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G. William Bouldin, More Than a Businessman

Mario Gutierrez

Methods of Historical Research

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When the average person thinks about African American history, the two major historical subjects that possibly comes to their mind are slavery and the civil rights movement. I believe this is the case because African American history is a subject with a limited curriculum in the history classes of our public schools. Possible causes for this problem could be budget restrictions, limited amounts of time in classes, or even to 'soften' the reality of American history. Despite these reasons, the undeniable fact is that African American History has many unresearched areas within the subject. For instance, the historical study of African American owned businesses is a topic that has been given little attention to. That is why I decided to research the life of G. William Bouldin, a San Antonio based businessman who became a prominent role model for the San Antonio African American community during the early 1900s. Many Black business owners, like Bouldin, fought against injustices created towards their people and utilized the resources from their businesses to benefit their community in their own way. By sharing the life story of Bouldin, I prove that San Antonio's black business leaders were more than just businesspeople and Bouldin's accomplishments influenced San Antonio's black community tremendously.

Despite the little research done in the subject matter, there are some scholars who have done miraculous research on black owned businesses in America. Loren Schweninger's "Black-owned businesses in the South, 1790-1880" analyzes the wealth statistics between multiple black business leaders in the south throughout the specific century and compares their standings between rural and urban regions. Schweninger also provides great information on some of the south's most successful African American business leaders in American history. For example, she shares the story of John Carruthers Stanly, who was an emancipated slave that became one of South Carolina's most prominent businessmen. Stanly received an education and even opened a

barbershop in South Carolina all while still in bondage. By the time he was 21 he was freed from the shackles of slavery and shortly after earned a strong reputation as a successful business leader in his town. Schweninger also provides the context of other strong business leaders of the south during the time, giving us compelling success stories of black owned business of the south.

In comparison, the information displayed within my essay is different from Schweninger in various ways. In her writing, Schweninger focuses more on the wealth and statistical success of black businesses, while I focus more on the influences Bouldin created with his business.

Meaning, I do not ideally focus on the success of Bouldin wealth wise, but rather the impact he had on his community. Further along in my essay, I do discuss about the multiple businesses Bouldin was involved in to show how he was an entrepreneur, but I do not necessarily focus on his accumulated wealth like Schweninger does. Instead, I want the reader to see G. William Bouldin as a role model to the black community because that is what he prided himself as the most. Which brings me to my next argument.

Before I decided to fully research the life story of Bouldin, I briefly looked into some of San Antonio other black business leaders in the 1900s. I found that many of them all shared a common trait, which was that they wanted to improve the living conditions of their people in various ways. For instance, I found Paul White, a black barbershop owner who gave homeless African American's free haircuts throughout the mid 1900s; or Ella Austin, who opened a San Antonio orphanage taking in dozens of homeless children and giving them a proper education. These leaders found ways to give back to their people and help those in need because they all shared the similarity of living in a country that oppressed them. Dealing with racism,

¹ Schweninger, L. "Black Owned Businesses in the South, 1790-1880,"

gentrification, and segregation, African Americans felt compelled to help each other across class lines. I also found that African American Businesses ranged in variety, from barbershops, restaurants, taxi services, and much more. This allowed for black business leaders to provide different services to those in need in their community.

Bouldin however, provided his community with a different type of service, which was knowledge. To better understand how Bouldin spread knowledge through his community, I will explain how he managed to obtain his business. G. William Bouldin was born on June 29, 1895 in Hondo, in Medina County, Texas. His mother was Malissa Johnson and his father was William "Woodson" Bouldin. His parents were both in their late forties when he was born. Bouldin had a considerably large family, with four brothers and four sisters. G. William Bouldin and his family moved to San Antonio, Texas in 1908. Bouldin spent his earlier years living on San Antonio's Eastside on 227 Spruce street, which was just minutes away from what is now St Paul Square. Upon his arrival to San Antonio, Bouldin worked for the Pullman Company for the railroad system. According to an article about Bouldin in the San Antonio register, Bouldin took over ownership of the Inquirer within a year of being in San Antonio at a young age. The San Antonio Inquirer was originally located at 207 N. Center Street but was eventually moved to the corner of E. Commerce and Hackberry Streets.³ The building that housed the Inquirer eventually became known as the "Bouldin Building" due to the Inquirer's increased popularity. In his later years, Bouldin eventually became a family man, marrying Mrs. Ione White Bouldin on

² Texas, Death Certificates, 1903-1982. G. William Bouldin. Texas Department of State Health Services; Austin Texas, USA, Ancestry.com, accessed May 9, 2020.

