

**Ilus Davis:  
Exemplar of “The Greatest Generation”**



*Western Historical Manuscript Collection  
Kansas City*

**Charles N. Kimball Lecture**

**Mr. Gerald W. Gorman**

Slagle, Bernard & Gorman P.C.

April 24, 2000

## The Charles N. Kimball Lecture Series

is a tribute to our late friend and civic leader, Dr. Charles N. Kimball, President Emeritus of the Midwest Research Institute, to acknowledge his support of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City and his enduring interest in the exchange of ideas.

Charlie Kimball was a consummate networker bringing together people and ideas because he knew that ideas move people to action. His credo, "Chance favors a prepared mind," reflects the belief that the truest form of creativity requires that we look two directions at once – to the past for guidance and inspiration, and to the future with hope and purpose. The study of experiences, both individual and communal – that is to say history – prepares us to understand and articulate the present, and to create our future – to face challenges and to seize opportunities.

Sponsored by the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City, the Series is not intended to be a continuation of Charlie's popular *Midcontinent Perspectives*, but does share his primary goal: to encourage reflection and discourse on issues vitally important to our region. The topic of the lectures may vary, but our particular focus is on understanding how historical developments affect and inform our region's present and future. The Lectures will be presented by persons from the Kansas City region semi-annually in April, near the anniversary of Charlie's birth, and in October. Additionally, presentations may occur at other times of the year, if opportunities present themselves.

WHMC-KC appreciates the substantial financial underwriting and support for this Series provided by the **Charles N. Kimball Fund** of the Midwest Research Institute and by other friends of Charlie Kimball.



**1911-1994**

# INTRODUCTION

## to the April 24, 2000 Charles N. Kimball Lecture

### **David Boutros**

Associate Director, WHMC-KC

Good afternoon and welcome to UMKC. I am David Boutros, Associate Director of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City, the host of the Charles N. Kimball Lecture series.

“Chance Favors a Prepared Mind.” Those of you who knew Charlie, appreciate that phrase as his motto and a course of action. It is, in fact, the justification for these lectures given in Charlie Kimball’s honor and name – by understanding our experiences, by anticipating trends, movements, and motives, we are better prepared to confront and improve our present and future.

That was also the goal of Charlie’s *Midcontinent Perspectives* series that he founded in 1974 and continued until just before his death in 1994. Its purpose was to present new viewpoints on economic, political, social, and scientific issues that affect the Midwest and the nation. Over 100 lectures covering topics as diverse as bar codes to science fiction, genealogy to space exploration, agribusiness to Midwestern life styles, received the attention of Charlie’s midcontinent audience, and a larger group to whom he sent the published remarks. They represent the perceptions and advice of some of our most thoughtful leaders – Sosland, Rowland, Gaynor, Kipp, Esrey, Hall, McCallister, Kingsley, Menninger, to name but a few.

I am pleased to inform you that the Western Historical Manuscript Collection, in cooperation with and support from the Midwest Research Institute, has republished the *Midcontinent Perspectives* on the World Wide Web. They may be found on the WHMC-KC WebPages at [www.umkc.edu/WHMCKC/](http://www.umkc.edu/WHMCKC/). Included is the full text of the lectures, along with the questions and answers and pictures for the presentations.

I wish to thank Dr. James Spigarelli, President and CEO of MRI, for his permission and support for this project. In particular we are thankful for his providing Kirk Hall, Director of MRI’s Information Technology Center, to give advice and assistance in developing a search mechanism for the Lectures. Lastly, we appreciate the help of Katherine Long, Head of the Special Collections Department at the Kansas City Public Library for helping identify missing Lecture booklets.

This is a year of anniversaries. Of course you are all aware of the KC150 activities. But many of you may not be aware that last month marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City opening its office here at UMKC. In that twenty years we have gathered many important papers and records – nearly 9,000 cubic feet, including the records of the J.C. Nichols Company, The Milgram Stores, the Board of Trade, and the Womens City Club; the papers of Charlie Kimball, Francis Royster Williams, and of course, Ilus Davis.

