as part of the Sunbelt region, the city was built to suit business interests, was dedicated to the entrepreneurial spirit and always has been devoted to economic growth (Watkins and Perry, 1977). Diversity may exist, but until recently a lower cost of living and the relative affluence of urban dwellers compared to other areas have in a sense mitigated tension. And the formal and informal governance mechanisms which discourage social disruption,

confrontation and cleavages have kept a lid on political conflict.

American cities have been described as creations of economic forces, children of capitalism. As William Schultze explains, "capitalism is but one mode of economic organization, but it is difficult to deny that it has been by far the most significant pattern of economic organization that has given our cities their physical form and thereby shaped the social and political order as well" (Schultze, 1985, p. 64). Houston is an example of a city borne of and geared to capitalistic interests.

Using Oliver Williams' and Charles Adrian's typology of local governments, Houston's city hall could be characterized as a government which promotes economic growth, acknowledging the formulators' warnings that prototype cities are rare and most governments exhibit a complex typological profile. Still, local attitudes and values reflect Williams' and Adrian's categorical characteristics: 1) the city should have a good reputation; 2) politics should be low-keyed; 3) the image of stability and the regularity of city finances should prevail; and 4) the ultimate vocation of government should be the support and promotion of the economic producer (Williams, 1961).

Similarly, one could argue Houston falls within Lester Salamon's conceptual framework for urban analysis: the private city in which government is largely passive, a facilitator for local economic forces; a city whose municipal government accommodates private enterprise (Salamon, 1977).

Yet such characterizations may be too simplistic given today's urban landscape. First, private enterprises often compete for governmental

favours and support. Secondly, it may well be that the struggle for power is largely a confrontation of two major power systems--government and business (Schattschneider, 1960). And finally, with an increasing concentration of more vocal and diverse citizenry and increasing service delivery demands and decreasing resources, local government must shift from being a mere passive agent to becoming more active in meeting urban needs.

In addition, even Ira Katznelson has contended local officials have not acted to control resistive populations simply to serve corporate interests. Rather local politicians have been faced with social problems and urban questions of great magnitude while lacking the authoritative capacity to seek lasting solutions. Katznelson argues that the urban dilemma is caused in part because local officials' authoritative capacities have not kept pace with metropolitan economic development (Katznelson, 1978). Others discount councilmanic preference towards business, stressing instead bureaucratic decision-rules and bureaucrats as authoritative determinants of city policy (Lowi, 1967; Lineberry, 1978).

Hence, urban governance is complex; the demands on public officials are increasing; the solutions, confusing. One study predicted the future of urban government is not bright, "there will be many rips in the fabric of government created by economic readjustments, population shifts, demographic changes, technological innovations and political frustrations" (Rutter, 1980, p. 126).

Douglas Yates argues the city is, at the same time, too decentralized and too centralized to permit responsive, coherent planning; too dependent

on and too independent of higher-level governments to take policy initiatives aimed at solving urban problems. The contemporary city is, in effect, ungovernable (Yates, 1980).

What then of urban democracy? While metropolitan government is closer than the state or national government to the very public it serves, Robert Dahl holds such a system is not and cannot be a democratic unit. Meaningful participation is impossible; large scale urban problems unsolvable. Solutions can only be achieved by paring down the metropolis to a manageable governmental size where participation can be fostered and political socialization sought (Dahl, 1967).

While the rise of Sunbelt cities like Houston may lend legitimacy to capitalism, if history repeats itself such cities may experience an eclipse of their own defense (Watkins and Perry, 1977). Those diverse groups in the urban sandbox or on the reservation will not disappear and chances are they will not "vote with their feet" but will become more vocal and demanding if declining city revenue is translated into declining services. They will begin to look to local government for relief. And with the challenges to established political values comes conflict and the need for political adroitness if public officials wish to keep their jobs in the changing urban setting.

Given this framework, one wonders if structural reform will make any difference in urban governance. To analyze the current push for structural change, it is necessary to look back at city management in the past, the origins of the reform movement and its development and consequences. These topics are the subjects of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2: REFORM, A PERSPECTIVE

There is no denying that the government of cities is the one conspicuous failure of the United States. The differences in the national government tell but little for evil on the welfare of the people. The faults of the state governments are insignificant compared with the extravagances, corruption and mismanagement which mark the administrations of most great cities. For those evils are not confined to one or two cities.

James Bryce
The American Commonwealth

. In the late 1800s, James Bryce, a British political scientist, studied the workings of American government. He found the failures of local government to be caused by the party system, incompetent officers and boards, the infusion of state and national politics into municipal affairs, legislative control and the spoil system (Bryce, 1891, ch. LI). But such was not always the case. Many mid-nineteenth century American city governments provided democratic cohesiveness for a community-oriented society (Schiesl, 1977). But as an influx of immigrants amassed in urban centers, local governments were ill-equipped to deal with the ensuing problems of health, sanitation, transportation and crime. The earlier self-sufficiency of community governments foundered in the wake of industrialization and immigration. Government was passive when faced with new urban anomalies; officials were either unwilling or unable to deal with the problems of social adjustment, control and urbanization.

Supervision of government and participation by citizens was minimal.

In evolving urban environments, government had a limited role and the entrepreneurial spirit reigned. Services proved inadequate and were often supplemented by voluntary albeit haphazard community efforts. Official action was uncoordinated, inefficient and often self-serving. Such an urban landscape was fertile ground for political parties, patronage and bossism (Schiesl, 1977; Yates, 1980; Morris, 1982).

In the 1860s and 1870s, political parties grabbed the reins of municipal government, taking bits of power from precincts and wards and, in turn, distributed public posts and favors to loyalists. Parties tightened their grip on urban administration; bossism developed. And with bossism came increased bureaucratic ineptitude, waste, graft and mismanagement.

The spread of universal manhood suffrage and Jacksonian democratic ideology fostered a political climate where any man could run for office and try to win the support of new enfranchised social classes (Adrian and Press, 1968). Between 1840 and 1930, thirty-seven million people migrated to the United States from Europe--pliable, prospective voters who could be mobilized by those seeking to control local government.

As the number of immigrants in urban centers increased, members of European ethnic minorities ran for office. They were supported by political machines which sought to attract other immigrant voters into their ranks (Harrigan, 1984). This strategy often worked to the dismay of the Protestant middle-class.

Yet, political machines, like New York's Tammany Society, were often

biased against the very ethnic minorities they used. Bossism was a cultural mechanism which integrated immigrants into the political system via linkages to local political leaders (Fox, 1977; Harrigan, 1984; Schultze, 1985). New enfranchised immigrants accepted city politics for what it was and for what it provided. And they generally voted a straight party ticket. Protestant, white, middle-class elements, however, looked upon boss entrenchment as a corruption of legitimate and responsible government--a mechanism they once influenced and were now denied access to.

As a result, early protest efforts against machine politics were spearheaded by local businessmen. Initially, however, they lacked forceful leadership, experience and organization. Then too, many industrialists and small businessmen refused to join reformers' ranks, finding it much easier to buy off the machine (Adrian and Press, 1968). In many urban centers like New York and Chicago the task of wresting control of government from generally likeable, well-known bosses seemed like a futile effort. Nonetheless, reformers protested with the rallying cry of efficiency. They called for new techniques in administrative control and structural reform.

By the 1900s urban government reformers were calling for nonpartisanship, a strong executive, the separation of administration from politics and civil service reform. "Businesslike" or scientific management was touted as an answer to the inefficiencies and dishonesty of machine-placed bureaucrats. Ward politics was decried as selfish, fostering personal aggrandizement at the expense of the public interest. The

seemingly indiscriminate suffrage and irresponsible voters vexed middle- and upper-class businessmen who paid taxes, who were public-minded and who abhorred the distasteful maneuvering of party bosses. Such men promoted ethnicity to garner power; they introduced instability, ineptitude and uncertainty into the management of city business. Strong city self-government absent bossism was the goal of reformers.

And yet, such a goal seemed unreachable given the nature and historic impotence of municipal government. By its very nature the city is an appendage of the state, and state-imposed limitations have hampered the actions of local officials until the advent of home-rule legislation. This coupled with the Jacksonian principals of weak government and a system of extreme deconcentration of administrative and executive responsibilities prevented urban public officials from acting as a unified mechanism of governance (Adrian and Press, 1968, Schultze, 1985).

As a result, reformers were not just businessmen. The reformist ranks included lawyers, political scientists, federal statisticians, city officials and elite activists who sought a general model for a functional city government (Fox, 1977). For these innovators, the model consisted of one essential function or responsibility for each major administrative department, a strong mayor who headed a departmentalized administrative structure and an at-large, single-chamber, representative city council (Fox, 1977, p. xviii). The model was designed to place public policy in the hands of technical experts well versed in city management. It sought to remove decision-making from the patronage and polling booths of the bosses.

Unfortunately, the changes sought by reformers would, in effect, limit lower-class access to government. Martin Schiesl argues reformers' "corporate view of government implied a profound shift in theory and practice in municipal politics and by opting for 'no politics' in city administration, (they) were promoting a program that jeopardized the existence of the only institution capable of responding to groups at all levels of the social structure" (Schiesl, 1977, p. 44). Yet urban reformers believed structural changes would enhance democratic practices and foster popular government. If the structure of government were made more efficient and purged of politicians, they believed the public will would be better served: "The theory was that with a mechanically 'tight' governmental system--one that was simplified, unified, and integrated--democracy would inevitably ensue because the mechanism would be highly sensitive and responsive to the will of the people" (East, 1965, p. 22). By introducing the short ballot, the direct primary and at-large, non-partisan elections, reformers believed the private interests of the power-seekers would be short-circuited.

The first vehicle seen to increase municipal efficiency was the commission form of government. Its birthplace was Galveston, Texas. The new structure of government was a direct result of that city's efforts to cope with a hurricane and tidal wave that blasted ashore in September 1900. The city's emergency organization called for a charter revision to provide for a five-man commission to serve as a policy-making council. The new commission would assume both legislative and executive functions.

The Galveston commission proved to be an effective administrative

machine that rose to the task of rebuilding the city. And it was viewed as a tightly organized alternative to the corruption of party organization.

Bouyed up by Galveston's governmental success, municipal reformers throughout the country touted commission government as a way to reduce costs, to increase services, to streamline government via a unit that had both administrative and legislative power and, not coincidentally, to promote the middle-class business ethic of "good" government:

To other representatives of the middle- and upper-classes who staffed the commissions, it represented an important advance in urban political reform. It was not only the movement's commercial efficiency, with its suggestions for tax cutting, that they had in mind but also the possibility of a redistribution of power in local affairs. The businessman's commitment to fiscal efficiency fitted closely with this objective and shared its implications. For those entering local government, the new plan meant the emergence of a polity in which commissioners would define and determine policy according to middle-class social values. (Schiesl, 1977, p. 140)

And so, while the commission plan put the reins of government in fewer hands, increasing accountability, it pushed into public office men generally unsympathetic to the plight of the lower-classes. The new structure had other flaws as well.

First, commissioners were not above using patronage to secure their own power bases. They often disregarded collective responsibility. One group of researchers found the major weakness of the commission structure to be governmental disintegration caused by private political ambitions (Stone, Price and Stone, 1940). Secondly, many politicians elected as commissioners not only lacked the technical expertise to run their particular departments but also were deficient in managing collective governmental affairs. One commission critic urged others to "abandon the

idea that because a man is a successful lawyer or merchant he will... make a successful municipal administrator" (Schiesl, 1977, p. 146).

Other systemic faults soon became apparent: 1) ineffective coordination between the various city departments; 2) no leadership to respond to the social needs of urban dwellers; 3) no consolidated power source to provide responsive administration and to bring about welfare changes to meet the demands of city residents; and 4) a lack of long range planning to address the problem of municipal growth and a changing urban environment. Such weaknesses brought about the demise of commission governments which had within a decade been adopted by approximately 160 cities. Only the smaller, cohesive communities retained commissioners while larger cities and innovative reformers looked for a new model of city government.

That new model became known as the city manager plan. It supposedly combined efficiency, a strong executive acting as a professional manager and a business approach to government (East, 1965; Schiesl, 1977; Stone, Price and Stone, 1940).

Richard S. Childs is generally given credit for the manager concept of government. He was a Yale graduate, a businessman, a dedicated municipal reformer and the creator of the National Short Ballot Organization. Childs based his model on a formal chart approach to governing. And he believed that structure of government should be based on specific principals: 1) elective office must be visible; 2) the constituency must be wieldy; and 3) governments must be well integrated (East, 1965).

Commission decentralization could be corrected by placing policy authority in the hands of a small elected council and placing administrative

authority in the hands of a single, expert administrator. This expert would be employed by council at its pleasure; he would work under its control; and his job was administration, not policy or politics. The role of the mayor in Childs' model was purely ceremonial. In Childs' view, the strong-mayor structure was defective because citizens must depend on the abilities of one man, who generally was not capable of administrative, executive and legislative tasks (Childs, 1933).

Under Childs' innovative scheme, it was the city's business manager who would provide efficiency. He would control city departments and could ferret out waste. As a result the cost of government would be less. Cheaper government and the possibility of reduced taxes--for these reasons alone many reformers were enthusiastic. Others supported the city manager plan because it would put like-minded business managers in administrative positions and would place political roadblocks in the way of ethnic minorities and the poor (Banfield and Wilson, 1967). Still others perceived the plan to be the answer to the inefficiencies of the strong-mayor, weak-mayor and commission forms of government.

Richard Childs model was adopted by the city of Dayton, Ohio in 1914. Shortly thereafter, under the auspices of the National Municipal League, a national movement gained impetus. By 1918 there were 98 council-manager municipalities. The total increased to 418 cities by 1930. And in 1945 the number of municipalities using the council-manager plan reached 622. By the end of 1969, 2,252 United States and Canadian cities had implemented versions of Childs' scheme, and in November of 1984, the International City Management Association recognized 2,626 cities and counties

in the United States and 131 cities in Canada using a council-manager plan (The Municipal Year Book, 1985).

Generally, cities that adopted some form of the council-manager plan early on used a model charter approved by the National Municipal League in 1915. This charter provided guidelines for this new form of government.

Promoters of the council-manager structure used a number of methods to get the plan adopted: 1) a popular referendum approving a home-rule charter prepared by a select charter commission; 2) a local referendum to adopt the provisions of a state enabling act; 3) a special charter passed by the state legislature effective with or without a local referendum; 4) general laws for specified population-sized cities; 5) an ordinance creating and defining the duties and responsibilities adopted by council; and 5) council implementation of an optional council-manager enabling act (Nolting, 1969).

As cities adopted the council manager plan of government, Childs' mechanistic model was altered to suite community needs. Model charter revisions were necessary to mesh with political realities.

But for Childs there were only two competing groups in the political sphere, the public and the politicians. His goals were an impartial, depoliticized city administrator to serve the public and the demise of politicians. It was the evils of the political system and not the shortcomings of popular self-rule that wreaked havoc on municipal governance. What was needed was a professional municipal manager.

Childs did not believe that true public interest would triumph as

a result of the politics of group struggle (East, 1965). The public will could only be realized by separating policy-making from administration. It was Childs' policy-administration dichotomy which became the subject of much early literature on municipal management.

For example, Leonard D. White, who studied city managers around the country, also believed policy and politics should be separated from municipal administration. In his The City Manager, White noted:

The two major problems in every city government, no matter how organized, are (1) to secure effective community leadership and responsible formulation of a municipal program and (2) to achieve efficient day-by-day administration. City-manager charters often give little hint concerning the presumption about civic leadership, but in general it may be said that this duty may rest upon the mayor or the council. In no case is it assumed that community leadership is a duty of the city manager. In every case it is assumed that the manager will not interest himself in political campaigns or party demonstrations, and he is at times specifically forbidden to participate in politics. (1927, p. 155)

White found that under most manager charters the mayor held a position of secondary importance. In fact, mayors were removed entirely from administration and held only those powers granted to them as members of city council. In some cities White surveyed, the mayor was elected by the public, in other cities he was chosen by council from its own members. However selected, the mayor generally was the presiding officer of council. He served as the official ceremonial head of the city and was, in most cases, the community's political leader.

White's research indicates that city managers assumed mayors' administrative authority and operated "undisturbed by politics." Likewise, White noted that under city-manager charter revisions, the manager was, in effect, the city's chief executive. Generally, managers had the power

to execute approved council programs, appoint department heads, supervise and discipline employees, prepare the budget and make suggestions to council (White, 1927).

The policy-administration dichotomy and pristine views of business-like municipal management were put to the test once they were applied in the real environment of urban governance. Later studies concluded that managers were thrust into the mainstream of political struggles. Technical expertise only disguised the manager's political role of bargaining, conciliation, and negotiation with council, the mayor, heads of agencies and the public in general (Stone, Price and Stone, 1940; Kammerer, Farris, DeGrove, Glubok, 1962; Bollen and Ries, 1969)..

For example, Stone, Price and Stone found that politics played a part not only in the selection of a city manager but also in that individual's duties and tenure as well. In Dallas during the 1930s, the researchers noted:

The city manager made political enemies simply by doing what the charter and the council asked him to do. His unwillingness to show partiality sometimes put him on his guard and gave him an attitude of aloofness that the breezy and informal society of Dallas resented. His impartiality made enemies for him among those who had been accustomed to special treatment; as one councilman said of him, "He treated bankers and bums alike." Influential citizens sometimes became annoyed when they were put on the same basis as others and asked to make engagements in advance. (1940, p. 322)

Interestingly, the manager the researchers were referring to was John N. Edy, who later became Houston's city manager briefly during the 1940s. While serving as Dallas' city manager, Edy was violently attacked by some city employees, members of council, a private association called the "Catfish Club," and members of the media. In 1935 Edy lost his power base

when Charter Association candidates were defeated in the general election by Civic Association council candidates. He was replaced as city manager by Hal Moseley, who accepted council supervision more readily.

Stone, Price and Stone found Moseley to be more willing than Edy to work with various interest groups in Dallas. Unlike Edy, Moseley did not perceive his administrative job as a crusade against city politics. The new city manager avoided controversial issues and gave citizens the impression council ran government (Stone, Price and Stone, 1940, pp. 337-339).

Likewise, the first city manager in Austin, Texas, Adam R. Johnson, quickly learned to maneuver in political waters after the council-manager plan was adopted by a mere margin of 20 votes in 1924. But he later irritated politicians and business leaders by wresting governmental control from administrative agencies and council. While honest, forceful and efficient, Johnson was ultimately perceived to have "bossed council." That tag became a political liability even though the city manager was considered a dominant community leader. Johnson, as city manager, was a campaign issue in the 1927 and 1931 elections. He survived both elections. He was not so fortunate in 1933. When his opposition was elected to office, he resigned (Stone, Price and Stone, 1940, pp. 460-468).

The first city manager of San Antonio also faced political conflict once the council-manager charter was approved by voters in October 1951. That man, Charles Harrell, was chosen by a newly elected council which had been supported by the Council-Manager Association of San Antonio, the Chamber of Commerce and business leaders like W.W. McAllister, owner

of the San Antonio Building and Loan Association.

The struggle for a council-manager form of government for San Antonio began in 1931. The movement developed as a result of the maneuverings of Bryan Callaghan II, San Antonio's first political boss and the shortcomings of the commission government. It gained impetus among the business leaders when professional politicians of lower-status supplanted socio-economic elites in office. Economic stagnation and poor city service delivery resulted in criticisms of the commission government and calls for reform (Johnson, Booth and Harris, 1983).

In 1934 Maury Maverick ran on a reform platform against machine mayor C.K. Quin. He was elected to office and made significant changes in municipal government, but he failed to keep his campaign pledge to back council-manager charter referendum. But area businessmen continued to push for a council-manager charter revision.

Victory for San Antonio's persevering reformers did not come until 1951. In that year, hotelier Jack White was re-elected to the office of mayor, in part, because of his public commitment to the manager plan. The electoral defeat of hostile commissioners removed a major obstacle of the council-manager plan, and Harrell was ushered in as the city's new manager.

Harrell wasted no time in attempting to modernize government and improve services; however, political animosity soon developed between the mayor and the manager as White attempted to centralize power in his own hands. Conflicts between the two men continued until 1953 when Mayor White ran for re-election, advocating a return to a commission government.

His efforts, however, failed. The city's Good Government League used its power and economic resources to defend the nonpartisan council-manager government (Johnson, Booth and Harris, 1983).

While these examples are closer to home other studies disprove the policy-administrative dichotomy and the politically neutral role of the city manager. The classic study of council-manager cities by Kammerer, Farris, DeGrove and Clubok revealed managers are, indeed, political actors. Their tenure and effectiveness depend on their political skills: "Managers tend to play policy roles in the making of the principal decisions of the city, and, therefore, they tend to incur political hazards. We found no managers in our case study cities who were not involved in the making, shaping or vetoing of policy proposals. Therefore, they were right in the heart of politics" (Kammerer, Farris, DeGrove, Clubok, 1962, p. 83).

A case in point is the 15-year service record of L. Perry Cookingham, who served as city manager in Kansas City, Missouri. Before his selection, a "good" government coalition ousted the Pendergast machine-picked politicians and machine subservient city manager in 1939. Politically savvy, Cookingham refused the city manager job until a temporary city manager pro tem, selected from within city hall ranks, had eliminated 2,000 city jobs and reorganized city hall. Once in office, Cookingham repeatedly used legal guidelines to his benefit and tactfully maneuvered council (Harlow, 1981).

In view of these and similar research findings, the National City Manager's Code of Ethics was revised. Its 1938 prohibition on political

involvement was deleted. New verbage acknowledged the city manager as a community leader, who of necessity must be involved in political persuasion, bargaining and policy promotion.

Ronald Loveridge, who studied city managers in the California Bay Area, supported the revised political role of municipal managers. He found that potential conflicts, confusion and tension between managers and council members necessitated involvement in the political process: "In sum the city manager must strive to be a complete politician as well as an effective administrator" (Loveridge, 1971, p. 31).

And finally, a handbook for the effective local manager by the International City Management Association acknowledges the manager as monitor, disseminator, spokesman and the "nerve center" of city organization: "In the liaison role, the manager works with people outside the formal chain of command--building a network with others who have a relationship to the organization, have influence over it, or have expectations of it" (Anderson, Newland, Stillman, 1983, p. 3).

It is important to note that charter provisions for a council-manager structure generally do not grant broad political powers to the manager. However, the astute manager can appropriate such authority. He is able to do this in part because of his technical expertise and also because he often deals with amateur and part-time councilmen and mayors.

Before discussing the kinds of cities which have opted for a council-manager plan, the criticisms of this structure and a derivation of the form, it is important to recap the major points made thus far: 1) as local governments foundered in the wake of industrialization and urban problems,

reformers sought ways to improve the structure of government and to increase municipal efficiency; 2) a business-like approach to government was viewed as an answer to the inefficiencies and ineptitudes of machine-placed politicians and bureaucrats; 3) the city manager plan evolved from flaws in the commission structure and was championed because it removed administration from politics; 4) as cities adopted council-manager structures, Childs' mechanistic model was altered to suit the political realities of municipal governance; and 5) a professional city manager of necessity is involved in urban politics.

