

Texas in the 1920s

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TEXAS IN THE 1920S. This entry is currently being revised and the new version will be available soon!

At one time historians commonly described the 1920s as a decade of sterility, in which little happened except the economic excesses (symbolized by the great bull market on Wall Street) that brought on the 1929 crash and the ensuing **Great Depression** [\(/handbook/entries/great-depression\)](/handbook/entries/great-depression). Most historians concentrated on politics and, compared with either the **Progressive era** [\(/handbook/entries/progressive-era\)](/handbook/entries/progressive-era) that preceded or the New Deal reforms that followed, the twenties did indeed look like retrograde years. However, the period was really one of amazing vitality, of social invention and change. The twenties were the formative years of modern America. In that decade the country became urban, and a new type of industrial economy arose, typified by mass production and mass consumption. Both factors speeded the breakdown of traditional habits and thought patterns in such areas as religion, folkways, dress, moral standards, and the uses of leisure time. The popular image of the Twenties is that of a "roaring" era, replete with "flappers," Fords, raccoon coats, jazz, movies and radio, speakeasies, Florida real estate promotions, mail-order stock schemes, bootleggers, gangsters like Al Capone, flamboyant preachers, and the "Lone Eagle," Charles A. Lindbergh. Societies do not give up old ideals and attitudes easily; the conflicts between the spokesmen for the old order and the champions of the new day were at times both bitter and extensive. The reaction of Texans to this cultural conflict is of central importance in the history of the state.

For most Southerners the dominant theme of the 1920s was economic expansion. If electrical power was the basic regional builder in the Southeast, petroleum assumed that role in the Southwest—Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Oil diversified the region's economy, which was previously based on agriculture and timber, and fueled the burgeoning automobile industry in the United States. By 1929 there was an automobile for every 4.3 Texans. A storied oil boom was set off in 1901, when exploratory drilling at the **Spindletop oilfield** [\(/handbook/entries/spindletop-oilfield\)](/handbook/entries/spindletop-oilfield), near Beaumont, resulted in a gusher

of unprecedented volume. In 1902 the field produced more than seventeen million barrels of oil. This discovery opened the first of the series of new oilfields discovered in Texas and Oklahoma that made these two states the nation's top producers; in 1919 Louisiana assumed third place when the Homer field was opened. Texas oilfields included the [Ranger, Desdemona, and Breckenridge oilfields](/handbook/entries/ranger-desdemona-and-breckenridge-oilfields) and the [Sour Lake](/handbook/entries/sour-lake-oilfield), [Batson-Old](/handbook/entries/batson-old-oilfield), [Humble](/handbook/entries/humble-oilfield), [Goose Creek](/handbook/entries/goose-creek-oilfield), and Burkburnett fields before 1920, as well as the [Big Lake](/handbook/entries/big-lake-oilfield), [Yates](/handbook/entries/yates-oilfield), [East Texas](/handbook/entries/east-texas-oilfield), Mexia, Panhandle, Van, and McCamey fields after that date. The discovery of oil beneath school and university lands subsequently channeled billions of dollars into public education in Texas. The 1920s witnessed an oil find in Arkansas, and in 1929 the four southwestern states represented about 60 percent of the major crude oil production in the United States. Texas pulled in front of Oklahoma by 1928. On October 3, 1930, near Henderson in East Texas, a seasoned wildcatter named [Columbus Marion \(Dad\) Joiner](/handbook/entries/joiner-columbus-marion-dad) struck the southwestern edge of the largest oil pool discovered in the world to that time and set off a new oil boom reminiscent of Spindletop.

By 1930 Texas ranked fifth in population nationally, with 5,824,715 residents—a 24.9 percent increase over 1920. Forty-one percent were living in concentrations of more than 2,500. This was up from 32.4 percent ten years earlier. Among major cities, Houston led with 292,352 people, Dallas had 260,475, San Antonio 231,542, and Fort Worth 163,447 (see [URBANIZATION](/handbook/entries/urbanization)).

Wartime inflation and demands for Southern products brought a brief period of unprecedented prosperity, and the Southern farmer held high hopes of climbing out of his economic slough of despond. The cotton crop of 1919 sold for a satisfying figure. Postwar prices continued to rise in the early months of 1920. Farm boys felt so prosperous that some of them bought silk shirts and silk underwear. But farmers who had expanded their operations and gone further into debt in order to capitalize on inflation and the increased demand for products found themselves the victims of the "cotton cycle." Cotton prices rose to a high of forty-two cents a pound in New Orleans in April 1920, and that spring Southern farmers planted their largest crop since 1914. Prices held steady until the middle of the summer, when they began to decline. By December 1920 the price had fallen

to 13½ cents, and the great 1920 crop, 13,429,000 bales, proved to be a disastrous financial failure. Cotton was selling for 9.8 cents a pound in March 1921. The crisis of 1920–21 inflicted near-fatal wounds.

