

## Social Studies – US History

### Derailing Jim Crow: The Fight Against Houston’s Segregated Streetcars

#### MASTERY FOCUS

Inquiry/Compelling Question		
To what extent was the Black struggle against Jim Crow segregation in Progressive Era Houston successful?		
Standards – Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills / Student Expectations (TEKS/SEs)		
Ethnic Studies: African American Studies 8D		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain how the rise of Jim Crow laws affected the life experiences of African Americans in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.</li> </ul>		
Learning Targets		
I can:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Define and explain the concept of a boycott.</li> <li>Explain the connection between Jim Crow segregation and the Houston streetcar boycott.</li> <li>Summarize the impact of the streetcar boycott.</li> <li>Analyze a variety of primary sources to make an argument about the success or failure of the streetcar boycott.</li> </ul>		
Vocabulary		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Boycott</li> <li>Ordinance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jim Crow</li> <li>Poll Tax</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hack Driver</li> <li>Strike</li> </ul>
Sources Utilized		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Houston Public Library, Digital Archives.</li> <li><i>Houston Chronicle, Houston Post and Street Railway Journal.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HAM Slice Houston History #48, Transportation in Houston.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Seizing Freedom, Walk! The Streetcar Boycotts.</li> </ul>
Performance Task		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students will create a textbook entry that utilizes primary source evidence to make a clear argument.</li> </ul>		

#### LESSON CYCLE

Derailing Jim Crow: The Fight Against Houston’s Segregated Streetcars		Teacher Moves
<b>1</b>	<b>Engage</b>	
	Procedure: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Handout copies of the I See, Think and Wonder assignment.</li> <li>Have students analyze an image of the inside of a Houston streetcar and complete the graphic organizer.</li> </ol>	

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<p>3. After students have completed their graphic organizer, have them share out with their partner or small group.</p> <p>4. <b>Debrief:</b> The teacher will then lead a whole group discussion and have each group share out one observation from each column.</p> <p>Transition to New Learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As you conclude the discussion ask students to consider the following question:</li> </ul> <p><b>How do you predict African Americans in Houston reacted to the segregation of public transportation?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow a few students to share their predictions.</li> </ul> <p><b>Source:</b> Houston Electric Company streetcar, Houston Public Library, Digital Archives,  <a href="https://cdm17006.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/images/id/1532/rec/20">https://cdm17006.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/images/id/1532/rec/20</a></p> <p><b>Additional Resource:</b>            HAM Slice Houston History #48 Transportation in Houston  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbssmE1FclQ">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbssmE1FclQ</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Within the discussion make sure students consider the small “colored” signs on both sides of the streetcar.</li> <li>Projecting the digital copy will allow you to zoom in and highlight the segregation signs on the streetcar.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2</b></p>	<p><b>New Learning/Direct Instruction</b></p>
<p>Procedure:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Set the scene for students.</li> <li><b>Say:</b> In 1903, Houston’s African American community staged a boycott that would last nearly a year and would challenge the legitimacy of the newly emerging Jim Crow society.</li> <li><b>Say:</b> Jim Crow laws enforced racial segregation throughout the southern United States. These laws segregated everything from transportation to education. A boycott is when a group of people refuses to purchase a product or use a service in protest to pressure a business or government to change.</li> </ol>	

