

Houston Commemorates 66th Anniversary of TSU’s Historic Student Sit-In



Participants raise their fists and hold signs during a reenactment of Houston’s first lunch counter sit-in on March 4, 2026, as Harris County Commissioner Rodney Ellis led community members on a commemorative walk honoring the Texas Southern University students who launched the historic 1960 protest.

By: Terrance Turner, Forward Times Staff Writer

On March 4, 1960, 13 students from Texas Southern University met on campus, where they’d spent months organizing what would become Houston’s first sit-in. They gathered outside TSU’s Hannah Hall, prayed, paired up, and walked a mile to Weingarten’s grocery store at 4110 Almeda Road. Once there, they sat at the store’s lunch counter and asked to be served. They never were. But their act of civil disobedience would change Houston’s history.

On March 4, 2026, Harris County Commissioner Rodney Ellis led a crowd in a reenactment of that historic walk, with some surprise special guests joining along the way.

Outside Hannah Hall that afternoon, Commissioner Ellis addressed supporters and reporters.

“This is a historic day, and I want to welcome you all here,” he began. “This is a reenactment of a march that took place on this day, 66 years ago. Students from Texas Southern University gathered at this flagpole, said a prayer, and then marched to a lunch counter at the very site that would not serve them — and sitting at that lunch counter led to massive changes in this region.”

Indeed, that sit-in set in motion a chain of events that led to the quiet desegregation of Houston several months later.

“We always seek to pay homage to those young people who were the leaders of this movement,” Ellis said. He named the 13 student protesters: “Deanna Lott, Guy Boudouis, John Bland, John Hutchins, Jessie Parvis, Curtis Graves, Burley, Holly and Pete Hogrobrooks — three from that family — Clarence Coleman, Eddie Rigsby, Pat Patterson, and Eldrewey Stearns.”

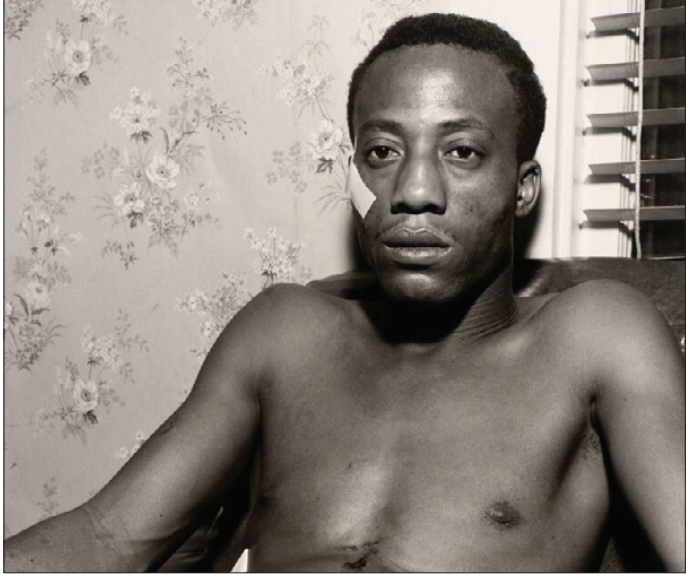
That group was joined by others as they marched toward Weingarten’s that spring day in 1960. Once inside, the group — which had swelled enough to fill all 30 lunch counter seats — sat down and politely requested service. But they were denied service until the store closed at 8:30 p.m.

Back at Hannah Hall, Ellis turned the mic over to TSU Debate Team President Hanson Nwole, who led a prayer before reciting the rules that the students followed for their protest:

*“Do show yourself friendly at the counter at all times.
Do remember the teachings of Jesus Christ, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King.
Do feel that you have a constitutional right and democratic reason for what you are doing.
Don’t strike back or curse if attacked.”*

Those words served as a reminder of what those protesters were facing back in 1960.

But Ellis wants the moment to be more than just ancient history.



Felton Turner photographed after a brutal racist attack in Houston days after the 1960 TSU sit-ins began.

“We do this every year that we can. We’re going to try to make it an annual event,” he said. “Now, more than ever, at a time when there’s so many efforts to erase Black history, Native American history, the history of Latinos, the history of women, now more than ever is the time that we do this reenactment — and we are convinced that we are not going to let our history be erased. In honor of our elders, we’re not going to let that happen,” he continued.