The price break resulted in demands to cut production in 1921, and a Cotton Acreage Reduction Convention met in Memphis to encourage reduced planting in the spring of that year. The Memphis convention, the [boll weevil \(/handbook/entries/boll-weevil\)](#), and a short cotton crop raised prices from 1922 to 1925 but did not solve the farmers' basic problems, which stemmed from unscientific farming, the crop-lien system, an unsatisfactory marketing system, and overproduction. From 1919 to 1926 Texas increased her cotton acreage from something over ten million to more than eighteen million acres and her production from three million to almost six million bales. Prices dropped again in 1926, to an average of 12.47 cents a pound, but not until the Great Depression did cotton fall to the disastrous average price of \$5.66 a pound (1931). The tenant farmer working on shares stood near the bottom of Texas agriculture and constituted one of the most serious social problems in the state. In 1880 tenants constituted 37.6 percent of all Texas farmers; by 1900 this figure had grown to 49.7 percent, and by 1920 to 53.3 percent. In 1930, 60.9 percent of Texas farms were operated by tenants. By 1920, 66.1 percent of all farms in nineteen "blackland" Texas counties were so operated. Agricultural expert [William B. Bizzell \(/handbook/entries/bizzell-william-bennett\)](#) wrote in *Rural Texas* (1924): "It is impossible to build a prosperous and progressive rural civilization with more than half the farmers cultivating the land on some basis of cash or share tenancy." The farmers' persistent problems in the 1920s were accompanied by the rise and decline of numerous farm organizations. The farmer alternately joined or abandoned organizations designed to help with his problems, depending upon his state of mind or financial condition. The revived National Grange (see [GRANGE \(/handbook/entries/grange\)](#)), the American Farm Bureau Federation, and the Farm Labor Union used various methods to gain support for their organizations and to agitate for better farm conditions. The Texas Farm Bureau Federation claimed a membership of 70,000 in late 1921 in 130 counties. The Farm Labor Union, organized in Bonham, Texas, on October 30, 1920, under the leadership of M. W. Fitzwater, represented the attitudes of the poorer tenants and laborers and was more radical than the other farm organizations. With the "cost of production plus a profit" as its slogan, the Farm Labor Union spread into parts of Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. Membership claims fluctuated from 45,000 in 1921 to 160,000 in 1925, but by 1926 the organization was in decline.

Although there was a steady stream of Mexican immigration into Texas during the 1890s, the flood began about 1920. According to the census figures, the number of people of Mexican descent in the state increased from 71,062 in 1900 to 683,681 in 1930, when 38.4 percent of them were foreign-born. Large numbers came across the border during [World War I \(/handbook/entries/world-war-i\)](#), and in the postwar period another heavy influx occurred. The rapid expansion of Texas agriculture was primarily responsible for the migration of Mexicans from 1900 to 1930. "Cotton picking suits the Mexican," was the unanimous opinion of Texas growers. Imported Mexicans did most of the work in the newly developed cottonfields of West Texas, where the plantation system was not deeply entrenched. The development of large fruit and truck farming areas in Texas between 1910 and 1930 came about by the opening of new [irrigation \(/handbook/entries/irrigation\)](#) projects and the availability of cheap Mexican labor. The *Literary Digest* judged, "The Mexican has put Texas on the map agriculturally." In a completely unorganized labor market, White, Black, and Hispanic agricultural workers roamed throughout the vast reaches of Texas trying to pick up temporary employment. Because Mexicans moved readily from area to area and were available in any numbers desired, they rapidly displaced both Black and White tenants and farm laborers. "There is a bird in Texas," a Mexican said, "called the road-runner, which cannot be like other birds, although it has wings. It stays on the ground and dodges in and out of the brush. The bird reminds us of our humble selves so much that we call it the *paisano*, which means countryman." Immigration authority Carey McWilliams remarked, "To the road-runner, as to the Mexican, 'the next field, the next season, always looks as if it might be better.'" Labor unions made little enough headway in the nation as a whole before the New Deal, but they were even less successful in the South. In addition to the surplus of unskilled labor, which lessened the probability that those workers with jobs would make demands that might alienate employers, labor unions in the South had to fight hostility, apathy, tradition, ingrained individualism, poverty, and suspicion of "Yankees." In the [lumber industry \(/handbook/entries/lumber-industry\)](#), despite the determined efforts of the Brotherhood of Timber Workers in 1910 to organize workers, the operators, headed by the "Prince of the Pines," [John Henry Kirby \(/handbook/entries/kirby-john-henry\)](#), were generally successful in preventing any union from getting a foothold. "The techniques employed were many and varied," wrote historian [Robert S. Maxwell \(/handbook/entries/maxwell-robert-s\)](#).

Many mills used an anti-union contract (yellow-dog) and known organizers were harassed by sheriffs and company police until they fled from the region. Some operated espionage systems which swiftly carried word of any unionization effort. The latent hostility of White and Black workers was played upon to prevent an alliance, and all union organizers were denounced as a new group of 'Carpetbaggers' who were coming south in an attempt to place the Black above the White man. As most companies owned an entire company town, including the streets, it was a simple matter to arrest and prosecute the would-be organizer for trespassing. This remained a favorite device for three generations.

The [lumber industry](#) ([/handbook/entries/lumber-industry](#)), however, declined in the postwar decade, as more and more companies, having exhausted their old-growth pine, moved elsewhere, often to the Pacific Coast states. The lumber and oil operators of Beaumont introduced the open shop, the so-called "Beaumont Plan," as a means of dealing with unions. Ben S. Woodhead of the Beaumont Lumber Company stated in March 1920, "So far as is known Beaumont is the first city previously working under closed shop conditions which has had the red blooded Americanism to stand upon its hindlegs and shake itself free from the tentacles and shackles of the closed shop." Under the leadership of the Beaumont group the Southwestern Open Shop Association was organized to cover Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana, and New Mexico. It was succeeded by the 'Texas Employers' Association.