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<p>4. <b>Say:</b> Just like the rest of the South, these laws impacted Houston as well. African Americans in Houston and across the South would use boycotts to fight back against Jim Crow laws.</p> <p>5. <b>Say:</b> We will now listen to the first few minutes of a podcast that discusses the history of struggle against segregated transportation in Houston.</p> <p>6. <b>Say:</b> As you listen, follow along on the transcript and highlight key moments in the struggle of Black Houstonians against Jim Crow transportation.</p> <p>7. Play the first seven minutes of the podcast. Note: The full transcript is available on the website.</p> <p>8. <b>Debrief:</b> Call on students to share one thing they highlighted in the transcript that surprised them or that they found interesting.</p> <p>Transition to Cooperative Learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Now students have adequate background information to understand the context of the primary source documents they are about to analyze.</li> <li>• Have students turn to the “Derailing Jim Crow” graphic organizer.</li> <li>• As students prepare to analyze the documents, remind them of the context of Jim Crow segregation and the role of the Supreme Court case <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> in laying the foundation of legal segregation.</li> <li>• Have them read the context section at the top of the graphic organizer.</li> </ul> <p><b>Source:</b> Seizing Freedom, Walk! The Streetcar Boycotts  <a href="https://seizingfreedom.vpm.org/walk-the-streetcar-boycotts/">https://seizingfreedom.vpm.org/walk-the-streetcar-boycotts/</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depending on time, you can shorten the clip used, play a longer clip or cut it and move straight to the documents.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3</b></p>	<p><b>Cooperative Learning</b></p>
<p>Procedure:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students will analyze a variety of primary source documents related to the Houston streetcar boycott.</li> <li>2. As students analyze each document, they will fill in the graphic organizer and complete the following for each document:</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The documents can either be analyzed as a gallery walk or in small groups.</li> <li>• Allow approximately 3-5 minutes for each document.</li> </ul>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Summarize two examples from the document that describe Houston segregation and the struggle for equality.</b></li> <li>• <b>Based on their analysis, students must determine if they believe the event or action was a success or failure for Black Houstonians.</b></li> </ul> <p>3. <b>Debrief:</b> Once students have completed the documents, have them count how many documents they described as a “success” and how many they described as a “failure.” Quickly go through each document and poll the class and ask why they viewed the document as either evidence of success or failure in the struggle against segregation.</p> <p>Transition to Application/Performance Task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have students use the sentence stem to complete the thesis statement at the bottom of the graphic organizer.</li> <li>• They will use this thesis to complete their performance task.</li> </ul> <p><b>Sources:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. “Suggested Ordinance,” <i>Houston Post</i>, March 8, 1904, <i>The Portal to Texas History</i>, texashistory.unt.edu.</li> <li>2. “Negro Women on a Strike,” <i>Houston Chronicle</i>, November 5, 1903.</li> <li>3. “Police on the Cars,” <i>Houston Post</i>, November 2, 1903, 3, <i>The Portal to Texas History</i>, texashistory.unt.edu.</li> <li>4. “Poll Taxes are Rushing,” <i>Houston Chronicle</i>, January 18, 1904.</li> <li>5. “The Houston Boycott,” <i>New York Press in Houston Chronicle</i>, July 9, 1904.</li> <li>6. “American Street Railway Investments,” <i>Street Railway Journal</i>, Volume 14, 1907 (New York: McGraw Publishing Company), 401.</li> </ol> <p>Link to digital copy: <a href="https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1VYWg7n9GA47YwfkeOj4VtcBGAhGqeq1mDStlqn8Nuw4/edit?usp=sharing">https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1VYWg7n9GA47YwfkeOj4VtcBGAhGqeq1mDStlqn8Nuw4/edit?usp=sharing</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To assist special population students, the documents include definitions for key vocabulary words related to the boycott. Further assistance can be given by highlighting key passages in each document to focus student reading.</li> <li>• Some students make take a more nuanced view and see the boycott in terms of mixed success. Allow students to modify their statement as needed. For example, “Although the boycott had many successes, it failed overall because...”</li> </ul>

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4	<b>Application/Performance Task</b>
	<p>Procedure</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Say:</b> Although the boycott lasted for less than a year and Jim Crow segregation remained, the struggle proved that African Americans did not wait for equality. From the very beginning of segregation, African Americans fought back. Despite the significance of this early struggle against Jim Crow in Houston and across the South, this history remains absent from most history textbooks.</li> <li><b>Say:</b> Your task is to create a short textbook entry that will provide a narrative of the Houston boycott and analyze the extent to which it succeeded or failed.</li> <li>On a separate sheet of paper, have students create a textbook entry that describes either the success, failure or mixed success of the Houston boycott. The assignment should include the criteria listed below.</li> </ol> <p><b>Must Haves:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Length: At least 5 sentences.</li> <li>A description of the context.</li> <li>Clear thesis arguing for either the success, failure or mixed result of the boycott.</li> <li>Two compelling pieces of evidence from the documents.</li> <li>Conclusion.</li> </ul>
6	<b>Closure</b>
	<p>Procedure:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allow several students to share out their paragraphs with the entire class.</li> <li>If time allows, have students find a partner who made an argument that was different from theirs. Have them trade paragraphs and then discuss what they found interesting about their partner’s narrative.</li> </ol>

# Derailing Jim Crow:



Source: Seizing Freedom, Walk! The Streetcar Boycotts.