What kinds of cities have chosen the council-manager form of government over the weak-mayor, strong-mayor or commission structures? John H. Kessel found that rapidly growing cities or declining ones face many administrative problems which make the council-manager structure attractive (Kessel, 1962). Using 1960 census data, Kessel found that political patterns in such cities are somewhat amorphous and the professional administrator is, therefore, less likely to face organized political opposition. He also found manager cities are generally in one-party states or in states where party organization is weak. Also cities which have more homogeneous populations or a greater proportion of urban dwellers who are native born tend to accept council-manager structure more readily (Kessel, 1962, pp. 619-621).

Kessel also used Howard J. Nelson's service classification of cities in his research analysis. He noted a preponderance of medium-size cities using a council-manager structure if their economy was generally geared to personal services, retail, finance or professional services. Kessel

attributed this to the significant number of businessmen whose markets lie within or around their own cities. On the other hand, manufacturing or highly diversified cities are more likely to have mayor-council governments. In these cities, Kessel noted businessmen are concerned with regional, national and international markets. And he hypothesized: "It is not implausible to assume that the small businessmen in the manager cities supply the consensus which enables the manager to concentrate on administrative problems" (Kessel, 1962, p. 619).

Moreover, Kessel found mayor-council structures more likely in smaller or larger cities with stable populations, with well-defined and persistent political rivalries and with a higher proportion of foreign born city dwellers. Because the political environment in large cities is so complex and because there are so many competing interests in these urban spaces, Kessel found few larger cities that had abandoned the mayor-council plan. Such a structure provides an important economic and political channel for less advantaged ethnic minorities, a channel they are not willing to modify (Kessel, 1962).

A more recent survey conducted in the spring and summer of 1981 supports Kessel's findings. The survey included 4,659 cities and was done by the International City Management Association. Fifty-two percent of the responding cities had a mayor-council structure of government. These cities included the largest cities as well as cities with the smallest populations (less than 10,000). The council-manager structure predominated in middle population ranges while the commission form accounted for less than 3 percent of all the cities. Researchers found, like Kessel, that

council-manager plan adoption occurred as smaller cities grew and faced governmental and management problems which could not be dealt with by part-time elected officials. Yet, the 1981 data figures did not suggest an increasing trend of mayor-council abandonment in either large or small cities for the coming decade (Sanders, *The Municipal Year Book* 1982, 178-79, 183-84).

The survey data also revealed a geographic division in the distribution of government with the mayor-council structure being dominant in the Mid-Atlantic, East, West North Central and East South Central areas. The council-manager cities are located in primarily the New England, South Atlantic and Pacific Coast Areas. Commission governments are found most often in the Mid-Atlantic, West North Central and South Atlantic areas of the country. Attributing such variations to the relative age of cities and regional reform sentiment, the analysts noted: "Western cities that were comparatively young during the reform movement often found it easier to alter their forms of government to the reform model than did their older, more established counterparts in the East. Western cities that were incorporated after the start of the reform movement adopted the council-manager plan from the outset" (Sanders, 1982, p. 179).

In the 1930s, Texas was regarded as one of the most progressive states in adopting the newer forms of government. By 1936 approximately 197 towns and cities had commission governments and 36 cities had council-manager structures with Amarillo having the distinction of being the first city in the state to implement a city manager government (Myers, 1936, pp. 29-30). As of January 1983, the Texas Municipal League

reported that of the 237 home rule cities, approximately 165 had a council-manager government while 41 had a commission-manager structure (Texas Almanac and Industrial Guide, 1984-1985, p. 600). Most of these are small or mid-sized cities, the exceptions being Dallas, Austin and San Antonio.

Raymond E. Wolfinger and John Osgood Field also stress the importance of regional variations and historical experiences as important predictors of government form and policy output. Rather than ethnicity or occupational status or the public or private-regarding ethos theory of Banfield and Wilson, these researchers believe a region's political culture and experiences determine structure of government: "The ethos theory is irrelevant to the South, where most municipal institutions seem to be corollaries of the region's traditional occupation of excluding negroes from political power. A one-party system removes temptation to appeal to negro voters as does the city manager plan" (Wolfinger and Field, 1966, p. 325).

Yet Robert R. Alford and Harry M. Scoble argue political and socioeconomic characteristics of cities do, indeed, relate to forms of governments. They used empirical indicators of three variables--social heterogeneity, class composition and population growth and mobility--in their research effort. They found "white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, growing and mobile cities are likely to be manager cities; ethnically and religiously diverse but nonmobile industrial cities are highly likely to be mayor-council cities" (Alford and Scoble, 1965, p. 95). In addition, they noted the larger the city the more likely that city would have a "politicized" form of government because of various group demands

for access. That large cities have generally adopted the mayor-council plan is supported by recent data compiled by the International City Management Association (The Municipal Year Book, 1982, 1985).

However, some proponents of the council-manager plan for larger cities point to Dallas, San Antonio and San Diego as successfully run manager cities. They argue there is nothing inherent in the council-manager plan that would prevent a large municipal government from dealing with major social problems of the urban environment or from being responsive to minority groups (Mulrooney, 1971; Lyons, 1978; Anderson, Newland and Stillman, 1983).

Still, while the city-manager plan may have introduced technical expertise and a business-like approach to government, analysts have pointed out a number of shortcomings inherent in this structure. This scheme gives too much power to one person--the city manager. Also a city manager may be too removed from the public he must, of necessity, serve. In addition, council may abdicate their policy-making responsibilities to an overbearing manager. Then too, council-manager or mayor-manager conflicts have stymied decision-making and administrative implementation. Finally, there is the possibility of increased costs of government under a council-manager plan (Harlow, 1981).

In the Kammerer, et al., city manager study, researchers noted a lack of organized political party activity in manager cities as well as the unstructured personal politics of nonpartisan elections. They found that candidates buried political issues during campaigns, and the city manager or technical expert was far removed from public control. Furthermore, in these

cities policy was based on dominant social and economic class interests while the mayor functioned in a reduced leadership role. The researchers concluded these shortcomings prevented the electorate from getting a quick and thorough policy change at any given election and concealed from voters the real economic and social alignments (Kammerer, et al, 1962).

Robert L. Lineberry and Edmund P. Fowler examined the impact of political structures--reformed and unreformed--on policy-making in American cities and found reformed governments were less responsive to the demands which arise out of social conflicts. Such governments modified minority group strength, and efforts by reformers to eliminate parties via non-partisan elections reduced the order and focus of political issues. As a result, the simplifying framework of political alternatives was severely weakened (Lineberry and Fowler, 1968).

Another criticism leveled at the council-manager structure is that the reduced leadership role of the mayor coupled with a professional manager removed from the public destroys the political link between city government and low-income residents (Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, 1968).

Furthermore, many urban political analysts argue reform changes in governmental and electoral structure are major impediments to voter participation (Schiesl, 1977; Harrigan, 1984; Schultze, 1985). Albert K. Karnig and B. Oliver Walter analyzed the decline in municipal turnout in a number of cities. They found that:

Reform cities indeed may be run more efficiently, more economically and more in accordance with management principals. But the adoption of reform does tend to forestall higher levels of municipal voter

turnout. Whatever their other advantages, nonpartisan and council-manager forms of government are not systems that promote citizen participation. (Karnig and Walter, 1983, p. 504)

Criticism of reformers' motives have also come from scholars like Samuel P. Hays who found support for municipal reform came not from the lower or middle-classes, but from the upper strata of society, those "in the vanguard of professional life, actively seeking to apply expertise more widely to public affairs" (Hays, 1964, p. 85). For Hays, the paradox of reform was that while business and professional leaders called the reform movement an effort to reestablish popular government, political corruption of the reform era developed because of the inaccessibility of municipal government from the grass-root segments of society. In effect, the reformers' democratization was an ideological tool used to destroy the political institutions necessary to the lower- and middle-classes.

Still others argue for all the reformers' rhetoric, government can never be run like a business; government leaders and administrators can never operate like a board of directors. Government is a resolver of conflict, a provider of municipal services. Therefore, because of these roles, government often does things that are not profitable, rational, sensible or business-like.

But criticisms of council-manager structures and nonpartisan reforms have not fallen on deaf ears. Proponents over the years have sought to correct the deficiencies by better manager training, by supporting the direct election of a mayor held accountable to the people, by efforts to communicate with the poorer segments of society, and by developing training programs to improve the relationships between mayors, councils and managers.

(Anderson, Newland and Stillman, 1983). And city manager advocates point to successfully operating cities like Dallas, Phoenix, San Antonio, Austin, San Diego and Cincinnati as positive examples of their efforts. And they argue abandonment of the city-manager form is rare (Anderson, Newland and Stillman, 1983; Sanders, 1982).

But the strong-mayor structure remains the choice of the majority of large cities. However, a number of sizable cities have taken Wallace S. Sayre's suggestion of marrying the manager idea with an elected chief executive whereby the mayor is the political leader who has ultimate responsibility for city affairs. It is the city's manager who handles the routine, day-to-day administrative matters. Because governance is complex, Sayre believes mayors need managerial support so that they can turn their attention from administrative minutia and focus on decision-making and public policy (Sayre, 1954).

In the past few decades there has been a trend towards establishing by charter or ordinance a chief administrative officer (CAO). While his powers may vary from city to city, he functions as a professional manager and is appointed by the mayor. He may handle day-to-day administration, coordinate the activities of various departments, oversee budget proposals and planning and handle personnel supervision. However, his function is to free the mayor from detail and allow the mayor time to serve as the community's political and ceremonial leader (Dye, 1968).

A number of larger cities have implemented this derivation of the council-manager plan: San Francisco, New York, Philadelphia, Louisville and New Orleans to name a few. In most cities these managers have reduced

administrative authority, answering directly to the mayor instead of the council. Despite this change from the original council-manager model, the International City Management Association has recognized and supported this trend which has increased since the end of World War II (The Municipal Year Book, 1985).

While a strong-mayor structure coupled with the appointment of a chief administrative officer frees the mayor for policy-making and places a technical professional in city administration, this scheme, too, has its shortcomings. First, there is the continuing threat of a legislative-executive deadlock. Second, the potential exists for a jealous rivalry between the mayor and the CAO (Dye, 1968).

The most recent move for structural reform in Houston includes the call for a hybrid city manager similar to the CAO system used in New York. But the CAO plan as it exists in New York has had, over the years, a number of deficiencies. These include: 1) charter ambiguity about the CAO's responsibilities; 2) a lack of continuous control by the CAO over operations of municipal departments and agencies; 3) a lack of real sanctions to use against recalcitrant New York commissioners and agencies; 4) the inability of the city administrator to obtain reliable information about what is going on within various municipal departments he is supposed to supervise; 5) a lack of explicit authority for the CAO to engage in advance long-range planning as well as short-term priority planning; and, 6) the less than full support given to strengthening the CAO's administrative powers by incumbent mayors (Caraley, 1966).

This is not to say that New York's various CAOs have not made important

contributions toward improving New York's municipal organization and management practices. But such accomplishments appear to depend more on the particular attributes of the CAO and the support given to him by the mayor rather than formal grants of power specified in various charter revisions (Caraley, 1968, p. 69).

The purpose of this chapter has been to consider the origins, intent and consequences of the municipal reform movement in this country. Since the proposed city manager plan for Houston is a variation of the council-manager and mayor-council structures each has been discussed in detail as well as the hybrid CAO plan. This explanation provides a backdrop for understanding early Houston efforts to promote structural reform and the political and socioeconomic environment in which such attempts were made. These endeavors are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: THE HOUSTON EXPERIENCE

Capitalists are interested in this town, and are determined to push ahead by the investment of considerable capital, and at this moment contracts exist for the sending of 700,000 feet of lumber there; and I can assure the members that several stores of much capital will very soon be established there.

John K. Allen
Argument for Houston before the
Texas Congress, 1836

The town of Houston was borne of land speculation and financial maneuvering. It was nurtured by advertisement and real estate promotion. Its two biggest promoters were two brothers Augustus C. Allen and John K. Allen. They had come to Texas from New York in 1832 and soon thereafter began acquiring land. In 1836 the Allen brothers made a down payment of \$1000 for a piece of land bequeathed to Mrs. T.F.L. Parrot by her husband John Austin. This land was located near the head of the tide water on Buffalo Bayou. Later, the site, which ultimately cost \$5000, was named Houston in honor of General Sam Houston.

While the fledgling Houston was heralded in the Allen brothers' grandiose advertisements, a visitor to the new site found "only one dugout canoe, a bottle gourd of whiskey, a surveyor's chain and compass, and a grove inhabited by four men camping in tents" (Carroll, B.H., 1912, p. 28). But the Allen brothers' germ of faith, initiative and entrepreneurial spirit would soon transform the wilderness into a bustling city.

For the first two years of her existence, Houston's affairs were under the control of the county. But in 1838 city voters supported incorporation and application was made and granted for a city charter in that year. Under that charter the city could sue or be sued, pass laws, establish tax rates and own or sell property. Dr. Francis Moore was elected the first mayor and served a full term which was one year. Other than extending city limits for taxing purposes, municipal administration was minimal and public improvements negligible (Carroll, B.H., 1912). Civic improvements were the result of private business initiative: a market house built on Congress Square by two French businessmen but controlled by the city; Protection Fire Company No. 1, a volunteer fire department later absorbed by the city; and the clearing along five miles of Buffalo Bayou to complete the city's first important shipping route (Carroll, 1912; Buchanan, 1977).

For a brief moment in history (1836-1840) Houston was the seat of government for Texas. However, dissatisfaction with the Houston site and new opportunities for land speculation prompted legislators to pull out of Houston and move the state capitol to Austin in 1840. As a result, the city was left to its own resources and entrepreneurial pool to prove itself as a commercial center (McComb, 1981).

Area businessmen took on the task and the rest is history. In 1840 the first Chamber of Commerce was organized to set standard rates for freight handling and storage. Boosterism appeared in print when an editor of the Morning Star noted "Houston is advancing with giant strides to her destined greatness" (McComb, 1981, p. 19). Trade and commerce flourished and transportation facilities developed as businessmen invested in roads,

in railways and in the dredging of Buffalo Bayou. Men like William M. Rice, a prominent cotton merchant and founder of Rice Institute, and Thomas W. House, a dry goods merchant and railroad investor, realized their futures as well as the city's depended on improved accessibility to regional and national markets. Projects like the Houston Ship Channel reflected the progrowth attitude, boosterism and enterprising spirit of the city's early businessmen. Later, men like Jesse Holman Jones, Gus Wortham, George and Herman Brown, Judge James A. Elkins, William P. Hobby and Hugh Roy Cullen would push Houston forward as a city of regional dominance. Often referred to as the entrepreneurial power elite, these men would promote Houston as they promoted themselves (Carleton, 1985; Hurt, 1980).

While early entrepreneurs forged ahead with commercial projects, municipal leaders lagged behind. Houston needed bridges, a new hospital, streets, drainage, sewage and garbage collection. The city lacked both the money and power to meet growth needs.

In 1839 the city obtained a second charter which included a more detailed account of municipal power and in 1840 a charter change provided for four wards with two representatives from each to serve on city council (Buchanan, 1975). Yet, city government was parochial in nature. Local politics revolved around ward meetings and a primary election. The mayor was generally a well-known business leader. And aldermen, concerned about their narrow constituency, were generally "retail proprietors, skilled laborers and white collar workers" (Platt, 1977, p. 30).

There were some attempts to meet the growing need for city services.

Unfortunately, local politics co-opted municipal needs. For example, the second mayor of Houston George W. Lively raised property taxes from $\frac{1}{4}$ of 1 percent to $\frac{1}{2}$ of 1 percent and enraged the Allen brothers. As a result, Lively lost his bid for re-election to Augustus Allen's candidate, Charles Bigelo (Carroll, Jim, 1946a). Attempts by Bigelow and city aldermen to deal with city growth were unsuccessful and Bigelow's decision to increase the fees of the market master drew the ire of Augustus Allen and cost Bigelow his support. In the next election, a Colonel Andrews, the Allen-backed candidate, had to run twice for the office of mayor because of skullduggery at the polls (Carroll, Jim, 1946a)

In 1850, the U.S. Census Report showed Houston's population to be 2,397--only 322 more than in 1839⁴ (Buchanan, 1975, p. 8). Even with Houston's early slow growth, subsequent city fathers still could not provide adequate service delivery to the small but growing community. By 1861 there were still no municipal services to speak of "only 2 fire engines, no paid firemen, no paved streets, no covered sewers, no street lights and no permanent health board" (Buchanan, 1975, p. 9). By 1868 Houston was unable to pay its few municipal employees, and military authorities appointed a carpetbagger to serve as mayor.

Throughout the 1870s, municipal government foundered. The issuance of bonds with little financial backing by a reconstructionist administration placed the city in severe financial debt. When Governor E.J. Davis, a Republican, appointed Timothy H. Scanlan mayor of the city and named four negro alderman, Houstonians chose to ignore municipal attempts at governance:

The citizens of Houston boiled with indignation, but Federal troops in blue with fixed bayonets sat tightly on the lid. Women walked through the mud of the street rather than walk beneath the United States flags that hung over boardwalks. The newspapers ignored the city government's actions whenever possible, the files being so devoid of news of what was done from 1870-1873 as to almost indicate the city had no government. (Carroll, Jim, 1946b, p. 1)

Because of charges of corruption by the Scanlan administration, rumors of Negroes being imported into the city to vote for the Republican administration and the election of Democrat Richard Coke as governor, Houston was granted a charter which authorized the new governor to appoint city officials. James Wilson was appointed mayor, but he was no match for the city's financial woes. Municipal debt was approximately \$1,691,349 and residents were outraged (Buchanan, 1975; Carroll, B.H., 1912).

'Conditions worsened, and one historian noted the city's financial plight was so desperate "the very best businessmen of Houston were placed in office, with the sole purpose of using their business talent and experience in an attempt to solve the trouble" (Carroll, B.H., 1912, p. 94). Eventually business leaders talked William R. Baker, a Houston financier, into becoming mayor. He was promised he would be allowed to select his own aldermen and told there would be no opposition to his ticket (Carroll, B.H., 1912).

Thus the commercial-business elites showed continued concern over the city's inability to deal with its financial difficulties. Soon these men targeted the neighborhood-narrow perspectives of the inefficient aldermanic structure as the culprit (Platt, 1977). As the city grew, urban policy became increasingly important as entrepreneurs tried to attract industry and Yankee dollars. An inflexible municipal tax rate, inferior services

and fiscal difficulties that prevented the issuance of new bonds--all became cannon fodder aimed at city officials by business and new, emerging residential groups. In addition, problems with franchise utility firms and the city's inadequate water supply continued to plague a part-time, amateurish aldermanic council while groups like the Good Government League and the Labor Council organized to effect political change (Platt, 1977).

Thus in the 1890s, urban reform became the watchword of elite businessmen like Henry Brashear, a Houston landowner, and H. Baldwin Rice, who ran for mayor in 1896 and won. It was during this Progressive Era that municipal reform was attempted. Harold L. Platt in his research on Houston's Progressive Era reform noted the first major attempt was by Mayor Samuel H. Brashear:

Brashear's administration vigorously pursued coherent programs designed to expand control over the environment and essential service functions. Progressive attacks on public utility company tax-dodging were enhanced by the administration's emphasis upon efficiency and professional expertise. New offices, such as the city auditor and electric and gas inspectors, were added to the burgeoning bureaucracies of established departments. The work force employed by local government also grew from projects that laid miles of asphalt pavement and began construction of a unified sewage treatment/electric power plant. In augmenting the machinery of government the municipal corporation became big business. It had a large impact on the local economy and the general well-being of the inhabitants. (Platt, 1977, p. 37)

But the cost of reform and the political opposition of frustrated alderman unable to cope with the growing bureaucracy resulted in strife within city hall and a political defeat for Brashear in 1902. Continued difficulties with the aldermanic system prompted municipal reformers to consider the commission form of government that had been operating in Galveston

since 1901. The new genre of government was receiving acclaim from reformers throughout the country as a way to reduce costs, increase services and modernize government. In fact, business leaders did more than just watch as Galveston's new administrative machine--the commission--rose to the task of rebuilding its hurricane-wracked city. Houston's Business League, a booster association of area companies and businessmen sought to consolidate its power over municipal policy by actively promoting a charter change for a commission government (Platt, 1977).

Due in large measure to the Business League's efforts, voters approved just such a change in 1904. Under the new municipal charter that was granted in 1905, four at-large commissioners were to be elected in addition to the mayor. Together they and the mayor were the legislative council of the city, and ward politics was no more (City of Houston Charter, 1905, Article V., p. 27).

Each alderman was to serve as an active chairman of a committee to oversee a municipal department. Civic leaders called it an efficient way to handle the city's administration because now an elected official would supervise each department that in the past no public official was willing to take responsibility for. The mechanism was not without flaws. Some aldermen or commissioners as they were also called soon usurped administrative power and came into conflict with the city's chief executive. Because the new charter also conferred veto, appointment and removal powers on the mayor, it is not surprising conflicts would arise between the administrative head of municipal government and the administrative head of a city department. In fact, it was just such a conflict that brought an end

to Houston's 38-year experience with commission government and helped to usher in another structural reform--the city manager government.

But for the eight years (1905-1913) that H. Baldwin Rice was mayor, Houston achieved a measure of political stability under its new government. Such stability was due in part to an alliance of the business community and reformers who supported Rice and also to the election of Rice's hand-picked slate of commissioners (Platt, 1977, p. 42). With stability came modernization and successful growth for the city.

It is true the commission system provided pro-business forces easier access to government and established a means of administrative accountability, but it was not so much the structure of government that brought positive, new changes to the city during Rice's reign. Rather it was the will of the man and the abilities of those who supported him (McComb, 1980; Carroll, Jim, 1946c). But the commission structure was hailed as success because it had "created business confidence in the city as a government" and gave to the city "a credit it never had before" (Carroll, B.H., 1912, p. 104).

But as early as 1912, however, the commission government came under the scrutiny of urban innovators. In the Putnam Report, a study of European cities sponsored by the mayor and council, a significant structural change was suggested: an end to aldermen serving as heads of departments--the very basis of commission government (McComb, 1980). The commission form, however, remained intact until a mayor-commission squabble for power left many business leaders considering a still newer, professionalized city manager government.

That squabble began when a new political personality emerged to take the reins of city government, a man who would dominate Houston city government and local politics off and on from 1921 through 1957. Oscar Holcombe, a successful building contractor, was that man.

First elected as mayor at the age of 32, Holcombe was a forceful politician who built up a power base over the years as the city's chief administrator. He used his political acumen to gain the support of business influentials like Jesse H. Jones, Judge James A. Elkins and Gus Wortham--men who were considered the city's power brokers when it came to selecting political candidates (Hurt, 1980; Carleton, 1985). Within government, Holcombe shored up support by adroitly using his appointment powers to place "his cronies" in influential department positions (Settegast, 1986).