But I would like to bring to your attention the passing of someone very important to WHMC-KC. Dr. Kenneth LaBudde died recently after very nearly 50 years association with UMKC. For many of those years he was director of the UMKC Libraries. He was also assigned the task of being WHMC-KC's first director in the years between 1968 when we were created on paper and 1980 when the first staff was hired. Ken was a gentle man, a scholar in the truest sense of the word. He had an extensive knowledge and appreciation of books, of history, of his university, and his community. Personally I am indebted to him for many things, including my employment here at WHMC-KC. Please join me in remembering and thanking Ken LaBudde for all he was and did.

Lastly let me give you early notice that our Fall lecture will be given by Rabbi Michael Zedek on October 23<sup>rd</sup>. The title of his presentation will be, "One Man Views the Heartland: A Critical Study of Character and Community."

Now may I present to you Mayor Richard Berkley who will introduce today's speaker...

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**Hon. Richard L. Berkley**  
Mayor, Kansas City, Missouri, 1979-1991

I've been fortunate to know Gerald Gorman for most of my life. We were at Harvard at the same time. Of course he did much better than I did in college and has gone on to have a great legal career.

There are many things I really admire about Jerry, one is that like Frank Barnes and Prime Minister Thatcher's husband – all three have the ability to be very content though their wives get a little bit more publicity than they do. That's not always easy for a man, but I've seen Jerry proud of Anita's career and at the same time content and committed to his own legal and civic career.

Jerry was a National Merit Scholar. He was the first Northlander we know of to attend Harvard (someone said that might be a reflection on the Northland - but of course I wouldn't repeat that).

Jerry was very skilled in college both at math and debating. He won championships in these two fields of skill where I would have been happy to just have been eligible to compete. Following in the tradition of his high school two-time state debate championship, he won the Harvard-Yale-Princeton debate cup his senior year. He was a very logical and successful debater and that particular skill has certainly proven a great attribute in his legal career.

Jerry is very civic minded and in many cases quietly does things behind the scenes, and in other instances he has been the leader of a variety of organizations. In addition to the numerous items listed in the program he has been president of the Harvard Club; chairman of the 7<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Citizen's Committee; chairman of the board of trustees for Avondale Methodist Church – for numerous years and; chairman of the local board of trustees of the Harvard/Radcliffe Endowment Fund.

Gerald was a legal associate of Mayor Ike Davis from 1956-1990 – a 34-year working relationship that was also a close friendship. Jerry developed a great admiration for Ike's legal and polished skills. He saw Ike in action and his ability to skillfully lead this city, participate in the banking industry, do high quality legal work and also pass his skills on to associates like Jerry. Ike and Jerry had a special relationship that was fortunate for both. Jerry learned from and was greatly respected by Ike.

Probably, no one besides Bea Davis is more qualified to reflect on the life of one of Kansas City's greatest mayors than Gerald Gorman – the husband of Anita and father of Gwen and Vicky (both also Harvard graduates).

Before I ask Jerry to make his presentation, we should of course remember Charles Kimball, who had such a wonderful, positive impact on our community. He moved here from Boston and became one of the city's great citizens and boosters. I think Charles Kimball would have been proud that his native Boston helped generate some significant culture and a great amount of knowledge in Gerald Gorman who then came home to help make Charlie's adopted city an even greater place to live.

It is a pleasure to present Gerald Gorman. Thank you.

**Ikus Davis:  
Exemplar of “The Greatest Generation”**

**Mr. Gerald W. Gorman**  
April 24, 2000

Mayor Berkley, Mr. Boutros, ladies and gentlemen.

Few in the room could imagine the trepidation I felt upon knowing I was going to be introduced by Dick Berkley. Some of you would know that he and my wife have introduced one another at numerous events over the past few years; and many times, the one doing the introducing works in some dig at the other. Since Anita has more often been the one introducing Dick, I think she probably holds the lead currently. As a result, I was not sure just what Dick might do to even the score this afternoon; and I am mightily relieved.

It was a very gracious introduction. It reminds me of a remark I heard Hallmark’s Charles Egan make in another circumstance – that I could wish that my parents were here to have heard it. My father would have been grateful; my mother would even have believed it.

