

## ABSTRACT

Politics, Patriotism, Pageantry:  
Performing Power at the Texas Cotton Palace, 1910-1930

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This study examines the Texas Cotton Palace Exposition of 1910-1930 as a performative event reflecting, endorsing, and reinforcing cultural attitudes and priorities of select groups within the community of Waco, Texas. The Cotton Palace of this period was an expansive exhibition, incorporating elements of fair, public drama, parade, concert, landscape spectacle, carnival, and educational exhibit. Throughout the Texas Cotton Palace Exposition, the performance of power and the promotion of civic virtue were demonstrated to the local community through a variety of performative elements enacted by or evocative of iconic characters. This study will therefore consider King Cotton's political perpetuation of the pastoral ideal in parades and visual rhetoric, Uncle Sam's rousing wartime displays of patriotism in the form of battle reenactments and the prominence of service members in key events, and the Cotton Palace Queen's endorsement of the community elite through the allegorical pageantry and exclusivity of the Queen's Ball.

Politics, Patriotism, Pageantry: Performing Power at the Texas Cotton Palace, 1910-1930

by

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A Thesis

Approved by the Department of Theatre Arts

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## DEDICATION

To Damian and Derian, my foremost creative endeavors

## CHAPTER ONE

### Genesis and Regeneration of the Texas Cotton Palace

#### *Introduction*

Waco, Texas has grown and changed a great deal since its humble beginnings as an Indian village on the banks of the Brazos River. At various times in its history, Waco has been known as a Wild West trail crossing town nicknamed “Six-Shooter Junction,” a community of antebellum plantations and postwar tenant farms, the origin of Dr. Pepper, the location of an officially recognized red-light district known as “The Reservation,” the site of a devastating tornado, the home of Baylor University, and the setting associated with the Branch Davidian siege at nearby Mt. Carmel. Given this mixed bag of identities, it is no wonder that Waco is a city that is continually striving to define itself and its context. For over one hundred years, the Texas Cotton Palace has been a part of this ongoing project of self-definition.

“The Cotton Palace” is familiar to any native Wacoan. However, the phrase will signify to each individual just one variant of countless associated events and images. Like the city of Waco itself, the concept of the Cotton Palace has transformed through a number of permutations that span three different American centuries. The generative Cotton Palace, erected in 1894, was the site of a grand month-long agricultural exposition. The second incarnation of the Texas Cotton Palace, which lasted from 1910 through 1930, rebuilt and revived this fair-like atmosphere, continually expanding and adapting its attractions and entertainments throughout twenty-one annual two-week-long expositions. In 1971, the reinvented Waco Cotton Palace Pageant was inaugurated to pay

homage to this unique element of the city's history with an annual one-day historical pageant and court procession—a tradition which has continued into the twenty-first century.

This study specifically examines the rebuilt Texas Cotton Palace of 1910-1930 as a performative event reflecting, endorsing, and reinforcing cultural attitudes and priorities of select groups within the Waco community. The Cotton Palace during this period was an expansive exhibition, incorporating elements of fair, public drama, parade, concert, landscape spectacle, carnival, and educational exhibit. Visitors to the Cotton Palace throughout these years faced a nearly-overwhelming exhibition of food, midway games and rides, sporting events, livestock and agriculture, community performances, vaudeville, nationally-acclaimed musicians and dancers, merchant displays, transportation, technological advances, art, public education, and flora and fauna. Throughout this incarnation of the Texas Cotton Palace Exposition, the performance of power and the promotion of civic virtue were demonstrated to the community through iconic characters and a variety of performative aspects. This study will therefore consider King Cotton's political perpetuation of the pastoral ideal in parades and visual rhetoric, Uncle Sam's rousing wartime displays of patriotism in the form of battle reenactments and the prominence of service members in key events, and the Queen of Waco's endorsement of the community elite through the allegorical pageantry and exclusivity of the Queen's Ball.

### *1894: The Original Texas Cotton Palace*

The generative Texas Cotton Palace in Waco was typical of the agricultural palaces which had become a new and distinctly American trend of the late nineteenth

century. Cities throughout the South and Midwest sought to gain attention, recognition, and commerce by building large palatial buildings to host expositions. These structures were decorated to celebrate the plentiful natural resources of the area, be it cotton, corn, or even coal. Sioux City's Corn Palace is one well-known example which predated the Cotton Palace of Waco. This particular palace was torn down, redesigned, and reconstructed anew for each of five annual expositions from 1887-1891.<sup>1</sup> When Sioux City was financially unable to continue the Corn Palace in 1892, the tradition was carried on by Mitchell, South Dakota. After a profitable debut exposition in 1892, Mitchell left its Corn Palace structure intact, redecorating it for an even more successful event the next year. Despite the financial gains brought by the 1893 Corn Palace, conditions of drought and recession throughout the region compelled the committee to cancel the exposition in 1894 and for several years thereafter.<sup>2</sup>

Mitchell, South Dakota was not alone. The Panic of 1893 and ensuing Depression brought a halt to this trend of "People's Palaces" across the nation. According to Richard Selcer, "The Panic of 1893 hit agriculture particularly hard and put many of the smaller-scale exhibitions out of business...the age of grandiose displays made of food and fuel were over."<sup>3</sup> Waco, however, had not only weathered the economic downfall but was practically thriving in 1894. According to *Morrison & Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Waco* for that year:

The material growth and prosperity of Waco has been such as to astonish everyone...We think it is the universal opinion that on account of the depressed

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<sup>1</sup> Rod Evans, *Palaces on the Prairie* (Fargo, ND: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, North Dakota State University, 2009), 3-30.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 85-96.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Selcer, "People's Palaces," *American History* 49, no. 1 (April 2014), 65.

condition of the commercial and manufacturing interests throughout the country we would naturally show a decline in our population. While the increase... is not large it is sufficient to show that Waco is building upon a solid foundation. The lethargy which settled over the entire country did not affect her, but on the contrary seemed to prove the stability and soundness of the city in her banking, commercial and manufacturing interests. Not only did Waco preserve its institutions unharmed but it flourished in the midst of disaster, and while other centers struggled only to hold fast to what they had Waco, with laudable ambition and push, added to its enterprises and neither hesitated nor halted in its advance.<sup>4</sup>

Waco was a major hub of both agriculture and business, with an economy based largely upon the cotton industry. The city had nearly doubled in size from 1880 to 1890, with a 98% increase from 7,295 to 14,445 residents.<sup>5</sup> With a population comparable to that of the state capital, Waco was promoted as the “largest interior cotton market in Texas, and probably in the South.”<sup>6</sup> The city of Waco not only withstood the economic downfall but thrived, finally bringing to fruition the Cotton Palace that had first been proposed in 1890 by the wife of a prominent lawyer.<sup>7</sup> According to the recollections of one Waco citizen, “Waco had the cotton industry in the palm of its hand, I think. And it was the largest marketplace for the cotton. And they decided that something had to be done to celebrate that, to make it well known in Waco... and they thought of that idea of having a country fair. I think that is what it first started out to be. They conceived the idea—now this is still—this is the first one, 1894.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Morrison & Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Waco 1894-95*, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “Cities and Towns Having a Population of 8,000 and Over in 1890, Etc.--Continued,” *Census Bulletin, Eleventh Census of the United States: 1890, Urban Population in 1890*. <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/1890d9-01.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Cutter, *Cutter's Guide to the City of Waco, Texas, 1894* (Waco, TX: [s.n.], 1894), 39.

<sup>7</sup> “First Cotton Palace,” *Waco Tribune-Herald* (Waco, TX), 30 October 1949, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Kemendo Sendón, interview #6 by Lois E. Myers, 20 January 1994, in Waco, Texas, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, 283. <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buih/id/2308>.

That year, the citizens of Waco celebrated their agricultural and mercantile successes by constructing the “Cotton Palace,” a 300 ft. by 50 ft. exhibition hall and auditorium which housed a month-long exposition in honor of the source of their prosperity—King Cotton. According to descriptions, the building was impressively decorated: “Around the inside wall was a frieze on black background depicting the chariot race from Ben Hur, all the figures being executed in lint cotton glued to the black. Also in the frieze were the coats of arms of all the states in the Union, executed in colored grains.”<sup>9</sup> The centerpiece of the decor was an eagle with a 20 foot wing span, modeled in red and yellow corn and suspended over the foyer. Features for the month-long exhibition, which ran from 6 November through 6 December 1894, included displays representing all agriculture in the region, a typical sideshow attraction, band concerts, and performances from a prima donna in the auditorium.<sup>10</sup>

The culmination of this event was the “Harvest Carnival,” a pageant and grand ball in which “Cotton” was crowned the King of Agriculture and “Texas” coroneted as the Queen of Fortune.<sup>11</sup> Although conceived as an annual event by the founding committee, the jubilee was not reprised for more than a decade.<sup>12</sup> A mere six weeks after the inaugural festivities ended, the wooden Cotton Palace structure burned to the ground. A newspaper account related that the glare from the flames cast shadows in the yard of a

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<sup>9</sup> “First Cotton Palace,” *Waco Tribune-Herald* (Waco, TX), 30 October 1949, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Lavonia Jenkins Barnes, *The Texas Cotton Palace* (Waco, TX: Texian Press, 1964), 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Morrison & Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Waco 1894-95*, p. 61. Founding Committee: “Texas Cotton Palace (The)— Incorporated March, 1894. Capital stock \$100,000. J. W. Riggins, director-general; Lewin Plunkett, secy; W. W. Seley, treasr. Directors: J. W. Riggins, E. Rotan, W. W. Selev, J. Hansel Wood, H. B. Mistrot, Sam Sanger, J. S. McLendon, S. W. Slayden, Jas. I. Moore, R. B. Parrott, H. H. Shear, C O. Fosgard, Thos. Padgitt. Advisory board: Chas. Hamilton, S. Archenhold. S. Hirschberg, G. H. Randle, C. C. McCulloch, Bart Moore, M. L. Graves, Geo. Clark.”

home twenty-two miles from the Cotton Palace. “10,000 Wacoans stood in the frigid night air and wept at the sight of their great Cotton Palace going up in flames.”<sup>13</sup> The following year’s city guide had this to say: “The local Commercial Club intends erecting another exhibition building in its place on a grander scale. The plans are for a building of classical design and an immense auditorium with sufficient seating capacity to accommodate national conventions. Subscriptions are being received for the exhibition of 1896.”<sup>14</sup> Despite what seems to have been a great public interest, it ultimately took fifteen years for the citizens of Waco to successfully rebuild the Texas Cotton Palace.

### *1910-1930: The Texas Cotton Palace Exposition*

By 1910, Waco was an up-and-coming urban marketplace in the heart of rural Texas, with a 22-story Amicable Life Insurance building under construction, inter-urban transportation, and 69,000 bales of cotton produced on 240,000 acres of farmland—half of the available land in the county.<sup>15</sup> 26,425 citizens lived within the city limits, making Waco the eighth-largest city in Texas.<sup>16</sup> After many years of civic attempts to reconstruct the 1894 Cotton Palace, the newly formed Young Men’s Business League (YMBL) of Waco was finally able to do so through the establishment of a new Texas Cotton Palace

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<sup>13</sup> “First Cotton Palace,” *Waco Tribune-Herald* (Waco, TX), 30 October 1949, p. 16.

<sup>14</sup> *Morrison & Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Waco 1896*, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> Sharon Bracken, *Historic McLennan County: An Illustrated History*. (San Antonio, TX: Historical Publishing Network, 2010), 11.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “Thirteenth Census Of The United States: 1910 Vol. 42-46, Statistics of Population, Agriculture, Manufactures and Mining for the State, County, Cities and Other Divisions, Section 1, Supplement for Texas.” Census Bulletin, Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910, 569. <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41033935v42-46.zip>.

Association (TCPA) and the public sale of bonds to secure a trust agreement by First National Bank of Waco totaling \$100,000.<sup>17</sup>

According to the Municipal Handbook of Waco for 1912-1914, the Cotton Palace Exposition was built out of a desire to provide an attraction for people who would visit the city during the fall:

It was finally determined that the Texas Cotton Palace should be its name, and that in addition to exploiting the great cotton wealth and production of the state, and especially that part of the state in which Waco is located, other features should be included. As cotton is but one of the products, the purposes and aims of the organization were made broad enough to include all agricultural products and livestock, poultry, machinery, and flowers. These elements were of the exhibit portion, direct dealing with the productive area of the state. In addition, the women were asked to take a part and their work was to be shown; curios were provided for, mercantile exhibits were sought and given prominence, and in addition to all these, there were provided many amusement features that gave a continuous entertainment from the opening day until the close.<sup>18</sup>

The 1910 resurrection of the Texas Cotton Palace prompted the construction of an even larger complex than the original, including a truly palatial main building.<sup>19</sup> The grounds, which served as a city park for the majority of the year, would come alive with spectacle for two to three weeks each autumn after the cotton harvest. The annual exposition boasted myriad entertainments—exhibits of agriculture, livestock, and transportation; a large midway carnival; sporting events; parades; band concerts; vaudeville shows; and more—in addition to the Queen’s Ball which continued to celebrate King Cotton with different and more elaborate themes each year.

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<sup>17</sup> Lavonia Jenkins Barnes, *The Texas Cotton Palace*. (Waco, TX: Texian Press, 1964), 20; and Letter from First National Bank to Bondholders. Texas Cotton Palace Records, Accession #792, Box 1, Folder 2, The Texas Collection, Baylor University.

<sup>18</sup> *Municipal Handbook of the City of Waco. Mayor's message and reports on all departments of the city*. (Waco, TX: Published by the city, 1912-14), 85.

<sup>19</sup> Barnes, *The Texas Cotton Palace*, 22.

By 1915, a promotional booklet for the city of Waco promoted the Texas Cotton Palace as “combining all the features of a great agricultural fair, an exposition of commerce and manufactures, a museum of arts and sciences, a music festival, and a series of brilliant social events.”<sup>20</sup> The grounds are described as incorporating six large buildings for housing exhibits of automobiles, machinery, historical and government relics, agricultural and manufactured products, textiles and apparel, fine arts, and more. The Coliseum at that time had a capacity of 10,500 people and was designed to house orchestra performances, grand opera, and the Queen’s Ball. The midway carnival was known as the “War Path,” and it was adjacent to the racetrack and grandstand where automobile and horse races were held.<sup>21</sup> After 8 million visitors over two decades, the depression closed the doors of the Cotton Palace permanently in January 1931.<sup>22</sup>

#### *1971-Present: The Cotton Palace Pageant*

In the decades following the 1931 closure of the Texas Cotton Palace, the city of Waco recalled the splendor of the exhibition with wistful nostalgia. The coliseum remained for some time as a venue for meetings, dances, and shows, but ultimately all of the buildings were torn down. The cornerstone of the palatial exhibition hall, with the names of the founding T CPA board members engraved, was placed at the top of Lover’s Leap in Cameron Park as a monument. In 1970, however, there was gathering interest in reviving at least the society aspects of the event.

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<sup>20</sup> *Waco, the Heart of Texas*, 1915.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup>“Glamour, Excitement Made Cotton Palace...,” *Waco Tribune-Herald* (Waco, TX), 15 October 1961, p. C12.

According to the recollections of Lavonia Jenkins Barnes, she became interested in the idea of reviving the Cotton Palace shortly after the 1964 publication of her book about the exposition. She approached the organizers of the existing Heart O' Texas Fair, which had established itself as an annual event at the local fairgrounds, with a proposition: if they renamed the exposition building at the Fairgrounds as The Cotton Palace, she would re-establish the social aspects of the event, gathering women to help work the fair and to create a "women's sphere" similar to Woman's Day programming at the Cotton Palace. She also tried to garner interest in the exhibition of cotton products — "the few that were still made," as she says — and to bring back cotton memorabilia exhibits.<sup>23</sup> When the fair organizers turned her down, she went to a fellow Junior League member, Mrs. Margaret Brown, and together they discussed restoring social aspects of "the old Cotton Palace."<sup>24</sup> Embracing the idea, the Junior League of Waco organized and developed a tribute to that bygone era in the form of the Cotton Palace Pageant. This annual springtime event continues to the present day with the performance of a historical pageant which both narrates and enacts key episodes in the city's history, particularly the heyday of the old Cotton Palace expositions, followed by the presentation and coronation of a debutante court.

The debut of this reimagined "Waco Cotton Palace Pageant" was announced in the Spring 1971 *Waco Heritage and History* publication:

After more than three years of planning and a great deal of work, the Waco Cotton Palace Pageant will become a reality on the evening of April 30, 1971, in Waco Hall. This gala event will not be a re-creation of the early Texas Cotton Palace in its entirety; rather, it will be a revival of the social side of the first

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<sup>23</sup> Lavonia Jenkins Barnes, interview #3 by Pamela Bennett Crow, 22 March 1976, in Waco, Texas, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, 121-3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Cotton Palace with the coronation of the first Cotton Palace Queen since 1930. The pageant itself is a one and one-half hour long production which traces Waco's history through seventeen scenes.<sup>25</sup>

The historic pageant was written, directed, acted, and produced exclusively by people of Waco with major contributions from the Baylor University Theatre Department, under the direction of Bill Cook. The format to this day has remained as described, although many scenes have been updated or replaced throughout the years.

Though it uses different performative means, the contemporary Cotton Palace Pageant defines and performs the civic identity of Waco to the community in much the same way as the historical Texas Cotton Palace identified and demonstrated key values and priorities to area citizens in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The remounted Texas Cotton Palace of 1910-1930 is still being used to characterize the city of Waco through its canonized representation in both the historical performances and society pageants of the present-day Cotton Palace Pageant.

#### *Problem, Research Question, and Methodology*

Dorothy Scarborough's 1923 novel *In the Land of Cotton*, which follows a young girl's coming of age within a Central Texas cotton farming family, portrays many aspects of early twentieth-century farming life in the heart of the cotton kingdom, from planting to ginning. As the young protagonist, Serena, gets her anxiously-awaited first glimpse of the lavish Cotton Palace exposition grounds in Waco, she wonders at the spectacle that venerates this staple that is such an ingrained part of her family's everyday life.

Spanning the street in front of the exhibition park was a great archway extending across the street at the entrance to the grounds, and towering high in the air. The hundreds of bales of cotton used in its construction were like so many giant brick

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<sup>25</sup> Historic Waco Foundation, "Waco Cotton Palace Pageant," *Waco Heritage and History* 2, no. 1. (Spring 1971), 4.

in their brown wrapping. At the top, a colossal figure of King Cotton upheld in one hand a great bunch of cotton bolls and in the other a sphere.

“What does that mean?” questioned Serena.

“He’s King Cotton, and he’s on a throne up there to show that cotton rules the world. It does this section, anyhow. Folks here seem to think cotton, eat it, wear it, sleep on it, live in it, and breathe it.”<sup>26</sup>

In looking back nearly a century later at the Texas Cotton Palace’s extravagant exaltation of this agricultural crop, the question endures: “What does that mean?”

The aim of this study is to examine how the performance of power structures and the promotion of civic virtue were demonstrated to the Waco community at the Texas Cotton Palace of 1910-1930 and how those shifting ideologies were characterized through political perpetuation of the pastoral ideal, rousing wartime displays of patriotism, and the endorsement of the community elite through the pageantry of the Queen’s Ball. The Texas Cotton Palace adapted dynamically to changing trends with variable programming and scope, but what remained constant was the ambitious desire of this community to present an impressive face to the rest of the state, nation, and world.

There were a vast number of narrative sources within each annual Texas Cotton Palace exposition due to the abundance and diversity of events, entertainments, and exhibits. This multivalence allows for a wide range of construals of the civic identity of Waco. Although the parameters of this study are chronologically broad, spanning two decades, they are topically narrow, limited to such key components as parades, political public address, visual rhetoric, programming and displays, battle reenactments, pageants, and balls. Within these selected performative aspects of the exposition, this study seeks to examine the manifestation of narratives involving the pastoral ideal, patriotism, virtue, and various modes of power.

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<sup>26</sup> Dorothy Scarborough, *In the Land of Cotton* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923), 121-122.

At the outset of the Cotton Palace, its rhetoric revolved entirely around the pastoral ideal within the context of a progressive urban environment, using powerful agrarian iconography, characterized by King Cotton, with which politicians and merchants were eager to align. During the war years of 1917-1918, this bucolic imagery was almost completely eclipsed by overt demonstrations of war artifacts and battle recreations by military and government entities as the icon of King Cotton abdicated his influence to Columbia, goddess of America, engendering a strong sense of patriotism among spectators. Finally, in the postwar years, the Cotton Palace placed increasing emphasis on the Queen's Ball and the coronation of the symbolic Queen of Waco, underscoring local civic hegemony by portraying the society elite using allegory progressing from the exotic and historic to the deistic and mythic in a pageantry of power. The iconography of each of these characters—King Cotton, Columbia, and the Cotton Palace Queen in the guise of historical and mythological figures—referenced preexisting cultural narratives which translated and transmuted existing superstructures within the local civic culture upon which they were overlaid. Throughout two decades of fluctuating priorities and values, from 1910-1930, the Texas Cotton Palace employed these icons to symbolically represent the power and virtue of its social and economic interests.

This study of the Texas Cotton Palace is demarcated into three periods of differing lengths, with each one placing primary focus on one of the three aforementioned icons. The period from the rebuilding of the Cotton Palace in 1910 through 1916 was allegiant to King Cotton, who abdicated his power to Columbia and the American ideal during the war years of 1917-1918. Once the war was over, the Cotton Palace Queen's

coronation became the focus of the exposition throughout the decade of the 1920s until the close of the final Cotton Palace exhibition in 1930. The shifting of a community's values and priorities is a fluid process, but these period divisions each offer insight into ways that performative elements of the Texas Cotton Palace reflected and reinforced the civic culture of Waco. Each period of the study is associated with a reigning icon which is demonstrated in juxtaposition with an enactment of allegiance by a progressively exclusive group of community members and visiting guests: cotton farmers, uniformed soldiers, and court debutantes. Each chapter, aligned with one of the identified periods above, examines the associated icon, the correlating cultural dynamics, and the concomitant changes to civic culture.

The term "performance" is used very generally throughout this study, encompassing such public spectacle as political addresses as well as parades and pageants. In *Cities of the Dead*, Joseph Roach works with an array of three definitions of performance: "that it carries out purposes thoroughly, that it actualizes a potential, or that it restores a behavior."<sup>27</sup> Roach notes that all of these definitions perceive performance as a substitute for something which preexists it, deducing therefore that, "Performance...stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and replace."<sup>28</sup> Thus, the processes of cultural surrogation, as the attempt to place mimics or potential replacements for "self" or "other" within societal vacancies, and memory, as an act of defining a culture through a selective process of both remembering and forgetting, are integral to the performance of communal culture. In this study, the expansive and nebulous limits of paratheatricity are established in a manner

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<sup>27</sup> Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 3.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

suggested by Bruce Wilshire: “To act we must bound an area, but to do so we must leave something unbounded, sealed off from us, no matter how far we extend the boundaries of our performance.”<sup>29</sup> Thus, the performances examined in this study are behaviors which exist within specific spatial and temporal margins, with an acknowledgment that some aspects of social performance are inevitably being left unbounded.

### *Researching the Texas Cotton Palace*

In qualitatively assessing the performed demonstration of social hierarchy and civic virtues at the Texas Cotton Palace, this study will rely upon archival data from 1) sources that recorded the subjective community observations of the event, such as personal records, memoirs, oral histories, and newspaper reports; 2) promotional materials presented by the organizers of the event, such as advertisements and program materials; and 3) more objective sources, such as business correspondence, legal documents, and organizational records. The existing literature about the early Texas Cotton Palace exposition focuses primarily on elite society functions and spectacle rather than offering a critical or comprehensive assessment. The primary source of all other textual references to the historic Texas Cotton Palace is the eponymous 1964 book by Lavonia Jenkins Barnes, which is the only publication to date that offers a broad compilation of research from primary sources. The tone of the text is romantic and nostalgic, exemplifying the civic affection which led to the reinterpretation of the event in 1971.

As there is no existing critical analysis of the Texas Cotton Palace exposition, this examination will seek to place performances and characterizations of agrarian virtue,

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<sup>29</sup> Bruce Wilshire, “The Concept of the Paratheatrical,” *TDR* 34, no. 4 (Winter 1990): 175. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1146050>

nationalism, and social status in context with extant criticism of other events to find modes of commonality. Applying various theoretical lenses developed by authors such as Roach, Anderson, Hobsbawm, Bahktin, and others to the Texas Cotton Palace of 1910-1930 informs an understanding of the shifting social and political landscape of Waco, Texas through this two-decade period of growth and change, as the community navigated the Progressive Era, the Great War, and the Roaring 1920s.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Bridging the Pastoral and Political with King Cotton (1910-1916)

#### *Introduction*

The Texas Cotton Palace Exposition as remounted in 1910 expanded greatly upon the 1894 generative event's homage to the personification of King Cotton. This rich characterization of a potentially polarizing icon perpetuated the pastoral ideal in a uniquely Southern way while simultaneously offering an escape from the harsh realities of farm life. A concurrence of real and ideal aspects of cotton culture was notably manifested in the programming of the opening day parade, which featured growers, civic leaders, and prominent politicians among the procession of cotton wagons. Elected officials statewide came to participate in the opening day festivities, actively endorsing and perpetuating Old South symbolism in their eagerness to appeal to the regional masses. The idealized portrayal of King Cotton as a benevolent monarch who supported the economy with his product was juxtaposed with the romantic depiction of his humble subjects who toiled virtuously in the fields for his benefit. This iconography effectively portrayed the preeminence of the product itself over those whose labor produced the crop to reinforce a hegemonic superstructure which empowered the commercial corollary of agriculture.