³ Salas, Mario Marcel. "An Important African American Leader in San Antonio." The San Antonio Observer, June 4, 2019.

September 17, 1925. Bouldin and his wife had two children. A daughter named Ella P. Bouldin and a son named G. William Bouldin Jr.⁴

Although most sources will indicate that this information is historically correct, I did find another primary source that conflicts with this information. On June 5, 1919, G. Wiliam Bouldin filled out and signed a U.S World War I draft registration card. These draft registration cards were mandatorily enforced by the Selective Service act of 1917. With the U.S involvement with WWI, this new act signed by President Woodrow Woodson, targeted younger able-bodied male citizens to Joined the US armed forces.⁵ While looking at Bouldin's WWI registration card, I noticed some discrepancies that conflicted with other primary resources about his life. For one, Bouldin stated in his draft registration card that he was born on January 29, 1887 instead of 1895. He also stated that he was an only child as well. This information came directly from him because his signature is on the card as well as his occupation and place of birth, which line up with his historical timeline. A strong possible reason why Bouldin would submit false information on his WWI draft registration card could be that he was trying to avoid being drafted into the US armed forces. By making himself appear older and by saying he was an only child, it gave him a better chance of not being picked for the draft. Above his signature, is a statement that states, "I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true." If Bouldin did intentionally lie to avoid the draft, he took a huge risk that he must have felt necessary to do.

⁴ "G. W. Bouldin Succumbs, Sunday To Short Illness." San Antonio Register July 10, 1936

⁵ Ray, Michael. "Selective Service Acts." Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., October 29, 2019.

⁶ G. William Bouldin, U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918. Registration State: Texas; Registration County: Bexar; Roll: 1983589; Draft Board: 4. ancestry.com

However, Bouldin was a risk taker and it showed by the type of information he provided in his newspaper. The information he shared is what made his paper become so popular. For a while, Bouldin remained one of the most popular San Antonio black newspapers until he received competition in 1931 from Valmo Charles Bellinger, founder of the San Antonio Register. The San Antonio Register was also a black owned newspaper business that catered towards the black community of San Antonio. In 1931, Bellinger asked Bouldin to feature a fullpage advertisement for a political candidate Bellinger was showing his support to. After Bouldin denied his request, Charles started his own newspaper business in the same building location as the Inquirer. Charles and Bouldin then became competitors for a short time up until Bouldin died in 1936.8 Yet there are still some unknown indications on when the actual end date of the Inquirer occurred. According to handbook of Texas, the Inquirer failed within 3 years of the San Antonio Register's starting date. Since the starting date of the Register is April 10, 1931 this indicates that the Inquirer would have ended in 1934. On the other hand, a primary source news article from the San Antonio Register that covers Bouldin's death provides slightly different information. The article states that Bouldin operated the inquirer until his demise in 1936. With this given information, it is safe to say that the Inquirer must have ended somewhere between those years.

Despite these complications, Bouldin had a reputation as a popular San Antonio Black
Newspaper operator while his business was still up and running. It was obvious that Bouldin had
certain intentions behind his newspaper business. Bouldin planned to make himself known as a

⁷ Handbook of Texas Online, Robert J. Duncan, "BELLINGER, VALMO CHARLES"

⁸ Texas, Death Certificates, 1903-1982. G William Bouldin. Texas Department of State Health Services; Austin Texas, USA, Ancestry.com, accessed May 9, 2020.

⁹ Handbook of Texas Online, Robert J. Duncan, "BELLINGER, VALMO CHARLES"

¹⁰ "G. W. Bouldin Succumbs, Sunday To Short Illness." San Antonio Register July 10, 1936

Antonio Register, Bouldin was very actively involved in his community. He was a member of multiple organizations from the American Woodmen, the United Brothers of Friendship, and became a member of West End Baptist Church. Bouldin eventually became one of the first Texans, and the first San Antonian, to attend the National Negro Business League. He would also meet often with multiple of San Antonio's other civil rights activists and discuss news or politics. ¹¹ These Black business professionals all wanted better for the black community and Bouldin was going to do his part by spreading information to his people.

Bouldin took much pride in his newspaper because he believed he was educating his audience about the injustices black people faced daily. This strong belief tended to show in his newspapers because of the way he labeled the Inquirer as. On the front cover of all his newspapers he included the name of his newspaper company at the top of the page, *The San Antonio Inquirer*, and right below the title would his slogan that read "Devoted to the upbuilding of the negro race." These words served as a symbol for the Inquirer that showed he was dedicating his business specifically to benefit the black community.