It is a signal honor to have been asked to deliver the Kimball Lecture. It is an interesting coincidence that of the Kansas Citians of the Year named by the Chamber of Commerce in the five years from 1970 to 1974, one was Ike Davis in 1970; one was Charlie Kimball in 1973; and it was Dutton Brookfield in 1974 – all of them being involved with this lecture this afternoon. Charlie has been a monumental figure in Kansas City history and I am most honored to give the lecture which is maintained in his name.

Also, I would certainly like to thank David Boutros and the Western Historical Manuscript Collection for the tremendous help they have been in getting together many materials for my review.

Now there is likely to be considerable question in the minds of many of you as to why I should be giving this lecture. At the outset I must acknowledge I am the third choice. Both Bea and Chris were asked, but they declined. However, there are several dozens who knew Ike well – including long-time close friends like Mac Cahal, John Windsor, John Foster or Bob Lyons, some of whom are here today. Any of them could doubtless do a much better job than I.

But I do have some qualifications. I practiced law with him for 35 years, 28 as his law partner. I was specially involved in his initial major election campaign of which I shall have more to say later. And I also had some rather special personal contacts, as over a period of about 20 years Ike and I had lunch together most every Saturday. We exchanged information about our family events and went through the growing up of Chris and Caroline and Gwen and Vicky.

Now let me try to assuage your fears by saying I plan to minimize personal references. When I am finished, you may not think I did a very good job of minimizing; but I am aware you have come to hear about Ike, not about me.

At the same time to the extent there is value in oral history, surely that comes from the personal experience which the oralist has to offer. To furnish that, some points will involve me personally. So let me give you here at the outset a single apology for all the personal references rather than trying to offer a separate one for each instance.

I had barely agreed to speak when David Boutros asked me for a title. I tried to distill Ike's strongest characteristics in my mind, and I came up with: "Ike Davis: Quiet Power, Midwestern Style."

To me, that was high praise. I ran that by my wife, Anita, who has no great admiration for understatement. She insisted that "the greatest" should be in there somewhere.

Personally, I have difficulty with superlatives like "the greatest." I believe in most cases there is no truly greatest anything.

Indeed, though he would never make the claim himself, the gentleman who introduced me today led an unprecedented three terms at City Hall, during which our City again enjoyed some of its greatest achievements. I would be happy to prepare a summary of those accomplishments. But this lecture is about Ike, so other administrations must await other lectures.

However, Anita persevered. Despite disliking superlatives, I did want to preserve our happy marriage of 45 years, so I tried to find a way to get "greatest" in the title. Anita had heard mention at her beauty shop (her source of all knowledge) of a book called The Greatest Generation. I looked it up and I found this passage in the author's forward:

*At a time in their lives when their days and nights should have been filled with innocent adventure, love, and the lessons of the workaday world, they ... answered the call to save the world from the two most powerful and ruthless military machines ever assembled, instruments of conquest in the hands of fascist maniacs .... They came home to joyous and short-lived celebrations ... and gave the world new science, literature, art, industry, and economic strength unparalleled in the long curve of history. As they now reach the twilight of their adventurous and productive lives, they remain, for the most part, exceptionally modest. They have so many stories to tell, stories that in many cases they have never told before, because in a deep sense they didn't think that what they were doing was that special, because everyone else was doing it too.*

That fit. Outstanding accomplishment with exceptional modesty. Ike was certainly part of that generation. In fact, he was an exemplar of all that, and hence my title.

Ike's vital statistics can be fairly summarily stated. Born in 1917, he was reared at 3537 Benton Boulevard in Kansas City. He received his college degree from Kansas University. He received his law degree from Missouri and passed the bar in 1939 at the age of 22.

He began law practice immediately with the firm of Gossett, Ellis, Dietrich and Tyler but was among the first to be called to military service after Pearl Harbor. He served on General McArthur's staff in Manila, and returned to Kansas City and the law firm in March 1946.