The organizers of the event were not constituents of the agrarian life. The Young Men's Business League (YMBL), which originated the Texas Cotton Palace Association (TCPA) for the purpose of rebuilding and reimagining the exposition, was composed of area businessmen who were primarily merchants and bankers by trade. These men

successfully restructured and expanded upon the original Texas Cotton Palace model in a way that enhanced their own economic, social, and symbolic capital within the local agrarian-based culture. The interdependence between the Texas Cotton Palace and the business sector of Waco, with the support of the city government, provided the YMBL and the TCPA with the opportunity and the incentive to promote urban growth through both performative and political means. At the Cotton Palace Exposition grounds, pastoral visual rhetoric was often depicted through progressive and modern methods, such as a bust of King Cotton illuminated by hundreds of electric bulbs or the marketplace promotion of cotton in the form of processed textiles tailored to the latest fashion. The remounted Texas Cotton Palace therefore owed allegiance both to the powerful pastoral iconography characterized by King Cotton and to the progressive municipal marketplace which promoted that image.

### *The Character of King Cotton*

#### *Origin of the King Cotton Character*

The personification of King Cotton is believed to have originated in 1855 with the publication of David Christy's book entitled *Cotton is King*, in which the author argues the impracticability of abolishing the institution of slavery in America. In this controversial work, Christy provides a rich characterization of his mythical creation:

King Cotton is a profound statesman, and knows what measures will best sustain his throne. He is an acute mental philosopher, acquainted with the secret springs of human action, and accurately perceives who can best promote his aims. He has no evidence that colored men can grow his cotton, except in the capacity of slaves. Thus far, all experiments made to increase the production of cotton, by

emancipating the slaves employed in its cultivation, have been a total failure. It is his policy, therefore, to defeat all schemes of emancipation.<sup>1</sup>

Considering the iconic character's origin and personification in this text, it becomes clear how King Cotton ultimately became enmeshed with the institution of slavery in popular culture.

Near the conclusion of his argument, Christy contends that, "King Cotton cares not whether he employs slaves or freemen. It is the *cotton* not the *slaves* upon which his throne is based."<sup>2</sup> However, the author immediately follows this claim by characterizing freemen as indolent and unwilling to contribute to cotton culture, concluding, "His Majesty, King Cotton, therefore, is forced to continue the employment of his slaves; and, by their toil, is riding on, conquering and to conquer! He receives no check from the cries of the oppressed, while the citizens of the world are dragging forward his chariot, and shouting aloud his praise!"<sup>3</sup> The book seems to have drawn a great deal of criticism, as Christy adamantly defended his position in the 1856 second edition by declaring, "King Cotton sits entrenched in a position impregnable to all the forces marshaled against him; and that he not only successfully resists the assaults of his enemies, but makes them contributors to the support of his throne."<sup>4</sup> This representation of King Cotton as invincible and unyielding was thereafter interpreted in radically divergent ways by the North and the South.

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<sup>1</sup> David Christy, *Cotton is King; Or, the Culture of Cotton, and its Relation to Agriculture, Manufactures and Commerce: To the Free Colored People; and to Those who Hold that Slavery is in Itself Sinful*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Derby & Jackson, 1856), 264-5.  
<http://catalog.hathitrust.org/api/volumes/oclc/1113716.html>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, vi.

### *Contrasting Representations of King Cotton*

Political cartoonist Thomas Nast, famous for his *Harper's Weekly* illustrations, painted a large scene of "King Cotton" as part of his 1867 postwar "Grand Caricaturama" exhibit (Figure 2.1).<sup>5</sup> The eight-foot by twelve-foot painting was designed to move across a stage before an audience as a piano played "Way Down South in Dixie" as accompaniment. The painting depicts King Cotton, whip in hand, being attended by slaves on an elevated dais inscribed with the word "slavery." The scene is filled with theatrically misshapen knights in armor, bearing the initials "C.S.A.," representing the



Figure 2.1. Painting by Thomas Nast, "King Cotton" [1867]  
Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog

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<sup>5</sup> Excellent historical information regarding the performance of the Grand Caricaturama on Broadway and in Boston and Philadelphia, as well as its critical reception and a historical context of panorama theatre, can be found at: <http://staging.thomasnast.com/Activities/NastCaricaturama/default.asp> Thomas Nast, "King Cotton," (Painting, 1867). From Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2009617745/>

Confederacy, on their shields. Cartoons and illustrations critical of the South's reverence for cotton culture typically depicted King Cotton in this despotic and domineering manner.<sup>6</sup>

In the South, however, King Cotton's power was venerated as a means of safeguarding his loyal subjects. An early and well-known example of Southern conviction in the supremacy of cotton was expressed on the Senate floor in 1858, when Senator James Henry Hammond of South Carolina replied to Senator William H. Seward of New York:

If there were no other reason we should never have war, would any sane nation make war on cotton? Without firing a gun, without drawing a sword, should they [Northerners] make war on us [Southerners], we could bring the whole world to our feet. What would happen if no cotton was furnished for three years? ... I will not stop to depict what every one can imagine, but this is certain: England would topple headlong and carry the whole civilized world with her, save the South. No, you dare not make war on cotton. No power on earth dares make war upon it. Cotton *is* King.<sup>7</sup>

The Southern states had an enduring faith in the ability of their agricultural monarch to ensure their independence and success, particularly as a means of exerting influence over England. A Civil War-era illustrated envelope depicts this conviction with a full-color cartoon of an anthropomorphic bale of cotton wearing a crown, with "John Bull," representing England, kneeling in a gesture of obeisance. Below the image is the verse:

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<sup>6</sup> In the late 1930s, Betty Smith and Robert Finch wrote a play titled *King Cotton* for the Federal Theatre Project's Living Newspaper series. The script used contemporary references to highlight the role of cotton in the cycle of poverty in the South and the role of politicians in perpetuating this situation. Although King Cotton is not presented as a character on stage, he is referenced as a sick tyrant keeping his subjects enslaved. The play was never performed due to the discontinuation of the Federal Theatre Project. <http://hdl.handle.net/1920/4493>.

<sup>7</sup> *The South in the building of the nation: a history of the Southern states*, Volume IV, "Political history," ed. by F.L. Riley (Richmond, VA: The Southern Historical Publication Society, 1909), 525. <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000196301>

Old England is mighty; Old England is free; She boasts that she ruleth the waves of the sea; (But between you and I, that's all fiddle-de-dee;) She cannot, O Cotton! She cannot rule thee. Lo! Manchester's lordling thy greatness shall own, And yield more to thee than he would to the throne: For before thee shall bend his fat marrow-bone, And deaf be his ear to the live chattel's groan.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the fact that cotton's power failed to provide the anticipated outcome for the South, these depictions of King Cotton as a source of power, prosperity, and protection for the region are consistent with the character's representation at the second incarnation of the Texas Cotton Palace Exposition, forty-five years after the end of the Civil War.

### *Agrarian Reality and Pastoral Ideology*

#### *Farming the Blackland Prairie*

The city of Waco, where the Texas Cotton Palace was established, is situated in the middle of a wedge-shaped region of Central Texas known as the Blackland Prairie, a particularly fertile area well-suited to cotton farming. During the years of the remounted Cotton Palace Exposition, most of the area farms were operated under the crop-lien system, which allowed the property owners to contract acreage to two different types of leaseholders. A tenant farmer under this system was a laborer who would furnish his own tools and stock to produce crops on the owner's land, paying the landlord a standard share of one-third of the grain yield and one-fourth of the cotton yield. A sharecropper was a lessee who provided labor only and relied on the landlord to provide all necessary implements, seed, and supplies to grow the crop. Under a sharecropping contract, all

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<sup>8</sup> Stimson & Co., "Cotton is King!" Pictorial envelope. From Civil War Treasures from the New-York Historical Society, [Digital ID, nhnycw/aj aj14016]. [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/cwnyhs:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(aj14016\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/cwnyhs:@field(DOCID+@lit(aj14016))).

resulting profits were split evenly between the landowner and tenant.<sup>9</sup> Farm laborers, many of whom were immigrants, worked for either the property owners or the tenants without the benefit of contracts. As such, they did not have any stake in the harvest and would instead work seasonal or odd jobs around the farm for minimal and varying wages. In McLennan County, where Waco is located, the prevalence of tenant farming was fairly consistent throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, demonstrating a gradual increase in rates of tenancy, as depicted in Table 2.1. These numbers demonstrate that tenants outnumbered farm owners nearly two to one and that property ownership became increasingly limited during this period, with fewer individuals maintaining possession of farmland in the area.

Table 2.1. Distribution of Farm Owners and Tenants, McLennan County

Year	# Owners	# Tenants	% Owners	% Tenants
1900	1,985	3,253	37.9	62.1
1910	2,083	3,781	35.9	64.1
1920	1,924	3,750	34.3	65.7

Source: Data adapted from Rebecca Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices: Women on Texas Cotton Farms, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 8.

As the crop-lien system continued to concentrate ownership at a steady but moderate pace throughout the first part of the century, a more drastic phenomenon was occurring in the urban areas of McLennan County. Table 2.2 demonstrates that the periods from 1900-1910 and 1910-1920 both witnessed a significant rise in the total population of the county. However, while the increase during the first decade maintained the ratio of rural to urban population with near exactitude, the second decade represented a significant escalation in the county's urban concentration. In fact, the number of city-

<sup>9</sup> Harry Yandell Benedict, and John A. Lomax, *The Book of Texas* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1916), 325. <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001264353>.

dwellers grew by more than the total county-wide population growth, indicating that not only was the gain restricted to metropolitan areas, but that the population of cities within the county was also augmented by a migration of rural residents to urban areas. The remounting of the Texas Cotton Palace Exposition in 1910 coincides with the beginning of a decade which saw the most significant influx of urban residents in a fifty-year period. The city of Waco alone gained over twelve thousand citizens, increasing by 45%, in the ten years after the Cotton Palace was revived to pay homage to King Cotton.<sup>10</sup>

Table 2.2. Concentration of Urban Population, McLennan County

Year	Total Population	Urban Population	Urban Concentration
1900	59,772	22,421	37.5%
1910	73,250	31,228	37.6%
1920	82,921	43,686	52.6%

Source: Data adapted from Rebecca Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices: Women on Texas Cotton Farms, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 236.

*The Liminal Spaces of Fair and Carnival*

In her examination of the lives of women on Blackland Prairie farms, Rebecca Sharpless notes, “Fairs, which were ostensibly rural harvest celebrations, ironically drew people away from their farms to show them the wonders of town life.”<sup>11</sup> Expositions such as the Texas Cotton Palace often served as agents of modernity in pastoral guise. As Ted Ownby points out, the increasing necessity of producing agricultural products for market effectively worked against rural isolation.<sup>12</sup> The Texas Cotton Palace offered an

<sup>10</sup> Rebecca Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices: Women on Texas Cotton Farms, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 236.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>12</sup> Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 168.

opportunity for the urban populace to celebrate the rural ideal, while the rural population was given the opportunity to “come to town” and experience urban modernity in a festival atmosphere.

The Texas Cotton Palace Exposition was like other fairs in its inherent dualism, offering demonstrations of educational exhibits and entertaining spectacle, awarding recognition for agrarian cultivation or husbandry and domestic arts and crafts, and providing markets for selling raw cotton and buying finished products.<sup>13</sup> In her analysis of county fair aesthetics, Leslie Prosterman observes, “Each section of the fair is not abruptly defined... Although an identifiable core proclaims the nature of each section, helping the fairgoers to organize their space and time, the edges blur... Only the interjacent areas permit this mingling to occur.”<sup>14</sup> She further notes that two elements of the fair which never intersect, even marginally, are the carnival and agrarian components. Aside from logistical reasons for such a separation, the divergence between these domains of midway and fairground provides a sort of cognitive cohesion that allows each aspect to contrast the aesthetics of the other. Prosterman provides an analysis of this phenomenon: “The reveler who patronizes the carnival in the context of the fair knows that his or her own world lies just a few safe feet away. But that world acquires an associational frisson by its juxtaposition to the uncertainty of the carnival. This juxtaposition in itself creates titillation and tension, in turn raising adrenalin and focusing

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<sup>13</sup> Although it is outside the scope of this study, the aesthetics of the Texas Cotton Palace in all of its iterations are ripe for a detailed analysis of the role of gender in numerous aspects of the event (as is suggested here by the distinction between masculine [agrarian] and feminine [domestic] achievements). The works of Sharpless, Prosterman, and Ownby, all referenced in this study, offer insights that could greatly inform such an examination.

<sup>14</sup> Leslie Prosterman, *Ordinary Life, Festival Days* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 32-3.

experience.”<sup>15</sup> In many ways, this tension is the characteristic feature of such events, offering an exhilarating concurrence of the safe and precarious, permanent and fleeting, and ultimately of natural and mechanical, in a way that is separated from everyday life by existing in a ritualized time and space.

In analyzing the concept of idyllic harmony divorced from everyday reality, which local fairs tend to create, Prosterman suggests:

The construction of an ideal time and space, and the discussion of this construct in ideal terms without reference to conflict, reveals important values...The county fair represents a world they would like to exist and highlights rules of conduct, sets of judgments, from which they know they deviate but which reinforce a sense of togetherness in a fractured and strife-ridden world...The participants in the fair create standards for harmony even though they know that people are left out and that friends have lost their farms...The fair constitutes a statement of what life could be—a kind of cultural icon.<sup>16</sup>

In this light, an event such as the Texas Cotton Palace can be seen as sustaining both the real and ideal cultures of the local population. It offers a representation of the values and norms of the community’s ideology, presenting the absolute standard by which behavior (or livestock, or agricultural product) is judged, while concurrently allowing for conduct which realistically might deviate from those ideals. This analysis, which both upends and reinforces the community structure, resonates with certain aspects of Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of the carnivalesque.

When Prosterman discusses the foreignness of the carnival, she mentions the reversal of town folk from insider to outsider status, the abandonment of established community rules, and the fact that, “the foreign patter of *ceeayzarnie* (carnie language)

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 11-2.

conceals the intentions of those temporarily in charge.”<sup>17</sup> This inversion of social order and power is consistent with Bakhtin’s “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions.”<sup>18</sup> This inside-out, upside-down world is a time “when boundaries are crossed and public roles are temporarily left behind or made secondary,” in the words of Prosterman.<sup>19</sup> In Bakhtin’s carnival, liminality is achieved through a “two-world condition” in which lies, “a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations...a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year.”<sup>20</sup> Prosterman’s description of the liminal nature of exhibitions bears similarities to the carnivalesque, but underscores a principal point of divergence between carnival and fair: “By locating in a time and space dedicated to a special purpose related to but removed from everyday life and by adopting stylized procedures, judging and exhibition reorder, highlight, and comment on the everyday occupational and domestic experiences of the fairgoers’ lives.”<sup>21</sup> While both experiences provide a ritualistic restructuring, Bakhtin’s carnival generates a temporary *communitas* within its designated space and time, while the process of judging and ranking in Prosterman’s fair is a cultural instrument which helps articulate a community’s aesthetics, principles, and social values.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>18</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 10.

<sup>19</sup> Prosterman, *Ordinary Life, Festival Days*, 20.

<sup>20</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 6.

<sup>21</sup> Prosterman, *Ordinary Life, Festival Days*, 16.

King Cotton's realm as established by the Texas Cotton Palace Exposition incorporates both carnival and fair while also assimilating and juxtaposing the worlds of the farm and the market, the pastoral and the political, the unifying and the delineating. Of particular interest to this study are those aspects of the exposition which exist outside the boundaries of either carnival or fair. While the dichotomy of those two traditional elements locates the Texas Cotton Palace within a larger context of agricultural festivals, the interstitial features, which dwell outside of the domain of either the midway or fairgrounds, provide a lens through which the cultural context of the Waco community can be discerned.

#### *The Cotton Palace Opening Day Parade*

The official opening events of the Texas Cotton Palace Exposition, particularly the Cotton Palace parade, occurred within such an interstice. An examination of the narrative underlying the spectacle of the opening day cotton parade is enhanced by the context of Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh's 1997 analysis of National Day parades in Singapore. The authors identify and analyze four elements which comprise this "secular ritual and landscape spectacle, namely: the constitution of ceremonial space; the contribution to display and theatricality; the composition of parade participants; and the selection of parade motifs."<sup>22</sup> The incorporation of all four of these elements and their changing use over time can be traced through the opening day cotton parades of the exposition. Those who traveled to Waco for the Texas Cotton Palace would find the city streets decorated with banners bearing such slogans as "The Cotton Palace, the farmer's

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<sup>22</sup> Lily Kong, and Brenda S.A. Yeoh, "The Construction of National Identity through the Production of Ritual and Spectacle: An Analysis of National Day Parades in Singapore." *Political Geography* 16, no. 3 (March 1997): 213-14.

friend,” “The farmer is always welcome at the Cotton Palace,” and “Cotton, the pride of the South.”<sup>23</sup> These served as a backdrop for the opening day cotton parade, which featured bands and mounted officials leading floats decorated thematically in cotton and a lengthy procession of hundreds of cotton wagons. The parade culminated in a formal opening ceremony at the Cotton Palace grounds.

The display of drawing the spectacle of the cotton parade through the heavily-decorated market square of Waco and extending it toward the Cotton Palace grounds established a ceremonial connection between the exposition site and the civic center, creating a unity between the agriculturally-themed event and the marketplace. The morning after the 1916 opening day festivities, the *Waco Morning News* listed the names, addresses, and total number of bales for all entrants in the previous day’s parade; more than a hundred growers, at least two of which were women and with each entrant hauling a load ranging from one to forty-eight bales, paraded over seven hundred bales of cotton along the parade route. Prizes were awarded, including two which were created spontaneously: one for the largest load of cotton on one wagon (twenty-seven bales) and another for “the unique arrangement of the largest cotton stalk.”<sup>24</sup> The ritualistic element of public recognition in the conferring of awards, and its reinforcement of crediting these growers in print, contributed to the ceremonial nature of the parade.

The theatricality and display of the Texas Cotton Palace parade provided an impressive spectacle through the city of Waco. The 1916 parade was described in detail on the front page of the *Waco Morning News*:

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<sup>23</sup> *Waco Daily Times-Herald* (Waco, TX) 1 November 1914, 1.

<sup>24</sup> “Farmers Who Entered Cotton,” *Waco Morning News* (Waco, Texas) 5 November 1916, 3.

What has been declared one of the greatest parades in the state of Texas was that of yesterday morning. Hundreds of people were in the procession. Thousands upon thousands of dollars was represented. Autos, wagons, mules, horses, products and all swell the total. Sidewalks on the line of march were lines of humanity. Thousands and thousands of Wacoans and out-of-town people packed the streets. Headway through these crowds was nearly impossible. So well had the magnificence of this parade been heralded throughout the adjoining country that hundreds of out-of-town persons flocked to the city. All during Friday night wagons could be heard rumbling in from the farms. Loads upon loads of cotton and cottonseed came in Friday night, each man eager to enter the parade. One wagon alone coming to the city in the early hours of the morning bore twenty-seven bales of cotton. From the smallest tenant farmer to the large farm owner, each and every man was represented. One man was seen in the parade with only one bale of cotton. Wagonloads of cotton passed in revue before the assembled thousands which were strung out along Austin Street on the line of march.<sup>25</sup>

The impressive display of cotton was intermixed with multiple bands, a number of officials including the governor, mounted officers in special white Cotton Palace uniforms, and society girls perched atop many of the loads of cotton, lending pomp and spectacle to the parade. In her oral history interview, Mary Kemendo Sendón recalled, “Oh, but those were days we looked forward to. We always had to go to the parades. The Cotton Palace parades were fabulous, though. Oh, they just really put on the dog out there.”<sup>26</sup>

As for the composition of parade participants, the opening parade and ceremony each year represent the most ritualized tribute to King Cotton, and correspondingly were the most visible and publicly accessible aspect of the exposition. The parade was open to the public and required no admission fee, wending its way throughout downtown on its way to the Cotton Palace grounds. Furthermore, entry in the parade appears to have been

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<sup>25</sup> “Governor Driving Mule-Team Leads Big Cotton Parade,” *Waco Morning News* (Waco, Texas) 5 November 1916, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Mary Kemendo Sendón, interview #3 by Lois E. Myers, 11 January 1994, in Waco, Texas, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, 131. <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buioh/id/2308>

indiscriminate—it seems that cotton was the only requirement for participation. There are records of recognition for the number of bales entered into the parade being granted to male and female, young and old, black and white.<sup>27</sup> Cotton was used as the lodestone to bring all of these people together in a public spectacle which appeared to transcend differences of age, race, and gender. Their one common factor, as growers of cotton, qualified them to be celebrated in grand fashion at these opening events and throughout the exposition. Likewise, the experience of witnessing the parade offered an experience of public unity. In an oral history interview, Rubie Wilburn Evans recollected that the cotton parade was one of her favorite memories as a young black girl growing up on a farm outside of Waco: “They’d have this big parade and we’d be standing on the side of the street, greeting it very much like children would...we would always try to make it to the Cotton Palace parade... the social thing was the parade, you know, into the Cotton Palace.”<sup>28</sup> The parade seems to have provided the most accessible opportunity for cultural mixing and the creation of a liminal space to generate *communitas*.<sup>29</sup>

As for the selection of parade motifs, it is apparent that cotton was the venerated theme of the opening day Cotton Palace parade. Although King Cotton was not identified or depicted by his characterization in the parade, his influence can be seen. The demonstration of agrarian virtue brought ceremoniously to the modern market, mixed

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<sup>27</sup> *Waco Daily Times-Herald* (Waco, TX) 1 November 1914, 1.

<sup>28</sup> Rubie Wilburn Evans, interview by Rebecca Sharpless, August 16, 1990, in Waco, Texas, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, 8.  
<http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buioh/id/5774>

<sup>29</sup> Although there has been some question as to the inclusion of the black citizens at the Cotton Palace, the oral history transcript of Rubie Wilburn Evans reflects that, in addition to the parade, she recalls being able to visit the Cotton Palace Exposition grounds, including the exhibits and midway carnival, without restriction but that the society events such as the ball and crowning of the queen were exclusively for whites. Furthermore, photographic archives in the Texas Collection show a mix of races among the parade spectators, although the majority of black participants in the parade appear to have served as grooms, walking alongside the horses and mules.

with the previously discussed inclusive nature of the event, created the ideology of a unified populace. A closer look at the structure of the event, however, reveals that the elevated status of a certain subset of participants distinguished them as privileged even as they went to great lengths to publicly identify with the collective masses, similar to the phenomenon Joseph Roach identifies in Mardi Gras carnival parades: “Amid the experience of total civic participation in a collective cultural performance, carnival tradition asserts and enforces historic claims of entitlement, priority, and exclusivity.”<sup>30</sup> The 1915 parade was led by Texas Governor James Ferguson being pulled in a four-mule wagon bearing the slogan “Our Governor—Farmer Jim.”<sup>31</sup> This performance of solidarity and public alignment with agricultural interests was furthered when he returned to lead the following year’s parade by singlehandedly navigating a six-mule team (Figure 2.2).<sup>32</sup> The demonstration of government officials, local elites, and businessmen depicted prominently atop and amid massive cotton bales was a means of legitimizing their elevated status, borrowing cultural capital through their association with the physical agricultural representation of the symbolic King Cotton.

### *Characterizing King Cotton at the Texas Cotton Palace*

#### *Political Alignment with Pastoral Iconography*

Many politicians used the Texas Cotton Palace as a platform to identify themselves as part of the agrarian aristocracy, promoting and adopting the image of the

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<sup>30</sup> Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 245.

<sup>31</sup> “Texas Cotton Palace Opens Sixth and Greatest Exposition,” *Waco Daily Times-Herald* (Waco, TX) 6 November 1915, 1.

<sup>32</sup> “Governor Driving Mule-Team Leads Big Cotton Parade,” *Waco Daily Times-Herald* (Waco, TX) 5 November 1916, 1.

bucolic life, perceived as good and virtuous, while delivering rhetoric of forward progress and justifying their social position. Public figures from the mayor to the governor of Texas took advantage of the Cotton Palace Parade and opening day ceremonies as an opportunity to align their offices with this unifying theme.



