

Houston Hype, Houston Reality

Essential Question (to be answered after examining all documents)

How did the advertisements by the Allen brothers differ from the realities of the new city?

Document #1

Advertisement by the Allen brothers from the *Telegraph and Texas Register* published in Columbia, Texas on August 30, 1836.

THE TOWN OF HOUSTON.

SITUATED at the head of navigation, on the West bank of Buffalo Bayou, is now for the first time brought to public notice because, until now, the proprietors were not ready to offer it to the public, with the advantages of capital and improvements.

The town of Houston is located at a point on the river which must ever command the trade of the largest and richest portion of Texas. By reference to the map, it will be seen that the trade of San Jacinto, Spring Creek, New Kentucky and the Brazos, above and below Fort Bend, must necessarily come to this place, and will at this time warrant the employment of at least ONE MILLION DOLLARS of capital, and when the rich lands of this country shall be settled, a trade will flow to it, making it, beyond all doubt, the great interior commercial emporium of Texas.

The town of Houston is distant 15 miles from the Brazos river, 30 miles, a little North of East, from San Felipe, 60 miles from Washington, 40 miles from Lake Creek, 30 miles South West from New Kentucky, and 15 miles by water and 8 or 10 by land above Harrisburg. Tide water runs to this place and the lowest depth of water is about six feet. Vessels from New Orleans or New York can sail without obstacle to this place, and steamboats of the largest class can run down to Galveston Island in 8 or 10 hours, in all seasons of the year. It is but a few hours sail down the bay, where one may take an excursion of pleasure and enjoy the luxuries of fish, fowl, oysters and sea bathing. Galveston harbor being the only one in which vessels drawing a large draft of water can navigate, must necessarily render the Island the great naval and commercial depot of the country.

The town of Houston must be the place where arms, ammunitions and provisions for the government will be stored, because, situated in the very heart of the country, it combines security and the means of easy distribution, and a national armory will no doubt very soon be established at this point.

There is no place in Texas more healthy, having an abundance of excellent spring water, and enjoying the sea breeze in all its freshness. No place in Texas possesses so many advantages for building, having Pine, Ash, Cedar and Oak in inexhaustible quantities; also the tall and beautiful Magnolia grows in abundance. In the vicinity are fine quarries of stone.

Nature appears to have designated this place for the future seat of Government. It is handsome and beautifully elevated, salubrious and well watered, and now in the very heart or centre of population, and will be so for a length of time to come. It combines two important advantages: a communication with the coast and foreign countries, and with the different portions of the Republic. As the country shall improve, rail roads will become in use, and will be extended from this point to the Brazos, and up the same, also from this up to the head waters of San Jacinto, embracing that rich country, and in a few years the whole trade of the upper Brazos will make its way into Galveston Bay through this channel.

Preparations are now making to erect a water Saw Mill, and a large Public House for accommodation, will soon be opened. Steamboats now run in this river, and will in a short time commence running regularly to the Island.

The proprietors offer the lots for sale on moderate terms to those who desire to improve them, and invite the public to examine for themselves.

A. C. ALLEN, for
A. C. & J. K. ALLEN.

August 30, 1836.—Gm
The Commercial Bulletin, of New Orleans, Mobile Advertiser, the Globe, at Washington, Morning Courier and New York Enquirer, New York Herald, and Louisville Public Advertiser are requested to make three insertions of this advertisement, and forward their bills to this office for payment.

Examining the Document:

1. Who is the audience for this document?
2. Describe all of the advantages of settling in Houston described by the Allen brother's advertisement.

Document #2

Print accompanying Document #1 in newspaper advertisement



Examining the Document:

1. Who is the audience for this document?
2. Describe the town of Houston as it is depicted in this print.
3. What landform is depicted in this scene that did not exist in Houston?

Document #3

The Allen brothers wanted to show that ships could navigate Buffalo Bayou to their site for Houston. They talked Francis Lubbock into bringing a supply of goods to Houston on the steamboat, the *Laura*. Lubbock describes the trip from Harrisburg to Houston. (Harrisburg was about where the Loop 610 East bridge is over the ship channel.) This account is found in his memoir, *Six Decades in Texas*.

