

Houston Philosophical Society Dinner and Lecture

Cohen House, Rice University

November 21, 2019

After cocktails and dinner, former Houston mayor Bill White spoke. He said he has made many speeches, sometimes as many as four in a day for over 120 days when he was running for mayor the first time. He won with 63% of the vote. For his second term, he made no speeches, and won with 92% of the vote.

Concerning his style of leadership in Houston, Mayor White valued *Churchill's Wartime Leadership* by Martin Gilbert, which discussed three necessities for leadership: competence, a willingness to delegate to competent people, and an articulation of the values and goals of the mission. Big city leaders do those three things well—especially the third.

Houston is first in the nation in per capita income less living cost, and that has created its growth. The city is a hub for important industry and has the highest concentration of engineers.

Mayor White broke Houston's history into three eras.

The first, about 100 years, it was a trade hub, with railway and plow.

The second, from about 1940 to 1970, he characterized as "patriarchal," under the patronage of certain business leaders. The population tripled. When civil rights riots began to disrupt other cities and institutions, the Houston establishment decided to be a "western" state instead of a "southern" one, and undertook integration with relatively little disorder.

The third era, from 1970 to the present, saw Houston's population triple again. Houston became the center for many multinationals, beginning with Shell. Ben Love committed to building up the arts here. Houston has great demographical diversity in a metropolitan area with many employment centers scattered through and around the city.

For the future, Mayor White sees Houston's affordability and international connections as leading to more growth, in spite of the fact that education and research are not great. HISD governance is broken and we have passed up chances to improve it in Austin.

Leadership isn't just about getting one's name in the headlines, but is about encouraging others to get involved. As mayor, he had five goals: safe neighborhoods, improved mobility, improved amenities, improved neighborhoods, and make the dollars spent count.

After Katrina, Houston treated its neighbors as we would want to be treated. Houston worked hard to get people on the route to self-sufficiency as quickly as possible, spending \$170 million to house them. People were farmed out to megachurches and corporations, who chipped in to help. The criminals went to jail.

He believes education and workforce training are the biggest problems Houston has. Teaching should be a prestigious career.