Figure 2.2. Governor Ferguson as “Farmer Jim” at the reins [1916]  
Source: The Texas Collection, Baylor University

On opening day in 1910, the first year of the reconstructed Texas Cotton Palace, the principal address was given at the culmination of the Cotton Parade by the junior U.S. Senator for Texas, Joseph W. Bailey. According to one report of the event:

Senator Bailey declared himself an advocate of intensive farming and discussed that subject and the necessity of more extended rural school facilities at length...

The keynote of Senator Bailey's address, however, was a consideration of the cotton manufacturing possibilities of the South. He wanted to see the time when the cotton manufactures of the world would be built by the side of the cotton fields of the South, and discussing the economic waste occasioned by the sending of Southern cotton North to be manufactured, declared that the millions the South expended uselessly in this way would pay the interest upon a sum so fabulous as to stagger the imagination.<sup>33</sup>

Senator Bailey thus identified himself with the Old South and popular sentiment. There was some measure of resentment during this era of the fact that the South grew cotton only to send it to northern manufacturers for processing. Recently the Waco area had seen the development of several textile mills, but they all produced a coarser, cheaper grade of "duck" fabric. As a result, Sharpless notes, "Texans grew intimately acquainted with the colonial practice of shipping the cotton out to have its value added elsewhere and, ironically, having to buy cloth made of cotton."<sup>34</sup> Therefore, Senator Bailey's exclamation of "Let's build a manufactory by every cotton field and a schoolhouse in between and we will have made the greatest country on the globe!"<sup>35</sup> This sentiment of progressive agrarianism extolled the value of both the farm and the factory, seeking to unite both under King Cotton and thus gain superiority for the region.

The official opening of the inaugural exposition of this generation was then given by the democratic nominee for governor, O.B. Colquitt, in which "he bespoke for the people of Waco and the people of Texas an era of prosperity and of development which would not only unveil the king of our products, but unveil the people of Texas as the

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<sup>33</sup> "Opening of Texas Cotton Palace and Exposition," *The Galveston Daily News*, (Galveston, Texas), 6 November 1910, 18.

<sup>34</sup> Sharpless, 238.

<sup>35</sup> "Opening of Texas Cotton Palace and Exposition," *The Galveston Daily News*, (Galveston, Texas), 6 November 1910, 18.

grandest and the best in the American union.”<sup>36</sup> Colquitt’s invocation of King Cotton underscored the message of Senator Bailey and served as a thematic introduction for what would come next. After delivering his opening address, Colquitt turned to the curtained throne which had been above and behind him and, in a ceremony of formal opening, cast aside the curtains to reveal the personification of King Cotton.

The monarch was depicted by the Honorable John Maxwell, the representative from the McLennan County district, who then delivered a royal proclamation.<sup>37</sup> He was costumed in a pure white colonial outfit complete with knee breeches, ruffled shirt, and long cloak, with a crown and scepter incorporating bolls of cotton. Unlike the social leveling in the visual rhetoric of the parade, here was a hegemonic figure in all of his glory, reinforcing the supremacy of cotton and the South while incorporating Colonial elements which conferred a historical validity to his power. In contrast to the Bakhtinian carnivalesque of the parade, this event exemplified what Bakhtin identifies as the “official feast”:

Whether ecclesiastical, feudal, or sponsored by the state, [they] did not lead the people out of the existing world order and created no second life. On the contrary, they sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it. The link with time became formal; changes and moments of crisis were relegated to the past.

Actually, the official feast looked back at the past and used the past to consecrate the present. Unlike the earlier and purer feast, the official feast asserted all that was stable, unchanging, perennial: the existing hierarchy, the existing religious,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> There was a great deal of political subtext to the choice of opening guests. Senator Bailey’s 1906 reelection to the US Senate had been threatened by allegations of financial impropriety, and he had been accused of voting in the interests of big oil at the expense of citizens, prompting questioning of his stance on tariffs. He had supported a different Democratic nominee for Governor over Colquitt, who had ultimately won the nomination (and would thereafter win the gubernatorial election). Furthermore, Honorable John Maxwell, who portrayed King Cotton, had authored the “Maxwell resolution” just months prior to the Cotton Palace opening, wherein he provoked a “Bailey question debate” and a great political divide over those for or against “Baileyism.” When it was announced that Bailey would open the Cotton Palace, there was a public outcry which was addressed by conferring upon nominee Colquitt the honor of unveiling Honorable Maxwell as King Cotton.

political, and moral values, norms, and prohibitions. It was the triumph of a truth already established, the predominant truth that was put forward as eternal and indisputable. This is why the tone of the official feast was monolithically serious and why the element of laughter was alien to it.<sup>38</sup>

This powerfully political use of cotton iconography would persevere throughout the years of the Texas Cotton Palace. When former governor James Ferguson's wife, Miriam A. Ferguson, held the governorship of Texas in 1925, she opened the event with a bold proclamation: "As governor of this now renowned cotton state, I congratulate you, the subjects of King Cotton, in again journeying to the Mecca to do reverence to the shrine of the Texas Cotton Palace. I feel safe in predicting that the Cotton Palace Exposition of Texas will grow year by year and become, as it is now, one of the most important influences in advertising the resources of this state."<sup>39</sup> In delivering this declaration, "Ma" Ferguson, as she was known colloquially throughout the state, allied her political office with the Cotton Palace not only as a venerated agricultural event but also as an economic and social force, using terms of holy monarchy to apotheosize King Cotton as virtuous, divine, and powerful.

### *King Cotton and His Subjects—Ideology and Reality*

The invocation of the pastoral ideal was not a new concept at the time it was used at the Texas Cotton Palace. This ideology harkens back to bucolic Jeffersonian imagery. Remaining at the heart of the American pastoral identity are these words from Thomas Jefferson's 1781 *Notes on the State of Virginia*: "Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his

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<sup>38</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 9.

<sup>39</sup> *Waco Daily Times-Herald* (Waco, TX) October 25, 1925, 1.

peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue.”<sup>40</sup> Jefferson’s response to *Query XIX*: “*The present state of manufactures, commerce, interior and exterior trade?*” establishes a harsh dichotomy between the idealized husbandman and the demonized manufacturer:

...Generally speaking, the proportion which the aggregate of the other classes of citizens bears in any state to that of its husbandmen, is the proportion of its unsound to its healthy parts, and is a good-enough barometer whereby to measure its degree of corruption. While we have land to labour then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work-bench, or twirling a distaff. Carpenters, masons, smiths, are wanting in husbandry: but, for the general operations of manufacture, let our work-shops remain in Europe. It is better to carry provisions and materials to workmen there, than bring them to the provisions and materials, and with them their manners and principles.<sup>41</sup>

By the time the second incarnation of the Texas Cotton Palace was established in the early twentieth century, this bucolic imagery remained strong despite actual circumstances of agricultural laborers being much less poetic. Nearly two centuries later, Leo Marx would use this passage to distinguish Jefferson as promoting a *pastoral* rather than *agrarian* agenda, identifying the product of this romanticized husbandman’s farm as “rural virtue” rather than agricultural staple.<sup>42</sup>

The Texas Cotton Palace, and the character of King Cotton that it promoted, celebrated both the virtue and the staple over the idealized farmer. Jefferson’s virtuous husbandman existed side-by-side with his vilified workman at the base of a superstructure represented by the icon of King Cotton. This cultural hegemony reinforced the idea that the crop itself—and all of its historical, economic, and political associations—held the virtue that had been ascribed to the farmer in Jeffersonian rhetoric,

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<sup>40</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (Washington, D.C.: Issued under the auspices of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association of the United States, 1905), 229.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 229-230.

<sup>42</sup> Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1964).

thereby redistributing cultural capital from the agrarian to the mercantile. This transference of economic interests and priorities from a dominant group to other secondary groups is defined by Antonio Gramsci:

It is the phase in which previously germinated ideologies become ‘party’, come into confrontation and conflict, until only one of them, or at least a single combination of them, tends to prevail, to gain the upper hand, to propagate itself over the whole social area—bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also an intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a ‘universal’ plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups.<sup>43</sup>

Thus King Cotton as a character and icon represents the interests of both economic and political power in a way that convinces the working-class base that the existing superstructure is also in their own financial and moral interest.

#### *Founding Fathers of the Texas Cotton Palace Association*

The original Cotton Palace of 1894 was inspired by other contemporary agricultural festivals, such as the Iowa Corn Palace, and placed preeminent value on the agricultural staple as integral to the economy and identity of the entire community.<sup>44</sup> Although the 1910 remount retained the original ideology of cotton culture as personified by King Cotton, it was enacted by the merchant class and provided financial benefits to urban business and civic economics underneath the veneer of agrarian gentility. The exposition thus constituted a complex confluence of mercantile, municipal, political, and popular interests.

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<sup>43</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 205.

<sup>44</sup> Barnes, *The Texas Cotton Palace*, 1-2.

The Texas Cotton Palace Exposition that was revived in 1910 was the product of a recently-formed group, The Young Men’s Business League (YMBL), which created a separate entity, the Texas Cotton Palace Association (TCPA), specifically to remount the exposition. The YMBL was characterized in the 1911 City Directory as “being composed of the younger ‘live wires’ of Waco, active and aggressive, who have helped most materially to upbuild the city in every department.”<sup>45</sup> When the TCPA was organized in 1910, it was decided that in honor of the YMBL’s role in selling capital stock to make the new Cotton Palace a reality, Albert T. Clifton, who had served for two years as the inaugural President of the YMBL, should thereafter become the President of the TCPA.<sup>46</sup> After leaving his birthplace and hometown of Waco, Clifton had completed a course at the Philadelphia Textile School and subsequently worked his way from machinist to manager in a North Carolina cotton goods mill; he returned to Texas where he ran two other cotton mills before ultimately organizing the Clifton Manufacturing Company, a producer of canvas goods, in Waco in 1909.<sup>47</sup> In addition to helping the YMBL and the TCPA, Clifton served as chairman of the board for the First National Bank, Behrens Drug Company, and the Clifton-Simpson Hardware Company.<sup>48</sup>

The remaining directors of the TCPA represented equally diverse and impressive enterprises, serving as bank presidents, owners of cotton compresses and manufacturing interests, and proprietors of a number of Waco businesses, including founders of the two

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<sup>45</sup> Morrison & Fourmy’s *General Directory of the City of Waco 1911-12*, p. 3.  
<http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/tx-direct/id/8910>

<sup>46</sup> Barnes, *The Texas Cotton Palace*, 20.

<sup>47</sup> *The Handbook of Waco and McLennan County, Texas*, edited by Dayton Kelley (Waco, TX: Texian Press, 1972), 62-3.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

largest dry goods stores in Waco—Sanger’s and Goldstein-Migel’s.<sup>49</sup> By and large, these founding members represented a range of interests in the manufacturing sector, including every aspect of cotton except for growing: compressing, milling, textiles, sales of finished product, and investment. These merchants and bankers successfully reorganized and reimagined the Texas Cotton Palace model in a way that promoted urban growth and stimulated the growing mercantile economy of Waco. Because of the concurrence between the Texas Cotton Palace and the businessmen of Waco, this endeavor contributed directly and indirectly to the economic capital of many of the directors. The directors of the TCPA were generally unpaid volunteers, but they were also industrialists who would benefit from the increased tourism and patronage generated by the annual exposition.

In conjunction with each annual exposition, store owners would advertise heavily to attract the business of the hundreds and thousands of out-of-town visitors. In addition, the Cotton Palace hosted exhibit space which many merchants would use to establish miniature storefront displays at the exposition grounds. The two largest stores in Waco, which each maintained at least one member of the owning families on the TCPA board throughout the years, would both take out full-page advertisements in the local newspaper to promote both the offerings at their storefront locations and the displays at their exhibition space at the Cotton Palace. For instance, a full-page ad from Sanger’s in 1913 featured a headline across the top of the page boasting “The Cotton Palace and

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<sup>49</sup> Waco owes a great debt to its Jewish Pioneers. Jacob De Cordova, the son of Sephardic Jewish parents, is credited with first establishing the city of Waco. By the time the Cotton Palace was originally established in 1894, and during the span of the 1910-1930 remount, the Jewish community was a significant presence, actively contributing to Waco’s civic, social, and economic growth. With the declining trend of Waco’s general population beginning in 1960, the Jewish community likewise dwindled.

Sanger's—Two Greater and Still Better Institutions.”<sup>50</sup> Down the center column of print, between advertisements for furs and frocks, ran a “Sanger Storitorial” which proclaimed the “Texas Cotton Palace for 1913 a Pride to All The State.” The text below declared that “The ‘Greatest and Grandest’ of them all—the Texas Cotton Palace—opened last night at the touch of the electric button beneath the finger of O. B. Colquitt, the chief executive of the Lone Star State. And amid the blaze of glory and grandeur came the feeling that inspired the poet who wrote, ‘Breathes there the man with soul so dead, who never to himself hath said, this is my own, my native land.’”<sup>51</sup> The ad then congratulated the efforts of all involved in the Cotton Palace and predicted a successful exposition before appealing directly to the event’s visitors: “We place all of the conveniences of this big modern store at the disposal of all—Cotton Palace visitors and homefolks alike—we want you to feel at home here and we have left nothing undone that would add to your pleasure or comfort.” The store offered the use of its rest rooms, writing rooms, and free checking of wraps and bags, insisting, “You are welcome here; welcome in every sense of the word, whether you buy anything or not.” Yet another section of the massive ad announced that “Hundreds of Admirers Saw Sanger Bros. Exhibit at the Cotton Palace Yesterday,” describing in detail a \$50,000 De Mareau painting, “La Forge,” on exhibit at the Sanger booth amid the display of “high class merchandise.” Every effort was made to not only bring guests to the store location but likewise to draw interest and focus to the store’s Cotton Palace exhibit, which to visit required purchasing an entry ticket for the exposition.

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<sup>50</sup> *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX) 2 November 1913, 32.

<sup>51</sup> Interestingly, the quotation is originally from "The Lay of the Last Minstrel" by Walter Scott (1805) but was appropriated into "The Man Without a Country" by Edward Hale (1863), which is purported to be a Civil War allegory sympathetic to the Union cause.

A Goldstein-Migel company ad in the same day's newspaper edition expressed a similar duality of purpose, advertising not only for the store but also for the Cotton Palace. The ad proclaimed "A Royal Welcome to Every Guest" on a banner between an illustration of the iconic main exposition building labeled "The Cotton Palace" and a rendering of the Goldstein-Migel storefront labeled "The Merchandise Palace." The declaration below announced,

The Fourth Annual Cotton Palace Is Now Open... and Waco is now the Mecca of all Central Texas people who take pride in the institutions of their own section of this great State, and enjoy the festivities of this gay Carnival Season. A Waco that is Bigger, Better, and Busier than ever before greets the visitor this fall; the stranger within our gates finds not only the manifold entertainments of an ably-planned and elaborately-staged Exposition, but also the modern advantages of a Shopping-center that has no superior in the State.<sup>52</sup>

A different layout and design offered many of the same enticements as the Sanger's ad, offering a cordial welcome to every guest and likewise offering the courtesies of a rest room, writing area with complimentary stationery, and a room to check parcels and baggage, with the added amenity of a nursery. Under the heading "See Our Exhibit at The Cotton Palace," the advertisement described in detail their display of "a cleverly arranged assemblage of superbly attired figures in evening costume" amid a scene of an esplanade bordered by white columns and trellises with a water landscape background. In addition, Goldstein-Migel advertised a second exhibit space across the aisle from their display, featuring an automatic photo booth which would produce photographs at the cost of a dime.

According to the recollections of Mary Kemendo Sendón, "Along the walls of the lower floor were exhibits. Sanger Bothers had an exhibit. Goldstein's, R. T. Dennis, everything in the world... R. T. Dennis had a complete room of furniture, you know,

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<sup>52</sup> *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX) 2 November 1913, 13.

beautiful furniture. Goldstein's had all of its fancy clothes. Sanger's had all of its fancy clothes. Jewelry store had exhibits. Everybody that had anything to sell was out there at the Cotton Palace."<sup>53</sup> She notes that these tableaux were behind glass walls and for display only, but she declares, "They were their best things." These exhibits drew a number of spectators to the grounds, where they could browse for hours. Although these merchants were competing rivals in the civic business sector, all of them had owners active in the TCPA who promoted attendance to the event through their own store advertising and displays of merchandise.

### *The Promotion of "Modern" Waco*

The interdependence of resources between the businessmen of the TCPA and the institution of the Cotton Palace is not of a strictly financial nature. Although the directors advertised heavily on behalf of the exposition, they received no monetary remuneration for their efforts. One way of explaining the benefit to these directors is through the concept of social capital. The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu identifies capital not only as an economic entity but also as a system of social, symbolic, and cultural commodities.<sup>54</sup> Social capital is acquired through relationships and consists of nonfinancial benefits received through inclusion in groups or networks, such as recognition, acknowledgment, and association. Michael Grenfell explains, "The formal presentation of the principle of social capital is that of altruism. This systematic denial of the fact that symbolic capitals are transubstantiated types of economic capital involves the process that Bourdieu calls

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<sup>53</sup> Mary Kemendo Sendón, interview #6 by Lois E. Myers, 20 January 1994, in Waco, Texas, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, 288. <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buiroh/id/2308>

<sup>54</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* edited by J. Richardson (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 241-258.

misrecognition.”<sup>55</sup> Thus, one benefits from the acquisition of social capital, in the form of credentials and legitimacy, by participating in institutionalized relationships through group membership and by committing acts which seem to be selfless and have no obvious direct advantage to oneself, but this status is in fact an unrecognized and transmuted form of economic capital.

With this definition in mind, The Young Men’s Business League was an impressive treasury of social capital. The YMBL started as a small collective, but by 1914 consisted of a commercial body of 1,750 members and was responsible for aggressively promoting the growth of Waco in population, business, transportation, and manufacturing. One of the ways the organization did this was through trade and booster trips. Annually, the group would amass a crowd of businessmen, educators, and even a band, to ride a heavily decorated train to nearby cities and towns in advertisement of Waco and the Cotton Palace. The fanfare of these events seems to have functioned similarly to parades but was caravanned to other locales as a means of advertising. The 1914 *Municipal Handbook* claims, “The importance of these trips can be realized when it is stated by a railway official that instead of one freight train loaded with Waco merchandise per week formerly went out over his lines, that now a freight train leaves Waco loaded with merchandise from Waco jobbers and manufacturers every other day or three times as much as before.”<sup>56</sup> The group thus received a great deal of credit for the

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<sup>55</sup> *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, edited by Michael Grenfell (Durham, GBR: Acumen, 2008), 104.

<sup>56</sup> *Municipal Handbook of the City of Waco. Mayor's message and reports on all departments of the city.* (Waco, TX: Published by the city, 1912-14), 151.

economic growth of Waco in a way that not only gained them social capital but indirect economic capital through increased orders and goods for their businesses.<sup>57</sup>

According to the “Brief History of the Young Men’s Business League of Waco” listing in the 1914 *Municipal Handbook* of the city, “In the march of progress of the City of Waco for the last five years, in the unprecedented growth of the population, in its enormous building operations, and in its general era of prosperity, the two factors generally most recognized by the people of Waco who are in touch with civic and municipal affairs, are the advent of the Commission form of government and the Young Men’s Business League.”<sup>58</sup> In describing the YMBL’s capital stock drive which raised the funds for the Cotton Palace, the book claims that, “the money was easily raised, overcoming an obstacle which had always before presented itself when any kind of an organization went among the monied people of Waco to raise money for a laudable enterprise.”<sup>59</sup> This suggests that the YMBL already possessed a significant amount of social capital, especially as there are several accounts of other unsuccessful attempts to rebuild the Cotton Palace in the interceding years from 1894 to 1910, and the improved

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<sup>57</sup> The organization also independently published a number of promotional books and materials advertising the resources that Waco had to offer citizens, business, and manufacturers who might wish to relocate and share in the city’s prosperity. An excellent example is found in the Texas Collection archives: *Waco*, published by the YMBL, 1912, Roy Ellsworth Lane Papers, Accession #0441, Box 1, Folder 7, The Texas Collection, Baylor University. In addition to advertising Waco, this booklet also describes the “Prosperity Banquet” that the YMBL altruistically hosted for the city in celebration of the completion of the 22-story Amicable Life Insurance Building, purported at the time to be the tallest south of the Mason-Dixon Line. An entire city block of the shopping district was roped off and set with rows of banquet tables for a “small army of guests.” Incidentally, urban legend also holds that the “Alico” building, as it came to be known, survived a devastating tornado in 1953 because of cotton bales built into the foundation of the building, suggesting that they served as a “shock absorber” to prevent the building’s collapse. (see Cox, Mike. *Central Texas Tales*. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2012.) This is one example of how the mythos of cotton as a benevolent and protective force still prevails in the area.

<sup>58</sup> *Municipal Handbook of the City of Waco*, 149. Emphasis added.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

ability to raise economic capital for the endeavor exemplifies how social capital can translate to the economic realm.

The *Municipal Handbook*, which features a picture of the Cotton Palace on its cover, greatly extols the “evolution” of the city from the aldermanic form of government to the commission form. The “Texas Cotton Palace” entry of the book begins, “One of the early policies of the Commission, which has been rigidly adhered to, was standing for the Cotton Palace.”<sup>60</sup> It goes on to describe the relationship between the Cotton Palace, the YMBL, and the city government:

When the Young Men’s Business League convinced the citizens of Waco that the time was ripe for the re-establishment of the Cotton Palace, and not yet enough money had been raised to purchase the ground and erect the buildings, appeal was made to the Commission for help. It was suggested that out of the public park fund a plat of ground be purchased, the Cotton Palace committee to purchase adjoining grounds on which to erect necessary buildings with the money in hand. To this arrangement the Commission assented, and Padgitt Park was purchased and arrangement was made with the Cotton Palace committee by which this ground could be used during the Cotton Palace Exhibition, and as a public park and playground at other times. By reason of this arrangement the Cotton Palace Association was enabled to carry through their plans and thus was established one of the most valuable institutions in the City.<sup>61</sup>

There was a considerable degree of cooperation between the city government, the YMBL, and the TCPA (four of the thirteen TCPA directors in 1914 were simultaneously directors of the YMBL—one of them serving as YMBL President) in the interest of building, expanding, and promoting the Texas Cotton Palace.<sup>62</sup> In many instances, the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> There was also incredible controversy in the selection of a site to rebuild the Cotton Palace. In his book *William Cameron Park: A Centennial History, 1910-2010* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), p. 36-7, Mark E. Firmin reveals that president of the Waco Cotton Exchange and Texas Cotton Association William Lawson had proposed a similar deal at Proctor Springs, wherein the city would purchase part of the property to create a public park with the Cotton Palace rebuilt on an adjacent tract. There was a public stockholder vote between six locations, and although Proctor Springs received more

cooperation involved direct contributions of economic capital, such as the commission's 1914 vote to raise \$60,000 in bonds for the purchase of grounds for expansion of the Cotton Palace.<sup>63</sup> In other instances, it was the principle of social capital which advanced the interests of King Cotton's Palace.

### *The Iconography of King Cotton at the Texas Cotton Palace*

The endorsement of the city of Waco as a politically relevant example of urban modernity was underpinned by the symbolic promotion of agrarian virtue at the Texas Cotton Palace. Bourdieu suggests that symbolic capital imbues certain things with greater worth than others. According to Grenfell's interpretation, "symbolic fields, on the bases of their specific principles, establish hierarchies of discrimination."<sup>64</sup> As such, symbolic capital can be seen as yet another instrument of cultural hegemony. For example, the mercantile business owners of the TCPA and YMBL, who are precisely the sorts of industrialists demonized by Jeffersonian pastoralist rhetoric, are able to gain moral standing (social capital) by aligning their enterprises with the King Cotton character

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votes than the other properties, it did not gain a clear majority and thus required a runoff vote with the second most popular site, Gurley Park. After a heated propaganda campaign, voters chose the Gurley Park location in the runoff. Although the entire purpose of the highly-publicized voting process was to allow Cotton Palace stockholders to select the location of the enterprise they had helped fund, the TCPA directors bypassed the outcome of both votes and chose to build the Cotton Palace at Padgitt's Park, which cost twice as much as the other properties. More information can also be found in the Legal Documents: Minutes: Second TCPA, Texas Cotton Palace Records, Accession #792, Box 1, Folders 5-7, The Texas Collection, Baylor University.

<sup>63</sup> *Municipal Handbook of the City of Waco*. 58. These votes involving public money which advanced the efforts of a private sector organization (the TCPA) came under public attack in a letter mailed directly to citizens by City Commissioner J. W. Holloway on 8 September 1924, opposing the decision by the other three commissioners to levy a tax of 5¢ on \$100 and to appropriate \$25,000 out of the city budget for the 1924 Cotton Palace Exposition on grounds including that such a decision was illegal according to the Texas State Constitution. Original source: J. W. Holloway, 1924, Correspondence, Texas Cotton Palace Records, Accession #792, Box 1, Folder 1, The Texas Collection, Baylor University.