A number of Ike's characteristics were obvious and well known. For example, most people were impressed with Ike's intelligence simply upon meeting him. Often he was described as brilliant, but I think he was smarter than that. To be sure, he was quite bright, as shown by his becoming a lawyer at age 22. But he also had an uncommon degree of common sense, with the ability to separate important issues from the not-so-important more quickly than most.

Ike also was decisive. A harbinger of this was related by Joe Bruening in his book, Ilus, recounting the story of Ike's courtship and marriage. On Ike's return from the Pacific, Joe and his wife, Allene, told Ike they had two young ladies in mind they would like him to meet. He said, "Fine." The next Saturday Joe and Allene were at Mission Hills Country Club, and one of the ladies, Beatrice Buecking, was there. They asked if she would like to go to a dance that night at the Auditorium with a friend who had just returned from the military. She said, "Yes." Ike and Bea danced and talked together all evening, obviously enjoying one another's company. The next Tuesday Joe went to Ike's office to arrange for Ike to meet the other young lady. Ike said, "No, don't bother, just get ready to be in the wedding." Ike and Bea were married that November with Joe Bruening as the best man. Coincidentally in 1991 when Joe remarried following Allene's death, Ike returned the favor and was Joe's best man.

Ike further, however, was a genuinely modest person. He had what to me was the best kind of modesty. He was not like the Churchill enemy, of whom Churchill, upon hearing the person described as modest, said that he had a great deal to be modest about. Rather, Ike had great abilities, but he never trumpeted them to the world. For example, in a 1988 interview, he was asked how he felt about being known as one of the City's greatest leaders. Ike just smiled and said, "Well, it's better than the alternative."

Of all Ike's well-known admirable qualities, the one I prized highest was his unwavering sense of ethics and personal integrity. One little known example occurred immediately after his election as Mayor in 1963. He was Chairman of the old Baltimore Bank. Baltimore Bank had been successful in securing deposits of City funds and was making money on them. But upon his election, Ike ordered the Bank to divest itself of all City deposits to avoid any possible questions of conflicts of interest.

Some of Ike's characteristics were not so well known. For example, few realized his tremendous wit and sense of humor. He had a store of great stories. He loved to tell about the lady who rose up at a New England town meeting and declared to the speaker, "Young man, I have seen a lot of changes in my 90 years, and I have been against every one of them." That sort of gentle humor was typical of Ike throughout his lifetime, but in the public records you will find little mention of it.

Ike also was truly compassionate. To the public, Ike's compassion generally seemed that of the engineer. He wanted things to be right and to work right simply because that's the way things should be. Very early in our relationship, I learned of a deep and genuine warmth in his character. When I had been back from my military

service about a year or two, Ike and I were walking down Baltimore Avenue to a meeting at the Kansas City Club. As we passed the Muehlebach's Baltimore door, about 20 feet ahead of us was a blind woman. Her seeing-eye dog had just relieved himself in the middle of the sidewalk. She was attempting to scoop up the deposit off the concrete with a tissue, and was experiencing the difficulty you would expect in such circumstances. Ike and I had been joking about something, and I continued the jocular mood by what must have been a grin and a nod at her predicament. Ike immediately became extremely angry with me for what, as best I can recall, was the only time in our 40-plus year friendship, at least that he let show. He wheeled and faced me. His voice was not raised nor were his words uncivil. They were direct and simple, but with no tact or ambiguity. He said, "There is nothing funny about that. She is doing the best she can."

In recent weeks you have probably all read one or more of the advertisements Bea Davis has drafted and paid *The Kansas City Star* to run, pleading for more favorable treatment in the current City budget for the health care of those who cannot afford it. One well-meaning friend confided to me that he approved of Bea's goal but that he felt mildly sorry to see Bea taking advantage of Ike's name in the ads. I could not help thinking of my incident with Ike many years ago. I assured him that Bea, in pleading for the poor and destitute who are doing the best they can, was speaking as much for Ike as for herself.

Now it was generally true that Ike was more a professor than a politician. Indeed, in Joe Bruening's book, Joe reports a recollection of the now imminent cardiologist, David Steinhouse, who married Mimi Dietrich, Ike's backyard neighbor. David wrote, "I suppose we met nearly 30 years ago when Chris Davis and I were friends at Pem-Day. I remember coming to the Davis house and gorging myself on Wolferman's cookies along with the other boys. Mr. Davis was a bit curious and formidable at that time, especially when mowing the lawn in his white shirt and necktie."