No boat had ever been above this place [Harrisburg], and we were three days making the distance to Houston, only six miles by the dirt road, but twelve by the bayou. The slow time was in consequence of the obstructions we were compelled to remove as we progressed. We had to rig what were called Spanish windlasses on the shore to heave the logs and snags out of our way, the passengers all working faithfully, ...dignified judge, military heroes, young merchant in fine clothes from the dressiest city in the United States, all lent a helping hand.... In the evenings we had a good time dancing and frolicking with the settlers on the shore.....Just before reaching our destination a party of us, becoming weary of the steamer, took a yawl and concluded we would hunt for the city. So little evidence could we see of a landing that we passed by the site and run into White Oak Bayou, only realizing that we must have passed the city when we struck in the brush. We then backed down the bayou, and by close observation discovered a road or street laid off from the water's edge. Upon landing we found stakes and footprints, indicating that we were in the town tract. This was the first of January, 1837, when I discovered Houston. For though I did not accompany Columbus when he discovered America, as is asserted, I certainly was in at the discovery of Houston, the *Laura* being the first steamer that ever reached her landing.

Examining the Document:

1. Who is the audience for this document?
2. Describe the difficulties faced by the crew and passengers of the *Laura* on its first trip to Houston.

Document #4

Dilue Rose Harris wrote this account of her brother's first visit to Houston in her memoir, *Reminiscences*, written when she was 74. She was 11 years old when Houston was founded.

There was so much excitement about the city of Houston that some of the young men in our neighborhood, my brother among them, visited it. After being absent for some time they said it was hard work to find the city in the pine woods and that when they did, it consisted of one dugout canoe, a bottle gourd of whisky and a surveyor's chain and compass and was inhabited by four men with an ordinary camping outfit. We had a good joke on the boys at their disappointment. We asked them at what hotel they had put up and whether they went to church and to the theater. They took our teasing in good part and said they were glad to get home alive. They said the mosquitoes were as large as grasshoppers and they thought they would have a nice clean bath but in a few minutes the water was [full of] alligators. One man ran out on the north side and the others, who had run out where they went in, got a canoe and rescued him. He said a large panther had been nearly caught but that it had run off as the canoe approached.

Examining the Document:

1. Who is the audience for this document?
2. Describe Houston as Dilue Rose's brother saw it on his first visit.

Document #5

Augustus Allen, founder of Houston, described the difficulties of clearing the land for the city:

One could hardly picture the jungle and swampy sweetgum woods that a good portion of the city is built upon. These swampy grounds had to be cleared and drained....The labor of clearing the great space was done by negro slaves and Mexicans, as no white man could have endured the insect bites and malaria, snake bites, impure water, and other hardships.

Examining the Document:

1. This document does not state the reason that Allen is writing this information. Why do you think he may have been writing it? To whom do you think he was writing?
2. Describe the hardships faced in clearing the land so that Houston could be built.

Essential Question

After examining all of the documents for this assignment, you should be ready to answer this question in essay form.

How did the advertisements by the Allen brothers differ from the realities of the new city?

Extension Activity:

Find advertisements on the Internet that use exaggeration as a technique. Use what you learned from reading these documents and the ads you found on the Internet, answer this question:

Is exaggeration an effective method of advertising? Is it ethical?

Sources Used:

Copy of the Telegraph and Texas Register:

“History of the Lake Creek Settlement in Texas,” *Texas History Page*
(http://texashistorypage.com/Lake_Creek_Settlement.html) accessed April 2, 2011.

Illustration of Houston advertisement and text of document:

“1836 Houston Advertisement,” *Houston History Association*
(http://system.gocampaign.com/houstonhistoryassociation_com/images/1836HoustonAd.pdf) accessed
April 2, 2011.

Excerpt from Francis Lubbock Memoir, Excerpt from Dilue Rose Harris Memoir, and excerpt by
Augustus Allen:

Writer’s Program of the Works Progress Administration, compiler. *Houston: A History and Guide*. Anson
Jones Press, Houston. 1942.

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