<sup>64</sup> *Pierre Bourdieu: Key Concepts*, 104.

which is symbolic of agrarian virtue. Symbolic capital, in this way, allows for the opportunity to gain virtue by symbolic association:

Power and dominance derive not only from possession of material resources but also from possession of cultural and social resources. Moreover, through the concept of symbolic capital, in addition to capturing the importance of general signs of social recognition, he is drawing attention to the fact that the value of any form of capital depends, in part, upon social recognition. Capital is valuable because we, collectively and sometimes in spite of ourselves, value it. This can give rise to a situation in which our capital assets have a double value: having a lot of money, for example, is advantageous because it confers both spending power and status.<sup>65</sup>

The iconography of King Cotton which was presented at the Texas Cotton Palace thus conferred recognition to the event as well as to the citizens and the city associated with the exposition. With his relationship to Southern agrarian virtue, King Cotton conferred a local sense of integrity to the Cotton Palace. The impressive depiction of the character as a powerful monarch conveyed a sense of power and authority while the modern technology associated with his palace promoted Waco as progressive and modern.

Mary Kemendo Sendón's oral history interview recalls the plantation origins of the land where the Cotton Palace was built: "Between 1909 and 1910, I think it was, Padgitt—they decided they were going to try it again. Padgitt bought the land beyond the Padgitt Park, which was a part of the Ross plantation, that used to be a big plantation back there. He bought more land and that became the spot where they were going to build the main building."<sup>66</sup> When the Cotton Palace was built and the annual expositions took place, Sendón remembers, "that's where they grew a lot of cotton. And when they opened the Cotton Palace, they had a field out there—they grew cotton just to kind of bring it back, you know. But that's where the Ross Plantation was. They had a big cotton field

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>66</sup> Mary Kemendo Sendón, interview #6 by Lois E. Myers, 20 January 1994, 285.

out there just for display.”<sup>67</sup> It seems unlikely that a cotton field would be planted exclusively for decorative purposes, but even if the staple was harvested and used for manufacturing, giving it an economic value, it obviously served an important function in establishing the agrarian aesthetic for the Texas Cotton Palace. The field of cotton, as evidenced by these recollections, possessed a symbolic value which associated the event with cotton in its natural state of growth, a state characteristically associated with earthen virtue.

Returning again to Sendón’s recollections, “The yard—the grounds— when you walked into the gates, they had built flower beds all over the place. The landscaping was perfect. They had cleaned out the Waco Creek. They had built a fountain on the esplanade that led to the main building. There were flower beds lining that entire space up to the main building. Yellow chrysanthemums, that was the flower for the season. Every building was surrounded by flower beds with blooming flowers.”<sup>68</sup> Not only did the pastoral scene of the adjacent cotton fields signify the natural world, but also the hallmark of human cultivation. The civilizing force of man was not only apparent in the rows of staple, but also in the immaculate Cotton Palace grounds.

Situated in the midst of this natural yet manicured landscape, King Cotton’s Palace likewise reflected the improvements of man upon his natural form. The Cotton Palace was an electrified and electrifying homage to King Cotton, boasting a massive coliseum which could seat 10,000 people, entirely outlined with electric light bulbs, and a large, electrically-lit star at the entrance gates. Sendón could see the lights of the palace from her home seven blocks away:

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<sup>67</sup> Mary Kemendo Sendón, interview #3 by Lois E. Myers, 11 January 1994, 118.

<sup>68</sup> Mary Kemendo Sendón, interview #6 by Lois E. Myers, 20 January 1994, 286.

The main building was wide. On each end of the main building, there was like a little tower—lookout tower. The center of the main building was a dome, and that was what covered the coliseum where they had all the entertainment. As you walked into the main—I said, I loved to walk into the main building. At night, they'd have lights outlining the entire building, just like you do at Christmas here, you know. And you could see that whole thing. It looked like a French palace. That's what it looked like at night because the lights did things to it. The towers had extra lights or something. I don't know whether there were bells on those towers or what, but they had an extra light in each tower.<sup>69</sup>

The crowning jewel of King Cotton iconography spanned the street near the gates, leaving no doubt in any visitor's mind whose realm they were entering. "Across the street from the Cotton Palace entrance... they had put a kind of a walkway made of metal, and it had been covered with cotton. And in the middle of the walkway, they had made a figure of King Cotton sitting there. It was all done in cotton, and it really was a good piece of work. And that was King Cotton."<sup>70</sup> In 1914, the 50-foot King Cotton archway, which Sendón described in her interview and which is featured in the quotation from the novel *In the Land of Cotton* referenced in Chapter One, was erected at the Cotton Palace entrance. Built from 150 bales of cotton on a steel truss and featuring a 16-foot statue of King Cotton bearing his cotton stalk scepter and a small globe, the archway was outlined with 500 electric bulbs (Figure 2.3).<sup>71</sup> This impressive visual representation exemplifies King Cotton's characterization at the Texas Cotton Palace: a larger-than-life, godlike, agrarian symbol illuminated by modernity.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 286-7.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>71</sup> Barnes, *The Texas Cotton Palace*, 38.



Figure 2.3. King Cotton greets his subjects from the archway overhead [1914]  
Source: The Texas Collection, Baylor University

## CHAPTER THREE

### Performing Patriotism (1917-1918)

#### *Introduction*

The national climate of 1917 and 1918 induced a unique shift in the power structure and iconography of the Texas Cotton Palace. Over the course of six months, Waco gained a significant military presence with the establishment of Camp MacArthur and Rich Field, which brought 45,000 servicemen to the city.<sup>1</sup> Even as pastoral cotton fields made way for a city of military tents, all of the pomp that was generally reserved for cotton at the annual exposition was given to promoting support for the war effort, supplanting a local agrarian ideal with a nationalist American ideal. The changes in Cotton Palace programming and in Waco's civic culture represent a microcosm of the nationalist sentiment sweeping across America during the war years, personified by such characterizations as Uncle Sam, Lady Liberty, Columbia, and "our boys in uniform."

As news of the pending war declaration signaled America's imminent involvement in the Great War, the directors of the YMBL and the TCPA were quick to promote patriotic sentiment citywide, even as they were concurrently concerned with further building up the Cotton Palace. The directors performed their partisanship by sponsoring nationalist spectacle within their own city rather than fight on far-off shores. For the next two years, the Texas Cotton Palace exposition—an assemblage of various popular entertainments and exhibits—was reprogrammed to promote the interests of the war, with dramatic battle reenactments, a government-sponsored exhibition of war

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<sup>1</sup> Bracken, *Historic McLennan County: An Illustrated History*, 12-13.

artifacts, and the societal veneration of military figures, as a means of reshaping the cultural landscape of the city to engender a patriotic sense of nationalism, generate domestic support, and encourage hospitality to those in uniform. During the war years, the Texas Cotton Palace visibly shifted its allegiance from the agricultural icon of King Cotton to Queen Columbia and the nation she represented, allowing the exposition to not only maintain but expand its economic and symbolic capital as it reflected a shifting superstructure of perceived authority and virtue.

### *Nationalist Narratives*

In his seminal work on nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson identifies nations as limited political constructs of an imagined, sovereign, and communal nature. Limited by finite boundaries and sovereign in their representation as free and un beholden entities, nations are imagined structures that confer upon their constituents an impression of mass *communitas*. Emphasizing the subtext of creation rather than fabrication in the invention of nations, Anderson suggests that, “communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/ genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”<sup>2</sup> He also points out that despite the tendency of intellectuals to focus upon xenophobic elements of nationalism, “nations inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love,” as characterized by the pure and noble connotation of dying for one’s country.<sup>3</sup> This distinction between the invented narrative and the sense of nation which it engenders is what Homi K. Bhabha describes as, “a particular ambivalence that haunts the idea of the nation, the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who

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<sup>2</sup> Benedict R Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-144.

live it.”<sup>4</sup> This chapter seeks to elucidate the relationship of nationalist narratives to the changing characterization of the Texas Cotton Palace during the war years of 1917 and 1918.

In Chapter Two of this study, King Cotton was established as a historicized source of symbolic capital within the region of the South. Bhabha identifies the similarly historical concept of nationhood as, “an idea whose cultural compulsion lies in the impossible unity of the nation as a symbolic force.”<sup>5</sup> The role of symbols in providing the cultural capital of a national narrative is further explicated by Stuart Hall: “Stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols, and rituals... represent the shared experiences, sorrows, and triumphs and disasters which give meaning to the nation.”<sup>6</sup> This suggests that national narratives are linked to Eric Hobsbawm’s concept of invented traditions, defined by him as, “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the forming of a national identity through historicized narratives, which ritualistically and symbolically invent, justify, and immortalize the nation, is an institutionalized form of cultural hegemony, providing cohesion under the power of iconic authority figures while defining for the populace what is “normal” and “good.”

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<sup>4</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “Introduction: Narrating the Nation,” in *Nation and Narration* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 2013), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Stuart Hall, “The Question of Cultural Identity,” in *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*. (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 612.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

This thesis has thus far contended that the symbolic role of King Cotton as a regional cultural icon, represented within a pastoral frame, conferred the commodities of authority and virtue to the phenomenon of the Texas Cotton Palace. It has further identified the character as an integral element of a hegemonic superstructure which distinguished the political and mercantile interests associated with King Cotton as elite and influential in contrast to the base of farmers whose virtuous labor produced the staple. During World War I, this superstructure morphed to promote national rather than regional symbolism, transferring King Cotton's power and status to a nexus of "American" icons, such as the national flag, the American military, and the female personification of the United States, Columbia. Furthermore, whereas King Cotton was performed in the marketplace in relation to the farmers whose toil on his behalf formed the base of his power, the symbolic public demonstrations of support for the nation during this period were generally underpinned by drills and demonstrations performed by regiments of uniformed soldiers who might at any moment be summoned to foreign soil to risk their lives for America and the narratives it represented. This signifies both a continuation and an alteration of the demonstrated pattern, incorporating different iconography and new narratives into the existing ideological superstructure to performatively represent power in national rather than regional terms while identifying to its base members what is virtuous.

*Waco on the Eve of War*

*“Upbuilding” the Cotton Palace*

As the year 1917 opened, the primary concern of the directors of the Texas Cotton Palace Association was a proposal for the construction of a new coliseum on the grounds, to be located near the existing coliseum—which would be converted into an exhibit building—but with double the capacity. It was decreed that as soon as the finances were secured, the “great and modern” coliseum would “be pushed rapidly to completion” and would “be as near fireproof as possible.”<sup>8</sup> At this time, William W. Cameron, a wildly popular and influential businessman and lumber magnate, became president of the TCPA. Cameron had received a great deal of admiration and acclaim for the philanthropic gift of one hundred acres at Proctor Springs and \$5000 for improvements given by him, his mother, and two sisters to the city, establishing the impressive and eponymous Cameron Park.<sup>9</sup>

Cameron’s appointment as President of the TCPA was front page news, appearing alongside articles detailing President Wilson’s address to Congress in the wake of American deaths on the torpedoed Cunard liner *Laconia*.<sup>10</sup> The front page of the following day’s newspaper bore a large portrait of Cameron under the headline “Here’s Governor of Waco Come Cotton Palace Time.” Below the photo read:

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<sup>8</sup> “Modern Coliseum for Cotton Palace Will Be Constructed” *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX) 30 January 1917, 1.

<sup>9</sup> Mark E. Firmin, *William Cameron Park: A Centennial History, 1910-2010* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), p. 36-7. Now 416 acres, Cameron Park is one of the largest municipal parks in the state and includes miles of trails, tree-lined roads, and many scenic vistas.

<sup>10</sup> “Cameron is 1917 Head of Cotton Expo,” *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX), 27 February 1917, 1.

Forget lumber when you think of him in 1917, for his trade mark has changed to cotton. Selected head of the big exposition because he was fitted for the place. A typical Wacoan. Lives at 1715 Austin Street. Married a Waco girl, has a Waco daughter, Evelyn. Yes, the family is typically Wacoan. Under his leadership Waco's 1917 Cotton Palace should surpass all records for festivity and success."<sup>11</sup>

There was hardly anything "typical" about Cameron, however. In 1899, at the age of twenty, Cameron had inherited control of his father's lumber yards, which he consolidated into a single corporation worth \$2,400,000 at the turn of the century. Within five years, he had nearly doubled the corporation's worth, and it was valued at \$7,000,000 by 1924.<sup>12</sup> In addition to his significant wealth in terms of economic capital, Cameron seems to have held a great deal of social capital as a pillar of the Waco community. According to a 1905 profile of Cameron, "He takes a personal interest in the progress of his native city and is always active and foremost in every movement having for its object the welfare of Waco, subscribing liberally to the upbuilding of that city and setting aside a considerable sum annually for charity."<sup>13</sup> Although one might question how "typical" Cameron's wealth and status were among Wacoans, it is obvious that he was a genuinely revered civic figure.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Here's Governor of Waco Come Cotton Palace Time," *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX), 28 February 1917, 1.

<sup>12</sup> *The Handbook of Waco and McLennan County, Texas*, edited by Dayton Kelley (Waco, TX: Texian Press, 1972), 47.

<sup>13</sup> *American Lumbermen: The Personal History and Public and Business Achievements of One Hundred Eminent Lumbermen of the United States*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: American Lumberman, 1905-1906), 388. <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc2.ark:/13960/t6j09z317;view=1up;seq=579>

<sup>14</sup> According to his *American Lumbermen* biography, Cameron demonstrated humility and graciousness to his civic fellows, which may help explicate his very *atypical* social status in terms of more than financial assets: "Although the possessor of so large wealth, William Waldo Cameron displays none of the arrogance and pride that so often accompany the ownership of riches. He is plain and unassuming, and in his relations with people of less fortunate circumstances there is no indication of any feeling of condescension... Among those who know him best—in his own town and state—he is most popular and is invariably spoken of in the highest terms. His vast interests are conducted by clean business methods and with that good judgment and keen discernment that characterized his father's operations... Mr. Cameron has often made the statement to friends that he has no desire to heap up more riches for himself, as he does not

Shortly after Cameron's appointment, it was decided by a TCPA committee that the \$50,000 required to fund the construction of the new coliseum would be raised by a public subscription sale. This was the first capital stock sale since a 1911 expansion of buildings and property immediately following the inaugural exposition. The YMBL organized teams of its members to start a vigorous campaign in early April inviting "every man in Waco" to subscribe to the fund.<sup>15</sup> According to an article in the *Waco Morning News*, the following "are just a few of the expressions that have been made by prominent business men in this city during the last few days concerning the campaign":

"The Cotton Palace exposition has done more to increase my business than anything else. That's why I am going to subscribe for a nice slice of the new stock."...

"The Cotton Palace exposition has made Waco famous from Canada to Mexico. That is enough reason for me to give the Y.M.B.L. crowd half of my bank balance."...

"People in all walks of life are interested in the Cotton Palace...It is looked upon as one of the big community assets. The man who wields the pick and shovel feels that he has just as much interest in the Cotton Palace as the president of the biggest bank or the head of the biggest business concern."...<sup>16</sup>

The above quotes suggest that these members of the community still saw an apparent division between the "hardworking laborer" figure and the business and banking interests that were associated with the Texas Cotton Palace. It is also clear that regardless of national developments involving the war, the hearts and minds of much of Waco were

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care for money beyond what is necessary to supply the comforts of life to his family; but he devotes his life to carrying on and increasing the business bequeathed to himself, his mother and his sisters because he considers it a sacred trust left to his keeping by his father, and because by its proper conduct he may be of genuine service to the community." *Ibid.*, 389-90.

<sup>15</sup> "Will Organize Teams for Cotton Palace \$50,000," *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX), 27 March 1917, 10.

<sup>16</sup> "Cotton Palace \$50,000 Campaign Received Enthusiastically in Waco," *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX), 1 Apr 1917, 9.

still focused squarely on the Cotton Palace, which was credited with the growth and prosperity of the city.

*Patriotic Demonstration and Sendoff for Waco Guardsmen*

Three days later, a Sanger's advertisement boasting of "Waists for Just \$1.00 That Will Win the Favor of Every Thrifty Woman" included an illustration of an unfurled American flag and the announcement, "The Texas Cotton Palace Coliseum should be crowded tonight for the Patriotic Demonstration. Every citizen of Waco should attend. Secure a flag and take part in the parade starting from the City Hall tonight at 7:30."<sup>17</sup> The request for all to attend and the invitation to join the parade bearing a flag is evocative of the minimum requirement of just one bale of cotton to participate in the Cotton Palace opening day cotton parade, encouraging a significantly low threshold for community participation in the spectacle. The front page of the newspaper the following morning, which bore the overarching headline "Senate Passes War Resolution by Vote of 82 to 6; House Will Act Today," separately described the Patriotic Demonstration in detail:

The eagle screamed in Waco last night. Long before 7:30, the time set for the start of the parade, the square and Austin Avenue was a sea of people topped off with American flags. Conservative estimates state that over 20,000 people were on the streets of Waco...the parade formed in front of the city hall and headed by the militia men passed around the big building, other units falling in at their respective places...Everybody carried a banner with some patriotic design or an American flag, in fact so great was the demand for flags yesterday that the downtown supply ran out and many were pieced together by the loyal women of Waco...<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX) 4 April 1917, 10.

<sup>18</sup> "Waco Joins in Pledge to US in War Crisis," *Waco Morning News* (Waco, Texas), 5 April 1917, 1.

The parade followed the same route as the cotton parade—from the city center to the Cotton Palace. The fervor of the public participation demonstrates that Waco’s citizens were eager to support the national cause and to brandish the appropriate symbolic capital, which had become the national symbol of the American flag rather than the regional symbolic currency of cotton.

The front-page account of the event continues, describing how at the culmination of the parade, “ten thousand people packed and overflowed the coliseum, standing in the doors, the stairways, and filling the spaces around the balustrade.”<sup>19</sup> After the entire audience arose to sing “America,” the program of short addresses began. First to speak was the mayor, who “exhorted every man, woman, and child to stand by the flag.”<sup>20</sup> As the Young Men’s Business League was responsible for creating, organizing, and advertising both the parade and demonstration, the event was officiated by the YMBL president. The city attorney, a YMBL member, also addressed the crowd on behalf of the group, “declaring the league would devote their organization to the upholding of the life and honor of the country.”<sup>21</sup> As part of the event, an exhibition drill was performed in the coliseum by Company G of the Second Texas infantry, who had just received orders the previous day to report to Camp Wilson in San Antonio and who would leave by train that very night following the demonstration. The news article notes that after the closing remarks, the local photographer Fred Gildersleeve took a “flashlight picture,” which is shown in Figure 3.1.<sup>22</sup> Another front-page item of the same newspaper edition states that

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

after the close of the patriotic demonstration, the general committee of arrangement sent the following telegram to President Wilson: “Ten thousand citizens of this city in patriotic mass meeting demonstration endorse your action and offer their services to maintain our glorious freedom on land and sea. Signed, The Young Men’s Business League of Waco.”<sup>23</sup>



Figure 3.1. Patriotic Demonstration at the Texas Cotton Palace Coliseum [1917]  
Source: The Texas Collection, Baylor University

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<sup>23</sup> “Waco Wires President: City’s United Support Offered to American Flag,” *Waco Morning News* (Waco, Texas), 5 April 1917, 1.

Appearing immediately above this was yet another article involving the YMBL, this time relating to the Cotton Palace stock sale, under the heading, “We Must Afford a \$50,000 Coliseum as Income Insurance.”<sup>24</sup> The piece alleges that some citizens had responded to solicitation by replying that they were broke, or questioning what the Cotton Palace had done for them, or suggesting that the business firms should entirely fund the drive. The article contended that failure to expand the Cotton Palace’s accommodations would beget “a waning of the annual attendance and the dry rot of the whole Cotton Palace project. It means dry rot also for Waco at the time when our city should be ashamed to confess a failure. Waco cannot afford to face the dawn of war confessing doubt as to the stability of her prosperity. The progress of the city goes on largely according to the will and courage of her people.”<sup>25</sup> The article asserted that the businesses of Waco would contribute about \$30,000 to the stock sale and that, “every person with a \$1,000 income in Waco should at least buy one \$10 share,” reasoning that, “the future of the Cotton Palace is as good insurance for his job or professional income as he can buy.”<sup>26</sup> The YMBL was actively involved in generating enthusiasm and support from Waco citizens for the urban growth and progress that the Cotton Palace had come to represent and in turn using the facilities and resources of the Cotton Palace to promote local support for the emerging national narrative supporting America in the war. As the war progressed, the crossover of these two interests became increasingly complex, until

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<sup>24</sup> “We Must Afford a \$50,000 Coliseum as Income Insurance,” *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX), 5 April 1917, 1.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

promotion for the Cotton Palace was framed primarily within national rather than local or regional symbolism.

### *Cotton, Conscription, and Camp MacArthur*

#### *Cotton Market Concerns*

America's entry into the war brought a number of concerns about the resulting effects on local businesses and crops. In the days after the war declaration, there were mixed messages in the news about cotton farming. For instance, on Monday, 9 April 1917, the *Waco Morning News* finance section bore a headline declaring, "Cotton Goods Up—December Record Broken, Cotton Materials Show Unusual Advances—Raw Material the Cause," citing the anticipation of increased cotton consumption for war supplies as a catalyst for the high prices being received for the crop, although there were burgeoning concerns about the effects of recruiting on farm labor.<sup>27</sup> Lower on the page was another headline, "War Time Farming in the U.S.A.," with contrasting concerns about inadequate food production from the Director of Extension, Clarence Ousley. The article strongly encouraged farmers to plant staple vegetables and food crops rather than cotton, warning, "By fall there may be no ships for anything but food and feed stuffs. In that case our cotton will bring little or nothing. Even at good prices it will not go far in buying food and feed at war prices." Ousley closes his argument with the admonition, "Famine is worse than war. Every back yard and every vacant patch should yield something for man or beast."<sup>28</sup> This battle would continue for a number of months as the

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<sup>27</sup> "Cotton Goods Up—December Record Broken," *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX), 9 April 1917, 5.

<sup>28</sup> "War Time Farming in the U.S.A.," *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX), 9 April 1917, 5.

area seemingly longed to rely on the global wartime demand for cotton, despite the tactic having failed in King Cotton's heyday during the Civil War.

Only three days later, after an inch of rain fell on the area, the newspaper's front page celebrated, "April Rain is Texas Visitor: Keeps Promise — Big Crops Assured," boasting, "Today, Central Texas will be that much greener of foliage, while crops have been assured of their germination and can prefix their names with 'bumper' when advertised as visitors to the Cotton Palace next fall."<sup>29</sup> In contrast, the front page of the very next day's paper headlined, "Urge Farmers to Grow Food as First Crops — Chamber of Commerce Plans Week's Campaign Thro Country — Govt. Backing plans — To Preach Gospel of Less Cotton and Greater Produce Acreages," referring to a widespread plea to plant more acreage in grains and foodstuffs while cutting down on the cotton crop.<sup>30</sup> By August of that year, however, a drought had struck the area, with hopes for crops of all sorts waxing and waning with the rainfall totals. By August 25th, McLennan County reported that wheat and oats had only produced a half crop each, corn was a total failure, and cotton had only produced one bale from every seven acres on average.<sup>31</sup> The uncertainty of agriculture destabilized one of the pillars of the area's economic growth and stability.

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<sup>29</sup> "April Rain is Texas Visitor: Keeps Promise," *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX), 12 April 1917, 1.

<sup>30</sup> "Urge Farmers to Grow Food as First Crops," *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX), 13 April 1917, 1.

<sup>31</sup> "State Crop Report Says McLennan County Cotton Averages One Bale to Seven Acres." *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX), 25 August 1917, 1.

### *Conscription in Waco*

In her article entitled “The Politics of Southern Draft Resistance, 1917-1918: Class, Race, and Conscription in the Rural South,” Jeanette Keith argues that, “behind the patriotic pageant staged by war mobilization agencies are transcripts of resistance,” which were instigated by the fact that “the administration of the draft in the South proved riddled with class biases in favor of the region’s white middle class.”<sup>32</sup> Keith outlines the four-tiered classification system that was developed by Provost Marshal General Enoch Crowder, administrator of the Selective Draft Act of 1917 which authorized the conscription of men aged twenty-one to thirty. Based on occupation and familial status, the men most eligible for conscription were assigned to Class I and the least eligible men to Class IV. According to Keith, many historians inaccurately presume that Crowder’s assertion that only men from Class I had been called to service indicates that only unmarried men were drafted. Instead, Keith argues, the exemption was based on the status of *dependency* rather than *marriage*. As she explains:

In the rural South, the most significant of the PMG’s rulings was the one disallowing exemptions to married men whose families could be adequately supported by their army pay. In practice, this meant that if a married man earned less than about \$30 a month, he could be denied a dependency exemption. Few rural day laborers, sharecroppers, and small farmers made more than \$1 a day, as they would have had to do to claim exemption. As a result, as Crowder noted in 1918, “many registrants, both white and colored, have been put in Class I on the ground that their allotment and allowances while in the Army would furnish an equivalent support to their dependents.” Thus, the federal government encouraged draft boards to choose those to be sent into harm’s way on the basis of income.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jeanette Keith, “The Politics of Southern Draft Resistance, 1917-1918: Class, Race, and Conscription in the Rural South” *The Journal of American History* 87, no. 4 (March 2001): 1338, 1336. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2674731>

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 1345.

