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A REDEVELOPMENT PROGRAM  
FOR THE STATE FAIR OF TEXAS

Prepared for  
STATE FAIR OF TEXAS  
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e.r.a.

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## APPENDIX A

## Appendix A

### GROUP INTERVIEW REPORT

An Economics Research Associates subsidiary, Facts Consolidated, conducted a special portion of the research leading to the findings presented in the E.R.A. report. The Facts Consolidated report follows.

#### BACKGROUND

Economics Research Associates asked Facts Consolidated to provide qualitative answers to two questions of considerable importance in E.R.A.'s study for the State Fair of Texas.

The two questions, preceded by a discussion relating the relevance of each question to the State Fair project, are presented below. The remainder of this report is organized around these topics.

1. Fairs date back hundreds of years. In the Middle Ages, fairs were organized to exchange commercial information. They were an early form of mass advertising. They provided a setting in which merchants could display their wares to many prospective customers. Such trade fairs have survived, relatively unchanged, to the present day. The recent New York World's Fair is an example of a contemporary trade fair.

Another kind of fair was developed in the United States in the mid-19th century. Its function was only nominally to permit the exchange of commercial information. Its primary purpose was to provide an emotional, social outlet for fair-goers. Such fairs found their greatest acceptance in the agrarian Middle West. They represented a break in the endless, arduous labor that characterized pre-mechanized farming. They were a respectable escape from loneliness and remoteness. They offered social contact. As such, fairs were closely akin to revival meetings because they permitted intense emotional experiences in a group context.

However, 100 years of technology have molded a completely different society. The United States is no longer a nation of farmers, living and working in isolation. It is an urban nation whose people live and work in concert with one another. Even the remaining farmers can hardly be described as isolated. Roads, automobiles, television, radio, even consolidated school districts, have all contributed toward ending the remoteness of farm life.

Against this background, the question arises: What is the role of a "social" fair, such as the State Fair of Texas, in contemporary life; and, perhaps more importantly, what will be the function of such fairs in the future?

2. Considerable attention has been given in Dallas to the present location of Fair Park. Much of this attention has been critical, and several other locations have been proposed. Yet Fair Park has a number of significant advantages in its present location, and a move would be costly. It was thus considered important to explore the nature of the feelings and attitudes that exist toward Fair Park in its current location. The question posed was, "Can Fair Park be retained at its present site, and if so, under what conditions?"

#### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The technique chosen to answer the foregoing questions was borrowed from clinical psychology -- the group depth interview. In this procedure, small groups of people discuss their ideas and feelings about certain subjects. The dynamics of the groups are such that each group will select its own leader and work toward a consensus. In the process of accomplishing this goal, members of the group closely scrutinize the statements and positions of other members, demanding relevance and accuracy. During such scrutiny, true motives, attitudes, and feelings are frequently revealed.

Facts Consolidated conducted group depth interviews in Dallas, Texas, on June 10, 1966, and in Paris, Texas, on June 11, 1966. The two settings were selected for the greatest possible urban-rural contrast.

Members of the groups were recruited randomly, by telephone contact, and the only qualification was attendance at the State Fair of Texas within the past five years. Respondents were told they would take part in a discussion of their leisure-time activities and interests.

The groups were structured so as to contain both men and women, and to cover a wide age range. Groups totaled from 8 to 13 members. The moderator in all groups was J. W. Taylor, Vice President/General Manager of Facts Consolidated. The discussion focused initially on each member's personal leisure-time activities and interests, and eventually moved to the State Fair of Texas and Fair Park. Toward the end of the discussion, artists' renderings of the new Fair Park were introduced, and opinions and reactions were solicited.

#### THE ROLE OF FAIRS TODAY AND TOMORROW

The interviews revealed that the State Fair of Texas has as valid and as viable a social function today as it had almost 80 years ago.

The fair continues to provide an intense emotional experience spanning all age groups. A young mother said:

"It's a place to have a good time . . . and . . . I really enjoy just getting out there and forgetting you have kids at home and a thousand things to do."

A 60- year-old grandmother put it even more succinctly when she said:

"It's still excitement. . . even after 50 years."

This should not be construed to mean that all people need, or want, the emotional outlet provided by the State Fair. Some, particularly the more sophisticated urban residents, have found other means of fulfilling this need. Others find that simply living from day to day in the second half of the 20th century is sufficiently demanding of their emotions that the fair represents an unwelcome surplus. However, the steadily rising attendance figures at the fair provide the evidence necessary to quantify the demand for such psychological gratification. Since fair attendance is growing faster than Texas population, it is safe to conclude that the base demand for the fair among the general population is growing and will continue to grow.

## THE LOCATION OF STATE FAIR PARK

In the minds of residents of Dallas and surrounding communities, the present geographic location of Fair Park is unquestionably an optimum one.

However, the area surrounding Fair Park generates intense emotional discomfort in middle-class white residents of Dallas. This discomfort is caused by a combination, and interaction, of several conflicting value parameters.

One parameter results from the confrontation of middle-class affluence and abject poverty. Fair Park's location makes it impossible for visitors to avoid facing an undesirable, unpleasant aspect of life existing side by side with their new-found physical comforts.

Another parameter involves an intense civic pride on the part of many Dallas residents. They feel considerable embarrassment from the thought that visitors to Dallas see the "other side" of the city. They do not want to admit that Dallas has slums.

"You can't take visitors . . . well, visitors from out of town. I always feel ashamed . . . someone here in Dallas that you take out there . . . well, they expect it so it's all right, but . . . you always want to impress your visitors."

The middle-aged woman who haltingly expressed this thought suffered considerable anxiety as she searched for the words. She received solid support from the rest of the group.

The third parameter is distinct, but it prevades the others as well. It is race.

It is expressed in comments like these:

"Fair Park is a lovely place . . . but you feel uncomfortable."

"You don't feel safe around Fair Park."

"I know you are not supposed to discuss race and discrimination . . . but anyway, to me that's the main problem of the fair right now . . . so many colored and white people that --- there's the racial problem --- and the strain that exists between the people --- that's the main problem with the fair rather than the location."

". . . maybe it is slummy but if the racial problem didn't exist you wouldn't feel bad about going to that bad part of town."

The solution for all of these conflicts, at least in terms of the Fair Park location, is simple. All that is required is to eliminate the problem from sight. If the poor Negroes in their shacks cannot be seen, all the guilt feelings revealed above will disappear, or at least be removed from primary consideration. This question was posed:

"If all the land around Fair Park were bought up and turned into a paved, lighted, fenced parking lot, would that solve the problem?"

The citizens of Dallas answered with a resounding "Yes."