Galveston longshoremen went on strike in March 1920, demanding that their employers hire only union men and that wages be increased. After an investigation Governor [William P. Hobby](#) ([/handbook/entries/hobby-william-pettus](#)) concluded that the only way to keep commerce moving regularly through the port was to place the city under martial law. After several months the troops were withdrawn, and several [Texas Rangers](#) ([/handbook/entries/texas-rangers](#)) remained to help local authorities maintain order. When the strike was settled in December 1920, each side made some concessions. Meanwhile the legislature, in special session, passed an "open-port law," the purpose of which was to facilitate the movement of commerce by common carriers. Under its terms, it was unlawful for a person or persons "by or through the use of any physical violence, or by threatening the use of any physical violence, or by intimidation" to interfere with any person working at "loading or unloading or transporting any commerce within this state." Critics denounced it as an "antistrike law." Governor Hobby maintained that anyone could strike but could not compel others to do so. In July 1922 Governor [Pat M. Neff](#) ([/handbook/entries/neff-pat-morris](#)) invoked

the law against striking railroad shopmen in North Texas. Although this strike failed, in 1926 the Court of Criminal Appeals held the open-port law unconstitutional.

Progressivism did not disappear from the South in the 1920s. Instead, as historian George B. Tindall has shown, it was "transformed through greater emphasis upon certain of its tendencies and the distortion of others. The impulse for 'good government' and public services remained strong; the impulse for reform somehow turned into a drive for moral righteousness and conformity. The Ku Klux Klan and the fundamentalist movement inherited the reform spirit but channeled it into new crusades." Fundamentalists saw in Charles Darwin's theory of evolution an even more direct challenge to the old-time religion than that presented by modernism. The Bible was said to affirm that man was the product of fiat creation, molded from the dust by God's hands, not the result of a development untold ages in length. Evolution also indirectly impugned Christ's divinity. In Darwin's hypothesis there seemed to be no room for a supernatural being, no toleration for biological miracles. William Jennings Bryan expressed the opposition to evolution in words beyond the abilities of other fundamentalists: "Christ has made of death a narrow, star-lit strip between the companionship of yesterday and the reunion of tomorrow; evolution strikes out the stars and deepens the gloom that enshrouds the tomb." The center of antievolution agitation in Texas was Fort Worth, the home of **J. Frank Norris**

([/handbook/entries/norris-john-franklyn](#)), a firebrand Baptist minister.

Norris early became the belligerent champion of a movement to expose unsound instruction in the University of Texas and Baylor University, and by his excoriations won many converts to his views. By 1925 his church was the largest Baptist church in the nation. He was generally credited with having brought about the dismissal of six Southern professors because of their religious beliefs. In view of the mounting demand for a state antievolution law, two state representatives, J. T. Stroder of Navarro County and S. J. Howeth of Johnson, introduced a bill designed to add censorship of textbooks to the usual prohibition against teaching evolution in the public schools. The House passed the bill, 71 to 34, but the Senate let the measure die without a vote. Although a similar bill proposed in 1925 did not secure favorable action in the House, state officials decided to act upon their own initiative. Governor **Miriam A. Ferguson**

([/handbook/entries/ferguson-miriam-amanda-wallace-ma](#)) was the leading force in the adoption of a ruling by the State Textbook Commission that the state would select only works on biology that contained no mention of evolution and "that all objectionable features in science texts shall be revised or eliminated to the satisfaction of the revision committee." "I am a Christian mother who believes

Jesus Christ died to save humanity and I am not going to let that kind of rot go into Texas textbooks," Mrs. Ferguson declared. However, although five Southern states passed antievolution laws during the 1920s, Texas did not; and in time the fundamentalist crusade in the state lost much of its force.

[Prohibition](#) [\(/handbook/entries/prohibition\)](#) was another direct outgrowth of the reform spirit that became increasingly associated with narrow intolerance. It was basically a reform of the middle class, which in both country and city was predominantly native, old-stock, and Protestant. In *Progressives and Prohibitionists: Texas Democrats in the Wilson Era* (1973), Lewis L. Gould showed that in Texas statewide prohibition became a major goal of progressive Wilson Democrats "because it spoke directly to most of the perceived social problems of the state"; it was also "the major divisive element" in state politics. After the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919, the prohibitionists seemed to have won their fight, but it soon became apparent that many otherwise good citizens did not intend to abide by the law. The tenuousness of the dry victory was nowhere more transparent than in the South, both a major prohibition stronghold and a major producer and distributor of illicit whiskey (see [MOONSHINING](#) [\(/handbook/entries/moonshining\)](#)). In his *Recollections of Farm Life* (1965) Robert L. Hunt, Sr., recalled that "There was always some making of moonshine liquor in the area of Northeast Texas, but people were not so bad about drinking it until the 18th Amendment shut off the supply of good liquor." When Hunt returned from France in 1919, "The moonshiners had become rather common in the area. In fact so much moonshine was hauled out of the area that some places had quite a reputation for liquor making. Farms were left idle in some places and farmers turned to making liquor as a more profitable occupation."