Furthermore, the requirements to receive an agricultural exemption included that the farmer grow “an appreciable amount of agricultural produce over and above what is necessary for the maintenance of those living on the place,” which, as Keith points out, was often not applicable to tenant farmers who neither owned their land nor decided what crops were planted.<sup>34</sup>

The resistance fomented by this inequity is visible in Waco newspaper reports of nearby unrest in the weeks leading up to the implementation of the draft, including headlines of, “Secret Service Unearths Plot in Texas to Kill Authorities Who Would Enforce Draft Law,” “Officers Believe Many May Resist Army Draft,” and “Oklahoma Anti-Draft Bands Continue in Guerilla Warfare.”<sup>35</sup> By contrast, conscription in Waco was reported as passing “without disorder of any kind” as 3,630 young men were registered on draft day, June 5th.<sup>36</sup> However, a close examination of the newspaper’s reported registrations by ward supports Keith’s assertions of inequity in draft exemptions.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> *Waco Morning News* (Waco, Texas), 20 May 1917, 1; 26 May 1917, 1; 5 August 1917, 1.

<sup>36</sup> “Waco Ready with Offer of 3,630 Young Men of Military Age to U.S.A.” *Waco Morning News* (Waco, Texas), 6 June 1917, 1.

<sup>37</sup> The following interpretations are the result of a critical comparison between (1) the draft board reports by ward as reported in “Waco Ready with Offer of 3,630 Young Men of Military Age to U.S.A.” *Waco Morning News* (Waco, Texas), 6 June 1917, 1; (2) ward boundaries as described in the *Morrison & Fourmy's General Directory of the City of Waco 1917-18*. (Dallas, TX: Morrison & Fourmy Directory Co., 1917-18), 51 <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/tx-direct/id/7883> ; (3) a 1913 map of the city to visually locate the ward boundaries as described and to compare them to known landmarks or neighborhoods. Map, Bart Moore, Jr. (McCall-Moore Engineering Co.), Exhibit 11: Map of Waco, Texas and suburbs (1913) <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/tx-map-x/id/9> ; and (4) Waco population by wards from Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 , Vol. 3 (Population), Section 6 (Texas, Utah, Vermont), 788. <http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/36894832v3ch6.pdf>

Total registration in the first ward was 576, with “156 negroes and less than a dozen Mexicans,” with few exemptions.<sup>38</sup> The first ward, which occupied an area eight blocks in width extending from city hall northward to the city limits, was bordered on the east by the Brazos River, making it susceptible to periodic flooding. This area included Waco’s red-light district, known as “The Reservation” or “Two Street” for its westernmost boundary. The census data for 1910 does not break down population by race for individual wards, but the overall “Negro population” of Waco in 1910 was 23%, as compared to 27% of conscription registrants in the first ward, suggesting a concentration in this area.

Of the 697 registrants of the second ward, very few were minorities and nearly half sought exemptions.<sup>39</sup> The second ward was situated immediately to the west of the first ward and extended to the westernmost city limits. This ward is noted as having the greatest percentage of voter participation but placing third in draft registrants. According to the 1910 census, this ward was in fact the third most populous, consistent with the registration numbers. It seems likely that the high rate of voter participation is related to the low percentage of minorities relative to other wards. The house and gardens of William W. Cameron, president of the TCPA, were within this district, which had no statistically relevant minorities yet had a near-50% exemption rate. This seems to corroborate Keith’s observation that, “the majority of Southern draft boards made their

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<sup>38</sup>*Waco Morning News* (Waco, Texas), 6 June 1917, 1 “In the First ward registration totaled 576, with a comparatively small number claiming exemptions. Of the total there were 156 negroes and less than a dozen Mexicans.”

<sup>39</sup>*Waco Morning News* (Waco, Texas), 6 June 1917, 1 “The Second ward, usually the largest ward as to votes, had to yield the palm Tuesday to the Third and Fourth wards. The total registration was 697, of whom only a few were negroes and no Mexicans. It was estimated that nearly one-half claimed exemptions.”

choices based upon the potential conscript's class or, as they put it, 'station.' Draft boards seemed to define station as a combination of income (as mandated by federal regulations), accustomed standard of consumption, and character."<sup>40</sup> This assertion supports the supposition of the capacity for transference of economic capital to social and cultural capital while exemplifying the value inherent in such social and cultural commodities.

The third ward, which had the greatest number of registrants and a "good many" minorities, encompassed the Cotton Palace and the area known as South Waco. Of the 825 potential conscriptees, fewer than half sought exemptions. According to the oral history of Mary Kemendo Sendón, the Cotton Palace elevated the status of the South Waco area: "South Waco (laughs) was considered second-class. I say it that way because that's the way everybody felt about it. People who had money were gradually getting across Austin Avenue and building fine homes on Austin Avenue... But the Cotton Palace sort of boosted Waco and South Waco in a way. It made it important. People knew it was there."<sup>41</sup> The large number of registrants is consistent with the third ward's 1910 census data as the most populous ward.<sup>42</sup>

The fourth ward was situated south of the first ward along the western bank of the Brazos River. A large section of the riverbank in this ward constituted an area known as "Sandtown," a predominantly poor Mexican neighborhood, from 1905 until the 1960s.

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<sup>40</sup> Keith, "The Politics of Southern Draft Resistance," 1349.

<sup>41</sup> Mary Kemendo Sendón, interview #7 by Lois E. Myers, 27 January 1994, in Waco, Texas, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, 305.  
<http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buiogh/id/2308>

<sup>42</sup> *Waco Morning News* (Waco, Texas), 6 June 1917, 1 "In the Third ward, the total reached 825, this being the banner ward of the city. Less than half claimed exemptions. There were a good many negroes and some Mexicans in this ward."

The fourth ward produced more registrants than anticipated with 702. The report for this ward excludes any information about minority concentration, but the suggested expectation of lower turnout and possible disturbances or “friction” is telling, given the area demographics, and once again it is notable that there are few exemptions in an area of low socioeconomic status.<sup>43</sup>

Of the 404 registrants in the fifth ward, there were “large numbers of Mexicans” of which fewer than 10% sought exemptions.<sup>44</sup> East Waco, which constituted the fifth ward, was comprised of all of the area within city limits that lie on the eastern banks of the Brazos River. Obviously there was a large Mexican population concentrated in this district. The all-black Paul Quinn College was located in the East Waco area, but it appears to have been situated outside of the city limits at this juncture.

The sixth ward represented the latest area of growth in the Waco area, adjoining and extending northward from the second ward. Of the 426 registrants, more than half asked for exemptions. As the only ward to have mentioned receiving catered meals from the “patriotic women of Waco,” with the highest ratio of exemptions and no mention

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<sup>43</sup> *Waco Morning News* (Waco, Texas), 6 June 1917, 1 “With a big rush in the early morning and a steady line of men filling in during the day a much larger registration than was expected was handled rapidly at the Fourth ward, located in the Times-Herald building. Seven hundred and two men registered at this booth during the day and the number claiming exemption was comparatively small. No disturbances of any kind were experienced during the day and the work was carried on with the least possible amount of friction”

<sup>44</sup> *Waco Morning News* (Waco, Texas), 6 June 1917, 1 “With each man receiving a number as he entered the door, registration work was carried on with the precision and rapidity that only well organized preparation can accomplish Tuesday at precinct No. 5 in East Waco. The registration booth was located in Wilkins’ drug store and the work was under the supervision of J. E. Wilkins. Those in charge stated that the plan of giving each applicant a card bearing his number was a great time saver and proved of vast benefit to both the officials and the man registering. Registration for the day totaled 404 and less than 10 per cent asked exemptions. Several men well along in years, and one over fifty, endeavored to sign the draft cards and seemed hurt when their requests were refused. Large numbers of Mexicans were registered and in almost every instance an interpreter accompanied them to the booth and gave the necessary data.”

whatsoever of minority, it also incorporated neighborhoods known as Provident Heights, University Heights, and Farwell Heights.<sup>45</sup>

Geographically, it appears that the eastern wards bordering the banks of the river (the first, fourth, and fifth) were the ones to have the highest concentrations of minority registrants and the smallest number of exemptions, peaking at 10%. The third ward, extending southwest from the cartological city center at Austin and 8<sup>th</sup>, was a large, mixed population with fewer than half receiving exemptions. Finally, the more affluent area to the north and west of the center of Waco, comprised of the second and sixth wards, had few to no minority registrants with at least half of the potential conscripts requesting exemptions. Rather than demonstrate their patriotic allegiance through conscription, it appears that much of the elite class of Waco used their advantage of cultural, social, and economic capital to promote patriotism in the community at large by channeling symbolic national narratives into public demonstrations.

### *Camp MacArthur*

In July of 1917, the efforts of the city in lobbying the government for a military base came to fruition and it was announced that Camp MacArthur would be built in Waco. Two thousand workers built the camp in 25 days, at a total cost of \$700,000.<sup>46</sup> Water, sewer, and train lines were quickly run to the 5,000-acre training facility in

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<sup>45</sup> *Waco Morning News* (Waco, Texas), 6 June 1917, 1 “An unusually large number of applicants asked for exemptions Tuesday at the Sixth ward, the ratio being about six out of ten, during the afternoon and evening. While no great rush was experienced a constant stream of men were registering through the entire day. The registration booth was located in the North Ninth street fire station and seven men were kept busy from early morning until long after dark. The registration officers at the station were especially grateful to the patriotic women of Waco for the splendid meals served them. The total number registering amounted to 426.”

<sup>46</sup> Patricia W. Wallace, *Our Land, Our Lives: A Pictorial History of McLennan County, Texas*, (Norfolk, VA: Donning Company, 1986), 149.

northwest Waco. As the camp was finalizing preparations for the National Guard units from Wisconsin and Michigan who would be receiving their training there, the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry Buffalo Soldier Regiment from New Mexico arrived to help finish and guard the site. Although the military was initially hesitant to send the Black soldiers to Waco in the aftermath of a gruesome lynching which had gained the city a measure of notoriety on a national scale the previous year, Waco assured that they would be welcomed with a “patriotic spirit.”<sup>47</sup> After their late arrival by train on July 28, the soldiers were forced to spend the night in their rail car due to a city curfew of 11pm for Black troops. By the next day, when the soldiers made their way into the city of Waco, they were confronted with segregation and responded violently. The incident was rapidly quelled, the soldiers involved were court-martialed, and a crisis was averted.<sup>48</sup> Before the regiment left town, however, it seems that the segregated Waco community was still determined to offer them hospitality. An article three weeks later described an elaborate banquet that would be held for the soldiers, hosted by “several prominent local colored men.”<sup>49</sup>

### *1917-Cotton Palace Exposition*

At the same time that the city was placing bids with the government, seeking to locate Camp MacArthur and the \$3,000,000 pilot training facility of Rich Field in the city, the directors of the Texas Cotton Palace were accepting bids from contractors for the

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<sup>47</sup> Bradley T. Turner, *Lust, Violence, Religion: Life in Historic Waco*, (Waco, TX: TSTC Publishing, 2010), 80-1.

<sup>48</sup> Keith and Turner both point to another incident sparked in Houston only weeks later, on August 24<sup>th</sup>, when soldiers from a different battalion of the 24<sup>th</sup> Infantry became involved in a similar situation in Houston. However, that situation ended with 100 troops rioting and 17 dead.

<sup>49</sup> “Colored Soldiers to be Banqueted by Prominent Waco Negroes Monday,” *Waco Morning News* (Waco, Texas), 16 August 1917, 2.

design and construction of the new coliseum made possible by their stock sale.<sup>50</sup> The October 28, 1917 *Waco Morning News* featured an illustration of the newly-constructed 10,000 capacity coliseum, adding that the old coliseum had received improvements designed by the R.W. Scott & Co. architectural firm.<sup>51</sup> The image caption promised that the new addition would be the site of brilliant affairs in the upcoming exposition, but the community seems to have become much more excited at the prospect of involving Waco's military guests in as much of the programming as possible.

### *Opening Day Ceremonies*

There was a great deal of anticipation about the military features of the Cotton Palace, as demonstrated by a headline reading, "U. S. Soldiers to Give Military Spirit—Texas Cotton Palace at Waco Will Be Mecca for Wearers of the Khaki."<sup>52</sup> The festivities opened with the customary Cotton Parade, but this year the procession was led by Brigadier General W. G. Haan and his staff rather than local or statewide political figures. Preceding the cotton wagons which were ostensibly the feature of the parade was a substantial military contingent of 10,000 soldiers from Camp MacArthur. An article preceding the event announced that, "thousands of soldiers from Camp MacArthur will march in this stupendous procession. It is estimated that it will require at least two hours for the parade to pass a given point. In addition to the commanding General of the great army camp located at Waco, there will be many other army officers in the parade who

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<sup>50</sup> "Notice to Contractors," *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX), 18 June 1917, 3.

<sup>51</sup> *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX), 28 October 1917, Part Two, 12.

<sup>52</sup> "U. S. Soldiers to Give Military Spirit," *The Albany News* (Albany, TX), 28 September 1917, 3.

have won world-wide fame during their careers in the United States Army.”<sup>53</sup> Cotton Palace Association President W. W. Cameron followed the wave of khaki driving a wagon bearing thirty-five cotton bales, a number of Association Directors who were among the most successful and well-known businessmen in Waco, and the season’s debutantes.<sup>54</sup>

### *Uncle Sam Knows About It...*

A political cartoon published in the *Waco Daily Tribune* three days after the Cotton Palace opened in 1917 depicts a large formation of soldiers marching into the main building of the Texas Cotton Palace while in the foreground Uncle Sam is seen doffing his hat to Waco, as personified by a white-haired matron:

UNCLE SAM TO WACO—“I’m glad to know you better, Lady, and tell you how proud I am of the way you are treating my Camp MacArthur boys in connection with your Cotton Palace. I’ve heard how You sent more’n a thousand of Your Boys (fine boys, too,) as volunteers to the Army, and what you’ve done for Liberty Bonds and the Red Cross. It’s such as You that will sure help win this War for Democracy and Humanity.”<sup>55</sup>

This characterization of Uncle Sam seems tailored to a genteel Southern audience as opposed to his often brash governmental depiction in many posters and cartoons. Waco had previously been referred to as “Miss Waco” in print, and it is unclear if this matronly visual characterization had an antecedent. The dress and apron she is wearing certainly seems to depict the domestic home front, and likely portrayed an image sympathetic to the mothers of the Waco soldiers who had already departed for the front. She seems

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<sup>53</sup> “20,000 Soldiers Will March in Big Parade at Waco,” *The Mexia Weekly Herald* (Mexia, TX), 1 November 1917, 6.

<sup>54</sup> Barnes, *The Texas Cotton Palace*, 53-54.

<sup>55</sup> “Uncle Sam Knows About It,” *Waco Daily Tribune* (Waco, TX), 7 November 1917. <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/el-mst-wwi/id/44>



Figure 3.2. Uncle Sam Knows About Waco [1917]  
Source: The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Digital Collection

pleased with Uncle Sam's uncharacteristic gentility and refinement as he bows before her. His statement of being glad to know Waco better is timely given the Cotton Palace's support of the war; he specifically refers to the inclusion of the Camp MacArthur soldiers in Cotton Palace programming. The concurrent acknowledgment of both the sacrifice and

hospitality that Waco has given encourages the continuation of that support, in the interest of winning the war.

The sale of Liberty Bonds and Thrift Stamps became an important way for citizens on the home front to contribute to the war effort. Waco was active in a number of Liberty Bond campaigns throughout the war. Mary Sendón recalls:

There were big programs. In fact, they would come and get high school students to go and perform with groups that would go out and try to sell. And people would give programs. They'd get maybe some actor or somebody that would come and give us a kind of a little show and then try to sell Liberty Bonds. And they would have parades, you know, to start it off. . . every week there was somebody selling Liberty Bonds. That was a big thing. And that was to help the war. And they had posters, you know, with the Statue of Liberty and Uncle Sam all over town, holding Liberty Bonds. It was just well advertised.<sup>56</sup>

Uncle Sam and Lady Liberty were both hard at work during the war. These characters were frequently depicted on materials encouraging the purchase of Liberty Bonds and War Savings Stamps. Columbia likewise was a popular figure in promotional materials at this time. One of her most well-known depictions of the era shows her open-handed and beseeching, draped in an American flag. These characters and symbols endorsed and upheld the unfolding national narrative, personalizing their appeals to the individual citizen in a plea for valuable support to the cause of the nation.

### *Mock Battles at the Cotton Palace*

As early as August, when the National Guard Units from Michigan and Wisconsin were just arriving, talk had already begun about incorporating them into the

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<sup>56</sup> Mary Kemendo Sendón, interview #6 by Lois E. Myers, 20 January 1994, in Waco, Texas, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, 281-2.  
<http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buioh/id/2308>

Cotton Palace programming, and a sham battle had been suggested.<sup>57</sup> By September, it was decided upon: “Arrangements are being made to have the soldiers participate in sham battles and army maneuvers of all kinds on the Cotton Palace grounds during the exposition. In this way the people of Texas will be enabled to learn all about the army boys who are going to France to fight for their country.”<sup>58</sup> This is an early instance of the unique juxtaposition of informative instruction and sympathetic appeal that would become associated with such patriotic exhibitions at the Cotton Palace and elsewhere, an attempt to provide a sense of what going on “over there” in an age before mass media. Some descriptions were bold in their efforts to elicit an emotional response:

War means the crushing of human flesh; it means the taking of human life in an inhuman manner; it causes the existence of thousands of orphans; it fills the world with thousands of sad-eyed mothers and fathers and other dear ones. War is something that makes hell seem tame and inconsequential. War is a miserable blot on the twentieth century. But it is here and must be faced.<sup>59</sup>

This emphatic description of the sham battles is a foil to the decorum of Uncle Sam’s gracious thanks to Waco for all she has done. This article couples a striking emotional blow with a tone of enlightenment and education. Rather than use a characterization, this brash tactic presents itself as a pure and truthful narrative: “It will not be show-play. It will be the real thing staged by real soldiers—the very boys who will soon be in France.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> “Football Feature for Cotton Palace is Now Suggested.” *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX), 23 August 1917, 5.

<sup>58</sup> U. S. Soldiers to Give Military Spirit,” *The Albany News* (Albany, TX), 28 September 1917, 3.

<sup>59</sup> “Soldiers in Big War Spectacle,” *The Mexia Weekly Herald* (Mexia, TX), 1 November 1917, 4.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

There are elements of intense spectacle, but they are billed as part of the realistic and true-to-life experience, helping the spectator to better understand the reality of the situation:

Intermingled and forming part of this great pageant, there will be elaborate programs of patriotic pyrotechnics—the greatest ever brought to Texas. There will be aerial salutes that can be heard for miles. Special fireworks pieces 400 feet square will be set off nightly. Among the numerous pieces will be the bombarding of the Dardanelles, showing the sinking of battleships and the blowing up of forts.

Another feature will be the “Battle in the Skies.” This consists of aerial batteries 200 feet in length and exploded by electricity, each battery discharging a mammoth aerial gun with flash light effects. These aerial batteries will be surrounded by brilliant ruby red flares, and with the loud reports of guns and blinding flashing of lightning, create a vivid up-in-the-sky battle scene that is bound to arouse the patriotism in every fibre of the bodies of the thousands who will be present.<sup>61</sup>

The final sentence presents the motivation for this audacious promotion. The purpose of all of the literal and figurative “patriotic pyrotechnics” is to inspire nationalist sentiment through an emotional fusion of awe and fear, valor and onslaught.

### *The French War Exhibit*

In other 1917 programming, an advertisement announced that “The French War Exhibit Will Be Shown For The First Time In Texas At The Texas Cotton Palace Exposition”<sup>62</sup> The exhibit, which was housed in the building which had served as the Floral Building in previous years, was described as, “showing cannons, shells, swords, airplanes, zeppelins, etc., etc...in addition to the many articles of warfare, big and little that are displayed there is also a French Trench equipped with the same fittings now being used in the great world war on the French Battle Front.” Rather than displaying the

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<sup>61</sup> “Soldiers in Big War Spectacle,” *The Mexia Weekly Herald* (Mexia, TX), 1 November 1917, 4.

<sup>62</sup> *Waco Morning News* (Waco, Texas), 28 October 1917, Part Two, 12

bouquets of cultivated chrysanthemums and specialty flowers that would typically draw florists from around the state, the building now housed the paraphernalia of war.

Admission to the exhibit cost twenty-five cents in addition to the Cotton Palace Exhibition admission. For an extra fifteen cents one could purchase a guidebook for use in studying the hundreds of pictures that covered the four walls of the hall. There were also “thousands of feet of moving pictures” which accompanied the exhibit. An assertion of authenticity was stamped on the exhibit with the declaration that, “these pictures were taken under the direction of the French government and are actual scenes of the War and men in actual fighting...It comes to Waco under the direction of the French Government. You can’t afford to miss it and every school child as well as grown person in Waco should visit the French War Exhibit.”<sup>63</sup> Despite the fact that these artifacts did not generate directly from American involvement in the war, the objects reflected the lived experience of those who had already been fighting for years, effectively narrating the existing situation into which American soldiers were deployed. To underscore this fact, the French War Exhibit was decorated with fan-draped flags from French Allied nations, including the United States (Figure 3.3).

In an editorial for the *Temple Daily Telegram*, Andrew McBeath shared his strongly patriotic response to visiting the exhibit: “The French War Exhibit is the best thing to look at when you go to the Waco Cotton Palace exposition. I saw two German airplanes in that show when I visited the exposition Saturday... Those two German airplanes got me nearer to the war than I have ever been before, and I believe more than ever that now is a good time for a German-American to quit being a German and to begin

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.



Figure 3.3. The French War Exhibit [1917]  
Source: The Texas Collection, Baylor University

being an American.”<sup>64</sup> He defends this opinion on the basis that he feels “different” after having seen the German airships in his own country and also because he “hear[s] other folks talking the same way about German-Americans and Germans who may be still in this country.”<sup>65</sup> The sentiment was increasingly common. John Higham suggests that the governmental insistence upon national solidarity and the concurrently held belief that the country was more deeply divided than ever induced a “free-floating nationalistic anxiety”

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<sup>64</sup> Andrew McBeath, “The Texas Press,” *Temple Daily Telegram* (Temple, TX), 5 November 1917, 10.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

which in turn gave anti-German sentiment a “vague, generalized form,” exemplified by McBeath’s opinions.<sup>66</sup>

### *Defining and De-Hyphenating “Americans”*

As a result of nativist sentiment, the Cotton Palace Exposition altered the programming pattern it had held annually since its rebirth in 1910. Each year, the TCPA had designated certain days for different organizations, cities and towns, or cultural identities. For instance, in 1911, the exhibition offered Norwegian Day, with a special parade and public exercises in the coliseum; Italian Day, featuring a morning parade; Bohemian Day, which had its own separate Ball in the evening featuring national costume; and German Day, featuring a German Ball and German Queen.<sup>67</sup> These special programs within the exposition continued to develop more features as more communities became involved in celebrating their traditional cultures at the exposition.<sup>68</sup> The tradition continued to thrive through 1916, but when the 1917 Cotton Palace program was announced, there remained dedicated days for organizations, cities, and towns, but no other nationality or culture was listed.<sup>69</sup> As Patricia Ward Wallace points out, instead of German Day, there were exhibits of captured German war trophies of the sort that had so affected Mr. McBeath.<sup>70</sup> In his editorial, McBeath also noted, “There is a French airplane

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<sup>66</sup> John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 197-8.

<sup>67</sup> “Program of Days for Cotton Palace,” *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX), 24 October 1911, 2.

<sup>68</sup> “West to Close Up and Come En Masse to Cotton Palace,” *Waco Morning News* (Waco, TX), 16 November 1915, 8.

<sup>69</sup> “Sixteen Days of Amusement and Education,” *The Mexia Weekly Herald* (Mexia, TX), 1 November 1917, 6.

<sup>70</sup> Wallace, *Our Land, Our Lives*, 148.

there, too, but as France is our best loved ally, I was not so much interested in that machine,” suggesting that the allure of the exhibit was to define and foment hostility toward “the enemy” in an anti-German counterpoint to pro-American narrative.