Also, at the end of each newspaper, Bouldin would include a short promotion of why he felt that the information in his newspaper was important. In one of his promotions shared in 1918, he states "The Inquirer is operated on FIRM AND CONSTRUCTIVE basis. No paper in the whole country has made greater progress in the same length of time than has this paper, and San Antonio has never published a Race paper that held its own and enjoyed the undivided

¹¹ "G. W. Bouldin Succumbs, Sunday To Short Illness." San Antonio Register July 10, 1936

¹² Bouldin, G. William. The San Antonio Inquirer. August 18, 1918. The few existing issues of the Inquirer are in a small collection at the Briscoe Center for American History at UT Austin, Texas.

confidence of all the people before or since The Inquirer came into its own almost a decade ago"¹³ A bold claim, but he had the peoples support to back his claims up as more people chose the Inquirer as their source of news. He continued to increase his sales daily and on January 1, 1918 Bouldin had announced in his paper that gained 500 more subscribers. ¹⁴ According to his subscription rates people had the option of subscribing to the San Antonio Inquirer yearly, for a six-month time period, or they could purchase a three-month subscription. A yearly subscription cost \$2.00, a six-month subscription cost \$1.25, and a three-month subscription cost \$0.65. ¹⁵ Yet, no matter what his subscription price were, the African American community felt the need to follow his newspaper because of the great information he provided to them.

Along with the local news, Bouldin's newspaper also included local advertisements from various black business owners. I believe Bouldin chose to advertise other black owned businesses to support his people and cater towards his audience as well. The local advertisements included a variety of different businesses which were all mostly located in San Antonio's East side. One business that caught my attention was for an oriental bathhouse and hotel. The ad stated, "Show that you appreciate Negro Enterprises by giving us your patronage." This ad shows that the black owned businesses relied on the support of one another as well as their community. Bouldin would also sometimes take out advertisements for his own other businesses. On November 29, 1924 Bouldin dedicated half a page of his newspaper advertising his other endeavors. In the Ad, he calls himself "The Square Deal Man" with a list of the different lines of

¹³ Bouldin, G. William. "Are You Subscribed to the Inquirer?" *The San Antonio Inquirer*. January 1, 1918. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁴ Bouldin, G. William. "Are You Subscribed to the Inquirer?" *The San Antonio Inquirer*. January 1, 1918.

¹⁵ Bouldin, G. William. *The San Antonio Inquirer*. November 29, 1924. Subscription rates

¹⁶ Bouldin, G. William. *The San Antonio Inquirer*. Advertisement from an Unknown date

work he was involved in. Real estate, constructions, rentals, and loans were all within his line of work. Even on that same page, he still self-promoted by advertising the Mt. Zion Funeral Parlor that he co-owned. This self-advertisement is proof that Bouldin ran other businesses while maintaining his newspaper business. From this information we can see that Bouldin was a motivated and hardworking person. He was a dedicated businessman and took much pride in his accomplishments. He also wanted to help his supporters as he offered them many different services in his newspaper.

Even though Bouldin felt self-advertisement was important, he primarily focused his attention on informing his readers about civic political matters that affected African Americans. Bouldin would promote articles such as the anti-lynching fund of the San Antonio Express. In this article, the Anti-lynching fund offered a reward of \$500 to any individuals who were directly responsible for the arrest of any persons who were instrumental in arousing a mob to commit a lynching. The article also indicates that the reward will be raised to \$1000 "if the victim of the lynching was a Negro." The difference in the amounts of the rewards was because a large majority of lynching's had African Americans as victims. The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) then had a meeting at the St. Paul church to discuss the lynching, in which they set aside \$100,000 provided by the San Antonio Express Publishing Company to be used as rewards in hopes to stop lynching's in the U.S. 19 By sharing this information, I believe Bouldin accomplishes multiple things. First, he provides his readers with a

¹⁷ Bouldin, G. William. *The San Antonio Inquirer*. Advertisement from an Unknown date

¹⁸ Bouldin, G. William. "Fund Founded to Punish Lynching." *The San Antonio Inquirer*. August 18, 1918.

¹⁹ Bouldin, G. William. "Fund Founded to Punish Lynching." *The San Antonio Inquirer*. August 18, 1918.

positive way to earn money and improve African American lives. He then brings more attention to civic organizations while keeping his readers informed that lynching's are a major ongoing problem in the United States. By sharing this article, he hopes to bring an end to lynching and bring justice to victims of lynching's.

Another article that promotes information about African Americans was posted in the Inquirer on July 20, 1918. The purpose of the article was to discuss black soldiers participating in heavy fighting against the German soldiers during WWI. Black soldiers were now on the front lines for the first time. Due to the conditions of the newspaper I am uncertain about what the article continues to say, but the before the article Colonel Charles Young provides a strong statement. Colonel Charles Young states, "The Negro people of the world over, more than any other race group, lends themselves to service and sacrifice for the love of principle or an ideal."