It was not surprising that his attempts to gain control of city administration drew the animosity of commissioners, who sought to control their departments. Disagreements within council erupted as Holcombe sought to increase his power over city government (Carroll, Jim, 1946c; Settegast, 1986). In 1927, after public difficulties between the mayor and commissioners, a number of Houstonians suggested that perhaps a more professional form of government was needed. Such talk resulted in a front page editorial reply from the Houston Post-Dispatch. The paper acknowledged the conduct of local government was open to criticism. But the newspaper's position in effect supported the commission structure as highly responsive to the will of the people. It said the commissioners provided a check on the powers of the mayor and referred to a city-manager

system as "the setting up of a little tin god to run the city's affairs."

The editorial further argued:

The idea that municipal government is a job for the professional, and that class of office holder should be set up and entrenched in power, is foreign to democratic concepts....If the Post-Dispatch is not badly mistaken in its judgement of Houston people, they would be very slow to turn their municipal affairs over to some imported efficiency expert. (Houston Post-Dispatch, 10/30/1927, p. 1)

But disagreements between the mayor and council continued. In 1928 a number of business leaders approached state Justice Walter Embree Monteith and persuaded him to run for mayor. Monteith was viewed as a professional and above reproach: he had served as Chief Justice of the Court of Civil Appeals in Galveston, was past president of the Harris County Bar Association, and was a member of the Masons and Shriners. If elected the judge said he would consider a study of the feasibility of a city-manager government (H.P-D., 10/2/1929). After a hotly contested mayor's race, Holcombe lost to Monteith.

In December after the election, Houston's Real Estate Board unanimously passed a motion to study the city-manager structure and appointed a committee to visit city-manager cities in the country. Three area businessmen, John A. Embry, Hugh Potter and W.G. Burchfield were appointed to the committee after a lengthy speech by Embry to the real estate board.

Embry and other realtors were concerned about divisive politics, charges of a city hall political machine, realty interests and "the effect on general business conditions and the attitudes of outside interests on Houston as a direct result of municipal elections every two years (H.P-D., 12/5/1928, p. 4).

In calling for a city-manager government, Embry argued the real

estate industry would benefit because:

In order to do these things he (the realtor) must have the cooperation of the city government. Every real estate man should resent the idea that he must take the attitude of a begging pariah when he goes to city hall....The continuance of his business on a prosperous basis depends upon the growth of the city, and when we have men in office who are merely conservers and not city builders the business of the real estate broker suffers. (H.P-D., 12/5/1928, p. 4)

In the name of efficiency these men were seeking a change in the ratio of power and an assurance their interests would be protected. Support for a feasibility study also came from the city's Chamber of Commerce.

Monteith took a cue from the business community and kept a campaign pledge. In October 1929, Monteith appointed a committee to study the possibility of a city-manager government. The committee of 50--newspaper editors, businessmen, professional men and civic leaders-- was chaired by Frank Andrews, a well-known Houston attorney (H.P-D., 10/2/1929). The mayor told the committee "I consider service on this committee a most responsible one. In my opinion, the adoption of a feasible and practical city manager plan will promote the potential growth and kind of growth that will characterize this city" (H.P-D., 10/2/1929, p. 6).

But a strong mayor to oversee the administration of city business was preferred by many Houstonians because the mayor could be removed by the electorate, the city manager could not. As a result, the committee's efforts came to naught for the time being. The city and its judge-turned-mayor concentrated on a more pressing problem: the effects of the depression. Structure of government receded as an issue while unemployment and adverse business conditions came to the forefront.

In the early 1930s Houston had its bread lines and soup kitchens.

Federal assistance was sought, and the city suffered a shortage of revenue (Berryman, 1965; Buchanan, 1975, McComb, 1980). These adverse conditions worked to the advantage of Oscar Holcombe in the 1933 election. He bested Monteith 18,223 votes to 18,034. And his supporters once again filled key city positions.

Holcombe turned his attention to the city's financial difficulties. But conflicts with certain department commissioners soon developed. Holcombe used his political acumen and a new charter change to take control of government. Before the election he had worked out a compromise with manager advocates to deal efficiently with depression conditions. Monteith's city-manager commission's recommendations were used but with a slight twist: efficiency would result if the elective mayor was to be given greater authority and responsibilities--the administrative responsibilities of a city manager--but with the electorate still holding removal power. Under a proposed charter revision the administrative duties of the city were placed under the complete control of the mayor. Commissioners were to be elected at-large by position number and were to serve only as legislators. Difficult economic times, revisionists argued, necessitated giving the mayor strong administrative authority (H.P-D., 4/19/1933).

Voters approved this charter change which in effect reduced council to an approval body and concentrated administrative power in the office of the mayor. But the charter revisions were unclear as to whether commissioners were still entitled to head city departments (Proposed Charter Amendments, sample ballot, 1933). What was clear, however, was

that Holcombe wanted control over each department and popular sentiment at the time seemed to be with Holcombe (Settegast, 1986; H.P-D., 4/19/1933, p. 1). And he moved quickly to consolidate his power in the name of efficiency. But three commissioners balked. They argued the charter amendment revision did not include removing the commissioners from heading departments. They were successful in getting council to block Holcombe's efforts to reorganize city government (H.P-D., 4/19 1933, p. 6).

A stalemate developed with the media publicizing the conflict. Meanwhile, the depression took its toll on Houstonians--6,000 were unemployed, 7,500 were working Civil Works Administration jobs and Harris County sought jobs for 8,000 men (Buchanan, 1975, p. 39). The squabbles in city hall were bad publicity for both the mayor and council. The conflict between the mayor and council was eventually resolved by a three-judge committee in favor of Holcombe but not before city hall received sharp criticism from the press and the public (H.P-D., 4/19/1933; Houston Post, 4/4/1935; Gray, 1960).²

As a result, Holcombe just barely beat mayoral contender R.H. Fonville in the 1934 election, garnering 21,285 votes to Fonville's 20,754 (Gray, 1960). The effects of the depression, the struggles within city hall and Fonville's support for a city-manager government were issues in the campaign.

The charter conflict, however, was not resolved until June of 1935. Holcombe emerged victorious but not unscathed. A charter board ruling determined commissioners had no right to head departments: Councilmen's

job was to "legislate by motion, ordinance or resolution" (H.P., 6/6/1935, p. 1). Administrative power belonged to the mayor. With this decision and for all practical purposes the commission form of government was dealt a death blow. Holcombe's desire to dominate the governmental structure as a strong mayor was finally legitimized. The commissioners, however, would not give up their administrative powers that easily.

Difficulties between the council and the mayor continued and the adverse publicity reaffirmed city-manager proponents' convictions that the city needed a professional administrator. Along with R.H. Fonville, Will Carter, whose family owned Carter Lumber Company, Joel Berry, an attorney, and Burke Baker, who headed Seaboard Life Insurance Company pushed for a city manager (Settegast, 1986).

In the meantime, Holcombe had tossed his hat into the Congressional ring and was pitted against Albert Thomas. After losing to Thomas in the summer of 1936, he announced he would not run for mayor against Fonville. With Fonville as mayor in 1937, the city-manager movement gained momentum.

Fonville spearheaded an effort to amend the city charter, changing to a city-manager structure. The manager would serve at the pleasure of council and, supposedly, would be removed from politics--the kind of politics that characterized the Holcombe-council struggle. With his support, a group of concerned citizens petitioned council in 1938 to put just such an amendment before the voters (Houston City Council Minutes, 4/20/1942, p. 465).³ A number of commissioners balked and the effort was stymied for the time being.

But Holcombe promoted one project that later would be used by city-

manager forces. In 1939 he recommended council use the services of a well-known consulting firm to study government and its various departments in order to "give better government to the citizens at lower prices" (H.P., 9/24/1939, p. 1). The Griffenhagen Report, as it was called, pointed out a number of municipal shortcomings. The consulting firm questioned the legality of city council boards which had both legislative and executive powers; the "appalling" amount of ordinances, resolutions and motions; and:

a still further question of unauthorized combination of legislative and executive powers arises from the traditional practice of the city by which the council passes on multitudinous matters of trivial detail involved in the operation of departments. Common sense and good business procedure would call for most of these matters to be passed upon in detail by administrative authorities under general policies, standards, and rules of procedures established by the council. (1940, p. 19)

The report also noted that making aldermen or commissioners heads of departments handicapped the mayor in his efforts to carry out his administrative responsibilities.

Interestingly, The Griffenhagen Report recommended the mayor be relieved of his membership on council and serve only as a full-time chief executive. As presiding officer of council with an equal vote, this dual legislative-executive role made legislating more political and difficult as the mayor, who made specific recommendations to council, would have to build support to get his programs passed (The Griffenhagen Report, 1940, p. 20).

In their proposed government reorganization plan, the Griffenhagen consultants recommended a council with legislative authority only; administrative functions were to be surrendered. They called for a strong executive to be vested with "adequate authority" over "all departments" and an

end to existing limitations on the mayor's administrative and executive powers. The firm also found sufficient justification for an official assistant to the mayor to relieve him of burdensome routine matters. And finally, the consultants noted the municipal organization fell short of compliance with effective and economical principals of government (The Griffenhagen Report, 1940, p. 23). The report, however, had little effect on the continuing power struggle between the mayor and the commissioners.

In the 1940 election, dissatisfaction with the Holcombe administration was reflected in the resounding defeat of the incumbent C.A. Neal Pickett, a city-manager advocate. Pickett received 47,009 votes, Holcombe 22,913 (Gray, 1960). Pickett headed the Harris County Young Democrats and was active in the Houston Junior Chamber of Commerce. And while Pickett fell out of favor during his term as mayor, it was under his administration that the city-manager forces pushed for a charter change. Pickett, unfortunately, was a political fatality of his own struggle with commissioners. In his frustration in dealing with Frank Mann, the fire commissioner, Pickett fired Mann. It was a politically unpopular and damaging move. The public and the press chastised Pickett; Mann was reinstated as head of the Fire Department over the mayor's veto. And Pickett ran a miserable fourth in the 1942 election.

During Pickett's term, however, he consistently supported the idea of a city-manager charter change. He supported a Charter Committee's request to council that such a revision be submitted to the voters. Committee members included: former mayor R.H. Fonville; Lee M. Sharrar, an accountant and former chairman of the City Charter Commission; and Miss Nina

Cullinan, a well-known Houston philanthropist whose father was founder of the Texas Company (Texaco). When this committee addressed council there were other members present who represented women's organizations: The Height's Women's Club; The Committee for Better Health and Better Government; and the Council of Church Women. W.B. Sharp, director of the Bureau of Mental Hygiene, and W.P. Sutherland, vice president of Federated Civic Clubs of Buffalo Bayou were also present. City-manager proponents had enlisted the support of groups concerned with city health issues. Those present before council wanted a city manager because the present municipal government had "no health program and no health board" (H.C.C.M., 4/20/1942, p. 465). Under a professionalized city-manager government, these groups felt the city's health needs would be better attended to.

Council turned a deaf ear and refused to place such a revision on the July 25th primary ballot. Frank Mann bitterly opposed to a city manager told the group, "show me what a manager can do that a council can't" (H. C.C.M., 4/20/1942, p. 467). A recent interview with Frank Mann revealed he believes the city-manager issue was spearheaded by the Houston Press and out-of-town "Rockefeller boys." And he still believes local officials of the time were quite capable of handling city business (Mann, 1985).

But a number of prominent Houstonians were tired of the squabbles between elected officials. Council's refusal to submit a charter change to the voters only strengthened their resolve. The Houston League of Women Voters began a campaign for a city-manager government. Approximately 150 members and concerned citizens met at a local Y.W.C.A. four

days after council rejection. Concerned about the spread of venereal disease, the easy access to health cards, "three rats for every two people in Houston," only 18 public nurses for the city and county, and milk with a high bacteria count, the women rallied around the city-manager plan. Health issues were now tied to the need for a professional administrator. (An astute political move on the part of pro-city-manager advocates.) At the meeting, Mrs. C.A. Chase addressed the women: "This is no political fight but a wartime necessity to protect ourselves.... This work can be our greatest war effort, our finest contribution to our city and country" (Carroll, 4/24/1942, p. 1).

Houston Press's writer Ben Kaplan, a city-manager advocate, publicized the good-health-equal-a-city-manager rational in an article, "Dallas' Outstanding Health Record Due to City Manager System, Director Starnes." He quoted Starnes, director of Dallas' Public Health Inspection Division, as saying: "you can't have politics and a good health department too. I definitely think that the council-manager form of government is the answer" (H.P.D., 4/30/1942, p. 1). In the same article Kaplan noted Houston had been called the rabies capital of the world with 350 cases, while Dallas had only 11 cases in 1941 and 37 in 1940.

With such publicity, the Citizens Charter Commission was able to get 16,000 signatures on a petition which forced the issue to be placed before the public. Pro-city-manager forces wanted an election on July 25, 1942, the same day elections were to be held for county and state officials. They predicted a greater turnout would assure victory for the charter revision.

Commissioners balked, arguing the issue should not be placed on the state and county election ballot but deserved a special election. They no doubt hoped a lighter turnout of a separate election would work to their advantage. As a result, Motion 1664 passed council, calling for the city attorney to draw up an ordinance to submit a city-manager charter revision to the public on August 15, 1942 (H.C.C.M., 6/1/1942, p. 31).

Battle lines were not long forming. W.R. Morin, chairman of "The Opposition to the City Manager Set-up" later called "The League for the Preservation of the Democratic Form of Government," addressed council and gave council a list of 7,000 names of people opposing the city-manager revision. The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, Lodge No. 145, sent an open letter to council: "We feel this is more of a dictatorship than a city government and that it (city manager form) should not be given consideration here." Among other groups opposing the charter revision were the Houston Labor and Trades Council and the Isolationist America First Committee (H.C.C.M., 4/22/1942, p. 31; H.C.C.M., 6/1/1942, p. 31; Kaplan, 8/7/1942, p. 1).

An outspoken critic of a city manager was Lewis Fisher, an attorney, former judge of a court of appeals and former mayor of Galveston. He repeatedly argued it was not form of government but the people in office which caused inefficiency: "Don't blame anyone but yourselves if the government of the city of Houston is not good. We, as a people have been lax. We haven't even evidenced enough interest in city improvements to marshall but a few thousand votes. We haven't used our right of recall.

We are the culprits not the form of government" (Houston Chronicle, 8/7/1942, p. 1; Kaplan, 8/7/1942, p. 1).⁴

In the city manager controversy, even the media took sides: The Houston Press and its writer Ben Kaplan for; The Houston Chronicle and its reporter Conrad Collier against.⁵ Kaplan argued the city-manager plan would cure the "spoils system evils" and advocated a professional career man via his articles. Collier's slant was against the efficiency and the utility claim of the city-manager structure (Kaplan, 5/8/1942; Collier, 8/6/1942; Collier, 8/1/1942).

Close to election time, the struggle between opponents and proponents took on racial overtones. Opponents used an anti-manager cartoon showing negroes supporting the plan. The cartoon questioned the intelligence of blacks. C.W. Rice, editor of the Negro Labor News, supported the city-manager plan, arguing it would provide better health services for blacks and better street conditions in black neighborhoods. An editorial in The Christian Examiner countered that black support was "silly and childish:"

The negro sections are going to have better streets just as soon as the negroes run their hands into their pockets and pull up some money. Houston is overrun with negroes who want something for nothing and the average negro in Houston has not learned he must put some money where his mouth is....A city manager is no guarantee they will get better streets. (H.C., 8/1/1941, p. 1)

Others disagreed. Housing, sewers, streets, drainage, sewage disposal, welfare, health, police and fire protection, the water supply and venereal disease were problems council had been unable to handle because of ineptness and the structure of government. Among those supporting the charter change were three former mayors: Fonville, Monteith and A.E. Amerman.

The volley of ammunition traded back and forth produced a large voter turnout on August 15th--29,000 voters. Four city-manager proposals were submitted to the voters and were passed by a margin of 2900 votes on each proposal (Gary, 1960). The proposals provided for: a council-appointed city manager with broad administrative powers over all departments; a city manager salary of \$17,500; the election of a mayor without veto power; the election of five councilmen by district and three at-large, all without administrative power (Sample Ballot, H.C.C.M. 8/12/1942, p. 130).

Victory for city manager advocates was achieved by Article VI-b which was added to the city charter. It stated in part:

that the City Manager shall be the chief administrator and executive officer of the city;...that all administrative work of the city government shall be under the control of the City Manager;...that neither council nor any of its committees or members shall interfere in the appointment of officers and employees in the departments of administrative service vested in the City Manager. (City of Houston Charter, 1943, VI-b, secs. 2,3 and 7, pp. 59-61)

While the mayor still had the right to appoint, with council confirmation, all advisory boards created by charter or ordinance, still presided over council and still fulfilled ceremonial obligations for the city, he was divested of administrative power. No longer was a strong-mayor at the apex of municipal structure--the battle had been won after 15 years of verbal skirmishes.

But the Citizens Charter Commission marshalled their forces to make sure that victory was not short-lived. Otis Massey, head of a roofing company, was selected as a nominee for mayor by the Commission. Pickett had not risen to the task of dealing with city commissioners; pro-city business

leaders wanted a new man to push the city-manager plan forward. Massey was that person, and he was hand-picked by Charter Commission members Rex Baker, John H. Crooker, Mrs. R.D. Randolph and former mayor R.H. Fonville (H.P., 9/26/1942, p. 1). In addition, a "Charter Ticket" was promoted; most of the candidates being either businessmen or professionals and all committed to seeing the new structure work.

Massey was elected in 1942. Along with him, voters sent the entire "Charter Slate" to council. Prior to their inauguration in January 1943, the new council and mayor began looking for a city manager. (With, of course, the assistance of the Citizens Charter Commission.)

That man was to be John North Edy. And he was known as one of the nation's outstanding city managers. With more than 15 years experience as a city manager in Dallas; Berkeley, California; Flint, Michigan; and Toledo, Ohio, Edy passed the litmus test--he would be a strong, capable administrator.

Edy's credentials were impressive: cited in Who's Who in America; a B.S. degree in civil engineering from the University of Missouri; a M.A. degree in political science from the University of California; a lecturer on public management at Stanford University (1928-30), S.M.U. (1933-34) and the American University (1940); assistant director of the U.S. Bureau of the Budget (1935); executive assistant and budget officer of the Federal Works Agency (1939-43); member of the American Society of Civil Engineers; president of the International City Managers Association (1927-28); and a 32nd degree Mason (H. Press, 1/1/1943, p. 1).

Leonard D. White, who did a classic study on the city manager structure characterized Edy as a professional: "He displayed the qualities of courtesy and frankness, open-mindedness combined with independence of judgement, tact combined with firmness....Edy believes in avoiding the spectacular" (White, 1927, p. 105). White saw Edy's strong points as his quiet skillful handling of city problems and his astuteness in dealing with councils. While city manager for Berkeley, California, Edy supposedly eliminated politics from city employment, established high standards at city hall and cooperated with area civic organizations and local improvement clubs (White, 1927).

Stone Price and Stone, in City Manager Government in Nine Cities referred to Edy as "second to none in professional prestige, educational qualifications and zeal for public service....He had an unbounded faith in the profession to which he belonged, a jealous regard for its code of ethics and a stern determination never to sully it by politics" (Stone, Price and Stone, 1940, p. 288-289). The researchers also found Edy able to set up an administrative organization in Dallas and make it work. They found Edy's higher standards of excellence forced that city's employees to "buckle down and work." And finally they noted Edy's "systematizing procedures" and manuals helped to standardize the administrative services provided by the city of Dallas.

While city manager for Dallas (1931-35), Edy was credited with correcting the city's financial problems by using professional budget-making procedures, by his tight control over the budget process and by his policy of refusing to make appropriations in excess of revenue. In

addition, Edy used civil service provisions to improve the caliber of city employees and to eliminate inefficient and unproductive workers from the city's payroll. Annual reports were sent to the Dallas council which reflected not only cost of municipal services but also measures of worker output (Stone, Price and Stone, 1940, pp. 295, 299).

In short, with such commendations, Edy seemed the perfect choice for Houston's first city manager. The new council, the public and the press enthusiastically supported his selection (H.C., 12/16/1942, p. 1; Kaplan, 1/1/1943, p. 1). Edy, who supposedly did not solicit the Houston job, was given council assurance that he could work without interference on administrative and appointment matters. A pledge from the new administration that no politics would be played succeeded in luring Edy to Houston.

Edy was presented to council and took his administrative oath of office January 2, 1943. Afterwards in a somewhat prophetic statement Mayor Massey told council "the city manager form is easier to get than to keep and must be protected at all times (H.C.C.M. 1/2//1943, p. 284). Edy pledged to be the kind of city manager the mayor would never be ashamed of when it came to integrity, effort and conscientious service.

Edy moved carefully at first for he realized he could ill afford a conflict with the mayor, council or the city's bureaucracy. But his administrative plan reflected a goal of consolidating a number of the city's 35 departments. He was quick to publicly assure city employees their jobs were secure, but it was clear Edy intended to take administrative control of the city (Kaplan, 1/1/1943, p. 1; H.C., 1/2/1943, p. 3).

One of his first priorities was setting up an expenditure control

system and professional budget procedures. He advocated public budget hearings rather than private department-council negotiations and called for an efficient pared-down budget.

While Edy was trying to maneuver through the city's bureaucratic labyrinth council was taking full advantage of their city manager. Four days after he was sworn into office, council assigned a number of projects to Edy: to study the problem of regulating city dance halls; to evaluate the statement of incurred council expenses; to review the elimination of certain bus stops in the city; to review the passage of certain city safety measures; and to report on deficit operations of certain city-owned properties at the port of Houston (H.C.C.M., 1/6/1943, p. 285).

On January 13, 1943, council assigned the city manager other routine tasks: to correct certain deed restrictions on building lines; to see to unsanitary conditions reported on a city lot; to review a complaint about a city ditch on private property; to review the feasibility of opening three streets west of Main; and to make suggestions of the regulation of suburban buses (H.C.C.M., 1/13/1943, p. 290).

On January 27, 1943, a Mrs. Abbie S. Norris, of 1726 W. Alabama, filed a petition of citizens' signatures--all of whom protested against "the continuous annoyance caused by a rooster at 1722 W. Alabama." The protest was referred to Edy. Also on that day, council assigned Edy the following tasks: to take care of a complaint about water standing on a city street curb, to handle a request for financial assistance; to deal with the problems of garbage collection; to determine whether the Houston Civic Ballet could use a room at the Coliseum free of charge; to study whether

Houstonians would use a park free movie system; and to take care of leakage at the old city hall (H.C.C.M., 1/27/1943, p. 291).

A review of council minutes during Edy's first year in office revealed similar findings--council continued to assign an inordinate amount of routine administrative tasks to the city manager. While much of it was no doubt referred to various departments much of the initial leg-work and final reporting was done by Edy.