## The Fight Against Houston's Segregated Streetcars, 1903-1904



Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### What Do You See, Think and Wonder?

Directions: Look carefully at the image and complete the chart below. In the first column write down several things that you see in the image. In the second column, write down what the image makes you think about. And in the final column, write down anything that the image makes you wonder about.



Source: Houston Electric Company streetcar, Houston Public Library, Digital Archives, <https://cdm17006.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/images/id/1532/rec/20>

I see...	I think...	I wonder...

## Seizing Freedom: Houston Boycott Transcript

**Kidada E. Williams:** On June 2, 1904, a white businessman living in Houston set off to work between 6 and 7 a.m. Normally, he'd leave later and take the Houston Electric streetcar. But a workers' strike meant that the streetcars weren't running, and he was forced to make other plans.

**Unidentified White Man:** I live away in the South End and having neither a horse nor carriage was forced to foot it to town.

**KEW:** As the man made his way to the business district, the streets and sidewalks became increasingly choked with commuters on foot. The man likely added to the chorus of bothered grumbles getting louder as the sun rose and the heat intensified. Unaccustomed to that kind of hike, and with a long way to go, he looked for relief.

**UWM:** A conveyance came along driven by a Negro and I asked him for a lift. Looking at me and grinning, he said: "Boss, I'm obliged to refuse you the favor. The City Council won't let the white folks and the black folks ride together." And with that, he drove on.

**KEW:** The driver's wry "nope" spoke volumes. A new law in Houston had segregated public transportation for almost a year. City Council wanted to draw and uphold the color line to keep white people from the social "inconvenience" of riding side by side with Black Houstonians on their commutes. But now this white businessman was inconvenienced by a worker's strike and was asking a Black driver for a lift.

In response to the unjust law, most Black Houstonians avoided streetcars altogether. The boycott lasted so long and had such an impact that it was reported as far away as Maryland, in the *Baltimore Sun*:

**Baltimore Sun:** The Negroes of Houston have boycotted the streetcars here since the Jim Crow cars, separating the races, began to run. They have organized and are fighting the innovation with all their might.

**KEW:** Black hack drivers used wagons and carriages to ferry the city's Black business and working people to and from work and about their daily affairs, even lowering their fares to support the cause of boycotting public transportation.

**BS:** One Negro church is reported by one of its members to have contributed nearly \$300 to the movement, which is to be spent in maintaining a hack transportation system for the accommodation of Negroes.

**KEW:** And the community was adamant that people fall in line with the boycott:

**BS:** It is reported that the Negro churches have threatened their members with expulsion if they ventured to ride upon the cars of the Houston Electric Company, and that many secret societies threatened their members with expulsion also if they patronize the street cars. In some cases Negro washer women have gone on strike in order to induce their white patrons to advocate a change in the car system.

**KEW:** Black people in Houston's Fourth Ward, who usually rode the San Felipe streetcar line, took the boycott to the next level. During the day, they jeered at the few Black passengers who still used the service, mocking them for riding in the "bobtail" of the car. A Black woman was arrested and fined early on for throwing stones at the passing San Felipe line.



**Houston Post:** The conductors reported that the cars were stoned on every trip. The car was always stopped and every effort made to ascertain who the guilty parties were but without avail. While the Negroes stood around and jeered, all denied any knowledge of who had thrown the stones, stating that they had not seen anyone do it.

**KEW:** When white Houstonians realized that their own business interests were being interrupted, they questioned why Black Houstonians would give one another rides, but exclude white patrons. Black Houstonians answered with actions, not words.

**BS:** The Negroes are silent when questioned, saying that they are attending strictly to their own business and the white people can attend to theirs.

**HP:** The Negroes seemed to enjoy the predicament of the whites hugely, and many of their conveyances could be seen driving about the streets with the space in the rear some 2 feet in length blocked off by a piece of cardboard bearing the legend, "For Whites only."

**KEW:** Southern streetcar companies, like Houston Electric, initially opposed the segregation ordinance. But their bottom lines were no match for the color line's popularity with the white majority, who rolled their eyes at the protests in the local press.

**HP:** There was much comment among the white people as to how long the Negroes would keep up the boycott, it being the consensus of opinion that within the next few days they will realize that a separation of the races on the streetcars is a fact, and that then they will gradually patronize the service.