During the early 1920s the second [Ku Klux Klan](#) [\(/handbook/entries/ku-klux-klan\)](#), organized at Stone Mountain, Georgia, in 1915 by Col. William J. Simmons of Atlanta and shrewdly promoted by two publicity experts, Edward Young Clarke and Mrs. Elizabeth Tyler, dominated the politics of the Southwest. The organization capitalized on the hate generated by war propaganda and the hysteria of the Red Summer of 1919, when race riots flared across the country. Anti-Catholicism, White supremacy, hatred of Jews, antiradicalism, opposition to immigration—these were the salients of Klan ideology. Membership in the secret order was principally confined to the lower middle class. However, men prominent in business and politics donned white robes and hoods, and many clergymen welcomed the Klan as an agency of moral censorship. A close observer remarked, "There is a great 'inferiority complex' on the part of the Klan membership—due in part to lack of education—Dallas and Fort Worth (where

the Klan is especially strong) being largely populated by men and women reared in obscure towns and country places where public schools are short-termed and scarce." The revived Klan made its first appearance in Texas at Houston in the fall of 1920, taking advantage of the sentiment for the past rekindled by the annual reunion of the [United Confederate Veterans](#) [\(/handbook/entries/sons-of-confederate-veterans\)](#). Simmons was there, along with a companion and aide, Nathan Bedford Forrest III, grandson of the "imperial wizard" of the [Reconstruction](#) [\(/handbook/entries/reconstruction\)](#) Klan. Sam Houston Klan No. 1 was the first chapter to be established in Texas. By 1922 state membership was between 75,000 and 90,000. The "Realm of Texas" had been organized under its first "grand dragon," an Episcopalian priest, Dr. A. D. Ellis of Beaumont, and divided into five provinces, with their headquarters in Fort Worth, Dallas, Waco, Houston, and San Antonio. The "grand titan" of Province No. 2 was a plump, affable dentist, [Hiram Wesley Evans](#) [\(/handbook/entries/evans-hiram-wesley\)](#), who had been "exalted cyclops" of the state's largest "klavern," No. 66, in Dallas. After becoming national secretary of the Klan, Evans was elected "imperial wizard" in November 1922, thereby seizing control from the Simmons-Clarke faction. From 1922 to 1924 the secret order was the chief issue in Texas politics; it elected sheriffs, attorneys, judges, and legislators. The Klan probably had a majority in the House of Representatives of the Thirty-eighth Legislature, which met in January 1923. Perhaps as many as 400,000 Texans belonged to the Klan at one time or another.

According to historian Charles Alexander, the "distinctive quality" of the Klan in the Southwest was "its motivation, which lay not so much in racism and nativism as in moral authoritarianism." In the Southwest "the Klan was, more than anything else, an instrument for restoring law and order and Victorian morality to the communities, towns, and cities of the region. Its coercive activity and its later preoccupation with political contests make vigilantism and politics the main characteristics of Klan history in the Southwest." Only a relatively small part of the Klan's defense of morality and society was directed at Blacks. Its campaign of systematic terrorism—beatings and tarrings and featherings—was aimed mostly at bootleggers, gamblers, wayward husbands and wives, wife beaters, and other sinners. The Klan in Dallas was credited with having flogged sixty-eight men in the spring of 1922, most of them at a special Klan whipping meadow along the Trinity River bottom.

Some Texans were alarmed by these outrages and attempted to take preventive measures. A number of outspoken district judges ordered investigations. Some sheriffs and city officials attempted to prevent Klan parades. The mayor of Dallas, Sawnie Aldredge, demanded that the Klan disband. Forty-nine members of the

state legislature petitioned a silent Governor Neff for a law against masks.

[American Legion](#) (</handbook/entries/american-legion>), posts, the [Daughters of the American Revolution](#) (</handbook/entries/daughters-of-the-american-revolution>), the [State Bar of Texas](#) (</handbook/entries/state-bar-of-texas>), Chambers of Commerce, the Masons, and others denounced the Klan. The most serious threat to Klan political activity in the Dallas area was the Dallas County Citizens' League, formed on April 4, 1922, at a mass meeting of 5,000 citizens. This organization chose [Martin M. Crane](#) (</handbook/entries/crane-martin-mcnulty>), attorney general of Texas during [Charles Culberson](#) (</handbook/entries/culberson-charles-allen>), 's administration, as chairman and adopted resolutions deploring the existence of a secret order that engaged in terrorism. However, all but one of the Klan-backed candidates for Dallas County office won election despite the opposition of the Citizens' League; the following year (1923) anti-Klan mayor Aldredge and the rest of his ticket were defeated in the election by a margin of almost three to one.

During the 1920s the Klan was as intensely active in Texas politics on the state level as it was on the local. In 1922 it made its influence felt quite dramatically in the race for United States senator. In the Democratic primary, which took place on July 22, seven candidates sought the seat held by Charles A. Culberson, who was old and ill after a quarter century of service. The Klan backed an avowed "knight," [Earle B. Mayfield](#) (</handbook/entries/mayfield-earle-bradford>) of Austin, a member of the [Railroad Commission](#) (</handbook/entries/railroad-commission>) who received a plurality of the ballots cast. The runner-up was former governor [James E. Ferguson](#) (</handbook/entries/ferguson-james-edward>). Culberson finished a poor third. Mayfield won the second primary on August 26 by a vote of 273,308 to 228,701 over Ferguson. A substantial group of Democrats, taking the position that Mayfield was the Klan and not the Democratic nominee, turned to the Republicans with the suggestion of a fusion candidate. The Republican nominee, E. P. Wilmot of Austin, a banker, was withdrawn, and Democrat [George E. B. Peddy](#) (</handbook/entries/peddy-george-edwin-bailey>), a young assistant district attorney in Houston, was substituted as the Republican and Independent Democratic candidate. In the general election on November 7, 1922, Mayfield won easily, 264,260 to 130,744. Peddy charged that Mayfield had won the race through gross irregularities, and a subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections heard the case from May 8 to December 13, 1924. Peddy

introduced more than thirty witnesses from Texas, including Ku Klux Klan officials; Mayfield introduced but two witnesses. The committee decided that there were no grounds for unseating Mayfield.