In addition to these responsibilities, Edy continued to work on his reorganization plan. It was adopted on February 19, 1943 and pared down the city departments to 10. The positions of tax assessor-collector and the director of the water department were abolished. His plan was not popular with city employees.

But Edy had other problems. He reported to council that city departments were losing key employees because of the city's low salary structure. He was unable to get equipment and material for road work. Parts for garbage trucks were unavailable. There were unsanitary conditions at the city airport. The city had experienced an increase in infantile paralysis. And finally, there was one of Edy's most unpopular moves--the hiring of out-of-town experts from the University of Minnesota to do model studies on the proposed \$5 million San Jacinto Dam Project. The local chapter of the Texas Society of Professional Engineers chastised Edy for not hiring local engineers (H.C.C.M. 2/1/1943, p. 301; 2/22/1944, p. 86; 5/30/1943, p. 416; Johnson; 5/23/1945, p. 1).

While Edy faced these and other problems, he was stoutly praised after only six months in office. He was given credit for non-political

administration, for strengthening civil service procedures, for tightening the budget, for a new training program for and reorganization of the police department, for an improved health department; and for pushing utility regulation (Kaplan, 6/3/1943, p. 1).

Just six months later, however, there was a public call for repeal of the city manager charter admendment. A fight against city annexation policy turned into a fight against the city manager structure (H.C., 1/17/1944, p. 1).

By August 1944, other groups were firing on Edy and the city structure. A "Committee for Peoples' Rule" called for a return of the strong-mayor structure as an estimated 12,000 Houstonians were dissatisfied with the council-manager government and with the high salary the city manager was getting (H.C., 8/30/1944, p. 12).

Council and the mayor reacted negatively to the petition movement that had gotten under way as a result of the "Committee for Peoples' Rule" intitiative. Backers of the city manager plan called the movement a political power play and argued Edy's salary was much less than that of most professional managers of Houston's industries. Former Mayor R.H. Fonville voiced fears that machine politics would once again raise its ugly head. (Although one contemporary researcher who has studied Houston politics argues the city never had machine politics (Gray, 1960)).

The Citizens Charter Committee did not take the threat to its new government structure lightly--it organized itself on a permanent basis. They argued publicly that council was honest, that the city had the lowest tax rate in years, that government was no more expensive than past city

administrations, and that considering wartimes the council-manager plan was successful. But they acknowledged it would take three or four years for the structure to prove itself. The Committee enlisted the support of groups like the League of Women Voters (Mrs. Edy was a national member of the LWV) and the Age Limit League of America to support the city manager.

The anti-city manager movement gained momentum, however. City manager politicians were charged with excessive operating costs by hiring 20 percent more employees to the municipal payroll; for allowing Houston to become the dumping ground for bad meat; for not dealing with the increase in venereal disease (reported to be higher than in any other Texas city); and for falling down on the upkeep of area golf courses (H.C., 11/2/1944, p. 1). George Neal, the "Peoples' Ticket" candidate for mayor used these criticisms in his 1944 election campaign.

But city-manager forces were victorious in the election when Otis Massey garnered 36,736 votes to Neal's 32,901. A charter amendment to combine the offices of the mayor and the city manager was defeated in a December 19th special election by 7,541 votes to 1,898 (H.C.C.M. 12/19 and 20/1944, p.448-449).

But criticisms against the city manager did not die down. Oscar Holcombe criticized the government sharply for failing "miserably." And he advocated a return to the strong-mayor structure. Once again structure of government and the city manager were issues used during difficult economic times to alter the ratio of power.

Though the struggle between opponents and proponents of the manager

raged in print, Edy remained silent. Only towards the end of his tenure did he defend himself. A charge by the city's Civil Service Commission that Edy had approved promotions before they had passed the Commission, however, drew his ire. He publicly defended himself, saying he was personally distressed that news stories reported he did not observe proper civil service procedures.

But adverse publicity about Edy continued through the fall of 1945. In November, the Houston Chronicle reported that a secret meeting between Mayor Massey and council resulted in the decision to try and get Edy to resign:

The reason given privately by council members for the present action is that Mr. Edy has become unpopular with critics of the city manager plan of government and that unless he resigns soon the city manager form of government in Houston may be discredited politically. (H.C., 11/23/1945, p. 1)

In response to the newspaper's request for a reply, Edy said, "I have not resigned. I have no further comment."

A review of council minutes during this time period revealed no vocal criticism of Edy by anyone on council. However, while Edy was present at most all council sessions, he reported less and was assigned less administrative tasks. Most recorded dialogue was between the mayor and councilmen or between members of council and department heads. Committees or councilmen were appointed to look into matters that ordinarily would have been assigned to Edy. On one occasion when asked to report on improvements at the airport, Edy replied he could not as he lacked the time to prepare such a report.

Because of continued pressure and adverse publicity, on December 6, 1945

Edy submitted his letter of resignation. It was not without bitterness:

You will recall that a year ago I told you I planned not to continue in office through another municipal election simply because it has become increasingly distasteful for me to be the target of personal attack while under the ethical necessity of not speaking out in my own defense. (Edy, 10/5/1945, filed under Motion 6370, H.C.C.M. 10/5/1945)

In addition, Edy referred to "the unfavorable public reaction to long-continued and misleading publicity regarding the work and program of the city government and the conduct of my office."

Council accepted Edy's resignation, noting regrettably the widespread, unfair and largely unfounded publicity that forced it. J.M. Nagle, director of the Utilities Department, was appointed the new city manager. And Edy left government service to form a partnership with Frank W. Sharp, a builder and residential developer. It was not a glamorous exit for one of the nation's most prominent municipal administrators.

Why did one of the most professional city managers fall victim to city politics, especially since Edy was so politically astute? Clearly adverse publicity was one cause. Another plausible reason was that Edy had come up against "Holcombe boys" entrenched in city departments. Still, he may have fallen victim to high public expectations during an economic period when money and material were not available to solve urban problems (See Bromage, 1964, p. 29-31). And finally, one could say that Edy was overburdened by a council and a mayor who were generally inexperienced in municipal governance. Massey and council were relatively passive actors; Edy's skills were too thinly stretched over the administrative apparatus. And many of his innovations were unpopular and not well-received by those in the municipal bureaucracy.

In 1946 Oscar Holcombe used dissatisfaction with the city manager administration to win another term as mayor. He pledged if elected to submit to voters a charter amendment returning government to the strong-mayor structure. Throughout the campaign, he hammered away at what he called the Charter Committee's political machine and its hand-picked slush fund candidates. And Holcombe won an overwhelming victory over his two opponents Frank Mann and Holger Jeppesen (the city-manager advocates' choice). Mayor Massey chose not to run for reelection. And it appeared voters were tired of wartime shortages, tired of unfulfilled expectations and tired of their experiment with a city manager.

True to his pledge, Holcombe pushed for a special election. The proposed charter amendments that would be placed before voters on June 14, 1947 would repeal Article VI-b which called for a city manager; would change Section 7 of Article VI, making the mayor chief executive and administrative officer of the city who would serve full-time; would re-establish the appointment and removal powers of the mayor; and would increase the salary of the mayor to \$20,000 (sample ballot, H.C.C.M., 1/1/1947, p. 344).

The battle between opponents and advocates of the council-manager structure was intense--the trophy being the reins of government. The mayor came under further fire when the election was postponed until July 26, 1945. The charter amendments were to appear on the same ballot as a \$25 million school bond election before the date changed, and advocates were hoping a heavy turnout would help their cause.

In the end, the vote was close, and voter turnout light. Those voting

yes on Proposition 2 for a strong-mayor structure numbered 13, 432; those voting no, 11,159 (H.C.C.M., Motion 1834, 7/27/1947, p. 344).

For Holcombe it was to be a new era of growth. For city-manager forces it was an end to a short-lived dream. A dream because political pressures and Houston's economic environment prevented the city-manager structure from operating as it was intended. For all practical purposes, structure of government and the city manager issue seemed moot. Houston would now have a strong-mayor structure which would last up until the present time. And voters had chosen to give its mayor, and future mayors, a great deal of formal power.

But structure of government and the city manager issue reappeared in 1955. A new mayor now had the reins of municipal government, and he was Roy Hofheinz. A liberal Democrat and a progressive, most of his support came from newer business interests, labor and the black vote (Gray, 1960).

Unlike Holcombe, "The Old Grey Fox," who often manipulated council behind the scenes, Hofheinz was public-issue oriented. If council bucked, he went public with his cause. And he appeared to relish confrontation (Richard, 7/29/1955, p. 1; Spinks, 7/3/1955, p. 1).

Hofheinz was first elected in 1952, then reelected in 1954. It was during his second term that his conflict with council turned into a public feud. And it was during this time that council considered a structural change in government.

On June 7, 1955, a Citizens Charter Committee met in council chambers. Councilman Dr. Ira Kohler described structures of government, including the council-manager plan. He argued the strong-mayor structure was

dictatorial. What was needed was an administrative officer, perhaps appointed by the mayor and confirmed by council--a hybrid city-manager structure (Citizens Charter Committee Meeting Minutes, 6/7/1955).

Hofheinz retorted Kohler's proposals were improper, and he produced a report from the University of Texas which argued in favor of the strong-mayor structure.

While the city-manager plan receded into the background, the strong-mayor issue did not. Council generated propositions that would have created a weak-mayor government, relegating mayoral power to that of an administrative assistant for council. And council had circulated a petition and had garnered enough votes to call for a special election to be held on August 16, 1955. Up for a vote were Proposition 7 which would have required the mayor to submit all recommendations to council in writing; Proposition 5 which would have removed the mayor as presiding officer of council; and Proposition 11 which would have given council inquiry power and authority to establish rules and regulations governing the operation of city departments.

While the public and the press tried to make sense out of the 18 proposed council propositions, Hofheinz organized a Citizens Charter Commission who sought to add a proposition to the ballot. This proposition, Number 19, merely called for a general election to be held in November whereby the public could end the mayor-council dispute by pulling the voting machine lever (Spinks, 7/3/1955, p. 1).

Prior to the election, council accused the Hofheinz administration with scandal and for the "abominable mess" in handling city housing and

rental properties. Council also tried to impeach Hofheinz and appointed Mayor pro tem Matt Wilson as the city's mayor. For a time, two mayors claimed the reins of government; however, a court order blocked the impeachment attempt (Richard, 1/16/1955, p. 1). Still later, council held a mock trial of Hofheinz to garner support for their 18 propositions. It was obvious to business, to the media, and to the public that municipal government was not functioning. The Houston Post noted the struggle would influence the "people whom we do business with and to whom we seek to sell bonds" And the newspaper called for an end "to the comic opera at city hall" (H.P., 1/17/1955, p. 1).

The comic opera would soon end, for on August 16, 1955, voters overwhelmingly rejected the 18 council-submitted propositions. Only Proposition 19 passed: for, 19,195; against, 17,554. The structure remained intact. The messy election and the complex charter amendments could be forgotten as the city geared up for a bitter campaign. While the strong-mayor structure was retained, the man who held the office was not. Business leaders and anti-Hofheinz opponents talked Oscar Holcombe out of retirement. He ran for mayor against Hofheinz and won with a 57 percent majority (Gray, 1960).

Structure of government was not again seriously challenged until the most recent push for reform; however, the city-manager issue resurfaced in 1980 when an incumbent mayor enlisted the support of a former city manager of Fort Worth, Texas. The mayor was Jim McConn and the former city manager was Roger Line.

McConn, a building contractor who had been labelled "amateurish" in

governing, had been criticized for his lack of administrative skills. To quiet critics, McConn and his political steering committee had been looking for a senior executive assistant to fill Gene Gatlin's vacancy. Line was selected and would earn a salary of \$67,500.

Once Line was picked, the mayor and the new assistant assured the press Line "would not serve as a city manager here" (H.P., 10/19/1980, p. 14A). In fact, Line made of point of divorcing himself from the city-manager plan, saying larger cities function best with the strong-mayor who had administrative control over all department chiefs. Line and McConn treaded carefully as some members of council criticized McConn for setting up a city-manager form of government (Reyes, 10/16/1980, p. 16).

Line came to Houston with extensive municipal experience: a city manager in Ft. Worth for 7 years; its financial director for 4 years; and its budget director for 6 years. It was hoped his skills would stand the mayor in good stead. Line did not see himself as a bureaucrat, although, initially, he remained low-keyed, studying Houston's administrative system.

Line's tenure as senior executive assistant-- a sort of CAO--was not long. He served barely a year and a half. Politics, a bright young mayoral candidate's "business-like" approach to government campaign and rumors of McConn's Las Vegas gambling debts--all worked to McConn's disadvantage in the 1981 election. On December 10, 1981, the mayor-elect Kathryn Whitmire accepted Line's resignation.

During Line's brief tenure, there were few press interviews and little seems to have been accomplished. Hints of a McConn reorganization never materialized. When McConn set out the goals for city hall in 1981, no

mention was made of Line.

After Line and McConn left city hall, there was speculation that Line had difficulty functioning within Houston's administrative system. It was suggested that too many department heads reporting to him made his job difficult (Bolton, 5/2/1982, p. 23). In addition, it was often difficult for Line to get information from the various departments (West, 1986). Perhaps Line's comments about the feasibility of a city-manager plan shed some light on his brief administrative experience in Houston: "I wouldn't want to be city manager of Houston. At some point in the size of a city, the demands put on a city manager to meet expectations get too great. It's not possible to measure up to standards" (Bolton, 5/2/1982, p. 21).

In conclusion, this chapter traced the historical reform movement for municipal government in Houston. A number of points bear restating. First, Houston was product of entrepreneurial endeavors. Capitalists have always been interested in this town, her government and her politics. Throughout Houston's history one sees examples of business leaders who have promoted the city as they promoted themselves.

Secondly, Houston's municipal government has had its share of difficulties--a vague charter, financial woes, a lack of power and political conflict. Perhaps factional struggles have proved the most serious for they have thwarted efficient governance.

Thirdly, business leaders become concerned when urban policy, or lack of it, stymies economic growth or casts a shadow over the city. Businessmen, community leaders, politicians and civic groups have sought an end

to parochial politics and/or have sought structural reform when their interests, as they perceive them, are best served.

And finally, this chapter proves that structural reform efforts are not unique to the city, but historically have been forced into the public arena when resources become scarce, when political values are challenged and when a change in the ratio of power is sought.

In the next chapter we turn to recent socioeconomic changes in Houston. And we will see that economic difficulties have resulted in some political dissatisfactions.

NOTES

¹Hereafter the Houston Post-Dispatch will be abbreviated H.P-D. in citation references.

²Hereafter the Houston Post will be abbreviated H.P. in citation references.

³Hereafter Houston City Council Minutes will be abbreviated as H.C.C.M. followed by the date in citation references.

⁴Hereafter the Houston Chronicle will be abbreviated H.C. in citation references.

⁵Hereafter the Houston Press will be abbreviated H. Press in citation references.

CHAPTER 4: HOUSTON'S SOCIOECONOMIC CHANGES

The world converges upon Houston, Tex. The unemployed pour into town in their hopeful thousands, clutching the want ads; the migrants illicit and respectable swell in like a rising tide, talking in unknown tongues; the Icelanders, the Ecuadorans, the Haitians, beaver away in their consulates, the Irish solicit investors to their Industrial Development Authority; the passengers of Andes Airlines, Cayman Airways, or Sahsa Honduras fly in all agog; the myriad ships tread up the Ship Channel, the scientists beyond number swarm to NASA; hour by hour the free-ways get fuller, the downtown towers taller, the River Oaks residents richer; the suburbs gnaw their way deeper into the countryside; and what was just a blob on the map a couple of decades ago becomes more than just a city--an idea, a vision, the Future Here and Now!....But then the future never lasts.

Jan Morris
"City of Destiny"
Texas Monthly

Houston grew dramatically between the late 1930s and 1980. City boundaries spread, business boomed and the population mushroomed. The Golden Buckle of the Sunbelt beckoned and many answered the call.

In 1940 the city's population numbered 528,961, up 47.2 percent from the 1930 U.S. Bureau of Census figure. In 1950 Houston's population jumped to 700,508. By 1960 Houstonians numbered 938,219, a population change of 57.4 percent from 1950. And by 1980 Houston could boast of being the fourth largest city in the country with a population of 1,595,138--a 29.3 percent change from 1970. With the influx of people, came increases

in housing units, strip shopping centers, restaurants and high-rise office buildings.

As the years progressed, Houstonians tended to be younger and better educated, while the city's population became more racially mixed. In 1940 the median age was 29.7 years; in 1980, 27.6 years. Only 25.2 percent of Houstonians had finished high school in 1940, but by 1980 the percentage had increased to 68.4. The city's 1940 population distribution by race revealed 73.5 white, 4.0 percent foreign born; 22.4 percent black and .1 nonidentified races. By 1980 the percentages had changed: 61.53 percent white, 27.56 percent black, 17.60 percent Spanish origin, 2.22 percent Asian and Pacific Islander and .25 percent American Indian, Eskimo and Aleut (U.S. Census Data).

But it is incorrect to perceive that the city's population change resulted from out-of-state migration, for 60.1 percent of Houston's 1980 population was born in Texas. Most of the city's population growth over the years can be attributed to the attraction Houston held for young Texans from declining small towns and cities within the state. In later years, non-southerners who came to the city would call themselves "Transplanted Texans" in search of the prosperity "Boom Town" seemed to offer. And what she offered, among other things, included a higher median family income (\$21,881 in 1979) than many other cities, lower taxes, a lower cost of living and jobs--jobs that began appearing in the 1930s and 1940s.

Although Houston suffered during the depression, her transportation facilities increased, bringing to the city equipment, materials and labor. In the 1940s, people found jobs in wholesale and retail trade, manufacturing,

business and personal services and transportation, communication and utilities--the largest business categories of employment. And with the increasing water traffic through the Ship Channel in the late 1940s, Houston became one of the leading distribution centers in the country.

The war years were good for Houston. During 1941, the Federal government spent over \$250,000,000 in the Houston area for defense preparations. The petrochemical industry got a boost from Uncle Sam's dollars as did area ship building industry (Buchanan, 1975, p. 42). But these were not the only industries to benefit from the wartime stimulus: "In 1945-1948 Harris County ranked first in the nation for value of industrial construction and with building permits of \$266,802,075 for the county and \$100,160,322 for the city, in 1948 Houston rated as the fastest-growing city per capita in the country" (McComb, 1980, p. 131). Energy-dependent businesses boomed, providing a basis for future high-technology industries and international trade (Handbook on the Houston Economy, 1986, p. 7).¹ Government jobs increased as well. And by 1950 only 3.6 percent of the civilian labor force was unemployed. Originally an agricultural and distribution center, Houston had been transformed into an international petroleum hub. And her expanding economy continued through 1981.

What were the causes of Houston's tremendous growth and prosperity? The causes include the discovery of oil at Spindletop in 1901, a transportation network, the rise of bank deposits, modern energy technology and "a new, more efficient municipal government which solved the major problem of fresh water supply" (McComb, 1980, p. 7). Another explanation is the Sunbelt Thesis.

The Sunbelt Thesis, and its contributing authors, suggests southern cities like Houston have drawn wealth, population and political power from older northern industrial cities. Economically, the South via its attractiveness became a major industrial growth pole of the the U.S. economy during the 1960s. Its attractiveness to business included: improved accessibility to national markets because of new interstate highways; cheaper energy costs; an abundance of land and other natural resources (sulfur, salt, gypsum, talc, helium, oyster shell, oil, gas); an underdeveloped and underutilized labor force; lower wage rates; federal dollars from government contracts which stimulated area business and, in turn, stimulated the growth of new businesses and more federal dollars; the pro-growth, pro-business feelings of southern cities as well as their public officials; and the negative aspects of higher taxes, higher land costs and powerful unions in the northern industrial centers (Kasarda, 1982; Perry and Watkins, 1977; Angel, 1980; Sale, 1975; South and Poston, 1982; Morris, 1982; Trounstein and Christensen, 1982).

To these economic factors, one can add a favorable climate; the development of air conditioning; the proximity to coast and water recreation; the availability of apartments and housing; and a cosmopolitan "young professional" atmosphere to the list of reasons why business and job-seekers from the Northeast and Midwest have found Houston attractive.

Important to the Sunbelt Thesis is the long-term impact of urban entrepreneurs upon Southern metropolitan growth centers like Houston. Such men are credited with developing a local infrastructure--environmental as well as political--that would not only attract prospective

businesses but would also lure federal dollars from the frost belt region. Houston's entrepreneurs have pushed, promoted and expanded the city's economy so much that it has been said the fortunes of the city are tied to the quality of local entrepreneurship (Watkins and Perry, 1977, pp. 47-48).

From the above discussion it would appear the Sunbelt Thesis offers insight about Houston's growth and prosperity. Yet there are others who are skeptical of some theorists' claims of an affluent region, saying instead "the myth of an affluent Sunbelt is mostly journalistic mirage" (Tindall, 1979, p. 9).

Advantages may have come to professionals of oil-based industries, but economic development has been uneven. And real poverty still exists. Consequently, southern cities like Houston have been criticized for a disparity of income and service delivery between middle-class urban dwellers and the inner-city poor:

Houston has poor, but the poor have little power and receive few services; the power rests in the hands of an expanding middle-class and economic interests that dominate the two major industries....Houston has always had a tradition of privatism. There has never been a concern about the lower classes, and inner-city Chicano and black neighborhoods have few city services. (Gluck and Meister, 1979, p. 215-216)

While one might disagree with the above statement, it is clear Houston's economic benefits have not been evenly distributed. Historically, many of Houston's black and Mexican-American minorities have suffered from poverty, poor housing, poor working conditions and lower incomes (Sorelle, 1979; Arturo, 1981; Wintz, 1984; Clayton, 10/8/1985).

Another aspect of the Sunbelt Thesis needs modification. While Houston is an important and international center, some researchers do not see a

real shift away from the traditional centers of corporate and financial power. First, many of Houston's industries remain under the control of outside economic actors. Secondly, Houston's dependence on the petroleum industry and the refining of raw materials has minimized the city's position in the country's hierarchy of financial-commercial dominance (Cohen, 1977; South and Poston, 1982).

But there can be no denying that Houston has attracted thousands in search of jobs and opportunity. Lance Tarrance and Associates, a political polling firm, estimated in 1981 that 13 percent of Texas households were made up of people who moved here after 1975. The Houston figure was double that estimate. Those who came were voters--white collar workers from the Northeast, Midwest and California (Texas Monthly, 9/1981). During the 1970s, a period when employment in metropolitan Houston nearly doubled, migration into the area averaged approximately 57,000 people per year ("Energy and the Houston Economy," 1985). Another study estimated that the 5 percent growth rate during the 1970s resulted in an additional 100,000 people a year to the metropolitan area (H.H.E., 1986). Those people came from other areas that were suffering the effects of a national economic recession. And many found jobs and dollars: "In 1975, 1978, and 1981, 100,000 new jobs were created each year. Even after adjustment for inflation real dollar personal income grew at a rate that was nearly twice that of the national average" (H.H.E., 1986, p. 13).