**KEW:** That prediction was wrong.

This is Seizing Freedom. Jim Crow in the South as we know it didn't emerge overnight. White people had to figure out an architectural design to legally force Black people (who had had their time in freedom's sun) back to their "rightful place" at the "bottom of [American] life". A key part of that plan was to physically separate races—to design a world bound by walls and screens or arbitrary invisible lines on sidewalks and streetcars—forcing white and Black people to move through space differently so that they wouldn't have to interact with one another on equal terms.

In this episode: how a segregated society was built brick by brick, streetcar by streetcar, town by town, and state by state after a Supreme Court decision. And how race men and women—those black people combating white supremacy at every turn—tried to fight back.

Protests of segregated public transportation didn't start or end in the mid-1950s in Montgomery, Alabama. African Americans fought for their dignity and the right to equal public spaces across the South from the very beginning of the 20th century.

By the winter of 1903, Black Houstonians had been resisting the spirit and violence of segregation for 8 months. There was no sign of letting up. And they were not alone. They were part of a huge movement of Black southerners protesting streetcar segregation. Between 1900 and 1910, in more than two dozen cities—from Mobile to Savannah, from Jacksonville to Richmond—African Americans tried to stem the tide of their exclusion from public life by taking the fight to the streets and streetcars.

Source: Seizing Freedom, Walk! The Streetcar Boycotts, <https://seizingfreedom.vpm.org/walk-the-streetcar-boycotts/>

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Derailing Jim Crow:  
Was the Struggle Against Houston’s Segregated Streetcars a Success or Failure?**

Context:

**Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)**-The Supreme Court legalized segregation in public facilities, arguing that “separate but equal” was legal. This set the stage for Jim Crow segregation laws.

*Directions: As you read each station, determine if the event or action was a success or a failure for Black Houstonians. Give two examples of evidence from each document.*

Doc #	Success or Failure <b>S or F</b>	Evidence (Summarize, paraphrase or use quotes)
#1		1. 2.
#2		1. 2.
#3		1. 2.
#4		1. 2.
#5		1. 2.
#6		1. 2.

Thesis: The boycott was a success/failure because \_\_\_\_\_

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## Document 1: Suggested Ordinance

### SUGGESTED ORDINANCE.

An Ordinance providing for the separation of white and negro passengers in street cars and electric cars in the city of Houston, Texas, and providing for the assignment of passengers on such cars to seats or space on the same, and prescribing penalties for the violation of this ordinance.

Whereas, the indiscriminate seating and commingling of white and negro passengers in street cars and electric cars in the city of Houston, Texas, causes affrays, disturbances and breaches of the peace, and tends to make travel thereon unsafe and insecure;

Now therefore, be it ordained by the city council of the city of Houston:

Section 1. It shall be the duty of the conductor or other employes in charge of any street car or electric car on any line of street railroad in the city of Houston, to assign all passengers entering such car to seats or space on the car in such employe's charge, and to remove from one seat or part of the car to another seat or part of the car, as may, in the discretion of said conductor or said other employe in charge of such car, seem advisable, so far as practicable to separate the white and negro passengers on such car.

Sec. 8. The ordinance of the city of Houston approved October 1, 1903, providing for separate cars or compartments for the white and negro races in street railways in the city of Houston, as well

Source: "Suggested Ordinance," *Houston Post*, March 8, 1904, *The Portal to Texas History*, texashistory.unt.edu.

#### Vocabulary:

ordinance: a local law.

## Document 2: Negro Women on a Strike

**NEGRO WOMEN  
ON A STRIKE**

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**New Phase of Race Separation on  
the Street Cars.**

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**NEGRO SECRET FUND**

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**Churches and Fraternities Are Helping  
Along the Boycott With Donations  
—Wholesale Discharges.**

Source: "Negro Women on a Strike," *Houston Chronicle*, November 5, 1903.

The attitude of Houston negroes toward the street car company and compartment cars for the separation of the races remains unchanged. In fact, the lines seem to be more firmly drawn about the negroes by their leaders, whoever they may be, and the boycott is stronger than ever, and indications point to its remaining in effect longer than was first anticipated.

Some families have reported that the negro women who have been doing family washing have declined to take any more washing on the ground that they wouldn't ride on the street cars, and the hack service of the negroes in opposition to the street car company would not permit them to carry baskets on their hacks.