On the national scene in the 1920s, Texas was a pivotal state in the transitional struggle between the prohibitionist, native-stock, Protestant Southern and western wing of the [Democratic party](#) and its urban, wet, new-immigrant northeastern faction. "Romantic in history, powerful in Democratic politics, Texas provides more interest for those watching political developments than almost any other State in the South," editorialized the *New York Times* in April 1928. "Ever since the 'Immortal Forty,' under the unit rule, stood by Woodrow Wilson at Baltimore until the nomination was won, an importance attaches to the Texas delegation out of proportion to the size of its vote or the state's geographical and industrial significance." In the spring of 1924 a three-man race developed in Texas to control the state's delegation to the Democratic national convention. First, Senator Oscar W. Underwood of Alabama, an antiprohibitionist, was supported by former senator [Joseph W. Bailey](#), A. J. Burleson, Wilson's postmaster general, and former governor [Oscar B. Colquitt](#), who was treated to the enmity of Klansmen and prohibitionists. Next, there was William Gibbs McAdoo, Wilson's son-in-law, whose candidacy was championed by the Wilson leader in Texas, [Thomas B. Love](#) of Dallas, and supported by the State Democratic Executive Committee. And finally, there was Governor Neff, a prohibitionist who was opposed to the selection of a pledged delegation and favored one instructed only to uphold dry principles in the party platform. Neff had some hopes that political lightning might strike for him as a dark-horse candidate at the New York convention, if the convention deadlocked between McAdoo and the other leading candidate, Al Smith of New York. It was rumored during the campaign that the Klan had agreed to support McAdoo in return for Tom Love's support of the Klan candidate for governor, Judge Felix D. Robertson of Dallas. Subsequent events made it apparent that some form of understanding was reached. Love, however, forcefully denied any formal bargain, though he readily admitted that he had freely worked with any group willing to support McAdoo. In any case, on the eve of the precinct conventions, secret orders went out to all Klansmen to vote for McAdoo delegates. McAdoo's overwhelming victory in Texas stimulated his flagging campaign and gave it the impetus to drive on to New York City, where it was halted by a 103-ballot debacle in Madison Square Garden. The Texas delegation was widely

characterized around the convention as a "klan dominated delegation from a klan dominated state." Love was preparing to carry Texas for McAdoo in 1928 when the Californian withdrew from the race, on September 17, 1927.

In the 1924 gubernatorial race in Texas, the Klan suffered a decisive setback. The hooded order campaigned actively for Judge Robertson. One of his opponents was Miriam A. Ferguson. Her husband, James E. Ferguson, was prohibited from running because he had been impeached as governor in 1917 and declared permanently ineligible to hold a state office. He remained the idol of the dirt farmers, the "boys at the forks of the creeks," and other rural voters. Mrs. Ferguson was his proxy. She based her campaign in part on a fight for the vindication of her husband at the hands of Texas voters and in part on opposition to the Klan. No candidate received a majority in the first primary, and Robertson, who had a large plurality, and Mrs. Ferguson contended against each other in the runoff. In the offing was one of the most heated political campaigns in Texas history. The group supporting Mrs. Ferguson adopted as campaign slogans "Me for Ma, and I aint got a durn thing against Pa," "A bonnet and not a hood," and "Two governors for the price of one." The Robertson camp countered with, "Not Ma for me. Too much Pa." Ferguson directed his wife's campaign and made the most of her political addresses. Throughout the state large numbers of politicians and voters flocked to Mrs. Ferguson's support in the second primary, not because they were for her, but because they were against Robertson, the Klan-backed candidate. Robertson was defeated in the second primary by nearly 100,000 votes—413,751 to 316,019. At the state Democratic convention in Austin on September 2–3, the Klan was given a merciless political drubbing. The convention inserted in its platform an anti-Klan plank that began: "The Democratic party emphatically condemns and denounces what is known as the Invisible Empire of the Ku Klux Klan as an un-democratic, un-Christian and un-American organization." Mrs. Ferguson's Republican opponent in the general election was [George C. Butte \(/handbook/entries/butte-george-charles\)](#), dean of the University of Texas law school. Ferguson attacked him as "a little mutton-headed professor with a Dutch diploma," who was taking orders from the "grand dragon" of the "Realm of Texas," Z. L. Marvin, "the same as Felix Robertson did." According to the *New York Times*, the November 4 election signified "the greatest political revolution that ever took place in Texas." Tens of thousands of rock-ribbed Democrats cast a ballot for a Republican candidate for the first time. Klansmen deserted wholesale to Butte, who was not in sympathy with the organization, as did a number of anti-Ferguson Democrats, outraged that Ferguson should return to power through his wife. Under the leadership of Tom Love they formed an association called the Good Government Democratic League of Texas, the purpose of which was to

defeat the Fergusons. However, Butte was defeated by more than 127,000 votes—422,558 to 294,970. These developments signaled the demise of the Klan as a force in Texas politics. "It was all over," recalled a former Klansman. "After Robertson was beaten the prominent men left the Klan. The Klan's standing went with them." By the end of 1924 Texas was no longer the number-one state in Klandom. The following year Ferguson persuaded the legislature to pass a bill making it unlawful for any secret society to allow its members to be masked or disguised in public.