To meet the demands of an expanding energy-based economy and of the new influx of job-seekers, Houston built--industrial space, retail space, hotels, apartments, hospitals, not to mention single family dwellings. In

constant 1977 dollars (millions) the value of building permits issued by the city was 1,039.8 in 1972; 1,088.5 in 1977; 1,422.1 in 1978; 1,664.1 in 1979; 1,611.0 in 1980; 1,973.4 in 1981; 1,855.1 in 1982, and 1,247.7 in 1983 ("Houston Area Economic Data," 1984). Between 1975 and 1982, it has been estimated that construction industry employment increased by 73 percent (H.H.E., 1986).

Construction was bouyed up by optimism and what seemed to be an ever-expanding energy-related industry. And while the rest of the country suffered an economic downturn, the boom in Houston continued. Researchers at the University of Houston's Center for Public Policy explain why in their "Handbook on the Houston Economy:"

Houston avoided recessions in the past, because the city's energy-dominated economic base was often stimulated at particular fortuitous times. The city's experience during the 1970s provides an excellent illustration. Just as the national economy began to experience a major downturn, the events in the Middle East gave Houston an enormous boost. This led to an almost $9\frac{1}{2}$ percent growth in employment locally despite a $1\frac{1}{2}$ percent decline in jobs nationally. The counter-cyclical boom not only brought a lot of attention to Houston, but also a lot of immigrants, who effectively eliminated the supply of housing and office space that had built up during the early part of the decade.

Slightly less than a decade later, the scenario appeared to be repeating itself with remarkable similarity. During 1980 and 1981, the national economy was struggling and poised for the worst recession since the Great Depression. Houston, by contrast, was soaring in the aftermath of another series of oil price hikes stemming from further deregulation, the Iranian Revolution, and the Iran/Iraq war. The year looked like 1974 all over again. To avoid being left out of the "Houston Rally" this time, businesses in all sectors of the economy jumped on the bandwagon. Most obvious was the Houston builder. In the two years that followed, the city added 15 percent more housing units than had existed in 1981 and nearly 50 percent more office space. (H.H.E., 1986, p. 9)

The economic future seemed bright. But visions of the future seldom last.

In 1982-1983, Houston suffered a recession. The recession was caused

by lower energy prices and the glut of cheaper foreign oil, a lag in energy activity, the effects of the national economic downturn and the devaluation of the Mexican peso ("Houston Economic Summary," 1986). When area energy industries suffer, predictably unemployment lines get longer. In the Houston Primary Metropolitan Statistical Area, the Texas Employment Commission estimated the percentage of unemployment was 4.0 percent in 1982; 9.3 percent in 1983; 6.6 percent in 1984; and 7.8 percent in 1985. In May of 1986, the estimate jumped to 10.7 percent. Between April of 1982 and July of 1983, approximately 150,000 area jobs were lost (H.H.E. Update, 7/1986, p. 1). And jobs in the city's economic base sectors (manufacturing, wholesaling, mining and transportation) continued to decline. Since 81 percent of Houston's economic base is related to oil and natural gas exploration, all of the city's employment is directly or indirectly affected by these industries (H.H.E., 1986).

In the 1980s the boom slowed; net migrations to the city dropped off sharply; and Houston suffered from an overbuilt market. Personal income growth dropped, barely keeping pace with inflation, and area businessmen saw a decline in sales and a decline in the demand for consumer services (H.H.E., 1986).

By 1984 Houston had 36.6 million square feet of vacant office space. In 1985 the figure increased to 38 million square feet. At midyear 1986, the figure jumped to 41 million (Drummond, 7/11/1986). As area businesses closed shop, the commercial office and retail space industry suffered.

Homes were put up for sale; their prices went down; and the residential

real estate industry suffered too: "The impact of the enormous excess supply drove home prices and rents down nearly 25 percent below their 1983 peak and pushed vacancy rates above the 17 percent level" (H.H.E., 1986, p. 26). By September 1985, approximately 36,000 homes were listed for sale on the Houston Board of Realtor's Multiple Listing Service (Drummond, 7/26/1985, p. 1, sec. 3). In addition, increasingly high foreclosure rates characterized the period from 1984 through the first part of 1986 (H.H.E., 1986, p. 29). In 1984, Houstonians were deluged with bad economic news: consumer spending was down, businessmen were tightening their belts, business bankruptcies peaked and there were mergers in the oil industry.

In that same year, Moody's Investor Service dropped Houston's bond rating from Aaa to Aa1. The rating is based on a city's ability to pay its debts and its willingness to make decisions to increase revenue. And the rating change reflected the downturn in the city's economy as well as a shortfall in municipal government's revenue. Municipal government was also having its financial difficulties. The city had to transfer \$25 million in revenue-sharing funds to pay for normal city operation expenses. Houston's Mayor, Kathryn Whitmire, was distressed at the rating change, but attributed it to the effects of the recession. Publicly she was optimistic about the city's future and its ability to rebound.

Late in 1984, one of Houston's city councilman, George Greanias, openly criticized Whitmire's fiscal management policies. He warned the city was in danger of spending more than it collected in revenue and called for changes in the city's revenue policies--even if it meant more

in taxes. His charges were later to become what the media labeled the "Great Houston Budget Fight," as Greanias repeatedly charged the mayor with using budgetary gimmicks to pull the city out of the red. The mayor repeatedly denied the charge. (H.P.11/29/1984; Elkind, 2/1985: H.C., 9/22/1985).

Actually, city budget problems were not new to Houston. In 1982 City Controller Lance Lalor restricted departments' spending by \$30 million to prevent a city deficit. Later the mayor cut spending by \$25 million, and the city reluctantly approved using \$20.4 million federal revenue sharing funds for general fund purposes (H.C., 9/22/1985). Throughout the next few years the city budget difficulties continued, the animosity between the mayor and city controller grew, and the mayor staunchly fought tax increases to Greanias' public dismay.

(By 1986 the city controller estimated a \$72 million shortfall in funds needed to maintain city services for the fiscal year beginning July 1. The shortfall was attributed to the downturn in the city's economy, stagnation of property tax rolls and an end to the \$22 million federal revenue-sharing funds. The mayor, however, did not escape criticism. Greanias, among others, questioned the mayor's plan to offset the shortfall by cutting city services, reducing the number of city employees and recreational facilities, hiking user fees and charging a garbage collection fee.)

Clearly by the mid-1980s, business leaders were distressed by reports of municipal government's financial difficulties and the lag in the city's economic activities. The figures were not good. By 1985 it was estimated

that 35 million square feet of industrial space in 2,100 buildings stood empty; 6 percent of the city's retail space was not used compared to 4 percent in 1984; 80 cranes stood idle that had served 50,000 feet of fabrication plants; and 200,000 housing units stood empty (Houston Business Journal, 8/12/1985). Industrial production was down from 1982 levels, and employment in manufacturing had fallen precipitously (H.H.E., 1986, p. 20). And Houston had lost population because of the economic downturn. Businessmen were ready for growth and progress. And they began marshalling their forces.

One group picked political targets. The Greater Houston Association Political Action Committee (GHA-PAC), formed in 1984 by businessman Walter Mischer, Sr., donated funds to councilmen who were rated "pro-business in their outlook." Approximately 50 area business leaders were members of the PAC. One media source reported that city council members who received the greatest contributions were those who had distanced themselves from the mayor on issues, especially the controversial Gay Rights Ordinance. But a member of the PAC publicly discounted the notion (Hart, 3/11/1985).

Nonetheless, Whitmire had drawn the ire of a number of businessmen for reportedly stating the mayor's job did not include attracting business to Houston (Chaderick, 10/1985). And Louie Welch, a past Houston mayor and president of the city's Chamber of Commerce, would seek the mayor's job in 1985, arguing Whitmire had not done enough to promote economic recovery. In campaign rhetoric he charged Whitmire made Houston unattractive to new business and added to the city's financial woes.

Whitmire would point to her 5-Year Capital Improvement Program and would boast in October 1985 that "we are creating over 1,000 new jobs a month in this city right now" (Snyder, 10/6/1985, p. 16). But a business professor argued the employment gains cited by the mayor were generally low-paying service industries, "whose benefits to the economy are considerably less than those of the industrial-manufacturing jobs the city lost during the recession" (Snyder, 10/6/1985, p. 16). And it was not good campaign publicity later in the month when approximately 20,000 job-seekers turned out for a Channel 2 television Job Fair, forcing overwhelmed organizers to close the event sooner than expected.

While Whitmire defended her record in the 1985 mayoral campaign, businessmen continued their boosterism. In December 1984, developer Kenneth Schnitzer and area businessmen unveiled a comprehensive development plan for the city, funded by \$6.6 million in contributions. The organization, called the Houston Economic Development Council, vowed to compete with Dallas, Phoenix, San Diego and Denver in attracting bio-medical, research and development, instruments and communication industries to the city. Businessmen sought economic diversification and a return to pro-growth optimism; the mayor praised their efforts.

Soon pro-Houston articles and advertisements appeared in city publications. A Houston slogan was developed and promoted. In response to Rand McNally's shifting Houston from 37th to 75th position in its almanac of best places in the country to live, other--more optimistic--material was offered the public. The Houston Post boasted the National Planning Association expected Houston to lead the nation in the number of new jobs

created in the year 2,000. The Houston Chamber of Commerce pointed to forecasts prepared by Sales and Marketing Management which showed that among 24 U.S. metropolitan areas with 1.5 million population, Houston's growth rate for 1983-1988 ranks "first on population, first on households, second on total retail sales, and fifth on total after-taxes personal income" ("Energy and the Houston Economy," 1985, p. 4). Using this data, the Chamber argued Houston compared favorably to most other U.S. metropolitan areas.

Meanwhile unemployment figures increased, the glut of foreign oil continued, energy activity faltered and a mild recession was anticipated for late 1986. Despite the bleak forecast, one vice-president and regional economist for RepublicBank⁴ predicted the city would show a modest improvement in 1986. The bank's 1985 annual economic report indicated:

Unless there is a sudden drop, falling (oil) prices will not have a devastating impact on the Texas or Houston economies, because four tough years have taken their toll. Weaker suppliers and service companies will continue to go out of business or merge into healthier entities, but not at the high rate of failure experienced in 1982 and 1983. (Clark, 9/27/1985, p. 1, sec. 3)

In summary, this chapter has attempted to trace the socioeconomic changes Houston has experienced from the late 1930s to the mid-1980s. Houston, as a distribution center, and its energy-dependent economy attracted job-seekers from within Texas as well as those from outside her borders. The Sunbelt Thesis may offer insight into Houston's attractiveness and her prosperity; however, one must guard against its broad assertions, especially in light of the city's recent economic difficulties.

Houston's boom slowed in early 1981. A lack of business diversifica-

tion, a dependency on its oil- and gas-based economy, a glut of foreign oil and national economic difficulties--all bode ill for Boom Town. Houston suffered a recession in 1982-1983. Business leaders and government officials were concerned. Throughout the next few years, area businesses suffered, and municipal government, too, faced financial difficulties. Criticisms of the incumbent mayor surfaced, while government officials and business boosters promoted pro-growth optimism in spite of rising unemployment figures, declining revenues, drops in retail sales and declines in industrial production. Efforts to attract businesses to the city increased.

It was in this economic environment that a push for city government reform was initiated. Promoted by those within government, the effort received impetus from the private sector. Its thrust was a more professional, business-approach to city government; its foundation, dissatisfaction with the incumbent mayor. Economic uncertainties seemed to fuel the movement--for a time. Ironically, the reform effort was aimed at a mayor who prided herself on her "business-like" approach to government.

Before we can analyze the reform movement and its initiators, it is necessary to look first at the powers and duties of the mayor and city council and then consider the political implications of governing the fourth largest city in the country. It is to this task that we now turn.

NOTES

¹Hereafter "Handbook on the Houston Economy" will be abbreviated H.H.E. in citation references.

CHAPTER 5: HOUSTON'S GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

To the political entrepreneur, who possesses skill and drive the pluralistic dispersion and fragmentation of power in democratic systems offer unusual opportunities for pyramiding limited initial resources into a substantial political holding.

Alexander L. George
"Political Leadership and Social
Change in American Cities,"
Daedalus

To analyze the recent push for a city manager and the reform strategy of specific political actors it is necessary not only to understand the socioeconomic climate in which reform was introduced but also the political system of the city. Politics has been defined as the means by which authoritative decisions are made and implemented; therefore, it is necessary to look at both the formal arrangement of municipal government--its structure--and the political pressures that impinge on municipal policymakers. With an increasing concentration of more vocal and diverse citizenry, increasing service delivery demands and decreasing resources, the demands on public officials have intensified, more conflicts are aired in the public arena and the call for municipal reform has been initiated. Let us then, turn first to look at the formal structure of city government and its evolution.

As was mentioned in chapter 3, the first city charter was granted to Houstonians in 1838. Under the charter, the city could sue or be sued,

pass laws, establish tax rates, and own and sell property. Yet municipal activity was minimal. In 1839 the city obtained a second charter which included a more detailed account of the city's power. In 1840 another charter change provided for four wards with two representatives from each to serve on city council plus a mayor. Ward politics prevailed and the structure of government could be characterized as a weak-mayor form. The city's government, as such, was typical of the type of municipal structure that predominated during the early years of the American Republic and of Texas (Benton, 1984).

* In 1905, with yet another charter revision, Houston's form of government was changed to a commission structure. The mayor remained weak as Article V, Section 1 of the charter provided that "the administration of the business affairs of the City of Houston shall be conducted by a Mayor and four Aldermen, who, together, shall be known and designated as the City Council" (City of Houston Charter, 1905, Article V, p. 27). While the first mayor under the commission form, H. Baldwin Rice, was able to wield significant power due to his personal style, clout and political savvy, other mayors were not so fortunate. Council in-fighting and battles for administrative power were common.

In 1933 a push for a strong mayor received voter approval with a charter change which concentrated administrative power in the office of the mayor. But later in 1942, voters rescinded that approval by voting in a city-manager form of government. Article VI-b was added to the city charter making the city manager the chief administrative and executive officer of the city. Mayoral power was primarily ceremonial and appointive,

with council confirmation. The mayor was divested of administrative authority. But such divestiture would not last long as a powerful political force pushed for a strong-mayor structure. That force was Oscar Holcombe who used economic dissatisfactions to defeat the city-manager experiment in 1947 and who ushered in a strong-mayor form of government that exists to this day.

Today, the mayor wields significant legislative and administrative power in addition to performing ceremonial functions. Control of the council agenda, presiding over council and appointment-removal authority are the bedrock of mayoral power. In large urban centers where the complexity of issues and the variety of demands require strong leadership and an attentive ear, political leadership and administrative control of government is generally viewed as desirable (Adrian and Press, 1968; Pressman, 1972; Harrigan, 1984). While the strong-mayor structure is no guarantee a mayor will hold a strong position in city government, it does facilitate such power.

Under the present municipal home-rule charter, Houston is governed by a mayor and 14 council members, nine who represent and are elected by Districts A through I and five who are elected at-large to Positions 1 through 5. The current council was enlarged from eight positions to 14 as the result of an amendment passed by voters on August 11, 1979 under pressure from the U.S. Justice Department--a subject that will be discussed later. The general powers of council include:

The city council shall have power to enact and enforce all ordinances necessary to protect life, health and property; to prevent and summarily abate and remove nuisances; to preserve and promote good government, order, security, amusement, peace, quiet, education,

prosperity and the general welfare of said city and its inhabitants; to exercise all the municipal powers necessary to the complete and efficient management and control of municipal property and affairs of said city; to effect the efficient administration of municipal government of said city; to exercise such powers as conduce to the public welfare, happiness and prosperity of said city and its inhabitants. (City of Houston Charter, 1986, Article II, p. 3)

Article VI of the city's charter grants broad powers to the mayor.

Section 7a provides that all administrative work of the city government shall be under the control of the mayor. In addition, the mayor's duties include: to see that all laws and ordinances are enforced; to appoint, subject to confirmation by council, administrative department heads, advisory boards and civil service commissioners; to remove department heads without council confirmation; to appoint and remove other city employees consistent with civil service provisions and the charter; to exercise administrative control over all departments of the city; to recommend programs to council for the city's welfare; to submit to council an annual budget of current city expenses; to keep council advised of the city's financial condition; to prescribe rules and regulations for administrative departments; and to marshal forces in case of emergency. Also "the Mayor shall have and exercise such powers, prerogatives and authority, acting independently of or in concert with the city council, as are conferred by the provisions of this article" (p. 43).

As a member of council, the mayor also serves as a city legislator. Mayoral power is further enhanced by a charter provision which requires the mayor to preside over all meetings of city council. While the mayor is not specifically granted agenda control, such power historically has been the mayor's by custom and council acquiescence. (In the past

there have been recommendations that council would be better served if a presiding officer of council other than the mayor be selected to conduct council sessions; however, the mayor's power seems firmly established.) As a legislator, the mayor has a vote, but no veto power. The right to veto legislation was rescinded by a charter change in 1942 which instituted the city-manager form of government.

It is also custom that the mayor serve as the city's ceremonial head. Such duties include attending business openings and ribbon-cutting events as well as welcoming foreign dignitaries and other state and national public officials.

The charter provides a two-year term of office for the mayor to begin in January of even-numbered years after the municipal election which is held on the third Saturday of the preceding November. To carry out the legislative, executive and ceremonial duties of the city, the mayor is to serve as a full-time public official. In addition, a full-time staff and various municipal divisions assist the mayor in carrying out charter duties.

By reviewing the authority granted to the mayor by the charter, it is obvious Houston's mayor is in a strong power position. As well as being the city's chief executive, the mayor can control to some extent the legislative process via agenda setting and council presiding powers. As we have seen in chapter 3, historically, there have been criticisms leveled at mayoral power. Specifically, such charges include that mayoral power violates the separation of powers doctrine, that such power subordinates council policy-making to the whims of the mayor and, finally, that such

powers could be abused by a dictatorial personality. But many view the strong-mayor structure as desirable in urban setting where there is considerable authority fragmentation and power dispersals among various governments and political systems.

Article VII, Sec. 10, of Houston's charter gives council members legislative power "only." No administrative powers are granted council, and these members are specifically restricted from interfering in administrative departments except for purposes of inquiry. Council members serve two-year terms and, notwithstanding the fact the mayor is presiding officer, they may determine their own rules of procedure.

Council meetings are held twice a week on Tuesdays and Wednesdays and are open to the public. The charter requires at least one scheduled meeting a week, and a quorum constitutes a majority of members elected.

In addition to passing resolutions, ordinances, and motions pertaining to general powers granted to council, other legislative powers granted to council members include: issuing bonds for permanent improvements; appropriating bond funds and awarding city contracts; determining boundary limits of the city; determining public utility rates; leasing and disposing of city-owned real estate; purchasing and appropriating land; and establishing and servicing streets and public places.

The city charter also provides for a city controller, who is elected for a two-year term. His primary responsibility is to superintend and supervise the fiscal affairs of the city. The controller is best described as the city's bookkeeper, certifying the availability of funds and assisting the mayor in preparing the budget. Recently the office of controller

has been a stepping stone to the mayor's office, and, as we shall soon see, some controllers have been at political odds with incumbent mayors. The battles at times have been bitter.

To understand municipal policy-making and the role of the city's mayor, it is necessary to turn from the formal authority granted office holders and look, first, at the political climate in which public decisions are made and, then, attempt to analyze the mayor's skill as a political entrepreneur in such an environment.

As was mentioned in chapter 1, Houstonians can be characterized as individualistic and traditionalistic. From a review of historical newspaper clippings as well as contemporary media commentary and interviews it is apparent that Houstonians believe: that the city should have a good reputation, that politics should be low-keyed; that government stability and financial integrity should be maintained; and that government should promote economic activity and support area business.

Voter turnout in past elections generally has been low; council elections generally have received little media attention; mayoral contests from the 1900s up until 1947 generally have focused on government reform or the personality and prestige of candidates.

While municipal government has developed infrastructure and service delivery systems to accommodate growth, Houston has not had a caretaker government. (A historical exception did occur, however, in the early 1940s when municipal government was prompted to commit itself financially to eradicating health problems in the city (City of Houston Budget, 1943 and 1944)). Historically, Houston's city hall has been a government

which promotes economic growth.

Three other research efforts offer insight on Houston's politics and minicipal government and the highlights of each will be offered here. One historical study done by Kenneth Gray in 1960 revealed: most officials and citizens have been generally satisfied with municipal government; no machine politics have existed in Harris County or Houston because of the individualistic characteristics of Texans and also because material rewards have been too scarce; politics tends to be non-partisan and non-factional; liberal Democrats, because they are issue-oriented, have generally stayed out of city politics; and conservative Democrats are rarely involved in local politics because government tends to be conservative-oriented in decision-making; and finally, when conservatives do become involved in local politics they have the power of the press, business and the state legislature behind them. For Gray, conservatism was a reflection of community values and not an imposition by business interests (Gray, 1960).

Clifton McCleskey in his study of Houston politics also found conservative Democrats have long had a significant edge in Houston politics despite the fact liberal Democrats have made efforts to build a coalition of blacks, labor unions, white liberals and Mexican Americans. He further found Republican party organization in the past rather passive, but noted Republicans were becoming competitive in the southwest and western parts of the city (McCleskey, 1967).

McCleskey also observed: a lack of political skill and manpower resources for campaigns; little activity from specific interest groups

in actual campaigns but the need for candidates to negotiate with various groups; the number of contestants in mayoral elections and the strength of the opposition depends on the incumbent, his record and his prospects; council elections are primarily struggles for voter recognition; and finally, he noted "Houstonians pay little attention to council, its members, its policies, and its politics" (McCleskey, 1967, p. 75-76, 79).

And yet McCleskey discounts the notion the policy process of municipal government is elitist in thrust or that candidates are hand-picked and groomed by a community elite. He suggests a pluralistic explanation of policy-making whereby "both public officials and a wide range of political, social, and economic groups, all interacting in a complex and variety of ways" effect policy (McCleskey, 1960, p. 81). Still he acknowledges the Chamber of Commerce, because of both its power and the generality of its interests, when united and inspired, "can block most proposals" and "its indifference can seal the fate of controversial issues" (McCleskey, 1960, p. 83).

While one must acknowledge business-related groups do not always act with singleness of purpose, and interests do, indeed, vary over time and over issues, I would argue, based on my research, that Houston historically had an elite which shaped municipal government, and, in turn, influenced public policy. The elite is the business community. Mayors of the past have been businessmen and so have many council members. Sources cited in chapter 3 indicated certain mayors were hand-picked and endorsed by the business community. Funds have been channeled to candidates who display a pro-growth, pro-business attitude. Other interests groups generally

have been poorly organized or lacked funds, while minorities have been difficult to mobilize.