In speeches, Ike tended to lecture, and his favorite topic seemed to be unexciting infrastructure such as sewers. Early on, it nearly cost him his mayorship. But, fortunately for the City, not quite.

No one could fully understand Ike without knowing his wife, Bea. She was a Smith graduate, extremely intelligent with a lively interest in public affairs. A *Kansas City Times* profile of Ike in 1988 included a comment from the then President of the Park Board, Anita Gorman. Anita said Ike was the first person in City government to appoint women to important positions, and added:

But then, he is married to Bea Davis, and she is one of the smartest women in town. He saw a lot and did a lot in a short time, and when he came home it was to somebody who was probably smarter than anybody else he had talked to all day.

Bea was by nature even more modest than Ike. She never liked the limelight, but she attended public functions dutifully when Ike needed. As far as I could tell, Bea never attempted to dictate Ike's position on a matter of public policy. Yet it was clear to me they had such a mutual respect for one another that public matters were much discussed between them. Ike often would tell me what Bea thought about some given issue. Never do I recall a difference between them. We will never know, but we should appreciate,

how much our City has prospered simply from Ike's having had such an able, constant consultant.

This, then, was Ilus Davis, whom I have called an exemplar of his generation.

But as I began to compile the story of why, it was clear there was too much to tell in a single sitting. Therefore this lecture will concentrate on Ike's terms as Mayor. That story, of course, must begin with the 1963 election. But some background is helpful.

In 1940, after several decades of crime and corruption, both in the City government and countenanced by it, a group of citizens had thrown out the Pendergast machine and most of its remnants. Over the next 15 years, through the administrations of John Gage and William Kemp and the City Managership of L.P. Cookingham, the City was cleaned up to a large degree and prospered.

The cleanup citizens evolved into an organization called the Citizens Association. It was a combination of Democrats and Republicans supportive of charter government. Known as an organization of non-politicians, it came to life every four years to elect a mayor and council of qualified people and then went dormant to let them govern as they found best.

In 1955 Roe Bartle had been elected mayor with a Citizens majority on the Council. But by 1959 complacency was taking its toll. Bartle was reelected mayor; but despite close elections and some suggested because of a late rain on Election Day in the southwest part of the City, only one Citizens councilman was returned to the Council. The Democratic factions had solid control.

At this remove, it is hard to remember how thorough a shambles City government became, even if you lived through it. By 1963, the City was broke and had virtually no remaining bonding authority. In virtually every respect and direction, government was failing its duties.

Perhaps most telling of the completeness of the shambles, it became difficult even to count the number of city managers. In four years the Council had gone through four official City Managers, five different persons as acting City Managers and at least four additional City Manager administrations as people who had been acting City Manager once were reappointed to subsequent acting managerships.

With this experience the quadrennial non-politicians of the Citizens Association were energized. Clearly a crusade worthy of 1940 was in store.

The first hurdle was the Citizens' nomination. Under the Citizens Association bylaws, nominations were a three-step process. First a screening committee would recommend candidates to a combined meeting of the Executive Committee and the Advisory Board. The Executive Committee consisted of about 20 persons who met fairly regularly. The Advisory Board was about 50 people who were elder statesmen types for the most part and whose only important function for the Citizens was this quadrennial one. For example, I was on the Executive Committee. Former Mayors Gage and Kemp were on the Advisory Board. That combined meeting of the Executive/Advisory Board would select the Citizens' candidates.

Those selections were then to be reviewed at a meeting of the full Board of Governors, a group of about 300 people. However, nominations determined by the Executive/Advisory Board would stand unless they were reversed by a two-thirds vote of the Board of Governors.

In this process I was able to be of some help.

Shortly after my return from the army in 1958, I engaged in some Republican activities which had gained me considerable credibility with the Clay County Republican Central Committee. With that credibility, I secured, late in 1962 and before Dutton Brookfield was even talked about as a candidate, an endorsement of Ike by the Clay County Republican Central Committee. This endorsement proved helpful for both the nomination and the election.