During Mrs. Ferguson's first administration, historian [Rupert N. Richardson](#) ([/handbook/entries/richardson-rupert-norval](#)) wrote, "reform took a holiday." Ma's first term was marked by behind-the-scenes domination by her husband, favoritism in the granting of highway contracts to firms that had advertised in the *Ferguson Forum*, and an extremely liberal pardon policy. In two years she granted 1,318 full pardons and 829 conditional pardons. "Jim's the governor, Ma signs the papers," one insider noted. In February 1925 came vindication day for Jim Ferguson, when the legislature voted to restore his political rights. On March 31 a radiant Mrs. Ferguson signed the amnesty bill with a gold pen given her by friends in Temple. (In 1927, however, the legislature passed a resolution declaring that the previous legislature had no authority to annul Ferguson's impeachment trial.) In 1926 Mrs. Ferguson sought reelection and was opposed by the youthful and able attorney general of Texas, [Daniel J. Moody, Jr.](#) ([/handbook/entries/moody-daniel-james-jr](#)). During the race the Fergusons, in an effort to use the Klan issue as in 1924, attempted to link Moody with the Invisible Empire. Ferguson charged in the opening rally of the campaign at Sulphur Springs: "Moody's campaign was daddied in the evoluted monkey end of the Baptist church and boosted by the Ku Klux Klan and supported by the big oil companies opposed to the gasoline tax." However, since Moody had a consistent anti-Klan record as a public official, the charge did not stick. Moody replied by referring to Ferguson's impeachment. He charged that Mrs. Ferguson was governor in name only, that her husband was the actual chief executive, and that the only real issue in the campaign was "Fergusonism." This political label covered a host of real or imagined sins of which the Fergusons were allegedly guilty. An interesting sidelight of the campaign was Mrs. Ferguson's challenge to Moody in her brief opening speech at Sulphur Springs: "I will agree that if he leads me by one vote in the primary...I will immediately resign without waiting until next year if he will agree that if I lead him 25,000 in the primary on July 24th he will immediately resign." Against the advice of some of his managers, Moody accepted the wager, but Mrs. Ferguson reneged when Moody led her by 126,250 votes in

the first primary. Moody won the run-off, 495,723 to 270,595; he went on to win by a 191,537 vote majority over his Republican opponent, Harvey H. Haines, in the general election.

The dominant theme of state politics in the South in the 1920s was business progressivism, a doctrine that emphasized the old progressive themes of public services and efficiency. "The Business class political philosophy of the new South is broad enough to include programs of highway improvement, educational expansion, and health regulation," political scientist H. C. Nixon noted in 1931. "But it does not embrace any comprehensive challenge to laissez faire ideas in the sphere of relationship between capital and labor, and the section is lagging in social support of such matters as effective child labor regulation and compensation legislation." In some states, business-progressive governors failed to win the support of rural-dominated state legislatures—among them Pat Neff and Dan Moody in Texas. In his messages to the legislature, Neff (1921–25) advocated reorganization of the state's administrative system in order to eliminate extravagance and duplication of effort, laws to halt the rising crime rate, a constitutional convention, and fundamental changes in the state tax system. Although some offices were eliminated or consolidated, the legislature refused to modify greatly the organization of the state administration, no constitutional convention met, and there were no fundamental changes in the state tax system. Neff thought the chief cause of the worst crime wave in Texas history was the suspended-sentence law, and he asked for its repeal—without result. Neff himself issued only ninety-two pardons and 107 conditional pardons during his entire four years in office. He deserves some credit for improving the highway system, and the state park system had its beginning in 1923 with the establishment of a nonsalaried park board. The legislature did not provide one dollar with which to buy parkland, and Neff had to solicit private donations of land suitable for public purposes. Somewhat later he wrote: "As I now look back on my four years in the Governor's office, it is difficult to know just how much worthwhile service was rendered. Early in my administration I discovered that it was impossible to do the things that I had dreamed I would do. Many things hindered. Numberless contending and opposing forces had to be reckoned with. Frequently a Governor is helpless to do the things that, as a matter of fact, should be done. At times he feels that about all he can do is to write proclamations that no one reads, and give advice that no one heeds."

Governor Dan Moody (1927–31) was also more progressive than the legislature. In his initial message, he proposed the correction of existing evils and abuses by the development of a scientific system of taxation, reform of the judicial system and court procedure, the enactment of a classified civil-service law, a unified

system of accounting for all state departments, laws against indiscriminate pardoning of criminals, the efficient and economical development of a system of correlated state highways, adequate revenues for the highway department, improvement of the election laws, amendment of the libel law, improvements in the state penitentiary system, coordination of educational institutions to eliminate duplication, provision of a stable income for public schools based on the state's taxable wealth, and further development of Texas ports. Historian [Ralph W. Steen \(/handbook/entries/steen-ralph-wright\)](#) wrote in 1937: "The Moody recommendations were in keeping with the best thought in political economy, and if adopted would have replaced the present government with a more modern government." But the legislature carried out only half or less of the ambitious "Moody Program," and few of the major organizational changes that Moody proposed were adopted. The determined opposition of state officials to any change in the status quo had a tremendous influence upon the solons. There was a natural hesitancy on the part of the legislature itself to deal with the complex problem completely. And the voters rejected necessary constitutional amendments. The greatest difficulty, however, was the argument that administrative reorganization would concentrate too much power in the governor's hands. No genuinely constructive reforms were achieved in the tax system, no fundamental changes were made in the cumbersome judicial system, civil service based on merit was turned down, no unified system of accounting was imposed, the prison system was incompletely reorganized, and money was not appropriated for a modern state highway system. During his four years in office, Moody had eight legislative sessions, vetoed fifteen bills during the sessions, and used the postadjournment veto 102 times. Only one of his vetoes was overridden. His record as governor was more noteworthy for its administrative than for its legislative endeavors. He reversed the Fergusons' liberal pardon policies, corrected the state textbook situation, and reformed the highway department—three areas subject to much criticism during the previous administration. Shortly before Moody left office, the [Dallas Morning News \(/handbook/entries/dallas-morning-news\)](#) noted that his record fitted well into the circumstances of his first election. "His candidacy for Governor was not a response to the call for great legislative enterprise needing a leader....His candidacy was primarily, and almost exclusively, a pledge to rescue public services from the grievous state into which they had been brought by maladministration." When Dr. [John C. Granbery \(/handbook/entries/granbery-john-cowper-jr\)](#) wrote Moody commending his 1929 message to the legislature, Moody replied: "Some parts of it, as you would imagine, have not met with any great amount of enthusiasm at the hands of the Legislature, and likely will not be enacted into law. I have sometimes felt that our