*1918-The Cotton Palace becomes a “War Theatre”*

*George Creel—Programming the Public*

The Secretary of War, Newton Baker, noted, “The whole business of mobilizing the mind of the world so far as American participation in the war was concerned was in a sense the work of the Committee on Public Information,” or CPI.<sup>71</sup> The man responsible for motivating that mobilization was George Creel, Chairman of the CPI for its duration during World War I. In evaluating Creel’s work with the CPI, James Mock and Cedric Larsen recall the work of Harold Lasswell, summarizing his principal goals as “1. To mobilize hatred against the enemy. 2. To preserve the friendship of allies. 3. To preserve the friendship and, if possible, to procure the cooperation of neutrals. 4. To demoralize the enemy.”<sup>72</sup> There are a number of interpretations as to the purpose and nature of the CPI’s work during the war years. The committee was charged with handling, processing, and dispensing a valuable commodity to American citizens—information. Despite numerous allegations to the contrary, Chairman Creel maintained that the CPI did not censor information, although a voluntary censorship was in place ostensibly for the

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<sup>71</sup> George Creel, *How We Advertised America; The First Telling of the Amazing Story of the Committee on Public Information that Carried the Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920), xiii.

<sup>72</sup> James R. Mock, and Cedric Larson, *Words That Won the War: The Story of the Committee on Public Information, 1917-1919* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1939), ix.

security of the troops and of the nation. Others, such as Mock and Larsen, observe his purpose as being principally propagandist and secondarily censorial.

According to Creel himself, “the work that is carried on by the Committee on Public Information is not a censorship and never has been a censorship. It is a medium of expression. It is the medium through which the government is trying to bring home to all the people of the world what America means and what we fight for.”<sup>73</sup> In this aim, Creel was instrumental in developing and promoting cohesive national narratives. According to Mock and Larson, Creel “helped to produce the 1917 temper in which the tossing about of symbols became a substitute for an intellectual transaction, and in which people thought together and thought in stereotypes,” indicating the conscious use of symbolic capital as a unifying commodity to be promoted for mass consumption.<sup>74</sup> In Creel’s words, “This fight we are making all over the world today, this fight for public opinion, is a fight that is not going to be won until every man, woman and child in the United States here at home is made to realize that they are called to the colors as much as the sailor and soldier.”<sup>75</sup> It is this role of programming the public opinion on the home front that brought George Creel’s work directly to Waco and the Cotton Palace Exposition.

### *The United States Government War Exposition*

The War Exposition was a grand exhibit with a humble origin. Creel had collaborated with thirty-five state fairs and expositions throughout early 1918 to tour an exhibit of three rail cars of war-related material. Upon being questioned as to the worth of

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<sup>73</sup> George Creel, “Public Opinion in War Time,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 78, Mobilizing America’s Resources for the War (July 1918), 191. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1014269>

<sup>74</sup> James R. Mock, and Cedric Larson, *Words That Won the War*, 12.

<sup>75</sup> George Creel, “Public Opinion in War Time,” 191.

the project by the Chairman of the Appropriations Committee, Creel contended that, “it is our duty to work for enthusiasm and against depression. That is important not only for the family, but for the boy who is fighting at the front. We know that every letter that is written to a soldier in a pessimistic tone tends to make him a poor soldier, and it is just as much the business of war to keep the home happy and ardent as it is to maintain courage on the firing-line.”<sup>76</sup> Creel was consequently awarded a \$5,000 budget for War Expositions and was contacted soon thereafter to provide an exhibit for the annual convention of the Associated Advertising Clubs, held in San Francisco in July 1918. The greatly expanded collection of exhibits then traveled to Los Angeles before finally moving to the Chicago lakefront, where the two-week long exposition rivaled the World’s Fair. A sham battle was staged at each of the San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Chicago expositions, but thereafter the War Exposition was unable to secure troops from the army and navy for the purpose of the mock battles and discontinued the feature.<sup>77</sup>

Table 3.1 demonstrates the order in which this format of the War Exposition arrived at the fifteen cities on its route, then ranks each stop by total income received. According to Creel’s *How We Advertised America*, the source of this data, tickets to the exposition were sold for fifty cents along the Pacific coast (but were redeemable for a twenty-five cent War Saving Stamp at the gate in an effort to cultivate the WSS habit in that region); elsewhere tickets were sold in advance for twenty-five cents and to children for two and a half cents. When organized by total income, Chicago is an obvious outlier, but a clear pattern emerges. The five cities which collected the least amount of income were all in the South—in fact, they were the *only* southern cities on the route. There was

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<sup>76</sup> Creel, *How We Advertised America*, 143.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

a disparity of \$20,725.82 between the most profitable southern exhibit and the least profitable northern exhibit, suggesting that perhaps conscription was not the only clearly divided regional sentiment during the war.<sup>78</sup>

Table 3.1. War Exposition Cities by Order of Arrival and Income

Order of Performance	#	Order by Total Income	Total Income
San Francisco	1	Chicago	\$583,731.24
Los Angeles	2	Cleveland	\$167,355.51
Chicago	3	Pittsburgh	\$147,804.16
Cleveland	4	Cincinnati	\$66,541.20
Waco	5	Los Angeles	\$65,375.75
Pittsburgh	6	Detroit	\$63,470.74
Kansas City	7	Buffalo	\$60,354.27
Cincinnati	8	San Francisco	\$54,274.80
Buffalo	9	Toledo	\$50,003.02
St. Louis	10	Milwaukee	\$49,372.02
New Orleans	11	Kansas City	\$28,646.20
Toledo	12	St. Louis	\$23,570.40
Detroit	13	Houston	\$22,684.05
Houston	14	Waco	\$16,904.70
Milwaukee	15	New Orleans	\$14,439.20

Source: George Creel, *How We Advertised America; The First Telling of the Amazing Story of the Committee on Public Information that Carried the Gospel of Americanism to Every Corner of the Globe* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920), 146-7.

### *The Government War Exposition at the Texas Cotton Palace*

There was a great deal of anticipation in the newspapers for the government exhibit's arrival as part of the Cotton Palace exposition. The fact that the War Expo did not arrive as a standalone exposition seems to be an element unique to its presentation at

<sup>78</sup> Keith proposed that the opposition to the draft was ideological among the former states of the Confederacy. These numbers have not been analyzed in comparison to relative population, which may be a factor in the disparity, but the remarkable division between receipt income in the north and south seems significant regardless.

Waco. In fact, the two expositions seem to have complemented and augmented one another in an interesting symbiosis. Five months before the opening of the Cotton Palace Exposition, a local article suggested that the government valued the Cotton Palace as a vehicle for the traveling exhibit to reach as many people as possible, and that, “the Texas Cotton Palace this fall, instead of being curtailed or eliminated entirely because of the war, will because of its relative importance and the opportunity that it presents to reach thousands upon thousands of people, be many times larger and many times more attractive and more important than ever before in its history.”<sup>79</sup> The article further underscores the value assigned to the Cotton Palace specifically as an agent of instruction: “never before in the history of expositions has the necessity for educational purposes been so great. The Cotton Palace is regarded as the most important activity in connection with the winning of the war. Its function is to promote a larger production, improve the quality of all farm products, and encourage better methods of agriculture.”<sup>80</sup> Thus, the Allied War Exhibit was not solely concerned with the artifacts of war but with many facets of the war effort and distributing information to citizens as broadly and as consistently as possible.

The newspaper reports made it clear that the government intended to use attractions to lure as many local citizens as possible to the educational exhibits, including those from the War Department, Navy Department, Agricultural Department, Department of the Interior, U.S. Food Administration, Department of Commerce’s Bureau of

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<sup>79</sup> “Government Is Getting Behind Cotton Palace,” *The Waco News Tribune* (Waco, TX) 9 June 1918, 5.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

Fisheries, and more.<sup>81</sup> Many of exhibits that were initially promoted were related to agricultural information and training. A working plan of the food conservation exhibit alone consisted of a thirty-four page document delivered to the TCPA by the U.S. Government.<sup>82</sup> For those not attracted by the government exhibit's movie reels depicting soldiers, farmers, conservation, national parks, and highways, the TCPA offered an additional incentive to attract patrons—free vaudeville shows from high-quality circuits would be running continuously in the Coliseum at no additional charge.<sup>83</sup>

### *King Cotton's Abdication to Queen Columbia*

#### *The Silver Queen of 1917*

The Texas Cotton Palace had begun the tradition of having a coronation for an annual King and Queen with an elaborate court pageant in 1914. However, there were some key differences that came about in 1917. First and foremost, this was the debut gala event in the brand new Coliseum for which the YMBL and TCPA had worked so tirelessly raising stock subscriptions earlier in the year. Also, the queen had heretofore been announced in advance, but this year the organizer, Mrs. Edgar Witt, kept the queen's identity a closely guarded secret. The mystery of the queen and subsequent fanfare of her reveal on stage became increasingly theatrical in succeeding years.

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<sup>81</sup> "Govt to Send Exhibits," *The Waco News Tribune* (Waco, TX) 17 June 1918, 5; "World's Stomach and its Demands to be Outlined," *The Comanche Chief* (Comanche, TX) 20 September 1918, 13.

<sup>82</sup> "Govt Is Getting Behind Cotton Palace," *The Waco News Tribune* (Waco, TX) 9 June 1918, 5.

<sup>83</sup> "Vaudeville for Cotton Palace," *The Waco News Tribune* (Waco, TX) 30 June 1918, 12.

The 1917 coronation began when a choral procession of soldiers was announced with a fanfare of trumpets. After the king, his guards, the princesses, and their escorts had all entered, there was yet another flourish:

Buglers from the Innes Band heralded the approach of the remaining members of the court while a detachment of soldiers from the 127<sup>th</sup> Field Artillery and the 107<sup>th</sup> Engineer Corps marched in and took their designated places. Fresh from the combat of western battlefronts, French soldiers dressed in royal blue and scarlet uniforms, stood in dramatic contrast beside the somber, khaki-clad American soldiers. There were those present who declared they could detect in the faces of the battle-seasoned French soldiers, expressions which could only have been the result of actual warfare.<sup>84</sup>

The Queen then made her entrance, kneeling before the king as the person portraying the archbishop crowned her and the Camp MacArthur soldiers sang “God Save the Queen.”<sup>85</sup>

The dance program of sixteen contemporary songs was a mix of popular tin pan alley music including wartime songs such as, “It’s Time for Every Boy to be a Soldier,” “Pack Your Troubles in Your Old Kit Bag,” “I’ve Got the Army Blues,” and “I’ll Come Sailing Home to You.”<sup>86</sup>

### *Queen Columbia in 1918*

The Queen of the Year, Columbia, was presented as the Goddess of Liberty over the 1918 Cotton Palace Court. The great hall was decorated with flags from a number of countries hanging from the ceiling and draping the stage and private boxes. The United

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<sup>84</sup> Barnes, *The Texas Cotton Palace*, 56.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> There were also a number of songs referencing Dixie or the South, such as “Mammy’s Little Coal Black Rose,” “And They Called it Dixieland,” “She’s Dixie All the Time,” and “How’s Every Little Thing in Dixie.” Although at first it would seem to suggest a correlation between an increase in national patriotism and a rising recurrence of regional patriotism, these “Back-to-Dixie” songs were actually popular songs of the day. They were generally written by northerners in Tin Pan Alley, many of whom had never been to the South. This popularization of Old South culture and iconography by non-Southerners is examined in: Karen L Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South was Created in Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2011), 18.

States flag was used as a backdrop for the coronation, and below the dais were arranged chairs for the out-of-town guests who represented states in the union. There was no King Cotton that year. The ceremony opened when the Herald announced General John Hartman the commanding officer of Camp MacArthur.<sup>87</sup> His escorts preceded him down the aisle, standing at attention and saluting his approach to the place of honor usually reserved for King Cotton. The second fanfare of trumpets announced Columbia's attendants, who were the season's debutantes. Columbia and the General received the duchesses, maids and princesses who were all escorted by officers in khaki.

Columbia's dress was fashioned classically with an American shield applied to the bodice and a silver cap. According to Mrs. Sendón's recollections, "The [1918] queen didn't wear a regal costume like a queen. She was dressed as the Goddess of Liberty. And it was some kind of a flowing garment. She had a tri-colored hat on her head and a flag somewhere, but it was not the elaborate scene we had had before, but this was the military theme."<sup>88</sup> When asked how the dress compared to the usually sequined and ornate dresses of the Queen's Ball, she explained, "This was very plain. It was just, well, it suited the situation, the war situation. And the Goddess of Liberty, she had all of her things that she held, and a wand in her hand. It was a pretty show. They sang—before the ball started they had a few minutes of singing the national anthem and that sort of thing. And that took care of that. After that, and until the war was over, there was always a little bit of the military in the Cotton Palace."<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Barnes, *The Texas Cotton Palace*, 60.

<sup>88</sup> Mary Kemendo Sendón, interview #7 by Lois E. Myers, 27 January 1994, in Waco, Texas, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, 297. <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buiroh/id/2308>

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 297-8.

The dance programs were distributed following the Grand March and featured a hand-painted character of Betsy Ross on the cover, complete with an American flag with a ring of thirteen colonial stars. The program for Columbia's Liberty Ball listed sixteen contemporary songs, including "Over There," "They Go Wild, Simply Wild Over Me," "My Girl from Southland," "My Belgian Rose" and "For Me and My Gal."<sup>90</sup>

### *Armistice*

Just four days after Columbia's Liberty Ball celebrated the soldiers to whom King Cotton had temporarily abdicated, the Armistice was signed. The exposition was still going on, and the celebration spilled over as the Cotton Palace became a hub of celebration. According to Sendón's recollection:

They had a big parade and the soldiers marched from Nineteenth Street, you know where that is, all the way down to Cotton Palace Park. And they had a parade with the soldiers in the parade. And you could hear those boots on that—it, oh, it was something. And they had some of the artillery, you know, they had horses and different things that they put in the parade. And they had that big parade on Armistice night and everybody went out to the Cotton Palace and that place was full of Waco. I don't think anybody was at home then. And they had a big celebration. They had fireworks. They had a sing-song. They had everything out there. That was November the eleventh, on Armistice Day. I guess it's never been celebrated in Waco like it was celebrated then.<sup>91</sup>

Throughout the war years in Waco, the farmers and laborers who had toiled so virtuously for King Cotton were, literally through conscription or figuratively through symbolism, replaced by soldiers who fought valiantly for Queen Columbia. In the government's efforts to encourage patriotic and nationalist sentiment, the Texas Cotton Palace not only provided a centralized venue for government-sponsored war exhibitions, but it used the

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<sup>90</sup> Historic Waco Foundation. HWF.3818a-b. "Columbia's Liberty Ball." The Historic Waco Foundation has this dance program in their archive, filled with the names of Lieutenants, Captains, and Majors with whom the bearer had promised to dance.

<sup>91</sup> Mary Kemendo Sendón, interview by Lois E. Myers, 201-202.

allure of popular entertainment to draw as many people as possible to the site. Once there, it was impossible to avoid the exhibits, reenactments, and visual rhetoric designed to encourage popular support of American involvement in the war. In exchange for the government sponsorship that allowed the Texas Cotton Palace to not only survive but to thrive during the war, the iconic characterization of King Cotton and the pastoral sentiment dedicated to the staple he represented gave way to patriotic veneration of the symbols and soldiers representing America.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Pageantry and Power (1919-1930)

#### *Introduction*

After the war, Waco emerged as a city more keenly aware of national culture. The transportation and media which had helped to unite the country during the war now aided in the proliferation of postwar consumer culture. The 1920s became an era of consumption and privilege as revolutions in technology brought labor-saving electrical appliances into the home; mass production made automobiles more affordable; and advertising, film, and radio mediated and disseminated changes in the new national culture. As Daniel Bell indicates, “taken all together, mass consumption meant the acceptance, in the crucial area of life-style, of the idea of social change and personal transformation, and it gave legitimacy to those who would innovate and lead the way, in culture as well as in production.”<sup>1</sup> Mass consumption and its correlating social ideals of class and privilege became an increasingly important force in the culture of the Waco Cotton Palace. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the extravagant revelry of the Queen’s Ball.

Throughout the 1920s, the increasingly elaborate coronation ceremonies and royal courts of the Texas Cotton Palace Queen’s Ball identified the social and cultural leaders within the local community by performatively correlating them with exotic characters of historical power and virtue. As the iconography of the Queen’s Ball increasingly distanced it from King Cotton’s flagging agrarian authority in favor of elegance and

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 66.

consumer culture, the Queen was ultimately given the social and symbolic authority to define virtue. While the narrative of the Queen's Ball delineated social strata and apotheosized the local elite in a progressively performative manner, the Texas Cotton Palace continued to diversify its offerings to include contemporary popular culture, a renewed emphasis on farm life and livestock, and the virtues of good breeding.

### *Waco and the Cotton Palace Enter the Roaring Twenties*

Waco's population grew from 26,425 in 1910 to 38,500 in 1920, an increase of more than 45%.<sup>2</sup> The spirit of reform which had been prevalent in the prior decade took a decidedly fundamentalist tone in the 1920s, adding members to the ranks of the Ku Klux Klan. According to Waco-based historian Roger N. Conger, "between 1900 and 1930 the racial composition of the city changed as rural blacks moved to Waco in search of better jobs and educational opportunities. By the 1920s a black middle class had begun to appear in the city. Perhaps partially in response to this development, Waco became a center of Ku Klux Klan activity and influence during the 1920s."<sup>3</sup> With their numbers and their influence, Klan members boldly held picnics and parades attended by thousands, boycotted businesses that were owned by minorities or that did not display a

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Fourteenth Census Of The United States: 1920 Census Records, Population, Volume 3. Composition and characteristics of the population by states." [http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41084484v3\\_TOC.pdf](http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/41084484v3_TOC.pdf); "Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Census Records, Population, Volume 3. Reports by states, Part 2. Montana-Wyoming." [http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/10612982v3p2\\_TOC.pdf](http://www2.census.gov/prod2/decennial/documents/10612982v3p2_TOC.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Roger N. Conger, "Waco, TX," Handbook of Texas Online (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hdw01>). Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

card indicating it as a Klansman-owned business, and self-identified their presence in the community as a source of morality and purity.<sup>4</sup>

The 1920s saw radical change across the nation in the transition to a consumer culture, the prohibition of alcohol, and the victory of the women's suffrage movement with the ratification of the nineteenth amendment. The role of women during wartime had helped garner support for women's voting rights, and the "Petticoat Lobby" promoted a number of social reforms. As urbanization continued, increasing not only the total population but also the number of minorities living in the city, the rural blackland prairie enjoyed a postwar cotton boom, relying on tenant farmers and immigrants to provide the intensive labor required. Despite unpredictable market fluctuations, overall cotton production across the state doubled over the course of the decade from three million to nearly six million bales.<sup>5</sup> Throughout a decade which saw the overproduction of King Cotton provoke diversification campaigns and acreage cuts under the authority of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, those who attended the Texas Cotton Palace became increasingly enthralled with the ornate and mythic pageantry of the "royalty" of Waco as the Queen's coronation ceremony departed from agrarian symbolism in favor of cosmopolitan fantasy.

### *Court Masques and Symbolism*

Social events and balls proliferated in the Texas Cotton Palace from the time of its reinstatement in 1910. Throughout the course of a single annual exposition's

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<sup>4</sup> Patricia Ward Wallace, *Waco: Texas Crossroads*, (Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor Publications: 1983), 56-9.

<sup>5</sup> Norman D. Brown, "Texas in the 1920s," Handbook of Texas Online (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/npt01>). Uploaded on June 15, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

programming, there might be an Opening Night Ball, a Bal Masque, an Elks Ball, a Grand Ball, a Society Ball, and a Business League Trade Ball, all catering to different elements of Waco's populace.<sup>6</sup> There was not a consistent pattern of coronations and courts among them, nor was there a comprehensive annual theme. That began to change with the coronation and Queen's Ball of 1914, the first year that "King Cotton" and his Queen would preside over a royal court composed of duchesses from towns and cities across the state, princesses chosen from among Waco's debutantes, and a number of additional escorts and attendants. The public coronation was followed by a grand march and the Queen's Ball, which was only accessible by invitation. After 1914, this remained the basic composition of each annual coronation and Queen's Ball, with all of the subsequent royal court pageants featuring a unique theme and becoming increasingly more elaborate and extravagant in design and pageantry, especially after the austere patriotism of the war years. During the 1920s, the Queen of Waco, Queen Cotton, or Queen of the Year, as she was variably known, became the most iconic character of the Cotton Palace Exposition.

The Texas Cotton Palace Queen's Ball and coronation ceremonies of the 1920s are reminiscent of court masques and royal entry pageants which flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—historical, mythical, or allegorical presentations composed of music, costume, and spectacle which were given single performances as gestures of loyalty to nobility. In his analysis of "Ben Jonson and the Limits of Courtly Panegyric," Martin Butler asserts that court masques were not simply flattering frivolity, but instead "promulgated the values and agendas of Stuart kingship, and evoked admiration for a dynasty dedicated to peace, stability, and prosperity. They represented

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<sup>6</sup> Barnes, *The Texas Cotton Palace*, 26-29.

the nation as happily unified under wise, rational, and benign monarchs, and they validated Stuart rule by projecting stupendous images of all-competent sovereignty.”<sup>7</sup> Masques thus imbued the Stuart dynasty with the iconography of kingship, which symbolically reinforced and demonstrated the station of these rulers before the court. Butler further contends that, “Court protocol and its lavish festivals were signs that the Stuarts were a modern, forward-looking, cosmopolitan dynasty, capable of competing on equal terms with Bourbon and Habsburg.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the Queen’s Ball coronation pageants promoted Waco as a sophisticated city among both local and visiting members of privileged society. The spectators of a court masque “were drawn from the social elites from which the crown chose its officials and magistrates, who sat in parliament, and channeled royal authority into the realm at large. They were thus an important point of contact between the crown and its political class, cementing their bonds of loyalty and outlook,” according to Butler.<sup>9</sup> He further notes that masques concurrently offered an opportunity to recognize and honor the representatives of other countries, whether they were visiting or in residence as ambassadors.

In summary, the functions of masque culture are identified as “binding the court together in relationships of dependence and obligation, of representing the monarch to the political nation at large, and of stimulating confidence in the values with which he sought

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Butler, “Ben Jonson and the Limits of Courtly Panegyric,” in *Culture and Politics in Early Stuart England*, edited by Kevin Sharpe and Peter Lake (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 91-2.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Butler, *The Stuart Court Masque and Political Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

to have his government associated.”<sup>10</sup> Again, the Waco court paralleled these purposes, bringing its members together in a hierarchical structure which was then performed for the community at large as a means of symbolically legitimizing the existing social stratification to the local populace while demonstrating the importance and value of the city to outsiders. As it progressed, the Cotton Palace coronation placed less emphasis on King Cotton, abandoning the symbolism of cotton altogether as the annual themes increasingly portrayed the monarchs as well-known historic or legendary figures. Conversely, as the premise of each coronation grew more exotic, the Queen became increasingly significant in the symbolic festivities.

*“Virtuous Womanhood” as Elite Status Symbol and Mercantile Stimulus*

Cynthia Kierner’s 1996 study of “Genteel Balls and Republican Parades: Gender and Early Southern Civic Rituals, 1677-1826” examines an event with a number of similar characteristics to the Texas Cotton Palace. Kierner demonstrates in her article that “civic balls accentuated the cultural distance between gentry and common folk by providing elites with a stage on which to display publicly the accoutrements of gentility” in the American South as early as a century or two before the Texas Cotton Palace Balls were staged.<sup>11</sup> This precedent similarly applies the principles of the European court masques to a Southern United States community with a stratified populace. The elite women chosen as the Cotton Palace Queen and court were generally young debutantes of Waco society—virtuous, educated, and cosmopolitan. Kierner further notes that the

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Butler, “Ben Jonson and the Limits of Courtly Panegyric,” 92.

<sup>11</sup> Cynthia A Kierner, “Genteel Balls and Republican Parades: Gender and Early Southern Civic Rituals, 1677-1826.” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 104, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 188.

proliferation of civic balls in the South coincided with “the appearance of sentimentalized ideals of virtuous womanhood, applied primarily to elite women,” and “that women's public visibility stimulated unprecedented demand among elites for fashionable feminine clothing and accessories” from local merchants<sup>12</sup> These occurrences establish a historic precedent for the complex connections between the society-elite female participants of the Texas Cotton Palace Queen’s Ball, the mercantile-elite business class who were directors of the Texas Cotton Palace Association, and the advertisements for fashionable dresses—suitable for attending the Queen’s Ball—posted by those directors to increase patronage for their dry goods stores.