That history is darker than many may be aware of.

On March 7, 1960, a group of white men approached 28-year-old Felton Turner, who wasn’t even involved in the protests. But that didn’t matter because, according to Turner, “they said they had a job to do: beat up a Negro.”

That they did.

The masked white men kidnapped Turner at gunpoint, forced him into their car, beat him with a bicycle chain, and used a knife to carve the letters “KKK” into his abdomen. Then they tied him up and hung him upside

down from a tree.

Remarkably, Turner was able to free himself and then call the police.

The incident gained media attention and galvanized Houston’s Black community. The protests continued.

On March 25, 1960, TSU students marched around City Hall carrying picket signs and singing spirituals. After about an hour, the group walked into the building’s cafeteria and asked to be served — and, to the students’ surprise, they were.

Soon students began targeting supermarkets, department stores, bus and railway stations, restaurants, and theaters. They quickly learned that peaceful protests such as sit-ins, picketing, and boycotts were effective in a city devoted to making money.

Those efforts led to a behind-the-scenes meeting by local business leaders, who agreed to integrate their stores without media coverage. By fall 1961, Houston’s restaurants and hotels had quietly desegregated.

Ellis harkened back to that history as he concluded his remarks — and paid tribute to a civil rights giant.

“I’d be remiss if I didn’t say how proud we are of the contributions of Reverend Jesse Jackson. And he would be right here in spirit, even if it gets up to 82 degrees today.”

It was indeed near 80 degrees once the walk commenced, but the 71-year-old Ellis forged ahead anyway, telling the crowd:

“It’s time to start marching again.”

And march we did — from the steps down Hannah Hall, across campus, exiting through Lot L near Ennis. Holding signs that read “NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE” and “BLACK LIVES MATTER,” we walked, heading down Wheeler Avenue and under the South Freeway toward Almeda Road.

As we walked, a couple of familiar faces emerged: first State Rep. Ron Reynolds, then actor and activist Kendrick Sampson.

Flanked and followed by police motorcades and the Mickey Leland bus carrying seniors, we arrived at the site where it all began: 4110 Almeda Road.

A post office now stands in place of Weingarten’s, but a historical marker commemorates the historic sit-in — just steps away from the office of the Forward Times.

Upon reaching the site, Ellis addressed the gathering. He stressed the importance of keeping these protest forms alive.

“Now is a time, more than ever, where we need more sit-ins, not fewer,” he said. “We need more demonstrations, not fewer demonstrations.”

He called up Deloyd Parker Jr., co-founder of SHAPE Community Center, to give brief remarks.

“First of all, I pay tribute and honor to all those people who made it possible for us to come here,” Parker said. “This is a post office. This [was] Weingarten’s, y’all.”

Crediting the students who took a stand decades ago, he continued:

“I just want to let you know: any people without knowledge of their past history, their culture, and their origin is like a tree without roots. So you need to know how we got here, y’all. And the story is going to be told. And we ask the students: don’t wait for us to tell you the story. Read about it. Find out more about it.”

“I stand on the shoulders of those who came before me,” State Rep. Ron Reynolds stated. “These amazing freedom fighters. Just like we think about John Lewis making ‘good trouble’ and Dr. Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, these amazing students from Texas Southern University were courageous when it wasn’t popular; it was dangerous. They could have been lynched and beaten, but they risked their lives because they were on the right side of history — fighting Jim Crow, racial segregation, and discrimination so that we can have the freedoms and liberties that we enjoy today.

“So as a proud alumnus of Texas Southern University, in the spirit of Barbara Jordan and Mickey Leland, I am so proud to stand here to commemorate these amazing freedom fighters. Let’s never forget them.”

Ellis next beckoned Kendrick Sampson.

“The only thing I have to say is this is the example of what we need to be doing right now,” Sampson said. “We need to be having more sit-ins. We need to be having more demonstrations and standing up to white supremacy. Standing up to folks who have built systems to harm our people and to continue to keep us subjugated and oppressed. And right now, we have a

pivotal moment where we can build true power for the people.”