attitude in Texas is a little too reactionary, and that we were not ready to accept progressive measures which worked successfully in other states." Moody's failure to mediate the bitter fight between Al Smith and anti-Smith Democrats in Texas in the election of 1928 left both factions dissatisfied with his leadership and embittered his relations with the Forty-first Legislature. "All the time the Legislature was in session, a crazy 'wild' group, and Dan sweating so hard to put over constructive measures," Moody's wife, [Mildred Paxton Moody \(/handbook/entries/moody-mildred-paxton\)](#), wrote in her diary on May 25, 1929, "Reactions were deadly, to the recent Smith-Hoover fight, with Dan the 'goat,' both sides." Jim Ferguson was "still working his hate" at the State [Capitol \(/handbook/entries/capitol\)](#).

Business progressivism in Texas had little to offer [African \(/handbook/entries/african-americans\)](#) or [Mexican Americans \(/handbook/entries/mexican-americans\)](#). A law passed during the Neff administration barring Blacks from Democratic party primaries was declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court in *Nixon v. Herndon* (1927). The Fortieth Legislature responded by giving political parties authority to determine their own membership, providing no one was excluded because of former political party affiliations or views. There was some criticism of the corrupt South Texas machines, such as the [Archer Parr \(/handbook/entries/parr-archer\)](#) organization in Duval County, which routinely delivered huge majorities for favored candidates in statewide races, but no serious effort was made to break up the power that rested on economic and political manipulation of Mexican Americans (see [BOSS RULE \(/handbook/entries/boss-rule\)](#)).

In close sequence to prohibition, the cause of [woman suffrage \(/handbook/entries/woman-suffrage\)](#) achieved its ultimate triumph with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1920. Women had been able to vote, by state law, in Texas primaries since 1918; and Texas was the first Southern state and the ninth state in the Union to ratify the federal suffrage amendment. The list of suffrage leaders in Texas included [Minnie Fisher Cunningham \(/handbook/entries/cunningham-minnie-fisher\)](#), [Jane Y. McCallum \(/handbook/entries/mccallum-jane-legette-yelvington\)](#), [Jesse Daniel Ames \(/handbook/entries/ames-jessie-harriet-daniel\)](#), and [Annie Webb Blanton \(/handbook/entries/blanton-annie-webb\)](#). With the vote secured, they set an example for other women by working hard in politics. The [Joint Legislative Council \(/handbook/entries/joint-legislative-council\)](#), or "Petticoat Lobby" of the 1920s, a coalition of women's groups, became one of the most successful public-interest lobbying groups in Texas history. The organization backed legislation dealing with education, prison

reform, prohibition enforcement, maternal and child health, the abolition of child labor, and other social reforms. Beginning in 1918 Annie Blanton served four years as state superintendent of public instruction—the first Texas woman to win a state office. Jane McCallum was a lobbyist, journalist, publicist, Democratic party worker, and Texas secretary of state under two governors, Dan Moody and [Ross Sterling](#). In 1922 [Edith Wilmans](#) of Dallas became the first woman elected to the Texas House of Representatives. Four years later [Margie E. Neal](#) of Carthage became the first woman to be a Texas state senator.

In the 1928 Texas Senate race, Senator Mayfield claimed that he had long since broken with the Klan, which in Texas was said by Governor Moody to be "as dead as the proverbial doornail." Mayfield politically championed Al Smith and pulled in support from Jim Ferguson, his 1922 run-off opponent; but Congressman [Thomas T. Connally](#) went to the Senate instead. One of the six candidates in the senatorial race was Minnie Fisher Cunningham, a former president of the [Texas Equal Suffrage Association](#). She ran a poor fifth, polling just 28,944 votes in a total of 675,038. She later wrote in an article, "Too Gallant a Walk," in *Woman's Journal*: "When, before opening my campaign, I called on certain leading men of the state with whom I have cooperated in various other campaigns to ask support and advice in mine, every one of them in his own way assured me that I would be defeated, and when asked why, replied 'Because you are a woman.'" The consensus was that it was "too gallant a walk for a lady to take."