20 Charles Young then continues his speech asking those who aren't in the front lines of war to conserve their consumption of wheat. By doing so, they make sure that enough bread will go around for those fighting in the front lines of war. I believe that Bouldin included this in his paper to inform his readers that African Americans were now in the front lines of war and what they could do to help benefit them, which was eating less wheat. By doing so, more black soldiers would have access to more enough food to get them through the war.

As you can see, the main idea behind Bouldin's newspaper was to provide the African American community information that correlated towards them. Whether the news was bad or good, Bouldin wanted to keep his readers updated and informed on the current events related to African Americans. Bouldin successfully spread the information he wanted without any serious

²⁰ Bouldin, G. William. *The San Antonio Inquirer*. July 20, 1918. Title is not accurately readable due to the conditions of the newspaper.

backlash for years, until one day he got into trouble for speaking out against the wrong historical event, The Houston Mutiny of 1917.

The Houston mutiny of 1917 started on August 23, 1917 after a rumor spread around that Corporal Charles Baltimore, an African American soldier, had been killed. Charles Baltimore interfered with Houston police, who were trying to detain and interrogate a black woman. Baltimore was severely beaten but survived and was later released. However, the rumor spread like wildfire and around 150 black troops reacted to the news by marching for two hours throughout Houston. They marched not only for their fellow soldier Charles Baltimore, but for racial discrimination as well. Unfortunately, the march ended in death of four black soldiers and fifteen Houston residents. In November 1917 sixty-three black soldiers were convicted and thirteen of them were executed on December 11^{th21} This unfortunate event spread through the news like wildfire, but black newspaper editors across the U.S were afraid to speak about the mistreatment of these black soldiers because of the dangers of doing so, except for Bouldin.²²

The Houston mutiny was a featured topic on the front cover of Bouldin's newspaper shortly after it had happened. On November 24, 1917, Bouldin published a letter from an African American woman residing in Austin Texas, who gave her support for these soldiers. Her name was C. L. Threadgill-Dennis and she was a student at Tillotson College in Austin Texas. Part of her letter, stated,

we are sorry you spilt innocent blood, but we are not sorry that five southern policemen's bones now bleach in the graves of Houston, Tex. It is far better that

Leiker, James. "Houston Mutiny of 1917." 2007, January 24. Blackpast, June 22, 2019
 Jordan, William G. Black Newspapers and Americas War for Democracy, 1914-1920. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2001.

you be shot for having tried to protect a negro woman, than to have you die a natural death in the trenches of Europe, fighting to make the world safe for a democracy you can't enjoy.

Threadgill-Dennis continued the letter discussing the many times African Americans faced injustices in Austin and how the Twenty-fourth Infantry actions were justified. However, the views shared in this letter went against the law according to the Espionage Act. G. William Bouldin was then charged for an unlawful attempt to cause insubordination against military forces. Law enforcement then claimed that Bouldin violated Title I, section 3, of the Espionage Act. Bouldin later was sentenced to two years in the Leavenworth federal penitentiary.²³

In most cases, many black writers remained silent on the subject as they tried to avoid praising the mutineers for protesting injustices. However, they also did not try to condemn the mutineers for their actions either. These other black journalists decided to only provide hard facts on the event in efforts to not take a side. Bouldin and his contributing editor, William Hegwood, were two of the only black newspaper writers to take the side of the mutineers. In addition to Bouldin's arrest, William Hegwood and the writer of the letter, Threadgill-Dennis, were also arrested and charged with violation of the Espionage Act as well. At the time, the American government felt compelled to maintain a strong patriotic presence and an even stronger military presence due to Americas involvement in World War I, one of the bloodiest wars in history. These three arrests occurred most likely to set an example for other newspaper editors, proving that the government was not going to take any criticism against them during war times. If they decide to violate the Espionage acts by siding with the mutineers, they will be arrested as well.

²³ Jordan, William G. Black Newspapers and Americas War for Democracy, 1914-1920. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2001.

The arrest of these three was just another way to limit the freedom of African Americans and used as a scare tactic for African American journalists.²⁴

Nevertheless, Bouldin was arrested on 1919, just shortly after he had published the letter written by Threadgill-Dennis. However, during his trail Bouldin's attorney provided proof that Threadgill-Dennis served time in the Texas state mental institute. He also stated that Bouldin did not actually read the letter and he had only printed it. By indicating that Threadgill-Dennis was possibly mentally ill and stating that Bouldin was not fully aware of what he was publishing in his newspaper, Bouldin's attorney tried to plead his case. Whether these indications helped Bouldin's case or not, he was still sentenced to a total of two years in Leavenworth's prison. Fortunately, Bouldin's arrest did not go unnoticed. Many people recognized that Bouldin's "crime" shouldn't have been a crime at all. Bouldin was simply sharing information that criticized a system that had mistreated African Americans.