“We’re not worried about the political parties. We’re worried about the people’s power,” he added, “and making sure that we defeat our enemy and protect each other and care for each other. We have to do that more now than ever. So it’s an urgent time to have examples like this and leaders who will push us in that direction to stand up for each other, care for each other, and build the systems that will continue to care and defeat these enemies.”

The most important thing, he concluded, is that we continue to fight for each other and protect each other.

Next came Bishop James Dixon, President of the Houston NAACP. He commended Commissioner Ellis for leading the march.

“That’s courageous leadership in elected office because most people in elected office won’t take the kind of courageous stance that you see Commissioner Rodney Ellis take because it’s not convenient.”

Returning to the theme of history, Bishop Dixon asserted:

“1960 was not that long ago. I was born in 1962... sometimes we talk about these events in history as if it was 200 years ago. It wasn’t that long ago that our ancestors couldn’t sit in this Weingarten’s.”

“That wasn’t that long ago, and I’m saying this for these students because we’re back at a time now where the rights that they fought for are being taken away.”

“I’ve got to be transparent,” Dixon said. “Honestly, I’m fighting depression right now. I’m not clinically in trouble. I’m talking about my spirit.”

He reflected on the efforts of leaders like John Lewis, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, and Medgar Evers.

“Brothers and sisters, all they were doing was fighting for us to have a right to vote... fighting for us to be able to express our humanity. They were not fighting to cause problems. They were fighting to solve problems. They were fighting so your grandchildren, that my sons and daughters, would be able to be fully human. And it cost them their lives.”

An impassioned Dixon urged the crowd to touch the historical sign before leaving as a reminder of our assignment.

“Fifty years from now, what monument will there be with our names on it, to say that we showed up and fought back when they tried to end DEI?” he asked.

“That we fought back when they tried to cancel out critical race theory. We fought back when they tried to cancel the right to vote. That’s the assignment we have: not just to stand here, but renew our energy, our zest, our commitment, and our desire and our decision to fight forward.”

After additional remarks by Ellis, Hanson Nwole returned to the mic and led the crowd in a chant evoking the late civil rights leader Rev. Jesse Jackson:

“I AM SOMEBODY.”

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Request for Proposal – Houston-Galveston Area Council – Enterprise Solutions – Rentals – Equipment & Portable Facilities – RN06-26

H-GAC is soliciting responses for the selection of qualified manufacturers, distributors, installers and service providers of **Rentals – Equipment & Portable Facilities** and to make these types of products and services available to Customers of the HGACBuy Cooperative Purchasing Program under blanket type contracts.

To view the solicitation documents, visit <https://www.hgacbuy.org/bid-notices> or [ESBD \(txsmartbuy.com\)](https://www.esbd.com).

Response Deadline: April 23, 2026 @ 12:00 P.M. CT

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Request for Proposal – Houston-Galveston Area Council – Community & Environmental – Livable Centers Study: South Belt – RFP-TRN25-08

H-GAC is seeking qualified contractor services to conduct a study and develop a plan to further the goals of the Livable Centers program in the South Belt area (referred to as “sponsor” or “local sponsor” in this document). The Contractor will develop a plan that addresses the application of the Livable Centers program goals in the specified study area. Since this project requires a range of research, public engagement, transportation, and planning expertise, a team of specialized firms is permitted.

To view/download the solicitation documents visit <https://www.h-gac.com/procurement> or [ESBD \(txsmartbuy.com\)](https://www.esbd.com).

Response Deadline: April 23, 2026 @ 12:00 P.M. CT

LEGAL NOTICE

The Houston Independent School District Purchasing Services Department located at 4400 West 18th Street, Houston, TX 77092 is soliciting Request for Qualifications (RFQ) via the District's electronic bidding portal. Proposers may login to view specifications and submit their responses at the following link <https://houstonisd.ionwave.net/Login.aspx> until 10:00 a.m. (CST) Wednesday, April 15, 2026, for the following solicitation:

RFQ 26-02-08 Internal Audit Services

Pre-proposal conference via Microsoft Teams will be held in conjunction with this RFQ. Information regarding dates, times, and instructions to receive a link to join the meeting can be located within the electronic bidding portal under the “Event Details” tab specific to this solicitation.