The business community's involvement in local politics and pushes for structural reform could, in part, be explained by the sheer magnitude of the electoral process in a city the size of Houston. To reach voters, candidates or reformers must, of necessity, incur costs, for campaigning is expensive. Other than business interests, there are no real contributors with the kind of capital available for costly campaigns. Candidates receive little backing from political parties because the organizations lack financial resources to support those who must run in non-partisan elections.

Another more recent study by Richard Murray and Robert Thomas indicate that Houstonians active in public policy have primarily been concerned with making money in the private sector. These political scientists found that: in the past there has been little opposition to business interests active in public policy areas; Houston voter turnout lags behind other large cities; there are few political clubs and organizations active in the city; black organizations have generally been ineffective; Democrats have not been especially active in local government; Republicans have focused on national rather than local issues; high-ranking public officials are committed to growth and are influenced by Chamber of Commerce leadership; media coverage of local political issues is low; and finally, Houstonians' local political interest generally does not extend beyond personal economic benefits (Murray and Thomas, 1986).

And yet there seem to be some changes on the political landscape. One

such change was ushered in by outside forces and the tremendous influx of new residents in Houston as well as the city's aggressive annexation moves in 1977 and 1978. That change was redistricting which enlarged council from eight positions to 14 and included the creation of nine single-member districts and five at-large positions.

In 1975 President Gerald Ford signed an extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 which included states like Texas which had language-minority citizens. Texas, especially Houston, came under the scrutiny of the U.S. Department of Justice. Large scale annexations of outlying municipal areas which might dilute the voting strength of minorities was suspect and targeted. Earlier, in 1973, a coalition of minority interests had filed a federal lawsuit challenging Houston's at-large district elections for reducing minority electoral opportunities and representation. But in 1977, a federal court in Houston ruled Houston's method of electing local council members was constitutional.

However, also in 1977 and 1978, Houston annexed portions of Alief, Clear Lake City, Greenspoint Mall area, Baybrook and Scarsdale. The annexations added approximately 100,000 white citizens to Houston and to her tax rolls. And it reduced the black population from 26 to 24.8 percent and the Mexican-American population from 14 to 13.5 percent (Harper, 6/12/1979). But under the Voting Rights Act of 1975, the Justice Department now required Houston prove that annexations did not dilute the voting strength of minorities and recommended the adoption of some single-member districts. And it delayed a city bond election and tax referendum limitation until proof was rendered (Harper, 3/17/1979).

Others leveled criticisms at Houston's districting plan, while then Houston city attorney Robert M. Collie, Jr. argued under the home-rule charter Houstonians had the right to determine the form of government they wanted without outside interference. Still, Dr. Clifton L. Washington, II, a black, sought (unsuccessfully) to get 20,000 signatures to force a single-member referendum and Houston Representatives Bill Blythe and Bill Caraway drafted a state bill, mandating Houston adopt single-member districts. But the Texas Legislature balked, saying there seemed to be a lack of interest on the part of Houstonians to change their electoral system. However, at one subcommittee meeting Blythe reportedly argued: " 'I can guarantee you when the power group which controls Houston is against you, they spend untold sums' to prevent change which would threaten their control" (Byers, 3/22/1979, p. 1).

Under increasing pressure from the Justice Department and the urgent need to hold a bond election, Houston's city council and Mayor Jim McConn began considering redistricting plans. The mayor's plan of five at-large and five single-member districts received little local support, and the city asked the Justice Department to specify council electoral changes it would accept. Public hearings were held, and several groups offered up plans of increasing council anywhere from 16 to 24 members. Council hired consultants to collect data on proposed district boundaries, a move which pitted then-city controller Kathryn Whitmire against the mayor. She eventually lost in her bid to withhold certifying funds for the effort, but used the single-member district to criticize both the mayor and council (Kennedy, 6/22/1979, 8/16/1979). The controller supported single-member

and "neighborhood representation" but objected to what she felt was excessive spending (\$50,200) for outside consultants.

Eventually council opted for what came to be known as the "9-to-5 plan," nine single-member districts and five at-large positions. An election for voter approval was scheduled for August 11, 1979. The Justice Department required that only one proposition for the district plan be submitted to voters, angering council and the mayor--who opposed outside federal interference in local political matters.

Ironically, the "9-to-5 plan" became a hotly contested issue, with a coalition of minority groups opposing the plan and city officials, Mayor McConn and the Chamber of Commerce leaders supporting it. Minorities wanted a larger council with more single-member districts to win more spots for minorities. But city leaders feared an unwieldy, large council would bog down municipal government. City officials and "the establishment" were charged with fearing a threat to their power (Nolan, 7/8/1979). The lines were drawn but opponents were unable to marshal their forces.

The "9-to-5 plan" passed by approximately a two-to-one margin. An estimated 83 percent of the white voters who turned out voted yes, while 87 percent of the black community and 72 percent of the Mexican-American community voted no. Characteristically, voter turnout was light--13.3 percent of eligible white voters, 5.4 percent of eligible black voters and 6.36 percent of eligible Mexican-Americans (Harper, 8/12/1979; Kennedy, 8/12/1979).

But dissatisfaction over the plan did not stop with voter approval or with the Justice Department's acceptance of the plan. When new district

lines were unveiled in September, a number of black groups objected. They argued four minority districts were not adequate representation and used data provided by Richard Murray, a political scientist and local pollster, to challenge the configuration of the new districts. They argued district lines as drawn underrepresented blacks by 50,000. And they called for redrawing district lines to provide three black districts instead of two plus a designated Mexican-American district. The Justice Department was not convinced and approved the original "9-to-5" boundaries after a review of opponents complaints (Kennedy, 9/13/1979; H.P., 9/18/1979; Harper and Wiessler, 9/22/1979; Kennedy, 9/22/1979).

The electoral change approved by voters in 1979 has been credited with changing the city's political landscape by allowing candidates with modest financial backing to run in single-member district races without having to incur at-large campaign expenses. As a result, council members and challengers in district races represent area constituents and are held accountable to the voters within the geographic district they represent.

In the 1984-1985 city council term, two blacks (Rodney Ellis and Ernest McGowen, Sr.), one female (Christin Hartung) and one Hispanic (Ben Reyes) represented four Houston districts. In addition, one female (Eleanor Tinsley) and two blacks (Anthony Hall and Judson Robinson) served in at-large positions. Thus, the single-member at-large council reflects a racial and sexual composite that heretofore had not existed. In comparing this council to councils past, one city hall observer noted:

Decisions at City Hall are being made differently now. Public policy is moving in new directions, and elected officials are hearing, and heeding, some different voices.

Had the 9-5 plan not come about, most observers agree, Houston would not have its first black police chief, major legislation such as limitations on outdoor signs and regulation of certain types of development probably would not exist. (Snyder, 1/1/1984, p. 1)

As evidence of his position, the observer cited an excerpt from an upcoming book by political scientists Richard Murray and Robert Thomas:

Its composition, style, willingness to tackle controversial issues and to challenge the mayor distinguish the new council from the pre-1979 version. But as to whether the reshaped council is changing the basic governance pattern of Houston, one must reserve judgement (Murray and Thomas, 1986).

So it is within this political climate and with this council that the mayor must interact. And it is within this political environment that the call for municipal reform was initiated. Since the current reform effort is, in part, the result of criticisms leveled not only at the strong-mayor structure but also at the incumbent mayor, it is necessary to turn our attention to the mayor and her skill as a political entrepreneur in the contemporary urban environment.

Mayor Kathryn Whitmire was first elected to office in 1981. In the election held on November 3rd, then-mayor Jim McConn faced a number of challengers. He drew his support from many business politicians despite the fact McConn had been criticized for lacking administrative skills and for his amateurish attempts at governance. These conservative business supporters were satisfied with McConn, a pro-growth building contractor, whose press-the-flesh political style was accepted and understood.

However, McConn was severely trounced in the election, garnering only 13.8 percent (38,717 votes) of the total vote for mayor. He ran a third behind Whitmire, who captured 36 percent (100,900) of the votes, and then-sheriff Jack Heard, who won 24.5 percent (68,639) of the total votes cast

(H.C., 11/4/81, p. 1). Continued criticisms of McConn and rumors of his Las Vegas gambling debts worked to the incumbent's disadvantage, pitting Whitmire against Heard in a bitter run-off campaign.

Whitmire continued to run a reform campaign--a campaign calling for a "business-like" approach to government. The need for efficient management of municipal government peppered her campaign rhetoric. The young, widowed certified public accountant was not a member of the "good-ole-boy network" and used this to her political advantage. She was able to persuade liberals she was liberal on social issues and at the same time convince many conservatives that, indeed, she was a fiscal conservative (MacManus, 1981). This was no mean task.

And Whitmire won a landslide victory against Heard in the November 17th run-off, garnering 62.4 percent (170,695 votes) to Heard's 37.5 percent (102,446). In the run-off, Whitmire was able to complement her broad base of white support by winning a vast majority of minority votes. For example, she won 90.1 percent of the middle-income black vote whereas Heard received only 9.8 percent of that vote. And she captured 93 percent of the low-income black vote while Heard received only 6.9 percent (H.C., 11/18/1985). Whitmire's successful race was attributed to the support she got from a coalition of blacks, other minority groups and young professionals, a coalition that would continue to support her in future bids for office. (Political scientist and pollster Richard Murray estimates at the public level, Whitmire has traditionally gotten about one-half of her votes from blacks, less than 10 percent from Hispanics and the rest from Anglos. And he estimated gay support to be approximately 3 to 4

percent of her coalition (Murray, 1986)). With Whitmire's win, a new reform administration was ushered into office.

A look at the formal structural arrangements of municipal government indicates Whitmire would have the necessary authority to deal with urban governance problems. Yet to pursue her goals, she would have to exercise considerable control over city council and administrative departments and push her legal jurisdiction to its limits to promote her programs and shape public policy. To analyze Whitmire's use of power requires looking at resources other than formal structure as well as limitations on that power.

Jeffery Pressman has looked at the preconditions of mayoral leadership, noting a number of resources contemporary mayors must have to exercise leadership. These include: sufficient financial and staff resources; city jurisdiction in social programs; a decent salary to allow for a full-time mayor; ready vehicles for publicity; and politically-oriented groups or a political party to be mobilized if necessary (Pressman, 1972).

In analyzing the broker-entrepreneur mayoral model, Myron A. Levine stresses that once in office a mayor must protect his position by building a broad-based coalition within the city. The mayor must be able to bargain, compromise, plead, threaten, cajole, sell and persuade when necessary (Levine, 1980).

To win the mayor's trophy does not mean the battle is over, for the political skirmishes have just begun. Roadblocks to effective mayoral leadership include staffing difficulties; internal administrative power struggles; social forces; economic concerns; the media and effective

communication; personality characteristics of the incumbent; and the city's electoral-political structure (Pressman, 1972).

Given the resources necessary for and the limitations on a mayor's leadership ability, how then has Kathryn Whitmire measured up? What are the difficulties she faced? And what have been the outcomes?

When Whitmire came to office in 1982, she did away with the mayoral executive assistant concept instituted by Fred Hofheinz and Jim McConn. Wanting more responsive municipal management, Whitmire was opposed to the confusion caused by functional liaisons. Therefore, she eliminated eight mayoral executive assistant posts.

While the public was assured the mayor would not allow an "inner circle" to control the mayor's office, she did bring with her a staff that was mostly young, white and male. An exception was Clintine Cashion, a Whitmire campaign organizer and past Democratic Executive Committeewoman. Along with Cashion, two other campaign workers followed the mayor to city hall--Clarence West, the mayor's senior director of staff, and Jerry Wood, the mayor's research director. These people, along with city attorney Jerry Smith, are seen to have significant influence on the mayor. In addition, the mayor has sought and used the skills of area businessmen, for example. R.Alan Rudy, an investor; James W. Lawson, a supervisor of Houston Light and Power Company; and Walter Holmes, of Tenneco, Inc.

Whitmire's staffers have often been criticized for attempting to shield her, to protect her from critics. They deny this charge. Another charge leveled at staffers is that loyalty to the mayor and her positions often hampers effective government. For example, one charge is the difficulty

of getting items on the agenda the mayor does not approve of with Clarence West as agenda director. West disagrees and asserts there are no roadblocks to council's use of agenda procedures. In fact, he counters his new agenda procedures provide council members with printed agenda information as well as access to pre-council agenda briefings.

Another innovative staffing option used by the mayor early on was task forces to study area problems instead of purchasing consulting time or hiring liaisons. Seen as an economic measure which provided community input, the media later criticized Whitmire for attempting to keep members of 17 task forces and their reports secret (Brewton, 3/12/1982).

While critics continue to level charges at the mayor's staff for being overly preoccupied with protecting her, others counter she has made good use of the professionals surrounding her and those outside municipal government whose advice she seeks--lawyers, businessmen, developers and heads of other governmental agencies.

As we have seen in chapter 3, administrative power struggles severely inhibit mayoral effectiveness. Whitmire moved quickly at the outset of her first term to consolidate administrative power by recommending a reorganization and restructuring of municipal departments, changing the city's financial procedures and methods of doing business with the private sector, and instituting merit and civil service personnel procedures.

To help her with reorganization she called on the private sector for assistance and she hoped to pare down 25 city departments to a smaller number of nine or 10. A voluntary task force was organized and a study began. Yet by the 1984-1985 term, city departments still numbered about

25, and the mayor's division numbered five, a reduction of only two units.

One of the most serious challenges to the mayor's financial powers came from City Controller Lance Lalor. Such a challenge was not unique as Whitmire had challenged Mayor Jim McConn in a similar fashion while she served as the city's controller.

Whitmire's previous controller and CPA experience and her appointment of William R. Brown as the new city treasurer early in her first term seemed to preclude any financial contests for power. Yet Lalor proved that notion wrong when he slapped a \$30 million spending restriction on city departments to prevent a deficit in 1982 and repeatedly balked on certifying city funds. Budgetary difficulties plagued city hall while the controller and mayor were at odds on the existence of shortfalls. The recession of 1982-1983 did further damage to the city coffers and Lalor continued to charge the mayor with spending more than the city took in. The mayor in turn charged Lalor had hurt the city by his financial bickering and appointed a charter committee to clarify controller duties, which, she said, were to certify the availability of funds only--not to block or attempt to dictate administrative or legislative programs (Grotta, 3/3/1984).

In 1983, mayoral challenger Bill Wright attempted to use the city's budgetary difficulties and the Whitmire-Lalor feud to his advantage. A former fund raiser for Whitmire, Wright called for a change in the city's budget process, for more efficient municipal management and for more and better ways to seek economic diversification for the city. He publicly criticized the mayor for budget shortfalls, for hikes in sewer

and water rates and for the failures of Metro.

Much of his support came from developer Walter M. Mischer, who broke with his tradition of supporting incumbents and opted to back Wright. Whitmire had been unsuccessful in mending political fences with the Houston power-broker, and she would later tell the media, "there would not be a Bill Wright campaign without Walter Mischer" (Foxhall, 10/6/1983).

But once again Whitmire's coalition proved unbeatable. In the November 8th election, Whitmire garnered 63.9 percent of the vote to Wright's 34.8 percent. Her support came from conservative affluent voters and liberal minority voters (over 90 percent of the predominantly black inner-city precincts). Wright's backers, predominantly middle-income whites and Hispanics, couldn't muster the forces to beat what was becoming known as Whitmire's Unbeatable Coalition (Foxhall, 11/9/1983). Whitmire's spotless record of personal integrity and her efforts to efficiently manage government seemed to overshadow the city's budgetary difficulties.

But bitter disputes between Whitmire and Lalor continued throughout the 1984-1985 session as budgetary difficulties were repeatedly targeted by the media. Lalor, however, had an ally in George Greanias, a councilman who chided Whitmire for her budgetary shortsightedness and who eventually spearheaded the hybrid city-manager reform movement to be discussed in the next chapter. It was soon apparent the mayor was unable to silence her fiscal critics, to significantly threaten or cajole them. And this, in some sense, hurt her credibility as a financial expert, which, in turn, impinged on her ability to display effective mayoral leadership.

Whitmire also drew fire from within the public works department.

during her first term when she charged "cronyism" had played a role in awarding some city contracts. While she had agreed in a semi-public meeting to acquiesce to builder and developer demands that public works director, Jimmy Schindenwolf, be kept on, she instructed him to propose a formal system for selecting architectural and engineering firms for city projects. And she called for a more aggressive approach to negotiating fees for city work. Schindenwolf eventually stepped down as public works director; Jon C. Vanden Bosch was ushered in, and while builders and developers made their peace with Whitmire, they were no longer able to stand alone as a blocking force to administrative reform efforts (Snyder, 2/2/1984). A case in point was the proposed increase of certain building and development fees. A popular reform incumbent coupled with a progressive, constituent-oriented council produced a change that might not have been supported by an all at-large elected council attuned solely to business and developer demands.

But the public works department was not the only city department shaken by Whitmire reforms. Two Whitmire administrative decisions which continued to produce political repercussions for the CPA-turned-mayor were the appointment of Lee Patrick Brown, a black with impressive academic and professional credentials, as police chief and a decision to revise the city's civil service system. The Houston's Patrolmen's Union balked at an outside professional heading the city's force, preferred appointments to higher positions be made by police chiefs rather than a reformed civil service system, and wanted increased wages. Even though the mayor was willing to negotiate with the union and attempted a compromise which was

to jeopardize her standing with the business community and the state legislature, Whitmire was unable to placate this powerful group. They consistently marshalled their forces against her in political campaigns and public forums and succeeded in enlisting the support of the firemen's union when the mayor refused their demands for pay increases. Much to the mayor's dismay, in 1984 the city council voted 11-4 to restore parity between police and firefighters' salaries, earmarking approximately \$1.6 million to come from the city's contingency or surplus fund. City council had come under increased pressure from the Houston Professional Fire-fighter's Union at a time, as the mayor charged, when the city was under increasing outside pressure to increase the fund balance, not reduce it (Gravois and Grotta, 10/24/1984).

Whitmire had also drawn fire from firemen when she appointed an outsider, Robert Swartout, as the city's fire chief. She fought a major battle with councilmen to gain confirmation of his nomination--and won, only to lose political points four months later when Swartout resigned abruptly over a budget dispute, charging the administration was not committed to developing a first-rate fire department. Calling the ex-fire chief unprofessional, Whitmire attributed his resignation to personal problems. She was later blasted by the media for attempting to keep the reasons for his resignation from the press (Hines, 4/24/1985; Kennedy, 4/25/1985).

From the above discussion, it is obvious the "reform" mayor ran into difficulties with bureaucratic elements of municipal government while trying to implement her new city hall management program. She won some

skirmishes, lost others, and, in still others, changed her political strategy. While her critics are still vocal, she has been credited with learning political lessons and adroitly moving forward in a bureaucratic maze that still remains a challenge.

Social forces at work in the city also proved a big challenge for the mayor. Whitmire supporters included minority groups, and yet, once in office she was charged with ignoring the city's Hispanic element. Councilman Ben Reyes, a vocal Whitmire critic, said she had slighted Hispanics by not appointing them to visible administrative positions. Anthony Hall, a black councilman, also questioned the mayor's decision to eliminate administrative liaison positions which served as links to minority groups. Generally, however, Whitmire remained popular with many minorities. The mayor pushed for a larger portion of city work for minority businesses, and in 1984 succeeded in winning council support for a minority business enterprise program. One low-bidder was denied a city contract because he had not moved aggressively enough in searching for minority subcontractors. The denial cost the city more money; the mayor was criticized; but the program remained in place.

Whitmire also drew the ire of the Harris County Women's Political Caucus in 1983 for her support of Anthony Hall in a run-off council race against women's advocate Nikki Van Hightower. The Caucus was a group that had consistently supported Whitmire even though her campaigns were not feminist-oriented. HCWPC charged Whitmire had broken a promise not to endorse Hall. Hall, however, generally supported Whitmire's programs in council, and it was clear the mayor valued his vote on council and saw

his reelection as politically expedient. Hall was reelected and HCWPC's criticism died.

Clearly, the social change which caused the mayor the most political havoc was a growing homosexual community that became more politically active and more vocal. Gays had supported Whitmire, and conservative community elements criticized her tour of gay bars in 1984 to thank those who voted for her. Whitmire's support for ordinances protecting the employment rights of homosexuals in municipal service positions mobilized conservative business leaders, public officials and religious leaders. Her political foes hoped a forced public referendum would spur on her defeat in a third-term election try. And a local survey showed Whitmire was vulnerable on that issue (Foxhall, 1/27/1985). In the referendum, voters rejected the ordinances; the mayor and council called for a healing of political wounds and for getting on with city business; and gay political activists adopted an uncharacteristically low profile in the 1985 mayoral campaign.

As was mentioned in chapter 3, economic concerns of municipal government that spillover into the private sector as well as the city's economic climate can thwart, stymie and even destroy mayoral leadership potential. The national recession which descended on Houston came as Whitmire finished her first year in office. She had come to the mayor's office with more than a few business leaders concerned about her ability to govern and to maintain the status quo--a government which fostered business and a pro-growth attitude. As Whitmire pushed forward on municipal reform and grappled with revenue shortages which seemed to grow, she clearly understood

her political future was directly linked to the city's financial health. In the 1984-1985 budget message to council, Whitmire said there seemed to be no immediate prospect of a return to the kind of economic growth the city had experienced in the past, therefore:

We must continue to be cautious in the short-term annual budget making process while exercising initiatives that will cut costs or generate additional revenue over the long term. Productivity must be emphasized in everything we do to insure that maximum service is received for a minimum of investment. (1984-1985 City Budget, p. i)

Yet the mayor fought a tax increase, was criticized for a cutback in city services, failed to get her budget approved until September 1984 and lost the support of councilman George Greanias, co-chairman of council's budget review committee, who had once been a staunch ally.

Whitmire fared better on her long-term projects and her efforts to woo the business community. She garnered support for a 5-year Capital Improvement Program, pushed successfully for a new convention center to bring additional dollars into the city, sought federal funds to revitalize the inner-city area via an Urban Development Action Grant and lobbied for Houston, not only in the halls of the U.S. Senate but also during a 12-day tour of Europe. Her efforts seemed to be paying off as former business opponents appeared to be moving into her corner.

That support, perhaps, was no more evident than at a business fund raiser held in December of 1984 where the mayor netted \$400,000 for a third-term bid. Supporters of the dinner included developer Vincent Kickerillo, who had supported Whitmire's opponents in the past, and Walter M. Mischer, Sr., a developer and political heavy-weight whose support the mayor has not completely won. Kickerillo was optimistic at the turnout of supporters:

oilman Michel Halbouty; Tenneco Board member James L. Ketelsen; developer George Mitchell; Texas Commerce Bancshares chairman Ben Love; developer Kenneth Schnitzer; oilman Jack Warren; developer Gerald Hines; and 3/D International chairman Jack Rains (Foxhall, 12/4/1984). For Kickerillo, it was obvious--Whitmire appeared to be the consensus mayoral candidate, for she had mended political fences with the conservative well-established business community. (This gala, however, was held before the controversial gay rights' ordinances controversy.)