Of course, the inconvenience is slight, as there are many laundries in Houston, which operate independent of the street car system, and these have been secured by those families whose negro washerwomen have struck. The effect is destined to have a more serious effect upon the washer-women who refuse to take washing because they won't ride on the street cars and can't ride in the hacks with their baskets.

It has been reported to the Houston Electric Company that the churches and other negro societies have organized the boycott and are perpetuating it by financial aid. One negro church is reported by one of its members to have contributed nearly \$300 to the movement, which is to be expended in maintaining and perfecting a hack transportation system for the accommodation of the negroes. Other churches and secret societies are reported as having also taken collections to go into a general fund to maintain the present antagonistic attitude of negroes toward the Houston Electric Company.

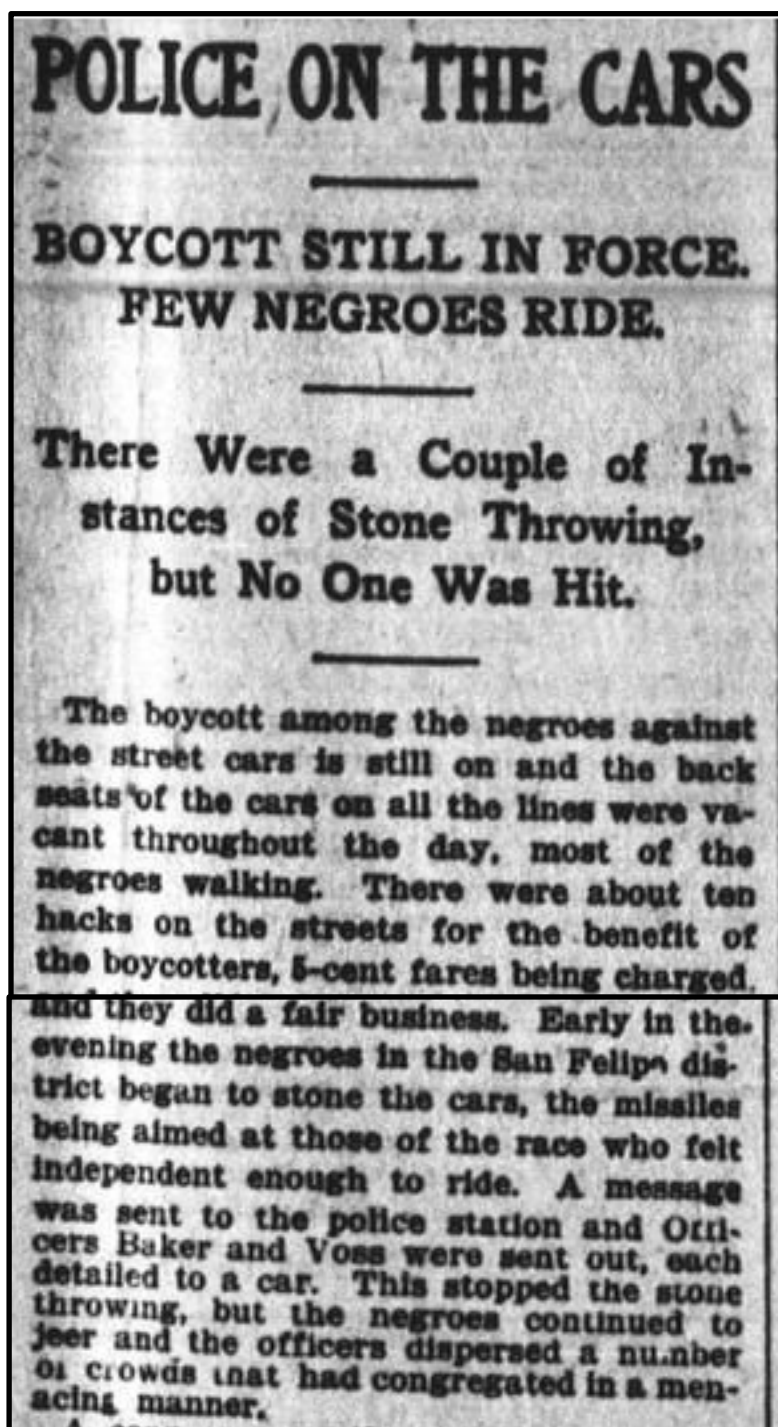
### Vocabulary:

strike: the refusal of a group of workers to do work until their demands are met.

boycott: when a group of people refuses to purchase a product or use a service in protest to pressure a business or government to change.

hack: a taxi driver.

