



what I Love about Houston

BY CHARLES C. FOSTER

When one is asked to write about what one loves about Houston, the surprising thing is that there is so much to write about. Having lived in Houston for more than three decades, having moved here to start my legal career in international law that morphed into one of the largest immigration law firms, what has always struck me is how little people outside of Houston have any image (for good or bad) of Houston. Today, because of its strong economy, being the energy capital of world, having the largest medical center, being the space capital of the world for man's exploration of the universe, being the 4th largest city in the U. S. with the 3rd largest Consular Corps, Houston clearly should have a better known profile.

The most interesting point for me is how much Houston is loved by those who move here. They may not have necessarily wanted to move here, but once they get here they fall in love with Houston and do not want to ever leave. What is it that we all love about Houston? I would characterize it that while Texas may be the friendliest state in the union, clearly Houston is the friendliest major city. Houston is wide open. We don't care where you come from; once you get here, live here and work here, you are by definition a Houstonian irrespective of your race, national origin or citizenship. While in some cities how long not only you but your family has resided in the city is an issue, but when people run for an

elected office in Houston, I've never once heard anyone question how long they have lived in Houston or their ethnicity or race. We take that for granted; once you live here, by definition you are a Houstonian.

I often repeat the following anecdote because it says a lot about our city, state and country. Early in my immigration law practice, I had before me a very attractive, wealthy couple who spoke



perfect English, French and Farsi. I had just outlined a strategy for how they could acquire their Lawful Permanent Residency or so-called "green card" status in the U. S. At that time they had both graduated from the finest university in Paris, University of Paris-Sorbonne, and they had an expensive apartment near the Champs Elysee and, of course, Paris is one of the great cities of the world. As I was advising them how to acquire

Permanent Resident status to allow them to start a new life in Houston, I paused briefly and with some degree of humility on behalf of all Houstonians, I said, "You know, Houston is a great city, but after all Paris isn't that bad, is it? Why Houston?" I will always remember the husband's answer. He said, "Mr. Foster, no matter how long we live in Paris, we will always be outsiders never considered Parisians or French, but we can move to Houston and we can become Houstonians and that is important to us and our family."

There is so much to love about Houston, but I have to single out the fact that during my career, I've seen Houston grow from essentially a big oil town with a very Texas flavor where you could literally count the number of Chinese or Indian restaurants on one hand, to one of the most diverse, multi-cultural cities in the U. S. In fact, we are the largest majority minority city where there is no one race or ethnic group that has an absolute majority.

The Asian American population is growing at the fastest rate. The incredible growth in the Asia American communities all came about as a result of legislation initiated by President John F. Kennedy and passed by President Lyndon B. Johnson. The Immigration Act of 1965 did away with the National Origin System, which for the first time effective in 1968 allowed people to immigrate irrespective of their nationality based upon family ties and more significantly

for Asians, based upon professional job skills. According to Stephen Klineberg, Co-Director of Rice University's Kinder Institute for Urban Research's latest report, "Diversity and Transformation Among Asians in Houston," Asian Americans are that part of the population with the largest number of college graduates and with the highest levels of income. That is directly related to the fact that in 1968 few Asians had any relatives in the United States and the only way to legally immigrate at that time was based upon job skills at a professional level or through investment.

Finally, in terms of why I love Houston, I have to single out three projects with which I was intimately involved, the most important of which is when, as Chairman of the Asia Society Texas Center in 1995, we dreamed the possibility of building a permanent home in the Museum District that would allow us to have space for art exhibitions and performing artists in addition to the regular lectures we were already hosting on policy and business. Just this last April 2012 we finally dedicated our extraordinary new \$48.5 million Asia Society Texas Center designed by the remarkable international architect, Yoshio Taniguchi, which celebrates Asian culture and which is a platform for the Asian American community to host important events and celebrate their culture. If you are not a member of the Asia Society, I would urge you

to go on-line and join the same and enjoy the many ethnic and cultural events and exhibitions that membership offers.

The other projects are the George Bush Monument and the James A. Baker III Monument on Buffalo Bayou in Sesquicentennial Park in Downtown. We often take our children to Washington, DC to visit Presidential monuments and we can now do that in Houston. The Bush Monument was initiated by me; I co-chaired both projects in order to commemorate the fact that these two gentlemen are not only clearly by any measure the most distinguished citizens of Houston in terms of their impact nationally and globally, but also the fact that great cities in our history have great public art. If you've not been to Sesquicentennial Park on Buffalo Bayou behind the Wortham Theater (on Franklin at Bagby across from the Aquarium), I would urge you to visit.

In short, I love Houston for its great diversity of population and incredible cuisines, the fact that I believe we are the most open, accepting city in the country and the fact that we have great cultural institutions, museums and performing arts companies and, as mentioned above (I'm biased), I love the new Asia Society Texas Center and the Bush and Baker monuments in downtown Houston.



Charles C. Foster is the Co-Chairman, FosterQuan, LLP, a well-known immigration firm. Foster currently leads the Greater Houston Partnership Task Force on Immigration Reform, a nationwide effort to secure sensible immigration reform legislation that meets the needs of the business community, families, and our nation's economy. He is the founding Chair of the State Bar of Texas Immigration & Nationality Law Section.

He also serves as Honorary Consul General for the Kingdom of Thailand. Additional service activities include: Board of Trustees of The Asia Society and Chairman of its Texas Center; Board Member of the Greater Houston Partnership and its Executive Committee; Member of the Executive Committee of the Houston International Festival; Member of the Board of Directors of the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA), the International Institute of Education – Southern Region, Neighborhood Centers, Inc., InterFaith Ministries, and the Houston Ballet. Long recognized as a national expert in U.S. immigration law, Foster has served as senior policy advisor to both Presidents Bush and Obama during their Presidential campaigns and has testified before both the U.S. House and Senate Subcommittees on Immigration on a variety of occasions. Foster is best known for his role in helping ballet performer Li Cunxin stay in the United States over the objections of Chinese Communist Party officials, which was memorialized in Cunxin's autobiography Mao's Last Dancer and later in a film by the same name.

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