The mayor also sought to make amends with the media whose wrath she initially incurred. During her first term, Whitmire's relationship with the press bordered on hostility, and she was criticized for being distant, secretive and combative. She, in turn, reportedly told media sources reporters would benefit or suffer, depending on how well they respected her guidelines (Fleck, 1/1982). But she lost a valuable political resource for a time as the media gave her little credit and coverage for the capital improvement program she so ardently pushed.

Over time Whitmire learned a valuable lesson, softened her approach, became more available to certain members of the media and even appeared in shorts and contact lens for a spoof at the Press Club's 34th Annual Gridiron Show. The media was a powerful, if fickle, urban force, and a professional mayor-manager, like the good ole boys of past, would have to meet some of its demands in order to survive.

Whitmire also attempted to deflect criticisms of her personality--that she was arrogant, unyielding, distant and unwilling to listen to those of a different persuasion. She employed the skills of Alan Rudy,

a businessman, and Clintine Cashion, a political organizer, to undo some of her political snags. To counter criticism like "if she were a city manager she'd be doing a great job; where she fails is in the press-the-flesh part of the job," she became more available, more political (Chadwick, 10/1983). Since Houston elections are non-partisan, and political party support is minimal, Whitmire had to build up a coalition of support to protect her position while in office as well as obtain campaign funds from those in established business circles who might be threatened by political encroachments of minority groups. Observers have given her credit for her adroit maneuvers and her recovery from past political stumbles.

One of the most difficult political roadblocks the mayor faced was a diverse and somewhat independent council which had often called her to task for lacking leadership qualities and for her administrative policies. With the 1979 redistricting changes, eventually came councilmen who owed their positions to constituent support that may, at times, be at odds with the interests of big-city financiers whose support the mayor, of necessity, must seek. Ben Reyes is a case in point. As a Hispanic, his allegiance is to his district; he is an outspoken critic of the mayor; and he has often decried the strong mayor-establishment tie.

Another change redistricting facilitated was the emergence of councilmembers who are savvy professional politicians and who often challenge Whitmire's power publicly. Examples include George Greanias, Rodney Ellis and John Goodner. No longer are council differences aired behind closed doors; the public arena is an acceptable testing ground.

Whitmire must also contend with long-time council members who have dealt with previous mayors and who have shown open hostility to Whitmire's reform efforts. Frank Mancuso and Larry McKaskle are two examples.

Still other politically astute council members like Eleanor Tinsley and Dale Gorczynski are not above questioning Whitmire's leadership abilities even though they often vote with the mayor. While Gorczynski has praised Whitmire's administrative reforms, he has, in the past, faulted her for falling short in the political art of encouraging council loyalty (Snyder, 7/5/1983). And another long-time councilman, Judson Robinson, reportedly complained after Whitmire's first term:

By her method of administration, she is not that available and open to the council as (former Mayor Jim) McConn was. In the old days we had a whole lot of behind-the-scenes explanations, talk about what the administration was doing. (Kennedy, 9/25/1983)

Whitmire smarted under the criticism, but attempted to placate and woo council members after the formation of the "Breakfast Club," a group of council members who were irritated by the mayor's efforts to push Anthony Hall into deceased Homer Ford's at-large position. The group was opposed to many of Whitmire's earlier policies and met to form political strategies to block objectional measures (H.C., 11/22/1985; Tinsley, 1986). Whitmire became more accessible to council, she and her staff attempted to lobby and build support on council and the mayor publicly praised council efforts.

But councilmen critical of the mayor remained vocal and as economic difficulties increased and the 1985 election approached their voices were increasingly heard. And it is in this political climate with its attendant pressures, that critics advocated a structural reform of government.

It is to this reform effort that we now turn; however, two points covered in this chapter should be re-emphasized. First, Houston's charter grants its mayor broad powers, and municipal government is headed by an incumbent who has honed her skill as a political entrepreneur and who has shored up a public coalition to protect her position. Secondly, although much of city governance is routine, power conflicts are frequent. Those who have a stake in municipal legislation and administration are those from the private sector who seek profit; those whose economic standings are enhanced by municipal policy and, finally, those whose political careers are advanced by the pro-growth actions of a stable government operating in and dedicated to a favorable business climate.

CHAPTER 6: THE PUSH FOR A CITY MANAGER

Political man can use his resources to gain influence, and he can then use his influence to gain more resources. Political resources can be pyramided in much the same way that a man who starts out in business sometimes pyramids a small investment into a large corporate empire.

Robert A. Dahl
Who Governs?

We need trained professional management at the highest level of city government. Few elected officials, however talented, have had the experience as senior managers in \$1 billion-plus organizations. Yet that is what the city of Houston is today. While our elected officials can and should provide strong political leadership, we can assure good management only by having a strong qualified senior manager at the top of the system.

George Greanias
City Council Member
District C, Houston

The most recent push for structural change of city government came in January of 1985 when three Houston city council members approached a mayor-appointed citizens committee studying lengths of office terms for city officials. The councilmen petitioned the committee to review certain "systemic structural changes in local government." The changes included a form of city-manager government--specifically a chief administrative officer for the city; limited terms of office for the mayor; a separation of the mayor from council; and the creation of a

president of council position. The move was spearheaded by George Greanias, councilman District C, who enlisted the support of Rodney Ellis, councilman District D. Larry McKaskle, councilman District A, joined the effort and appeared before the citizens committee (Citizens Committee Minutes, 1/31/1985).

The committee, however, refused to expand its charge to include a structural review of municipal government. Nevertheless, the councilmen went public, vowing to make the city manager a campaign issue to garner support for their recommended changes. Throughout 1985 up until the November municipal election, the issue of a city manager kept resurfacing in the press, while other structural changes receded from public view. The incumbent mayor deferred taking ^uaction on the suggestion that another committee be appointed to study the issue, while her opponent, who had served as mayor from 1963-1974, pledged, if elected, he would ask voters to approve the appointment of a manager to ease the city's administrative burdens.

To understand the push for a chief administrative officer or manager, we must first look at the political actors who promoted the issue in the public arena. We must ask: What, if any, specific pressures or demands may have been placed on these actors; Were the prescribed rules of the governance game violated? Were any demands on actors generated by outmoded formal mechanisms, by conflict with the mayor, or by a self-promoting call for efficiency, or some combination of these factors? And who stands to profit if the push for a city manager gains momentum and is translated into a mechanism of government? Finally we must ask: How do others within

city hall perceive this effort and what are the chances for a formal restructuring of municipal government? In an effort to answer these questions, we must first turn our attention to George Greanias.

Greanias, a professor of administrative science at Rice University and a Harvard Law School graduate, was first elected to his District C council seat in 1981, the same year Whitmire was elected to her first term as mayor. He represents a diverse district which includes part of the Fourth Ward, Montrose, Southhampton, Southgate, Braeswood, Meyerland, Westbury, Rice University, the Texas Medical Center area, and a portion of the city near the Astrodome. The district is approximately 73 percent white. Greanias' constituents include members of the homosexual community in the Montrose area; Jewish residents of the Meyerland-Westbury-Braeswood area; and many young professionals who have moved into the Rice University and Texas Medical Center areas. He is a playwright and is considered intelligent and "probably the best student on council" (Hart, 3/11/1985). One long-time city hall observer has praised Greanias for his conscientious efforts while on council: "The councilman has a reputation for tackling issues, diligently studying them and speaking his mind. He is unafraid of hard work and has numerous programs to his credit, including an ordinance strictly regulating sexually oriented businesses" (Kennedy, 11/29/1984, p. 10).

A believer of professionalism in government, Greanias was often allied with Whitmire during his first term. Both were in their early thirties, were degreed professionals and were committed to government reform and to their respective constituents--Greanias, to District C and Whitmire, to

the city. Yet, they shared many of the same liberal constituencies. And both are professional politicians.

Unlike Whitmire, Greanias is more adept at dealing with conflict and using it to his political advantage. From an interview with Greanias it is obvious he perceives himself as a politico rather than a mere governmental delegate, he relishes his role as legislative critic and he has found it difficult to negotiate his goals/ambitions within the strong-mayor governmental structure.

Clearly, Greanias is an example of Eulau's council opinion leader, one who is at ease functioning as a catalyst of the mass mood as well as taking a leadership role on council (Eulau, 1969). With such political persuasions coupled with legislative and administrative acumen, it should not be surprising such an ally could turn into the mayor's political foe.

Since 1979 redistricting changes, the mayor has had to negotiate with a council that is unipolar. Consensus is not assured. In such a political environment, a strong ally like Greanias could buttress Whitmire's programs; but such a critic could undermine her mayoral authority and wreck havoc with her programs. In a dispute over the mayor's fiscal policies, Greanias changed from ally to outspoken critic, a position that pitted the councilman against the mayor--a mayor who strongly believes in political loyalty.

While Greanias still voted with the mayor on key issues during his second term, he increasingly criticized her publicly, most notably on her 1984-1985 and 1985-1986 budgets. He questioned her refusal to consider a tax increase, charged her with gimmickry in trying to balance the city's

budgets and chastised her for financial shortsightedness (Elkind, 2/1985; Carreau, 7/3/1984; Snyder, 11/20/1984; Grotta, 5/21/1985; Mintz, 4/12/1985).

The mayor denied Greanias' accusations and countercharged him with coveting additional power by negotiating a deal whereby the 1984-85 budget would be approved if he were given the chairmanship of two committees: one to study the use of Houston's Civic Center buildings; the other, a finance and management committee to assist in municipal budget preparation (Kennedy, 11/29/1984). While it was politically expedient for Whitmire and Greanias to work together on various projects, their relationship has at times been strained. The mayor's 1984-1985 budget was not approved by council until November 27, 1984, and not until after Whitmire sent a 26-page memo to council, defending her fiscal policies. In the memo, Bill Brown, Whitmire's director of finance and administration, conceded many of the points Greanias raised--most notably, that in fiscal year 1983 changing the accounting procedures for year-end encumbrances showed expenditures exceeded revenue by \$21.8 million (Grotta, 11/20/1984).

Greanias' criticism of the mayor's fiscal policies did not stop, but resurfaced with Whitmire's 1985-1986 budget. She was already receiving financial fire from city controller Lance Lalor at a time when the city's revenues continued to suffer from an economic downturn and when the 1985 municipal election loomed on the horizon. The mayor took a number of council members' concerns into consideration when she revised her proposed \$1.29 billion 1985-1986 budget, but still drew criticism from Greanias who reportedly told the media: "City finances are not something to be toyed around with because of politics. A \$1 billion business ought

not be run by the election calendar" (Grotta, 9/10/1985). Eventually the mayor's revised budget passed on September 18, 1985, two and a half months after the beginning of the fiscal year.

A review of both budgets reveals the mayor's growing concern that economic difficulties would have an impact on municipal services and city revenues. Whitmire called for improved cost control and increased aggressiveness in collecting delinquent property taxes and existing revenue to support her 1984-1985 program: the starting up of eight police classes; civilianization of the fire department; maintenance of 3200 miles of concrete streets; grading and cleaning 300 miles of roadside ditches, resurfacing 470 miles of street; overlaying asphalt of 145 miles of roads; a merit pay program; park maintenance; monitoring air and water pollution; the creation of a new division in the health department; three new libraries; and support for the city's new information computer service (City of Houston Annual Budget 1/1/1984-6/30/1985, p. i-iv).

The mayor did, indeed, rely heavily on general revenue sharing funds: 25.7 million for the continuation of fiscal 1984 projects and 35.2 million for new programs. A significant amount of the revenue was earmarked for the replacement of equipment in the public works, police, fire, parks and recreation, and health department (1984-1985 Budget, p. iv). To Greanias' public claims the mayor relied too heavily on revenue sharing funds in lieu of general operating funds, Whitmire countered such fund usage was acceptable and legitimate.

The mayor's 1985-1986 budget message to council also reflected concern over the city's economic plight and the slow rate of growth in city revenue.

Her budget efforts were aimed at maintaining the existing levels of service while at the same time enhancing the police department (500 new cadets), fire department (190 new cadets, 2 new stations), street maintenance (187 miles overlaid), and two new libraries (Alief and Collier). The mayor estimated 46.6 million in revenue sharing funds and hinted if the city lost \$20 million in federal dollars, it might be necessary to increase revenue .03¢ per \$100 valuation.

In her \$1.39 billion 1985-1986 budget estimate, Whitmire had to grapple with a property tax revenue decrease (down to \$23 million) at the same time many on council were advocating additional service expenditures. Councilman Ben Reyes, an outspoken critic of the mayor, wanted: lighting for the downtown University of Houston campus; money to provide crossing guards at year-round schools; and extra pay for bilingual police officers. Councilman Dale Gorczynski wanted adequate funding for cleaning ditches and cutting weeds as well as funds for razing dangerous buildings. Councilman Frank Mancuso opposed Whitmire's attempt to abolish the park police (City of Houston Annual Budget 1/1/1985-6/30/1986; Grotta, 9/10/1985). In addition, the mayor had to deal with Greanias, who as co-chairman of council's finance committee, continued to criticize her finance policies and her reluctance to increase taxes.

Whitmire's position was analogous to James Q. Wilson's description of the country's new breed of mayor (Wilson, 1972). While Whitmire's budget is fixed and can be altered only trivially, she must be thought of as innovative, in control and capable of launching new programs despite declining revenue. On the other hand, Greanias, a legislative leader with

administrative and budgetary acumen, had pitted himself against the mayor by charging the city was in danger of spending more than it collected. Because the mayor and council did not relish a protracted budget battle in an election year, Whitmire's revised 1985-1986 budget eventually passed council.

During this extending budgetary confrontation between the mayor and the councilman, it was publicly obvious Greanias: 1) became increasingly frustrated with a strong-willed mayor and a strong-mayor structure; 2) pushed for structural changes in government, providing for a more independent council and removing much administrative burden from the mayor; and 3) considered satisfying his political ambitions by running for mayor himself.

Throughout the spring of 1985, Greanias vocalized the need for an independent council and a chief administrative officer, a manager nominated by the mayor and approved by council. He enlisted the support of councilman Rodney Ellis, a professional politician who one observer suggested might have aspirations to be Houston's first black mayor (Elkind, 2/1985). Ellis contends his involvement in the restructuring effort was inspired by his belief it would increase chances of public acceptance of four-year terms of office for elected officials, a move to lessen political and financial burdens of public officials. Long-time councilman Larry McKaskle pledged his support for the reform effort. Often at odds with Whitmire, McKaskle told a reporter his reason for joining the other two councilmen:

It's the first time in all the years I've been on council that the council has had so little input in the agenda. I'm in favor of a

city manager now; I would not have such a plan under any other administration. I have asked for things from the mayor's office for over a year and have gotten no response. At the same time, too many things that are running smoothly are being interfered with. Too many people on the third floor of city hall (the mayor's office) without any experience are trying to run the city, and we're just not getting anywhere. (Edelson, 2/4/1985)

The media was a ready vehicle for the restructuring effort and gave the needed visibility, suggesting the mayor should appoint another citizens committee to study the possibility of a city manager and other restructuring changes. The publicity came at a good time. Greanias, Ellis and McKaskle were coming up for reelection in the fall, and the public visibility they received by promoting efficiency changes and professional municipal management would benefit their campaign efforts. In fact, one business PAC pointed to Greanias' restructuring proposal as a point in his favor when it considered its campaign contributions (Hart, 3/11/1985). Researchers have pointed to a responsiveness bias on the part of municipal officials; and in Houston, council members who publicly support fiscal soundness and a professionalized government reap political benefits (Schumaker and Getter, 3/1983). In addition, both Greanias and Ellis had supported the proposed ordinances introduced by Anthony Hall to protect rights of homosexuals in municipal government, a move which was not popular with conservative business leaders. A call for fiscal soundness and a move for governmental responsiveness and efficiency, good publicity by themselves, could, perhaps, be used to deflect conservative criticism.

However, once the media gave initial lipservice to the government reform effort, the issue receded into the background. Obviously, the Whitmire administration found the idea of reform "interesting," but did

not pursue the matter. The mayor was now fighting a political battle for reelection and her political foe was Louie Welch, a man who had served as city mayor from 1963-1974 and who had also been president of the Houston Chamber of Commerce for more than 10 years. Welch blamed Whitmire for the city's economic difficulties and garnered the financial support of banker-developer Walter M. Mischer, Sr.; taxicab magnate George Kamins; real estate executive Howard Horne; developer Joseph J. Johnson; developer Harold Farb; and businessmen Roy H. Cullen and Robert Mosbacher, Sr. (Mintz and Snyder, 10/8/1985). In addition, HouConPAC, a political action committee organized by the Houston Contractors Association reportedly contributed \$49,800 to the Welch campaign (Mintz, 10/30/1985). Welch also received financial backing from the Houston Police Officers' Association, the Texas Business PAC, the Greater Houston Builders Association's Big 50 PAC and the Texas Business PAC.

Mayoral campaign rhetoric focused on the city's economy with charges from Welch that Whitmire failed to lead the government in fostering an attractive business climate. Whitmire pointed to improvements in city services, positive aspects of the city's economy and her administration's efforts to promote job opportunities. Welch was proving to be Whitmire's biggest political challenge to date; her position on the controversial gay rights ordinances and area economic difficulties were being used against her.

It was into this political fray that Greanias considered jumping. In July 1985, Greanias went public with his considerations about running for mayor: "One candidate talks about the past, and the other talks about the

present. But no one is talking about the future, about where we should go and how we should get there" (Grotta, 7/19/1985). Mayor Whitmire expressed dismay that "an old friend" would seek her job, while a Welch aide doubted Greanias could marshal the financial resources to run for office. Greanias' consideration about running against the mayor was short-lived; after testing political waters, he chose instead to seek reelection to his District C council position. (Grotta, 7/19/1985).

Greanias faced three challengers in his bid for a third term. One was a self-proclaimed gay who decided to run because he felt Greanias had not supported Whitmire and had ignored the Montrose community. Another challenger was a member of the Straight Slate, a group of candidates who opposed members of council who voted to support job protection for homosexuals in municipal government. He charged both Greanias and Whitmire with undermining family values and promoting the spread of sexual diseases. The final challenger, a black, backed by the LaRouche National Democratic Policy Committee, charged Greanias with ignoring the interests of Fourth Ward blacks and opposed increases in property taxes. He, too, criticized Greanias for a tolerance of homosexual lifestyles (Foxhall and Carreau, 10/22/1985).

Greanias, as a two-term incumbent, had better name recognition and a much better organized campaign. The councilman discounted the importance of the gay rights controversy, saying delivery of city services and effective management of city finances were key issues. And he focused on capital improvement projects earmarked for his district as well as his expertise in city financial and management affairs because of his

co-chairmanship of the council budget review committee (Foxhall, 10/22/1985).

Rodney Ellis also had three challengers for his District D seat. All were black. One was a pastor and U.S. Air Force veteran; one was a civil engineer with Exxon; and one was an attorney and president of the Houston Lawyers Association. Larry McKaskle had only one challenger, a consultant and administrator with Harvard Business School training.

In August, prior to the November election, the government reform issue resurfaced. Both Ellis and Greanias pledged to make structural revision a campaign issue. They acknowledged government structure was of little interest to voters but was critical to the operation of the city; therefore, it needed publicity or it might suffer a "quiet death." The councilmen called for a professional city manager (CAO) and a president of council because, they said, the mayor could not lead in economic development while inundated with legislative and administrative detail. Whitmire reportedly told the media the issue of government structure should be considered on its own merits rather than tainted by campaign rhetoric. Welch reportedly agreed (Hart, 8/19/1985).

But in October, Welch called for a non-political office of city administration and proposed to appoint a city manager to ease administrative burdens of the mayor's office:

The city staff is overburdened with inefficient, ineffective and inadequate management structure. With department heads and other staff members reporting directly to the mayor, the present system prevents strategic policy making, long-term planning and economic development initiatives being formulated in the mayor's office. (Foxhall, 10/3/1985, p. 10)

Welch did not have a city manager while mayor, because, he said, he felt he was a qualified city manager as well as mayor. Throughout the last month

of his campaign he continued to call for a modified city manager while deriding Whitmire's management skills. If elected he promised to submit a charter change to the voters.

Interestingly, the Houston Chronicle in an October editorial suggested the city-manager approach to local government "deserves attention." And the newspaper called for a thorough exploration of the issue (H.C., 10/8/1985, p. 14). (In the 1940s, the Houston Chronicle opposed the implementation of a city manager government.) Later in October a "Saturday Forum" was devoted to the city-manager issue. Seven individuals wrote in, advocating a change to a form of city-manager government. Two of those people were George Greanias and Rodney Ellis. Four persons, however, preferred the strong-mayor form. One person was Don Horn, who had served on the mayor's citizens committee that looked at four-year terms for city officials. Horn voiced concern that a city manager would remove the "accountability factor" of governing.

Whitmire's campaign rhetoric focused on her accomplishments while in office, the rebounding economy and her administration's efforts to stimulate growth. She remained relatively silent on structural revisions, but stressed government accountability. Clearly, the incumbent would not fuel efforts to strip her of power.

The November election came: Whitmire was reelected garnering 200,788 votes, or 58.88 percent of the total voter turnout. Approximately 138,553 voters supported Welch, giving him 40.63 percent of the total votes cast (H.C., 11/6/1985). Early on the race was close, but Whitmire moved ahead her margin solidified by the city's black vote. She received 95.47 percent

of the middle-income black vote and 97.94 percent of the low-income black vote. Only 3.98 percent of middle-income blacks and 1.93 percent of low-income blacks supported Welch. In this respect, Whitmire's selection of Houston's first black police chief, Lee Brown, and Welch's association with ex-police chief Herman Short were critical factors in the vote disparity.

Despite hefty campaign contributions, Welch was unable to garner enough support to defeat a Whitmire coalition of liberals, blacks, young professionals, gays and those who did business with the Whitmire administration. Welch's support of the Straight-Slate opposition to protecting homosexuals in municipal government and his program to protect the public against AIDS won him some conservative support; however, his public faux pas "shoot the queers" accidentally broadcast by Channel 13 sealed Welch's fate.

Also defeated at the polls were seven of the eight Straight-Slate council candidates. But two city councilmen, however, were forced into run-off elections by the support given to Straight-Slate candidates. Judson Robinson, Jr., the city's first black city-wide elected official, was pitted against Straight-Slate candidate Jim Kennedy for council Position 5. Anthony Hall, who had initiated the controversial gay rights ordinances, faced a run-off contest against Dick Hite after campaign spoiler Straight-Slate candidate siphoned off a critical 17 percent of total votes cast for Position 4. But both incumbents won solid victories in the November 26th run-off election--Robinson with 64 percent (115,199 votes) of the total votes cast for Position 5 candidates, Hall with 55.98

percent (101,411) of the total votes cast for the Position 4 seat.