Daniel Bell identifies such advertising as playing a major role in 1920s domestic culture, contending that more than just stimulating consumers’ desires, ads changed their habits by offering an ever-changing guide how to live “better:” Though at first the changes were primarily in manners, dress, taste, and food habits, sooner or later they began to affect more basic patterns: the structure of authority in the family, the role of children and young adults as independent consumers in the society, the pattern of morals, and the different meanings of achievement in the society.”<sup>13</sup> Thus, advertising lent itself to demonstrating the “correct” way to live, which ultimately involved increasing consumption. Bell further identifies that, “the ‘new capitalism’ (the phrase was first used in the 1920s) continued to demand a Protestant ethic in the area of production — that is, in the realm of work — but to stimulate a demand for pleasure and play in the area of

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 69.

consumption.”<sup>14</sup> This created a widening divide between the old and new national cultures, hastened by mass media which only contributed to the loss of the older value system’s social and symbolic capital.

*Performing Hierarchy and Hegemony: Waco and Taunton*

The Texas Cotton Palace had previously presented unifying narratives of a city allegiant first to King Cotton and then to Columbia while juxtaposing the iconography of power with a virtuous base. King Cotton was represented in the context of the noble farmer and his bales of cotton on parade, while Columbia was presented by brave uniformed officers in a sea of khaki and American flags. Concurrently, these events had also exhibited demonstrations of difference which identified specific social standing and sub-orders within the community. This delineation was brought to the forefront with the increasing opulence of the Queen’s Ball throughout the 1920s, as it framed desirable social and symbolic commodities such as female beauty, cultured elegance, and evident wealth. On the performative practice of “framing,” Victor Turner writes:

To frame is to discriminate a sector of sociocultural action from the general ongoing process of a community’s life. It is often *reflexive*, in that, to “frame,” a group must cut out a piece of itself for inspection (and retrospection). To do this, it must create — by rules of exclusion and inclusion — a bordered space and a privileged time within which images and symbols of what has been sectioned off can be “relived,” scrutinized, assessed, revalued, and, if need be, remodeled and rearranged.<sup>15</sup>

The Queen’s Ball, as it was performed from 1919-1930, provided a means of framing a select group of elite society in a way that legitimized their civic status and reinforced the (re)allocation of capital.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>15</sup> Victor Turner, and Edie Turner, “Performing Ethnography,” in *The Performance Studies Reader*, edited by Henry Bial (New York: Routledge, 2004), 266.

In his 1999 article, “Performing Power: Local Politics and the Taunton Pageant of 1928,” Michael Woods offers an excellent analysis of very similar phenomenon within an English Parkerian pageant of the same era. The Taunton pageant was a historical public drama typical of the sort popularized in Britain and abroad in the early twentieth century by Louis Napoleon Parker. These pageants “frequently became the focal point of a programme of events, including exhibitions, balls and processions.”<sup>16</sup> Woods identifies a number of strategies extant in this public pageantry which engendered support for established political structures. These strategies include 1) defining members of the elite class by “presenting them as privileged through ritual, language and socially-exclusive events,” 2) demonstrating the elite’s power “through the occupation of symbolically significant space,” and 3) using public drama to “demonstrate the power and autonomy of a town and its institutions, both to internal and external observers.”<sup>17</sup> He further notes that “in enacting these strategies, public drama combines elements of ritual, spectacle and carnival.”<sup>18</sup> Many of the local social, political, and economic structures that Woods observes in 1928 Taunton correlate with those of Waco in the same period, encouraging a comparison of these respective community discourses of power and hegemony despite differences in their forms of public narrative performance and their larger national context.

The Texas Cotton Palace Queen’s Ball clearly demonstrated all of the strategies that Woods identifies as reinforcing hegemonic superstructures in the Taunton pageant.

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Woods, “Performing Power: Local Politics and the Taunton Pageant of 1928.” *Journal of Historical Geography* 25, no. 1 (January 1999): 57-74.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

First, the event defined members of the elite class through a socially-exclusive ritualistic performance which included specialized language to refer to those members (e.g. “Eleanor of the House of Cameron”). Furthermore, the Queen’s Ball allowed for the demonstration of the power of the elite class by occupying a space which was symbolically significant as a civic symbol and icon—the coliseum was continually being rebuilt and expanded upon to provide the best possible venue—which was then made more symbolic by transforming the inside to represent a historic, exotic, or mythical setting for the ritual event. Finally, the Queen’s Ball represented the power and autonomy of Waco society to both internal and external observers by inviting and hosting a number of “outside” guests with significant social and symbolic capital. Members of society in other regions were included in the court as honored guests, but in a position that demonstrated deference to the Waco Queen, and political guests such as the governor were invited to observe this arrangement.

Michael Halloran’s “Text and Experience in a Historical Pageant: Toward a Rhetoric of Spectacle” examines the practice of observing a similar display of pageantry and concludes that the experience of such an extravagant event transforms the spectator’s role from audience to rhetor. “In gathering to witness a spectacle, I become part of it. I see not only what I came to see, but also those others who share my interest, and they in turn see me. Together we experience something, and in that shared experience is the germ of a public.”<sup>19</sup> This concept of the community engaging in the rhetoric of an event suggests that the spectacle of the Texas Cotton Palace was discursive and therefore communal among the audience in its observation of the elite.

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<sup>19</sup> S. Michael Halloran, “Text and Experience in a Historical Pageant: Toward a Rhetoric of Spectacle.” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (Autumn 2001): 6.

The superstructure of the community, upon which the iconography of King Cotton with his agrarian virtue and Columbia with her ardent patriotism had been transposed, was performatively represented in the 1920s by the Queen's Ball. The iconography of Waco's elites as royal monarchs ruling over an esteemed court was portrayed in the coliseum of the Cotton Palace, with all 10,000 seats filled. The coronation and pageant were witnessed by the front row boxes of influential local citizens as well as distinguished guests of political and social rank, behind which were rows of bentwood chairs and benches. Position within the coliseum would have determined a spectator's access to the dance floor for the invitation-only ball following the coronation in addition to establishing his or her visibility to the rest of the audience. Therefore, the event provided a leveling experience in the inclusive public witnessing of the spectacle while also demonstrating exclusivity with preferential seating positions and restricted participation in the ball following the coronation.

#### *Exoticizing the Elite: Queen's Ball Themes*

From 1919 through 1930, the pageant surrounding the Queen's coronation and the court entertainment which followed grew progressively more theatrical, with intricately decorated scenery and sumptuous costumes unifying a strong, exotic theme which supported the mythos of the royal characters portrayed by Waco's elite. Within these themes drawn from historical, mythological, and legendary characters was a strong visual allegory of power which concurrently reflected the Queen of Waco as an icon of virtue, class, and aesthetic beauty.

### *1919-Court of Flowers*

The tradition of the Queen's Ball had been turned into a spectacle of patriotism for the 1918 Cotton Palace Exposition with the King's abdication, but royal pageantry returned in 1919 with a lushly gilded Pageant of Roses. The exposition itself was in a state of post-war transition, with the return of government exhibits but also the inclusion of such famous acts as the Isadora Duncan dancers.<sup>20</sup> This state of conversion from the city's immersion in the war effort to a post-war popular culture was also reflected in a Sanger Bros. advertisement, which boasted of having "Charming Silks for Cotton Palace Gowns and Costumes" but also noted "The Remainder of Our Great Purchase of Government Blankets Goes on Sale Tomorrow at Very Low Prices."<sup>21</sup>

The Flower Fete was a means of reclaiming autonomy, as indicated by the language used on the Society page of the newspaper: "The king has summoned to his aid all those doughty men of affairs who are potent in making Waco the queen city of the Central section of the Empire state and in maintaining her prestige among the sister fair kingdoms."<sup>22</sup> This was enacted through a series of Society functions that were held in connection with the Queen's Ball but were private events hosted in the homes, hotels, and clubs of Waco— "smart little parties" such as the Queen's Tea, King's Reception Dance,

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<sup>20</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 5 October, 1919, p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 12 October, 1919, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 26 October, 1919, p. 16.

and various luncheons and dinners for visiting nobility.<sup>23</sup> These private and exclusive events contrasted with the popular public coronation.<sup>24</sup>

As for the Queen's Ball itself, Miss Camille Searcy, described as "a young girl who desires something higher and better than mere social pleasure and... has chosen dramatic art as her approach to the muses," was crowned queen amid "bowers of flowers" representing a traditional Southern garden.<sup>25</sup> Although this theme was not inherently related to a mythos of power, it represented the historical sovereignty of the region, bringing opulence and wealth and beauty back to Texas, as an article noted: "amid glitter of jewels, the assembled Texans shout her praises."<sup>26</sup>

### *1920-Egyptian Court*

The 1920 Cotton Palace Exposition brought Waco into the "Roaring Twenties" in dynamic fashion, boasting seven performances from the San Carlo Grand Opera Company to be held in the Coliseum for an additional fee, including *Carmen*, *Faust*,

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<sup>23</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 1 November, 1919, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> The Historic Waco Foundation has in its archives dance cards from both the Queen's Ball [HWF.3814a-b] and the Society Ball [HWF.3815a-b] of 1919. Both feature hand-drawn and watercolored images on the cover. The Queen's Ball cover depicts a basket of roses tied with a light green ribbon, whereas the Society Ball cover features an illustrated cotton stalk tied with a red, white, and blue ribbon. Furthermore, there were actual cotton balls glued to the watercolored stalk, providing a dimensional and tactical representation of cotton combined with patriotic colors. Although the two events featured the same band and most of the same songs and included the same guests, they offered drastically different iconography. The Society Ball, which was held off of the Cotton Palace grounds, was represented with cotton and vestiges of nationalism, the two icons previously identified with the Cotton Palace exposition in this study. Meanwhile the Queen's Ball, which was invitation-only but commenced at the culmination of the public coronation and pageant and was consequently a highly visible representation of the iconic monarchs who symbolically represented the exposition, depicted no iconography of either cotton or nationalism.

<sup>25</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 2 November, 1919, p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 31 October, 1919, p. 1.

*Aida, Madam Butterfly, Il Trovatore*, and more.<sup>27</sup> In addition to the glamour of grand opera, the princesses of the Queen's court were a draw themselves. According to an article entitled, "Princesses Enter Movie Field and Waco Gets on Silver Screen Gratis," the beauty and poise of Waco's young debutantes held mass appeal outside of the ritual space of the Ball:

Waco's princesses are so popular that the movie men are after them. Yesterday afternoon, camera representatives of the Pathé and Fox companies invaded the Texas Cotton Palace exposition grounds, managed to find the princesses together, and began "shooting" them for the news weeklies issued by these two firms. Now the pictures of the princesses and the name of Waco and the Texas Cotton Palace will go around the world together.<sup>28</sup>

Reflecting this interest in expanding the reach of Waco beyond its region, the 1920 event also broadened the province of the Queen's court. W. V. Crawford, president of the T CPA, had entreated Texas Governor W. P. Hobby to invite the governors of other states to designate young ladies to represent their home states as princesses, each with her own maid, at the Cotton Palace Queen's Ball. The participation of society girls from several states was promoted as making "the Queen's Ball and Coronation Ceremonies an event of nation-wide importance."<sup>29</sup> There was a duchess from the state of Texas and a princess from Washington D. C., who was hand-picked by the President and First Lady. The governor of Georgia nominated his niece, and the governor of Illinois named his own

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<sup>27</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 15 September, 1920, p. 8. Also, a year prior to this, *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 25 October, 1919, p. 8. Featured a sketch of yet another new coliseum constructed in 1919. It is unclear if there was a loss due to fire or why a new coliseum was necessary only two years after the \$50,000 stock sale and new coliseum construction in 1917. According to the caption, this coliseum also had seating for 10,000 but additionally was "noted all over America for its acoustic properties," boasted steam heat, and was built at a cost of \$100,000. Although there is no mention of it, the external structure is suggestive of a flyloft built into the coliseum for the rigging and "flying" of scenery. This would have also allowed for the accommodation of large-scale opera scenery.

<sup>28</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 10 November 1920, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 19 October, 1920, p. 8.

daughter as the state's princess.<sup>30</sup> In New York, the governor was said to have delegated the privilege of naming the state princess to Mrs. Astor, active member of New York Society and widow of the millionaire who had perished on the *Titanic*.<sup>31</sup> All of this contributed to a very privileged and cosmopolitan atmosphere surrounding the court of the Cotton Palace Queen, providing a near-celebrity status to the young ladies involved.

The 1920 Queen's Ball and Coronation Ceremonies boasted an Egyptian theme, perhaps inspired by the ongoing revolution in the region against British rule, with lavish decorations and detailed costumes. Queen Helen of the House of Williams, as she was known in Queen's Ball parlance, was described as "the Queen of the first exposition to gain a niche in national society."<sup>32</sup> The coliseum had been magnificently decorated as an Egyptian throne room, with hieroglyphic-inscribed columns, colorful satin cushions, and various decorative urns in the foreground of a scenic view of the pyramids. The King, Edward Marshall, was preceded on his approach to the throne by incense bearers waving their censers and performers characterizing a "Priest of the Theban Temple," pages, crown bearers, princes, and the royal jester, Holt Massey—who would later become the King of the 1927 Cotton Palace. The retinue of the Queen consisted of the visiting princesses, the court princesses, and their maids. Once the Queen was established on her throne, The Queen's Royal Dancer provided entertainment for her while the orchestra played music from their concealed location behind the balcony.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 18 July, 1920, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 15 August, 1920, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 10 November 1920, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

At the conclusion of the coronation pageant and before the Grand March, dance programs were distributed to those who would participate in the Queen's Ball: "Preceded by Little Lacy Rose Hammond and Dorothy Barton, both in beautiful costumes of Egyptian design, came a chariot drawn by a peacock, with the Little Princess Carol of the house of Kelly inside. She was dressed in a charming costume of the favored colors. The programs distributed by these tiny attendants were in jade, blue, and gold and bore Egyptian heads."<sup>34</sup> This performative and public recognition of invitation to the exclusive ball occurred at the end of the open and unrestricted coronation. Throngs of people would gather to behold the Queen's crowning and pageant, but at its conclusion they served as witnesses to those who were chosen to join the selected members of Waco society for the ball, many of which were already identified as elite by their reserved seats and boxes.

The pageantry and spectacle of this event allowed members of society to see and be seen by one another, recognizing and reinforcing the delineation of social strata. The participants of the court were defined as elite members of society by their portrayal of powerful characters which visually equated them to the monarchs of legend, venerating and even deifying them through the pageantry of power, while those spectators who were invited to join the ball gained status through their publicly demonstrated inclusion in the spectacle. While those invitees entered the symbolically significant space of the decorated coliseum, the remainder of the spectators served as witnesses to the spectacle, thereby contributing to it.

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<sup>34</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 10 November 1920, 9.

### *1921-Spanish Court*

This year, cultural entertainment was provided by Dunbar's English Opera company of Chicago, presenting light opera in English as well as offering an evening of Follies. According to an advertisement for the exposition, "The Cotton Palace last year broke all Grand Opera records for the Southwest, playing to 68,000 people at seven performances, and the American record for one performance — 11,400 persons."<sup>35</sup> People were strongly encouraged to buy their tickets in advance as "thousands" had been turned away due to sellouts the previous year.<sup>36</sup> The offering of accessible "cultural" entertainment was apparently a popular draw. Although events such as the Society Ball and the Queen's Ball were accessible by invitation only, visitors to the Cotton Palace were able to purchase inclusion and elevate their own social status for the price of an opera ticket.

Once again, the governors of all of the other states of the union were invited to select or appoint young ladies from their states to act as princesses at the coronation ceremonies. Over thirty states and the District of Columbia sent young ladies to represent them. In addition, TCPA President W. V. Crawford communicated with the State Department in Washington to issue invitations to foreign countries.<sup>37</sup> The YMBL made another one of their famous booster trips by train, but this time they went to Saltillo,

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<sup>35</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 1 October 1921, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> According to *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 21 August 1921, p. 12, an interesting cultural and technological development arose from the popularity of the Queen's Ball: "Smoke bags have been installed by President W. V. Crawford to facilitate pictures of the Royal pageant of the cotton Palace. This will be the first time smoke bags have ever been used in this section of the country and will enable [local photographer] F. A. Gildersleeve to take pictures while the ball is in progress for this purpose. A special camera has been purchased and shortly after the annual pageant comes to its kaleidoscopic climax pictures of the event will be on their way to every part of the continent."

<sup>37</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 15 May 1921, p. 1.

Mexico to extend an invitation for the municipality to nominate a duchess to the Queen's Ball.<sup>38</sup> As a consequence of the YMBL trade trip to Mexico, princesses were nominated from the Mexican Republican states of Nuevo Leon, San Luis Potosi, Morelias, Jalisco, Queretaro, and Durango, together with one from the Presidential "House of Obregon" to represent the Mexican government.<sup>39</sup> After Canada also agreed to send a representative princess, much of the publicity for the Texas Cotton Palace centered on the fact that this was to be an International Exposition. The expanded scope meant that the Cotton Palace, and by extension the people of Waco, had an opportunity to "demonstrate the power and autonomy of [the] town and its institutions," as Woods explicates as a means of reinforcing extant civic structures in his analysis of the Taunton pageant.<sup>40</sup>

Not everyone was a fan of the sort of pageantry exemplified by the Queen's Coronation and Ball. One such "old school" congressman, Manuel Herrick of Oklahoma, gained attention by attempting to legislate against any representations of royalty within live performance. Cotton Palace President W. V. Crawford responded personally and vehemently:

Associated Press quotes you as author of a bill introduced in Congress yesterday providing fine \$10,000 and imprisonment 10 to 20 years for impersonating king or queen in play, pageant, or carnival. The Texas Cotton Palace exposition, located at Waco, Texas, is the pioneer institution in the presentation for the last 13 years for the coronation of King and Queen Cotton. For the last few years princesses have been selected by the governors of practically all the states in the United States to participate in this nationally known event. We already have the appointment for the 1921 exposition of practically all of the states through the various governors, including your own state of Oklahoma, also princesses from Canada and three from Mexico. This event this year will take place on Oct. 25 in our coliseum, which seats 10,000 people, and it is my pleasure, as president of the

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<sup>38</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 24 May 1921, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 31 May 1921, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Woods, "Performing Power," 58.

exposition, to extend to you an invitation to be present and witness this affair. It will be an occasion of unparalleled beauty in both personalities and costume, and we believe that once you witness the beauty and splendor of an event of this kind that you will either withdraw your bill or fight for its adoption with renewed zest. We sincerely trust that you will accept this invitation and be our guest upon this occasion. W. V. Crawford, President of the Texas Cotton Palace Exposition.<sup>41</sup>

The inclusion of the “outside” spectators and participants of international scope in the Queen’s court is specifically used by Crawford to establish the legitimacy of Waco, the Cotton Palace, and specifically the Queen’s coronation ceremony. The bill was not passed, and there is no mention of Herrick accepting Crawford’s invitation.

The 1921 coronation ceremony, modeled after the court of Queen Isabella of Spain, featured “a quaint Spanish Plaza, canopied in green with verdant hedges and orange trees, bent under the burden of their golden fruit....In the background stood an ancient Spanish cathedral, its opened doors revealing a lace-decked altar, its silver chalices reflecting the fire of myriad candles.”<sup>42</sup> The costumes were modeled after a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Velasquez painting of Queen Isabella and Philip IV.<sup>43</sup> Eleanor Cameron, daughter of W. W. Cameron, was crowned as Queen Isabella by the Cardinal, portrayed by menswear store owner Dero Wood, as she knelt on an elegant cushion.

The dancer who provided entertainment for the Queen upon her coronation executed a Spanish dance, during which she threw a red rose into Governor Neff’s box. This gesture highlighted the presence of the high-ranking political official among the privileged section of spectators for the rest of the audience. *The Waco News-Tribune* declared that in the Grand March “democracy linked arms with autocracy” as, in

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<sup>41</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 30 September 1921, p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 26 August 1921, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

procession to the Queen's Ball, the entire court passed by the governor's box so that he could personally greet each princess and duchess.<sup>44</sup> This gesture and the phrase used to describe it support the manifestation of the Cotton Palace Queen as an icon of both the event and the city. The gesture itself is suggestive of a diplomatic meeting of heads of state, but the paratheatrical nature of the coronation event is demonstrated by the fact that the elected governor of the state, personified as "democracy" in the article, offered this recognition to the *character* of the Cotton Palace Queen, presented as "autocracy," thus publicly and performatively lending the symbolic legitimacy of his office to the characterization of power and virtue of the Cotton Palace exposition.

#### *1922-French Court*

The court of 1922 sought to replicate the lavish court of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. The coliseum doors opened at 4pm; those without reserved seats could enter at that time until the unreserved spaces were all filled. Mary Kemendo Sendón recalls that she and her friends would be sure to go early so as to get seats:

We'd get together and go as a group. We'd come home from school, and my mother would have a lunch fixed. We would go out to the Cotton Palace and take our schoolbooks. We'd find the best seats in the house, and we'd do our homework out there at the Cotton Palace. That's why we sort of grouped together so, you know, if we wanted to study together. We'd do homework, have a bite to eat, and then it was time for the ball to start. But that's how we took care of it. We always had good seats. We managed to find the best seats in the house.<sup>45</sup>

Attending as a general-admission spectator of the coronation and pageant is thus characterized as an exciting and entertaining event, despite the inability to attend the ball.

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<sup>44</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 26 October 1921, p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Mary Kemendo Sendón, interview #7 by Lois E. Myers, 27 January 1994, in Waco, Texas, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, 297.  
<http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buioh/id/2308>

Rather than focus on the exclusivity, spectators such as Sendón seemed to relish the inclusion of being present to witness the coronation of the iconic Queen.

The coliseum was designed as the “Temple of Love” for the French Court, with flower-filled urns flanking stone steps, bronze gates leading toward terraces, and a bower with marble statuary and fountain.<sup>46</sup> The coronation ceremony commenced with an opening tableau visible through a gauze curtain, featuring four former Queens and several maids of honor portraying famous beauties of the French court. The tableau was viewed through the curtain as a light in the “temple” intensified. Albert T. Clifton, the first president of both the TCPA and YMBL, had previously been announced as Cotton Palace King for the year.<sup>47</sup> The King’s retinue included the Cardinal de Rohan, as portrayed by Alan D. Sanford, and two acolytes as well as Arthur Upleger portraying the jester—he would follow the tradition established by Holt Massey and return seven years later in 1929 as King. Clotilde Brazelton was announced as queen, appearing dressed as Marie Antoinette, complete with enormous headdress and three ostrich feathers.<sup>48</sup>

She knelt before the cardinal to receive her crown and was then escorted to her throne by the King. In all, there were twenty-three duchesses from Texas towns and colleges, as well as princesses from twenty-two states and one selected by President Harding to represent Washington, D. C.. The King’s pages distributed the dance program, which featured gold medallions upon which a Marie Antoinette figure was sketched.<sup>49</sup> The costumes were quite elaborate, dripping with lace and pearls and silk. The spectacle

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<sup>46</sup>Lavonia Jenkins Barnes, *The Texas Cotton Palace*. (Waco, TX: Texian Press, 1964), 81.

<sup>47</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 1 October 1922, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 1 November 1922, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 4.

of the costumes and scenery provided a sense of opulence and powerful prominence to the members of the court, adding to the social repute and symbolic capital of those involved.

### *1923-Persian Court*

The theme of the 1923 Cotton Palace Queen's Ball and Coronation was patterned after the court of a Persian Caliph. Pauline Breustedt, a native Waco actress who had performed in New York and gained a measure of local fame, was crowned Queen Zobeida of the Persian Court. Amid the lavish decorations of oriental rugs, plush cushions, and winged facades on the architecture, Duke Lovell appeared as a scimitar-wielding genie, seemingly summoning two girls from urns. He then awakened a group of lovely maidens who were reclining around the border of a blue pool.<sup>50</sup> When J. Bruce Duncan entered in his role of Caliph Haroun-Raschid, he wore an elaborately embroidered costume which had previously been worn by Otis Skinner in his Broadway role in *Kismet*.<sup>51</sup> The Queen, attired in a Peggy-Hoyt-designed, peacock-inspired, jeweled chiffon outfit, entered borne on a palanquin supported by "ten ebony slaves" before being escorted to her throne by the Caliph.<sup>52</sup>

The program for the coronation lists the "Dramatis Personae of the Queen's Ball," listing Duncan as Caliph, Commander of the Faithful and a blank for Queen Zobeida so as to keep the tradition of secrecy before the Queen's appearance at her coronation. Further characters are the Queen's Favorites and Queen's First Favorite, High Priest,

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<sup>50</sup> *The Eagle* (Bryan, TX), 31 October 1923, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Barnes, *The Texas Cotton Palace*, 85.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

Grand Vizier, Mesrour the Ethiopian, Genii, and an extensive listing of the Princesses, Visiting Queens, Daughters of Iran representing cities and towns within Texas, and Handmaidens. Although the program lists all of the Dancers from the Persian Gardens, Water Carriers, and Spirits of the Dance, for a total of eighty-eight names recognized in the program for their participation in the court, there are no names listed under the roles of Royal Slaves of the Queen and Royal Slaves of the Princesses.<sup>53</sup> Figure 4.1, a cropped image from a court photograph, shows the Caliph and Queen on their elevated thrones bathed in a spotlight as they are attended by black, nameless “slaves.” Although framed within the conceit of the Persian pageant, the performance of slavery as part of the Cotton Palace coronation ceremony unfortunately perpetuates a narrative of racial intolerance in the South, and specifically in Waco, at a time when the Ku Klux Klan had been particularly active and prominent within the community.