### Document 3: Police on the Cars



Source: "Police on the Cars," *Houston Post*, November 2, 1903, 3, *The Portal to Texas History*, [texashistory.unt.edu](http://texashistory.unt.edu).

#### Vocabulary:

boycott: when a group of people refuses to purchase a product or use a service in protest to pressure a business or government to change.

Document 4: Poll Taxes Are Rushing

**THE HOUSTON CHRONICLE**

**POLL TAXES  
ARE RUSHING**

Agitation by Business Interests  
Brings Results.

**MANY NEGRO VOTERS**

Colored Brother Wants to Make "Jim  
Crow" Law an Issue in the City  
Campaign—The Record.

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**Colored Voters.**

The negroes of Houston are showing remarkable strength in the payment of poll taxes, the reason for which, it is said, are the hopes entertained by the colored population of securing a repeal of the compartment car ordinance by the next city council.

It is said to be the plan to throw all the negro votes to that candidate, democratic, republican or independent who will array himself against the compartment car ordinance and attempt to secure its repeal. In some wards, the negroes have organized and have gathered considerable strength which will be directed toward securing a repeal of the compartment car ordinance.

A negro prominent in the boycott against the street car company is quoted as saying that the ordinance will be repealed by the next city council. The only apparent explanation of his remark is the fact that the negroes hope to use their ballots in trying to secure a repeal of the measure.

Source: "Poll Taxes are Rushing," *Houston Chronicle*, January 18, 1904.

**Vocabulary:**

poll tax: a fee required to be paid before voting, used historically to prevent African Americans and low-income communities from voting.

Document 5: The Houston Boycott

**The Houston Boycott.**

**New York Press.**

Down in the city of Houston, Texas, which is to be pronounced "Heuston" by all means, and never "Howston," the last bench in all street cars is reserved for negroes and all other benches are designated for white folks. This "jim-crow" arrangement displeased the cullud citizens, who have now refused to ride on the cars. "We insist on havin' at least three seats," they say. The company "stands pat" and is losing 20 per cent of its revenues, as one-fifth of its patrons hereto were negroes.

A citizen of Houston now in New York says: "It is the firmest and stanchest boycott you ever heard of. When white men boycott a line there are always some recalcitrants who will do something to break the boycott: but in this case there is not a negro in Houston who has set foot on a street car since the colored population decided to stop riding. What do they do, these negroes, for local transportation? Such as are able ride in carriages: the rest walk. The population is about 60,000. We have thirty-five miles of electric street car lines."

Source: "The Houston Boycott," *New York Press* in *Houston Chronicle*, July 9, 1904.

Vocabulary:

Jim Crow: laws that enforced racial segregation throughout the southern United States.



Document 6: Houston Electric Co.

**HOUSTON.**

Population in 1890, 27,557, in 1900, 44,633, in 1906 (Gov. estimate), 58,132.

**Houston Electric Co.**—This company is the successor to the Houston Electric Street Ry. Co., which was sold under foreclosure of mortgage in Oct., 1901. Annual meeting last Tuesday in Jan. This company controls a franchise granted on Oct. 23, 1890, for 45 years, and does the entire electric railway business of Houston. Estimated population served 80,000.

OPERATION.—Year ending Dec. 31,

	1903.	1904.	1905.	1906.
Gross income. . . . .	\$416,124	\$357,183	\$517,315	\$591,351
Operating expenses. . . . .	*272,564	314,522	*313,524	*379,746
Gross income less oper. exps. . . . .	143,560	42,661	203,791	211,605
Deductions from earnings.				
Interest on funded debt. . . . .	84,657	96,336	105,504	93,319
Net income. . . . .	8,903	†53,675	98,287	118,286
Sinking fund . . . . .			27,255	29,304
Dividends. . . . .			15,000	52,500
Balance. . . . .			56,032	36,482

\*Including taxes. †Deficit.

NOTE.—The earnings of the company for 1904 were reduced by a boycott which extended over a period of 7 months, and by a strike which was declared on June 2, 1904, and terminated on Oct. 11, 1904.

Source: "American Street Railway Investments," *Street Railway Journal*, Volume 14, 1907 (New York: McGraw Publishing Company), 401.