Greanias, Ellis and McKaskle all won solid victories in the November 5th election, defeating their challengers by wide margins. Greanias captured 66 percent (30,493 votes) of total voter turnout in the District C election. His closest contender, Straight-Slate candidate Charles Carter got 21.8 percent (10,061) of the total turnout vote. Ellis bested his closest challenger, Arthur Jackson, with a margin of 70.2 percent (23,757) of the votes for the District D position to Jackson's 23.7 (8,030). And McKaskle garnered 80.7 percent (27,361) of the total votes cast for District A candidates compared to Stan Casey's 19.3 percent (6,558) (H.C., 11/6/1985).

'With the end of campaign rhetoric, the push for structural reform died.

In talking with Greanias after the election about his proposed structural changes, he acknowledged budget differences with Whitmire and his considered bid for her job. But he still argued separation of administrative power from legislative activity would facilitate better municipal government. "It is not easy to seek a useful change when the administration is against it," he said (Greanias, 1985).

An astute politician, Greanias did not swipe at the mayor, saying it was not fair to be too harsh on Whitmire. Rather, he said, it was necessary to look at the nature of the political system which stretches her ability to perform. Instead of looking at the symptom (mayoral performance), he preferred to look "at the disease" (government structure). Too many responsibilities heaped on a mayor who lacked professional management training resulted in inefficiency; consequently, it was time for the

day-to-day business of government to be handled by a professional administrator. When asked if Clarence West, the mayor's agenda director and so-called administrative trouble-shooter, did not, in a sense, serve as the mayor's ex officio chief administrative officer or manager, Greanias replied West was the mayor's person, did not report to council and was a lawyer not a trained professional administrator.

Greanias spent considerable time talking about the difficulties of providing constituent services and meeting neighborhood needs while dealing with city-wide concerns. He felt separation of powers was necessary for council to be more effective. Acknowledging structural reform was now unlikely, Greanias said he had received business support and would continue his efforts.

In reflecting on the reform effort, Rodney Ellis still believes it would promote a more independent council, a council better able to serve its varied constituents. With the mayor as council's presiding officer and chief administrator "you're either the mayor's rubber stamp or an obstructionist" (Ellis, 1986). But Ellis said his primary interest now is in dealing with the city's financial crisis instead of structural reform.

Eleanor Tinsley, council member for Position 2, is also a reform proponent. She said council needs more control over its own agenda and that day-to-day administrative decision-making plus legislative responsibilities are too much for any contemporary mayor. She continues to support structural reform for municipal efficiency and believes the issue will eventually resurface (Tinsley, 1986).

Staff members close to the mayor, however, do not believe reform

revisions to the city charter would ever get voter approval, nor do they believe such changes are necessary. Clintine Cashion, Whitmire's political coordinator, campaign manager and the mayor's director of inter-governmental affairs, believes a strong-mayor structure is necessary for a city as politically diverse as Houston. Involved in political campaigns for many years, Cashion believes Houstonians want a strong mayor accountable to them instead of a city-manager government where some accountability is removed. For Cashion, the time is long past when a city-manager system would work in Houston; such reform is not politically feasible: "Change is so difficult in municipal government, and people are relatively happy with their government. Punching the ballot gives people the feeling they have something to say in the direction of city government" (Cashion, 1986). And she points to the 1985 election results and Whitmire's popularity as proof.

"When I first heard of Greanias' plan, I thought it foolish, short-sighted and political," she added. But Cashion, who has worked with Greanias on a past campaign, said he is conscientious, an able councilman and an academic purist whose reforms may be based more on philosophy and theory than on reality and constituent demands. She believes Greanias, while well-intentioned, was setting a predicate to run for mayor.

For Cashion, the reform effort failed because: 1) it was not a grass-roots movement; 2) it really did not become a campaign issue; and, 3) there are many on council who might consider a future bid for the mayor's job and they would not be seriously predisposed to relinquishing any potential power (Tinsley, Hall, McKaskle, Greenwood and Ellis). Cashion also pointed

to Clarence West, an able administrator, who has relieved the mayor of many routine administrative concerns--without the need for a costly charter election to change structure of government.

West considers the push for structural reform a moot issue: "There is nothing under the present charter that prohibits the mayor from having a chief administrative assistant. It's something of a smoke screen to say you need to restructure government" (West, 1986). And he admitted, in some sense, his job is analogous to that of a city manager, "but I'm not a professional bureaucrat."

West, a lawyer who has worked on the mayor's campaigns, has been Whitmire's agenda director and coordinates with department heads and council on legislative issues which come before municipal government. He sees the recent reform effort as an attempt to curb the mayor's power and says the chances for any future charter revision is "pretty remote."

West discounts the notion Whitmire has too much control over council's agenda. Instead, he says the administration's agenda procedures, the development of his Request for Council Action Form (81-01), and his pre-council agenda briefings are proof Whitmire's administration is open and accessible to council members, who can post items on the agenda when they so desire.

In addition to agenda duties, West "dabbles in other things." He acknowledges he is the mayor's trouble-shooter, has "unstuck" a landing site ordinance for the West Side police command station and has pushed through a River Oaks sewer project. To accomplish his various assignments, West has worked with council, department heads and the public.

Recently, Whitmire named West to be her senior staff director, a post council unanimously approved. In a memo, Whitmire said the new position would allow "more of the administrative responsibilities of the mayor to be handled through staff" (Simon, 5/5/1986). West's new duties will include: assisting the mayor with special projects; resolving issues between departments; overseeing city contracts; and assisting with council issues. Unlike a city manager, West will not report to council nor is he confirmed by it; yet, one might describe his new position as similar to the duties performed by a chief administrative officer.

Like Cashion and West, other observers outside city hall see little chance for structural reform which would remove the mayor as council's presiding officer or curb her administrative power--even under the guise of giving her more time to devote to economic development. Bill Mintz, a city hall reporter for the Houston Chronicle, said the public is generally satisfied with the job Whitmire has done as mayor. "Structural changes come about only as the result of scandal or other serious problems. Greanias might have had more luck during the McConn days" (Mintz, 1986).

Tom Kennedy, a long-time city hall reporter and now a columnist with the Houston Post, agrees Greanias raised a political issue which has little chance for success. Past mayors have generally appointed defacto city managers to help them administer city business without a voter-approved charter change, Kennedy said. And he perceives the public as being generally satisfied with the strong-mayor structure of city government.

In 1985 the University of Houston's Center for Public Policy completed its 1985 Houston Metropolitan Area Survey, a telephone interview of 830 local adults between February 22 and March 21, 1985. The sample closely matched 1980 census population characteristics (age, sex and race), and respondents were asked a series of policy-related questions. One question concerned government structure:

Another proposal has been made that the City of Houston adopt a city manager system of government. The city manager would assume most of the administrative powers now exercised by the mayor to run city government. What is your reaction to this idea: Do you think Houston should keep its present system which gives the mayor strong powers, or would you like to see a city manager system adopted? (1985 Houston Metropolitan Area Survey, p. 22)

The results showed 55 percent of the respondents would keep the strong-mayor system, 42 percent would adopt a city-manager form and 3 percent were not sure. In categorical breakdowns, the study revealed: 62 percent of city residents opted for a strong mayor, while 36 percent would adopt a city-manager system. Of the respondents, 51 percent of whites, 73 percent of blacks and 62 percent of Hispanics would keep a strong-mayor structure. Of those respondents who follow politics closely, 59 percent would keep a strong mayor, while 40 percent preferred a city-manager form. And 61 percent of those who follow politics only a little chose a strong-mayor government, while 36 percent of that category would adopt a city-manager structure. While survey results showed the public rather closely divided on whether Houston should keep its present strong-mayor government, the researchers found city residents "tend to oppose changing the strong mayor system, with Blacks and Hispanics strongly favoring the status quo" (1985 HMAS, p. 21).

In conclusion, this chapter has analyzed the most recent push for structural reform which included a hybrid city manager to handle administrative details of city government. The reform effort came at a time when both public and private sectors were facing economic difficulties, when a municipal election loomed on the horizon, and when political dissatisfactions with the incumbent mayor were made public.

As we have seen, an able, conscientious and ambitious councilman spearheaded the reform effort which would have divorced the mayor from legislative activity and would have curbed her administrative power by delegating some of it to another.

But frustrated political actors over-estimated the saliency of the issue, and the audience turned a deaf ear. An attempt to make structural reform a serious campaign issue failed; a change in the ratio of power was sought and failed. The incumbent was reelected; the push for reform died--at least for a time.

Houstonians, generally, appear satisfied with their municipal leadership and strong-mayor structure. The public is more interested in growth and maintaining the status quo than in reform. But all was not lost in the most recent push for structural reform. Three of the four political actors pushing structural revision were reelected, and there are those within the city that would consider adopting a city-manager government. The issue may, indeed, resurface.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In the strong mayor version, there is considerably more administrative integration. The mayor is able to exercise control over other administrative departments and officers because they are appointed by the mayor rather than elected. If they defy the mayor's will, they can be removed from office. In those cities in which the strong mayor has responsibility for preparation of the budget and also has a full-time professional administrative officer to assist in this job, the strong mayor system comes to look very much like the reform ideal. The mayor resembles an elected manager.

William A. Schultze
Urban Politics, A Political
Economy Approach

This research effort has been an attempt to analyze structural reform of municipal government, specifically the most recent push for a form of city-manager government in Houston, Texas. This necessitated an effort to understand the apparatus of local government given the complex political environment in which it exists; a metropolitan milieu of cleavages, pressures, scarce resources and jurisdictional fragmentation.

Specifically, I was interested in finding out if the recent push for a city manager, which would require a charter revision, was designed to streamline or professionalize city government, or did the reform initiative stem from dissatisfaction with the incumbent mayor, or some combination of these factors. If urban governance is enhanced by a strong-mayor structure, then why the push for a charter change which included a hybrid

city manager?

Since the focus of this effort has been on policy-makers, on the structure in which they operate, and on the pressures which impinge on them, I felt it necessary to begin by perusing the general literature and developing a theoretical framework from which to view the issue of structural reform. Hence, I felt Easton's systems theory a good beginning, a way of thinking about reform strategy of specific actors through time as part of a larger political unit--the city. What specific demands may have been placed on individuals who have sought governmental restructuring? What generated the "withinputs?" What were the projected outputs, and who stood to gain if pushes for reform were translated into mechanics of government? Because a system does not exist in a vacuum, what environmental occurrences may have precipitated a movement for reform? Were there any historic parallels?

From my research, I found economic concerns and political frustrations have often prompted individuals to seek governmental restructuring. Business leaders historically have become concerned about structure when urban policy, or lack of it, stymies economic growth or casts a shadow over the city. And they have often pushed for reform openly or have supported such a movement when their interests, as they perceive them, are best served. Examples include the effort of Henry Brashear and H. Baldwin Rice in the 1890s; the Houston Business League's support for a commission form of government in 1904; and, the Houston Real Estate Board's unanimous vote to study the city-manager concept in the late 1920s. When the city or her business community suffers economic difficulties, structural reform is

often touted.

Consociate with economic difficulties are frustrations leveled at the mayor. A mayor who is perceived as an inefficient administrator, or a mayor who is unable to deal effectively with council is often targeted by those either within government or outside of government, and reform can become a watchword. Historic examples include business elites' dissatisfaction with Mayor James Wilson and their enlistment of William R. Baker as a mayoral candidate; the difficulties of the Samuel H. Brashear administration; and the public feuding between Oscar Holcombe and city council members who attempted to block his efforts to control city administration. Other examples include businessmen's drafting Walter Monteith to run against Holcombe on a city-manager reform platform and their support of C.A. Neal Pickett and Otis Massey, both city-manager reform advocates. Also, one council member's suggestion that a city-manager system would end the dictatorial rule of Mayor Roy Hofheinz and the squabbling between him and council is yet another illustration of how dissatisfaction can breed calls for structural reform.

Clearly then, pro-business forces as well as local politicians have pushed structural reform as a means to reduce factional struggles, a way to gain access to government, a method of fostering administrative accountability and, finally, as a strategy for changing the ratio of power in municipal government. Even former mayors disgruntled over a lack of municipal control and internal conflict have advocated structural reform as a solution to governmental inefficiency. From the calls for reform during the Holcombe and Hofheinz days, it is also evident political actors

operating within a strong-mayor structure have used city-manager reform as a way to vent their frustrations at mayoral roadblocks as well as a means of reducing mayoral power.

But all demands or "withinputs," like the push for a city manager, do not become issues that reach the public arena. Some demands die at birth, some lie insignificantly on the political landscape for a time only to suffer a quiet death. What variables bear on whether or not calls for structural revision are transformed into an issue garnering support? In looking at municipal reform, I sought to find those variables. Since no analysis of an issue is complete without an assessment of the actors and an understanding of why they do what they do, I found Long's ecology of games and Schattschnider's theory¹ of the organization as a mobilization of bias enhanced my awareness as I searched for variables.

From my efforts, I found power structure support to be a variable acting on the issue of government reform, a force that propels the issue into the public arena. By power structure, I mean those who have, or have had, high visibility as public leaders (like former Mayors Rice, Fonville, Pickett and Monteith), as well as those behind-the-scene entrepreneurs who wield significant influence over public officials (like Henry Brashear, Jesse H. Jones, Will Carter, Burke Baker, Ben Love and Walter Mischer). While a political actor may call for government reform, a city manager, or a curb on mayoral power, naught will come of such a move unless a significant number of those in the business community lend their support to the issue. As we have seen, it was not until businessmen and civic leaders mobilized the community that a commission or city-manager structural change

was accomplished. Economic difficulties coupled with dissatisfaction over the incumbent mayor's administrative skills galvanize such support. That the business community or municipal government suffer economic hardship is not enough to spawn a public push for structural revision. The mayor must also be perceived as incapable of municipal leadership, whether the cause is lack of administrative finesse or the inability to effectively deal with council.

Proper timing and political acumen of reform advocates are also variables influencing the success or failure of a structural reform movement. Generally, we have seen that Houstonians are not particularly interested in mechanics of local government unless such functioning is perceived to directly affect their personal well-being. Changing from an aldermanic to a commission structure did not become a reality until "neighborhood-narrow perspectives" and council infighting were viewed as serious impediments to area economic growth. Reform proponents were also able to enlist the support of new emerging residential groups by pointing to the inability of aldermen to deal with franchise utility problems and the city's inadequate water supply. And with such support came voter approval for a charter change.

Likewise, the call for a city manager echoed for years, but it was only until the issue was tied to area health concerns that the public began listening. While the city-manager structure was hailed as a way to reduce costs, increase services and modernize government, what made it appealing to many area groups was that a professional city administrator, supposedly, could better focus on health concerns--rabies, venereal disease, tainted

milk and a lack of public nurses. Tying health issues to the call for a city manager was an astute political move on the part of pro-city-manager advocates. Pushing for professionalized government at a time when the public was increasingly concerned about a lack of city health services reflects good timing. And mobilizing area women's groups to support structural change illustrates the political acumen of initial reformers.

City-manager advocates in the early 1940s also made effective use of the media. Pro-reform reporters of the Houston Press sought out and were fed positive information about proposed structural revisions. Opponents had an ally in the Houston Chronicle. Consequently, the continued printed debate succeeded in giving the issue visibility, and this visibility, as a result, influenced another important variable--the public mood. Eventually the voting public was swayed to give structural reform and a city manager a chance. The audience, in effect, determined the outcome of the game.

Therefore, while Houstonians are generally individualistic, traditionalistic and apathetic toward mechanics of city government, they can be mobilized around structural issues if political actors: 1) are able to play on (or create) public dissatisfaction with an incumbent mayor's administration; 2) can garner business community support and financial assistance; 3) are able to tie structural reform to another issue the public feels strongly about--an issue the public believes it has a direct material or social stake in; and 4) can keep structural reform as an issue alive and before the public.

Initiators of the most recent push for structural change were unable

to meet the above four criteria. As we have seen, the push for an independent council and a chief administrative officer grew out of frustrations with the strong-mayor structure and from political ambitions. The 1979 redistricting changes facilitated the emergence of city council members who were professional politicians, who had political savvy, used it effectively and were not above challenging Whitmire's power. George Greanias, who spearheaded the most recent reform effort, is such a man. Unfortunately, he overestimated the saliency of the issue.

Greanias, Ellis and McKaskle sought to force the restructuring issue into the public arena by addressing a citizens committee and soliciting media attention. The citizens committee refused to enlarge the scope of their study. After the media gave the issue initial publicity, reform faded into the background until Greanias and Ellis pledged to make structure and a CAO a campaign issue. Still, reform did not capture the public's attention nor did the business community openly rally around the proposed reforms. (Though Greanias said he received business support, he declined to name those who championed his plan.)

Why did the call for restructuring fall on deaf ears? One explanation is that while there was some dissatisfaction with the current mayor's ability to foster a favorable business climate during the economic downturn, generally the public appeared satisfied with the Whitmire administration and the strong-mayor structure.

As we have seen, financial difficulties of municipal government that spillover into the private sector can spell political doom for an incumbent mayor and can spawn calls for "professionalizing" government. While

Whitmire faced the effects of a national recession during her first year in office, she was able to deflect, for a time, concern over declining municipal revenue. In addition, the mayor was able to adroitly maneuver through an administrative labyrinth and recover from initial political stumbles. Whitmire learned to be more available to the public, more accessible to council and she effectively built up a coalition to protect her position. Her broad base of support stood her in good stead when facing mayoral challenger Louie Welch in the 1985 election.

While Welch received support from some members of the business community, it was support for the candidate, not for structural reform. Although Welch attempted to use city-manager reform rhetoric during the latter part of his campaign, restructuring never materialized as a major campaign issue. And the Welch campaign did not gain the momentum needed to propel the ex-mayor back into office. Election results showed a majority of the voting public felt Whitmire had done an acceptable job as the city's chief executive.

Since the election, structural reform has not resurfaced as an issue. Greanias' attempt to tie the need for a chief administrative officer to the city's economic vitality failed. And the public was not rallied by a call for a more independent council. Such reform was not an issue the public or influential members of the business community perceived as directly influencing their economic well-being.

In addition, the economic slump after the collapse of oil prices in early 1986 brought more pressing problems before council. Generally, economic problems facing the city seemed to eclipse the structural issue

as council members grappled with a budgetary shortfall and the possibility of municipal layoffs and rate hikes. Economic concerns, for the time being, may have pushed structural reform off the agenda as council members were reluctant to waste any more political capital on an apparently moot issue when faced with a fiscal crisis.

That does not mean that structure of government is unimportant. It is important, but structure of government is not the critical variable of urban governance. Formal power of city officials is important, but the skill of political actors, the political climate and the influence of informal group pressures on government are equally important. While structure of government may not be a salient issue with high visibility, it becomes so when the public feels government functioning is in jeopardy; when they believe their influence on public policy is waning; or when they believe their access to government is impeded. When these feelings are widespread, not only do new candidates for office appear, but government structure comes under scrutiny. In a city, like Houston, where business entrepreneurs have dominated politics, such leaders will mobilize to elect pro-business candidates and will consider altering the shape of government. As we have seen, the commission structure in the early 1900s and the city-manager plan in the 1930s and 1940s were viewed by some businessmen as solutions to municipal inefficiency. It was not enough to replace incumbent mayors or councilmen, business and civic leaders sought a new structure of government.

Structural reform has often been used as a campaign issue to change the ratio of power within the city and as a means to propel proponents

or their candidates into office. This, of course, does not mean the issue is used merely as a stepping stone to public office, for many reformers have believed their plan would streamline government. But, "professionalizing government" is good campaign rhetoric and can be used for political leverage, especially if dissatisfaction with the mayor or the council-mayor relationship exists. Most recently, Greanias, Ellis and McKaskle were reelected, not, of course, because of this issue alone. But a call for efficiency in government is an idea everyone agrees with, although they may not understand or approve of structural revision. And the call for reform gave the three candidates some needed visibility during the campaign year.

While recent reformers urged government restructuring, a charter revision is, however, unlikely. Conditioning the public to accept a charter change takes time, money and a group of political organizers dedicated to the task. No group, to my knowledge, has mobilized around the most recent push for reform. It is also clear the mayor is unwilling to consider a plan which would curb her power, and efforts to get Whitmire to name a new citizens charter committee to study structural reform have failed.

Greanias has said that a chief administrative officer, similar to the CAO plan in New York, would professionalize Houston's government. Yet New York's Deputy Mayor-City Administrator is selected by the mayor and serves only at the mayor's pleasure. But Greanias and Ellis have suggested the CAO be nominated by the mayor and confirmed by council. To require council confirmation and to give council removal power over the CAO could, in effect, foster a tension between the CAO and mayor and would remove the

loyalty factor from the CAO-mayor relationship that one researcher has seen as a necessary ingredient for the proper functioning of a CAO plan (Caraley, 1966).

As was mentioned in chapter 2, the CAO plan, as it exists in New York, has had a number of shortcomings. These would have to be addressed before one could conclude a CAO, via charter revision, would professionalize Houston's municipal government.

However, Whitmire has taken a measure of the reformers' ammunition by appointing Clarence West as her senior administrative director, a position similar to a CAO but without the need for a charter change. West's appointment, like a formal CAO, is designed to remove the mayor from administrative detail. And West's loyalty to the mayor removes the potential jealous rivalry between the mayor and a charter-established CAO as suggested by Greanias and Ellis.

The call for a more independent council, one that sets its own agenda and has its own presiding officer is not new. And it appears politically unlikely that those within government would support such a move. Clearly, the mayor is not predisposed to giving up agenda control or her power to preside over council. Furthermore, it does not appear probable that part-time council members (or their staffs) would have the time, skill, or willingness to attend to the administrative detail required for formal agenda preparation unless the task were to be assigned to a CAO the council had some control over. Finally, as we have seen, there are some on council who, in the future, might bid for the mayor's job. It is unlikely they would seriously consider giving up potential power.

Operating within the strong-mayor structure, Whitmire wields considerable power. She has administrative control, responsibility over the city budget, control over council agenda and a full-time lawyer-turned-administrator to assist her. And her strong reelection victory over a formidable opponent in 1985 strengthened her hand. As long as her black support remains solid, she appears unbeatable.

Houston, like other large cities, has chosen to maintain a strong-mayor structure because the mayor's political arbitration is a vital tool in a potentially volatile urban setting. Any weakening of a strong mayor's authority is seen by many as a weakening of government even when in the guise of streamlining municipal administration. And, Whitmire has carefully cultivated public acceptance of her dual role as competent mayor and the city's professional elected manager. Therefore, it appears unlikely a charter change curbing the mayor's power and establishing a CAO position would be approved by voters.

Does this mean structural reform is a dead issue? Of course not, for government structure is important to those political actors within and outside the playing arena, especially when social, economic, or political changes increase conflicts between actors. At present, both the business community and city government face economic difficulties. Tough choices will need to be made in face of revenue shortages. Such decisions may heighten tensions and increase conflict. As municipal resources become scarce, political values as well as city officials are challenged, and a movement for structural reform may gain momentum. For there are voters who would consider a city-manager government, and they could well be the building blocks for yet another attempt at municipal reform.

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