In 1928 the national Democratic party stretched the loyalty of the South to the breaking point by nominating the Catholic Al Smith for president at its Houston convention. The party, in effect, asked the rural, Protestant, and prohibition-minded South to support a candidate diametrically opposed to most things close to Southern hearts. Complained [Cone Johnson](#), a dry Texas delegate, "I sat by the central aisle while the parade passed following Smith's nomination and the faces I saw in that mile-long procession were not American faces. I wondered where were the Americans." Here and there party professionals yielded to the strain. Senator Furnifold Simmons of North Carolina, Senator Tom Heflin of Alabama, and Tom Love in Texas, among others, bolted to the Hoovercrats, Southern Democratic supporters of Republican Herbert Hoover. But most party leaders remained regular. In Texas, ultradry Democrats organized as the "Anti-Al Smith Democrats of Texas" and selected Alvin Moody of Houston as chairman. The group resolved that the "purpose of

the organization shall be the defeat of Gov. Alfred E. Smith for President and the wresting of Democracy from the grip of Tammany Hall." A fusion electoral ticket was arranged with the [Republican party](#). The Republicans and Anti-Al Smith Democrats flooded the state with literature. Smith's Catholicism was an important issue. J. D. Cranfill admitted to Hoover, "Quite unhappily the Catholic question obtrudes itself here constantly and perhaps more persistently than any other part of the United States." On election day the combined Republicans and Hoovercrats gave Hoover 26,004 more votes than Smith and put Texas into the Republican column for the first time in a presidential election.

The contest between Texas Hoovercrats and party regulars continued into the 1930 gubernatorial race. Former congressman [James Young](#) of Kaufman, who had been the leader of the Smith Democrats, and Tom Love, the leader of the Hoovercrats, were candidates. The state Democratic executive committee tried to keep Love off the ballot as a "bolter," but he appealed to the state Supreme Court and was allowed to have his name appear. Governor Moody intended to run for a third term, but he was unwilling to oppose the chairman of the Highway Commission, Ross Sterling, a Houston millionaire and former president of the Humble Oil Company. Sterling's platform included a call for a large state bond issue to build highways and to relieve the counties of payments on highway bonds. He promised to operate the government on a business basis. Someone said of him: "As a person, Ross Shaw Sterling is a Horatio Alger hero come to life." Jim Ferguson again attempted to secure a place on the ballot, contending that the 1925 amnesty act had removed the disqualification from state officeholding placed upon him in 1917, and that the 1927 repeal of this act had had no effect. The Texas Supreme Court ruled that the amnesty act was unconstitutional, and that the legislature could not remove a penalty imposed by the Senate sitting as a court of impeachment. Mrs. Ferguson then filed for a place on the ballot. Pa's campaign speeches indicated that Ma was running primarily against Dan Moody, who was not a candidate. Mrs. Ferguson led an eleven-candidate field in the first primary with 242,959 votes; Sterling was second with 170,754 votes; and Senator Clint C. Small, who ran on a "let's adjourn politics" platform, was a surprising third with 138,934 votes. Love trailed badly in fourth place with 87,068 votes, and Young was fifth with 73,385 votes. In the run-off, "Fergusonism" was again the main issue. Most of the defeated candidates gave their support to Sterling. The portly Sterling lacked color and was a poor speaker, but he was aided on the stump by such capable speakers as Dan Moody, Walter Woodward, Clint Small, Pink Parrish, and James Young. In the words of Gen. [Jacob F. Wolters](#)

([/handbook/entries/wolters-jacob-franklin](#)), one of Sterling's managers, "The issue now was HONEST AND RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT VERSUS DISHONEST AND PROXY GOVERNMENT. With that the battle cry, the great moral forces of the state arose and Mr. Sterling was on August 23rd triumphantly nominated." Sterling received 473,371 votes to Mrs. Ferguson's 384,402. The New York *Times* was pleased that the people of Texas "in a time of economic discontent and even distress, refused to follow adroit and popular demagogues."

By 1932, however, as the depression deepened, Texas voters were ready for a change; and Mrs. Ferguson narrowly defeated Sterling by less than 4,000 votes in the run-off. The Sterling camp charged that voter fraud in East Texas had given her the victory, but Sterling supporters were unable to overturn the result. When Mrs. Ferguson decided not to seek a second term in 1934, the newspapers described the gubernatorial contest (won by Attorney General [James Allred](#) ([/handbook/entries/allred-james-burr-v](#))) as the quietest in more than twenty years. *Texas Weekly* ([/handbook/entries/texas-weekly](#)) explained the public's apathy: "It takes a mob-rousing issue like that of Ku Kluxism, prohibition as it used to be, Fergusonism, or something of that kind—a single issue which divides the people into sheep and goats, according to one's point of view—to get the voters excited during the heat of summer. Fortunately, we think, no such issue looms at present." Thus, the three main issues in Texas politics during the 1920s—the Ku Klux Klan, "Fergusonism," and prohibition—had passed away and were replaced by problems arising out of hard times, especially the issue of state old-age pensions, which dominated Texas politics for the remainder of the decade.

See also [AGRICULTURE](#) ([/handbook/entries/agriculture](#)), [COTTON CULTURE](#) ([/handbook/entries/cotton-culture](#)), [FARM TENANCY](#) ([/handbook/entries/farm-tenancy](#)), [FUNDAMENTALISM](#) ([/handbook/entries/fundamentalism](#)), [GOVERNMENT](#) ([/handbook/entries/government](#)), [LABOR ORGANIZATIONS](#) ([/handbook/entries/labor-organizations](#)), [OIL AND GAS INDUSTRY](#) ([/handbook/entries/oil-and-gas-industry](#)), and [STRIKES](#) ([/handbook/entries/strikes](#)).

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