#### *1924-Chinese Court*

Three days before the Chinese coronation, the *Waco News-Tribune* printed the legend which was said to have inspired the Queen’s Ball theme. According to the legend, the coronation pageant depicted Chinese Emperor Chien Lung (as personified by Clint Padgitt) and his young wife Tsu-An (portrayed by Frances Nash), who had been struck blind but regained her vision when Chien Lung pled to Buddha to restore her sight.<sup>54</sup> This legend not only justified the relative youth of the Queen but it also established her as innocent and virtuous, with divine intervention curing her sudden affliction.

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<sup>53</sup> Texas Cotton Palace Exposition Program, Coronation of King and Queen Cotton, 30 October 1923, Historic Waco Foundation, [HWF.4400].

<sup>54</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 2 November 1924, p. 3.



Figure 4.1. Queen's Coronation, Persian Court [1923]  
Source: Historic Waco Foundation

The setting for the coronation was lit with many Chinese lanterns and featured a garden full of Lotus blossoms, a fountain, and wind chimes. There was a curtain with a sinuous Chinese Dragon and a night-black curtain jeweled with fireflies. The two throne chairs sat at the base of a Buddha-like statue. According to the newspaper's description,

“First entered grotesque masques, who paraded in fanciful manner through the royal garden of the ‘Palace of the Whirling Wind’ on this evening of the coronation of Empress Tsu-An by Emperor Chien Lung, at the time of ‘Festival of the Lanterns.’”<sup>55</sup> According to the report, ascent to the throne was by way of “spirit stairs, because of the immaterial nature of spirits, they cannot walk up ordinary stairs, so glide up the Golden and Jade spirit stairway.”<sup>56</sup> The Empress circled the Coliseum in her palanquin before bowing to the cardinal directions, after which Tsu-An, as enacted by Frances Marie Nash, was crowned Queen of the Texas Cotton Palace. A Dance Chinois was executed for her pleasure, then the Guests of the Ball were presented their dance programs for the “Festival of Lanterns” by two young attendants.

It is unclear whether the visual rhetoric of black slaves bearing the Queen’s palanquin was continued in this pageant, but it is also interesting to note that while earlier pageants depicted a religious figure performing the coronation and bestowing symbolically “divine” authority upon the Queen, there was no priest figure mentioned in this pageant, only the large figure of Buddha. The printed legend told of sight being restored to the Empress upon the Emperor’s prayers on her behalf, suggesting an even more direct link with the divine than was symbolized in prior pageants.

### *1925-Byzantine Court*

Ruth McLendon was crowned as Melisanda, Empress of the East and West in the Byzantine Coronation—a seven-part pageant carrying out the conquests of the Crusaders and the restoration of Alexis I to his throne which had been usurped by infidels. The

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<sup>55</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 5 November 1924, p. 7.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

pageant culminated in the Coronation and Grand March. Doyle Eastland portrayed Alexis, Emperor of the East and West, as ships silhouetted on the horizon and a large procession of Crusaders marched to choruses recalling the fourth crusade. The Court dancers, The Hoffmanettes, descended the stairs, danced about the mosaic jeweled pools, and vanished as bronzed warriors appeared in sword dance.<sup>57</sup> Alexis entered in linked armor and a tabard bearing the lion of St. Mark's. The Empress was brought on a golden palanquin emblazoned with emblems of St. George and the Dragon. The program for this pageant suggests that the Queen was not borne by black slaves this year, as the palanquin bearers were named, and those names correlated with young men of Baylor University and Waco High School. Furthermore, the coronation became secular as the Empress was crowned by a trinity of non-religious characters: the patriarch, the Doge of Venice, and the Chancellor.<sup>58</sup>

The definite departure from black palanquin bearers happened to coincide with the attendance of Governor Miriam Ferguson and her husband, former Governor James Ferguson. During her campaign, "Ma" Ferguson had run on a platform of opposition to the Klan, and upon her election she secured an antimask law, which was subsequently overturned by the courts.<sup>59</sup> The Fergusons occupied a box seat, where they witnessed their daughter participate in the pageant as the appointed state Princess from Texas to the Queen's court. The news also provided a detailed listing of all spectators who occupied boxes at the coronation, suggesting that at this point the greatest civic interest in the

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<sup>57</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 4 November 1925, p. 1-2.

<sup>58</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 4 November 1925, p. 1-2.

<sup>59</sup> John D. Huddleston, "Ferguson, Miriam Amanda Wallace [Ma]," Handbook of Texas Online (<http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ffe06>), Uploaded on June 12, 2010. Published by the Texas State Historical Association.

pageant was who participated in the court, who attended as audience members, and descriptions of the spectacular costume and scenery designs.

This was also the inaugural year in which “scores of young ladies from Waco and surrounding communities...entered in the cotton dress ball. Dresses fashioned by hand and made of cotton will be worn. Over 150 dollars in prizes for the best costumes will be given.”<sup>60</sup> The cotton dress ball coincided with the all-state farmers’ free barbecue during the day. A news article proclaimed, “A whole herd of beef is to be served to the tens of thousands of farmers who are sure to attend.” There was also special recognition of John W. McFarland, winner of the \$1000 dollar “more cotton on fewer acres” contest.”<sup>61</sup> In these events, cotton and agrarianism can be seen returning to the rhetoric of the cotton palace in new forms, but instead of aligning with the elite and business interests, it became a symbol of the working-class farm laborer. Cotton no longer conferred elevated status but was instead an element of Bakhtinian leveling. Any girl who sewed her own dress of cotton could enter in the ball, and there was open, informal, free dancing after the awards were conferred. Furthermore, the Cotton Dress Ball coincided with the barbecue feast, which offered free meals of freshly barbecued livestock for all farmers attending the Cotton Palace from anywhere within the state. While the reigning monarchs of the exposition, nominally King and Queen Cotton, wore silk and sequins and were visually equated to divinely-appointed royalty, the celebration of cotton was being performed by an open and inclusive group of much more modest means.

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<sup>60</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 1 November 1925, 28.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

### *1926-Napoleonic Court*

Willard Wigley was selected king of the Napoleonic Court. According to the *Waco News-Tribune*, “Mister Wigley’s popularity, socially and in the business world, together with his numerous friends in all walks of life, at once stamped him as the unanimous choice of the directors to receive the highest honor within the gift of the Cotton Palace.”<sup>62</sup> Kate Ross Padgitt was crowned as the Queen, portraying Maria Annunciata Caroline, wife of the King of Naples. The entire coronation scene represented a fete in honor of San Gennaro, patron saint of Naples, opening with Neapolitan peasants performing folk dances and Italian songs. It was reported that “during the coronation heavenly voices were heard, and a glimpse of angels surrounded by blue was given.”<sup>63</sup> A conspicuously empty seat remained in the coronation hall, a dedication to the great Napoleon who required the mark of respect in every Palace of his empire. It could be construed that not only did the empty throne indicate the absence of Napoleon, to whom the court held fealty, but also the absence of King Cotton, as his power had been symbolically stripped and replaced with Kings of legend.

An example of the paratheatrical role-playing in which the Cotton Palace court engaged can be seen through stationary associated with the 1926 King of the Year. The Dance Program for the Queen’s Ball following the coronation ceremony bore a simple and elegant wreathed monogram of “N” for Napoleon, the character of the King. Two days later, following the separate Society Ball in which Waco’s debutantes were presented to society, the newly-crowned monarchs of Waco hosted a Ball for the young

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<sup>62</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 10 October 1926, 1.

<sup>63</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 3 November 1926, 8.

ladies. The invitation for this event was printed on stationery that was identical to the monogrammed dance programs, except that it bore a “W” for Wigley, who portrayed the King. Thus, the public presentation and coronation ceremonies were enacted in complete character, but the status of the King and Queen was also recognized and observed at private society events where they were identified and addressed by their given names. This suggests that although the separation between character and identity was clearly recognized, this doubled role produced an ambiguous liminal state between the identity of elite citizen and symbolic monarch.

On the other end of the social spectrum, the free farmers’ barbecue and the Cotton Dress Ball with prizes and informal dancing were held again in 1926. Those events, and the added feature of a rodeo show in the afternoon, seemed to be very well received: “Yesterday at the Texas Cotton Palace was a typical farmers’ day when the activities and different events were turned completely over to the enjoyment of the rural people.”<sup>64</sup> Again, it is the “rural” people who are reclaiming the symbolism of cotton and of agrarian life.

### *1927-Court of Neptune*

The year of 1927 brought first-class entertainment to the Texas Cotton Palace. The Follies played at the exposition, featuring Ruth St. Denis and Ted Shawn with their Denishawn dancers. As Barnes observes, “Part of the genius of the Cotton Palace, no doubt, lie in the fact that for everyone, regardless of age or taste, there was an attraction.”<sup>65</sup> The Cotton Dress Ball continued gaining in popularity as well. In the

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<sup>64</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 5 November 1926, p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Barnes, *The Texas Cotton Palace*, 105.

competition for the best cotton dress, Barnes notes, “The winner was really ‘Queen Cotton’ for a day.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, it seems that the Queen of Cotton was not the feature of the coronation and the Queen pictured on the front page of the newspaper. Queen Cotton was the monarch of the “common folk” and remained accessible to anyone from any socioeconomic status.

At the hallmark event of the Queen’s Ball, there was no cotton to be found. Holt Massey ruled as the King this year, as the merman King Neptune, while Bonibel Glasgow was named Queen Amphitrite in an oceanic setting within the coliseum.<sup>67</sup> The intended effect was of a cavernous grotto, and the court was splendidly and fantastically attired, based on a panoramic photo of the Court of Neptune (see Figure 4.2).<sup>68</sup> The invitation for the 1927 coronation was embossed in gold on iridescent paper and bore the following verse:

From his throne in coral caverns, in the depths of ocean blue  
King Neptune hurls his mandate, waves his golden trident true.  
Fain would he urge your presence lovely sirens, sea nymphs all,  
Come where luring mermaids revel or the crystal caves enthrall.  
Mid scenes of emerald splendor in grottoes deep of opal hue  
Where starfish, sea anemones strew the billowy sea anew.  
From mists of dewdrops pearly, Amphitrite fair ascends,  
Crowned as Queen of Sirens ere the ocean pageant ends.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 106-8.

<sup>68</sup> The six young girls in shimmering costumes are dressed as goldfish and served as train-bearers.

<sup>69</sup> Invitation, Cotton Palace Queen’s Coronation, 1 November 1927. [HWF.5137] Historic Waco Foundation.

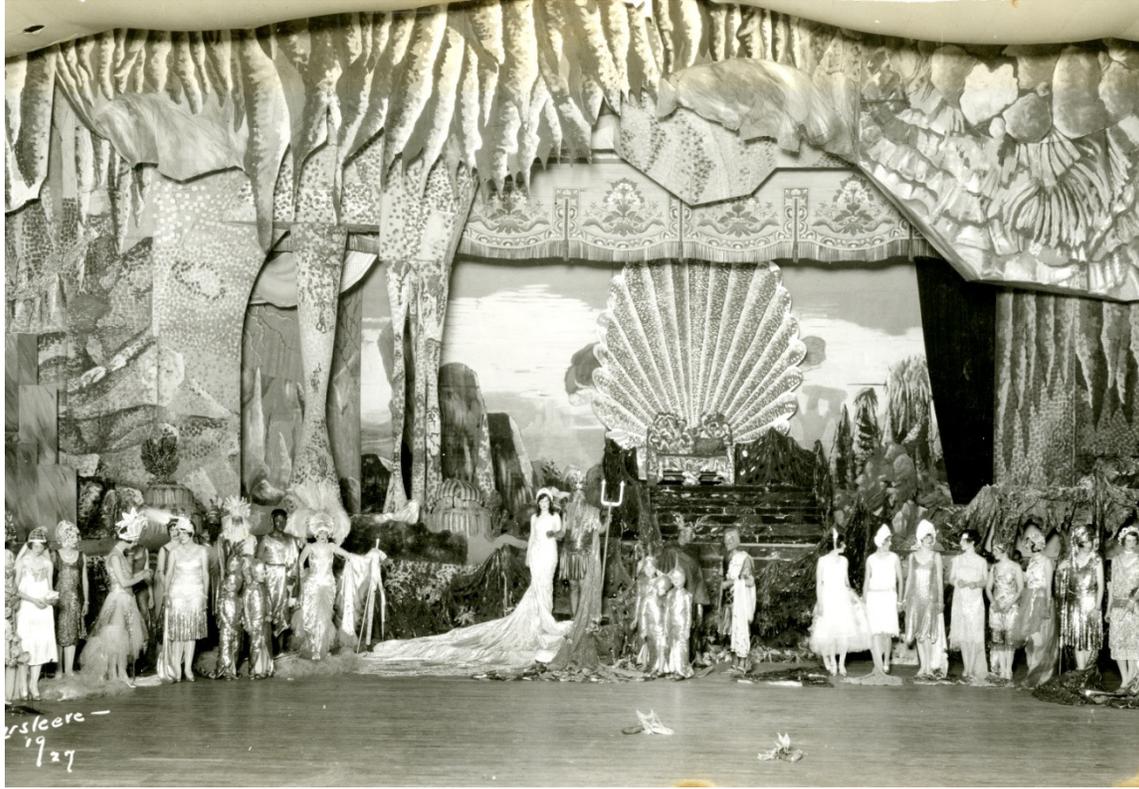


Figure 4.2. Queen's Coronation, Court of Neptune, cropped [1927]  
Source: Texas Collection, Baylor University

### *1928-Mayan Court*

Once more, the Cotton Dress Ball was well-attended, expanding to include a McLennan County Parade and Pageant. The Cotton Palace was on the front lines of the diversification movement as well, with a record set for the dairy cattle exhibit.<sup>70</sup> As the Cotton Dress Ball and related events grew more inclusive and broad in agrarian scope, the Queen's Ball was becoming increasingly exclusive and theatrical. Queen Margaret Jordan was crowned as "Kin Kuma", of the Mayan Court ruled by Zeb Chac as enacted by King John Barnes. The feathers, jewels, and headdresses of this court were the height of opulence. The introduction of the King and his Warriors, before the coronation

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<sup>70</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 14 November 1928, p. 8.

ceremony began, enacted a pantomimed pageant of Mayan legend, as produced by the Waco Little Theatre.<sup>71</sup> The Queen's ascension to the throne was led by the High Priest and followed by her retinue, but, perhaps due to the elaborate nature of her feathered headdress, rather than being crowned, she was presented with a ruby-encrusted scepter as a symbol of her reign.<sup>72</sup>

### *1929-Martian Court*

As the designs for the Queen's Ball became more elaborate, they also became more prominent features of interest. For example, the 1929 Martian Court designs and sketches were well underway and in the news by early September, nearly two months before the event. When the Queen's Ball did arrive, Miss Sarah Dossett was crowned Queen of the planet Earth at the Texas Cotton Palace "pageant of the universe" before an overflowing coliseum.<sup>73</sup> She was crowned in the role of Queen Cybele by Arthur Upleger, as King Apollo the sun God. Cybele's costume was described as fruits and flowers of the earth on white imported satin. The Queen's entrance was heralded by a fanfare of trumpets from the orchestra of Ligon Smith, who played music for the pageant from within a phosphorescent enclosure. In the midst of an astrological motif, the cover of the program read, "Through space, through time itself we have dwelled in a splendid flight to discover a new land and beings Godlike and Beautiful. Swiftly do the dreams of men take form and live in miracles of steel, poems of glass, and eternal harmonies of

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 14 November 1928, p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> *The Breckenridge American* (Breckenridge, TX), 6 November 1929, p. 1.

colored lines.”<sup>74</sup> This seemed to be evoked by the extravagant design by French designer Emile Robin, which was described as, “a star-studded throne whose columns branched in strange fashions not in keeping with earthly conceptions of gravity.”<sup>75</sup> The court is depicted in their “Godlike and Beautiful” costume in this “new world” setting in a panoramic photo, cropped in Figure 4.3 to demonstrate the height at which the monarchs’ thrones towered over the court.



Figure 4.3. Queen’s Coronation, Court of Mars, cropped [1929]  
Source: Texas Collection, Baylor University

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<sup>74</sup> Invitation, Cotton Palace Queen’s Coronation, 1929. Texas Collection, Baylor University.

<sup>75</sup> Barnes, *The Texas Cotton Palace*, 117.

The Queen presented King Apollo with a Golden Globe typical of the sphere over which she reigned, and he in regal gesture reciprocated with a royal scepter gift of the Sun's vital power over the earth. It is interesting to note that in earlier pageants, a religious character was included to sanction the coronation, but as the themes became increasingly fantastic the King himself bestowed the Queen's power until, in this instance, the royal couple share an even exchange of gifts.<sup>76</sup> This seems to be the pinnacle of the Queen's supremacy and was perhaps the most fantastic and cosmopolitan coronation design that Robin had produced for the event in his eight years of design work for the production. It certainly was the furthest removed from the agrarian world of cotton which had originally empowered the King and Queen, and its spectacle and renown eclipsed its humble successor, the Cotton Dress Ball.

### *1930-Arthurian Court*

The final exposition lasted only ten days in November, and King Cotton was forced to share the top billing; the event was now named the Texas Cotton Palace Exposition and Dairy Show and prominently featured cartooned livestock in its advertising. The final King of the Cotton Palace was O. B. Perot, President of Texas Mutual Life Insurance Association. Mrs. Sendón recalled the Arthurian Court of the final Queen's Ball, "We didn't go quite as much as we had in the years before that. But at the last court—I think they had a King Arthur's court. And that was (laughs) the heavy one, you know. They had all the people in armor and all that. Then the designs of the women's—the women had these hats that looked like a dunce cap, you know, and then

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<sup>76</sup> Gildersleeve, Fred. *Martian Court*, 1929:  
<http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/tx-photos/id/1904>

they had veils hanging off. And those were very elaborate scenes.”<sup>77</sup> The final Queen’s coronation and ball returned to earth and the stuff of legends with the Pageant of King Arthur, set on Christmas Day in the year 500 in Camelot.

### *Performing Exclusivity*

The luxury and magnificence of the Queen’s Ball was a cultural marker that grew increasingly lavish throughout the decade, with the performance of exoticized historical pageants depicting Spanish, French, Persian, Chinese, Byzantine, Napoleonic, and Mayan courts. Ultimately, court themes became mythic as the end of the decade saw royal courts of Neptune and Mars, with the final Queen’s retinue of 1930 adopting a legendary Arthurian theme. The symbolic personifications conferred upon these elite members of society during the Queen’s Ball and pageant demonstrated an annual progression from agricultural monarchs in the pre-war years of King Cotton’s reign, to the personification of Liberty during the war, to increasingly foreign historical royalty, Roman deities, and mythological legends during the era of the Queen of Waco’s supremacy.

Although the Queen’s coronation is being examined here as a socially stratifying event, accounts from the time suggest that much of the general population felt a sense of excitement, rather than exclusion, about the experience. It was considered high entertainment, practically a privilege, to personally witness the spectacle of the coronation pageants with their sumptuous costumes, ornate stage settings, and exotically-themed court entertainments of music and dance. By placing increasing precedence on the publically-accessible Queen’s coronation and pageant followed immediately by the

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<sup>77</sup> Mary Kemendo Sendón, interview #7 by Lois E. Myers, 27 January 1994, in Waco, Texas, transcript, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Waco, TX, 300-1. <http://digitalcollections.baylor.edu/cdm/ref/collection/buioh/id/2308>

selective and restricted Queen's Ball, the Texas Cotton Palace defined Waco's society elite using allegorical performances of power and benevolence to enact a segregation of social class. The Cotton Dress Ball that was organized in 1925 provided a stark social contrast to the Queen's Ball. While it received much less attention and lacked the celebrity of the Queen's Ball, it allowed for freedom of association and informality in dancing and feasting, providing a social event for the "commoners" which ultimately possessed the agrarian iconography that had fallen out of fashion with the elite. However, the Queen's Ball did allow for the reputation of the Cotton Palace and by extension the city and society of Waco to reach beyond borders of state and nation.

*The King is Dead—Long Live the Queen*

Events such as the Cotton Palace Queen's Ball held sway as enculturating institutions that elevated the social capital of the community, as noted in a response to the first post-war Queen's Ball: "The one thing that stood out most forcibly was that they all 'belonged.' It was there, in the poise of the head, the self possession, the graceful deportment. Each and every one of them was of the real nobility and her passing honors were but a phase of a nobility that was hers by right of birth and breeding. It was said over and over again throughout the evening, "they are all to the manner born."<sup>78</sup> Through the ever-changing icon of the Cotton Palace Queen, the elite females of Waco redefined the social element of the Cotton Palace to emphasize the cosmopolitan virtue of privilege and class, shifting the narrative of the exposition from local agrarianism, through wartime nationalism, and finally riding the waves of social change toward a rhetoric of mass consumerism and exotic extravagance.

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<sup>78</sup> *The Waco News-Tribune* (Waco, TX) 2 November, 1919, p. 2.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

The Cotton Palace has been an integral part of Waco's civic identity through many permutations since 1894. Over the course of a generation, from 1910-1930, the second iteration of the Texas Cotton Palace adapted and adjusted to sweeping changes in agribusiness, American culture, and social norms. Its structure as a paradigm of civic culture remained intact through the programming and modification of performative public events that reflected the pastoral ideal while aligning it with political and mercantile power, roused patriotism while promoting popular support of the war, and reinforced the preeminence of Waco's society elite while entertaining the public with spectacular pageantry. The reallocation of cultural capital throughout the three periods demarcated in this study allowed for the public performance of civic virtues through the icons of King Cotton, Columbia, and the Cotton Palace Queen in community-focused events. Parades, patriotic exhibitions, and pageants provided paratheatrical vehicles for the promotion of community identity. Concurrently with demonstrations of cultural attitudes and perceived virtues, these performances also reinforced existing hegemonic superstructures within the society.

This examination discovered that the symbolic capital ascribed to the character of King Cotton as a regional cultural icon, when presented within a frame of pastoral ideology, conferred the commodities of social influence and virtue to the phenomenon of the Texas Cotton Palace. The character was further correlated with the local hegemonic superstructure which established the urban political and mercantile interests associated

with King Cotton as powerful in contrast to the rural agrarian farmers whose labor produced the staple. This superstructure was imbued with national symbolism and narratives upon America's entry into the war, promulgating King Cotton's power and status to the female personification of the United States, Columbia, as well as a collection of patriotic symbols including the American flag. A nationally hegemonic system of conscription was imposed upon the community, translating the vulnerabilities of minorities, urban poor, and rural farm tenants under the existing agrarian ascendancy to a larger structure, drafting many of them into military service. The symbolic elements of military uniforms and formations were incorporated into civic narratives at every opportunity as a means of bolstering patriotic sentiment. Once the war had ended, the pattern continued its divergence from the agrarian, regional, Old South symbol of King Cotton. Although the icon retained nominal authority, the focus of power narrowed sharply to a civic icon, the Cotton Palace Queen, as demonstrated through cosmopolitan and exotic representation. Under the guise of historical, mythological, and legendary characters from which the Queen derived symbolic capital, the society elites who performed and assumed these characterizations were employed as representatives of the community culture of Waco. Thus, from 1910-1930, the Texas Cotton Palace employed these icons to symbolically represent the power and virtue of its social and economic interests.

Although this study contends that many performative and paratheatrical elements of the Cotton Palace exposition perpetuated locally hegemonic structures, the event remains an impressive achievement of community involvement and promotion which lasted throughout two decades of incredible social and cultural transformation. The Texas

Cotton Palace tailored its programming to meet the changing needs and values of its host community, which remains actively engaged in civic identification and promotion.

Although this generation of the Cotton Palace exposition eventually ended with the Great Depression, the ideology of rural virtue converged with urban vivification continues to be ascribed to the most elite social, economic, and political strata in the region. This study provided only a brief survey of a limited number of the countless entertainments, exhibits, and cultural offerings of the Cotton Palace during one phase of its existence, and kept to a very narrow scope of interrogation. The performance of power was only one manifestation of meaning within this multivalent event. There is a wealth of material available for further analysis, whether through the lens of economics, gender, race, religion, popular culture, urbanization, gaming theory, a comparative study, or any other number of approaches. The countless variations in programming provide numerous points of entry to the study of this topic, and a wealth of untapped archival resources remains.

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