Yet, Bouldin's arrest was only a minor setback for him. Once he had been released from prison, he went right back to be a strong civic leader in his community. It was throughout the 1920s that Bouldin started focusing on other business opportunities outside of the newspaper world. By 1924, he was involved in multiple businesses including real estate, construction, rentals and loans. Bouldin also used to own and operate a few funeral homes throughout the state of Texas. Bouldin eventually established Mount Zion Funeral Parlor with Frank E. Lewis, a famous business leader of San Antonio, Texas in 1923. The Mount Zion Funeral Parlor was

²⁴ Lentz-Smith, Adriane Danette. Freedom Struggles. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010.

²⁵ Lentz-Smith, Adriane Danette. Freedom Struggles. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010.

²⁶ "G. W. Bouldin Succumbs, Sunday To Short Illness." San Antonio Register. July 10, 1936

formally known as St Paul Colored Methodist Church located at 230 N. Center. Bouldin went on to establish mortuaries in Hallettsville, Lockhart, Luling, Gonzales, Yoakum, San Marcos, Kenedy, and Corpus Christi Texas. Bouldin and Frank E. Lewis remained associates in the mortuary business up until 1929. Bouldin lived the remainder of his life owning and operating multiple businesses across Texas, establishing the title as an outstanding African American businessman and civil rights leader. ²⁷

G. William Bouldin passed away on a Sunday evening July 5, 1936 at the age of 41.

Bouldin's death came as a shock for many San Antonio residents. According to an article in the San Antonio register covering Bouldin's death, he was suffering from an illness that was not to be taken very seriously but proved fatal for him. His funeral service was held on a Thursday afternoon July 9th, 1936. The funeral service took place at West End Baptist Church and was officiated by Reverend E.D. Dukes. ²⁸ Despite Bouldin and Valmo Charles Bellinger being rivals in the newspaper industry, the San Antonio register covered a great article that week honoring Bouldin for his services as a businessman. The article praises Bouldin as a brilliant businessman, including information of all his businesses and applauds him for his acts of courage throughout the years. The newspaper reported, "throughout his career as a businessman and as a citizen, was a man of courage and determination, standing upon his convictions for what he thought was right. His courageous stand for Negro womanhood, some years ago, brought him some unpleasantries, but he came out of it with the plaudits of an admiring and grateful race. He chose not to enter politics, preferring to be an independent champion of his people." The unpleasant

²⁷ Salas, Mario Marcel. "An Important African American Leader in San Antonio." observer. The San Antonio Observer, June 4, 2019.

 ²⁸ "G. W. Bouldin Succumbs, Sunday To Short Illness." San Antonio Register. July 10, 1936
 ²⁹ "G. W. Bouldin Succumbs, Sunday To Short Illness." San Antonio Register. July 10, 1936

event the newspaper was referring to, was the event that caused Bouldin his two-year sentence in prison. Bouldin also never chose to enter the political arena and instead stood by the foundation of the Inquirer, which was to spread knowledge to the African American people. Many of South Texas great civil rights activist came to san Antonio the week of Bouldin's death to attend his funeral service, honoring him for his outstanding fight for justice.³⁰

G. William Bouldin was an ambitious businessman who also served as an activist journalist for his community. Like his peers, Bouldin wanted more for the African American community and he utilized his resources to help his people prosper. By using his newspaper business as a source of information, he kept his readers informed on the injustices against African Americans. Like many other African American business leaders, He fought for his community in his own way. His arrest was not his downfall in the slightest, as he came back stronger than ever, diving right back into his civic duties shortly after his release. Bouldin remains one of San Antonio's most prominent African American Businessmen and his legacy should continue to be honored. Bouldin's story is just one of many black business leaders who utilized their business to benefit humanity.

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³⁰ "G. W. Bouldin Succumbs, Sunday To Short Illness." San Antonio Register. July 10, 1936



G. W. BOULDIN, for twentyeight years a resident of San Antonio, n.ilitant publisher and wellknown funeral home owner, who
once controlled a chain of mortuaries throughout Southwest Texas,
and who died Sunday evening from
an illness that had not been considered serious.

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³¹ "G. W. Bouldin Succumbs, Sunday To Short Illness." *San Antonio Register*. July 10, 1936 picture of Bouldin from this article

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