Next, as members of the Citizens' Executive Committee, Lew Dysart and I sat down with Ike and parceled out the members of the Executive Committee and Advisory Board to identify who should call whom. Between us, Lew and I called them all. Of those who would commit, we found we had a one-vote majority over Clint Kanaga, 31 to 30. But these calls also let us identify some undecideds, with whom we talked further.

Three days before the big meeting a diversion occurred that could have been significant. With the Executive/Advisory Board meeting set for Tuesday, January 8, the Screening Committee had met the preceding Saturday and had taken what it thought was its final vote. Its Chairman, Ed Biggar, had established a rule of confidentiality until the Tuesday night meeting, and the rule had apparently been generally effective even as to *The Kansas City Star*. But over the weekend I heard on my car radio an announcement of the Screening Committee recommendations, including Clint Kanaga as Mayor, and to my astonishment, Gerald Gorman for 1<sup>st</sup> District Councilman at-large. I rushed to inform Ike. When he graciously hesitated about what should be done, I cut him short. We had to get me withdrawn, so there would not be an excuse for anyone to refrain from supporting Ike because he had a law partner who was a council candidate.

We got word to Ed Biggar that I would not accept candidacy. In *The Star* on Monday, Harry Jones reported that the Screening Committee had hurried back into session that day. Jones wrote:

*Edward S. Biggar, chairman of the screening committee, said today that the meeting of the screening committee this afternoon was called because one of its choices for a council post has decided he does not want to run. A Republican businessman is understood to have turned down the recommendation for the 1<sup>st</sup> District at-large post.*

So far as I am aware, *The Star* never learned who the Republican businessman was. But at least the ground was cleared for the Executive/Advisory Board the next night.

That meeting became a dramatic event. Sure enough the screening committee recommendation for mayor was Clint Kanaga. Clint was a very responsible, likeable and upright citizen. An insurance executive, he was at that time also secretary of the Police

Board. Ike was promptly also placed in nomination. There were impassioned speeches on both sides. Finally a vote was taken. Ike won the nomination by 37 to 33.

With this crucial meeting, Ike was the nominee of the Citizens Association, subject to review by the full Board of Governors. Predictably, tensions continued to rise. On the afternoon of the full Board of Governors meeting, Harry Jones reported in *The Star* that Kanaga supporter and former Citizens Association Chairman John Monroe said he had received complaints about “power politics” Tuesday night in wresting the endorsement from Kanaga. Monroe, said the *Star*, had vowed, “We are going to fight them (the Davis forces) to a standstill.”

John Gage was parliamentarian at the meeting. There was a large turnout and again impassioned speeches on both sides. Finally a vote was taken in which Kanaga received 113 to Ike’s 103. Clint had won, but not by the two-thirds majority required to overturn the Executive/Advisory Board nomination. Clint issued a statement immediately after the vote, saying:

*I am proud to call Ilus Davis my friend. In 1948 and 1951 I campaigned vigorously for him for city councilman at-large. He made, in my judgment, an outstanding city councilman. I confidently predict that he will make one of the greatest mayors in the history of Kansas City. The issue in this election is non-partisan government.*

There were gentlemen in those days. Here was another member of the “Greatest Generation.”

Next up was the primary election. Ike promptly assembled the Citizens’ ticket and secured a unanimous pledge from each person on it to maintain unequivocal support for the entire ticket and to make that known if any should be endorsed by other groups endorsing opposition candidates.

Shortly after the Citizens’ decisions, an organization called the Independent Voters Association was formed to support the candidacy of Dutton Brookfield for mayor. Dutton was a prominent Republican businessman who headed the Unitog Company and was on the board of directors of several national corporations. He had formerly served on the Police Board. He was a distinguished and active citizen of the community, was clearly honest and an unusually attractive, charismatic candidate.

On February 1, the Jackson County Republican Central Committee broke a 24-year tie with the Citizens Association to endorse Brookfield and the IVA.

The primary campaign for mayor became a triangular battle of white hats. All three candidates had been civically active and were highly regarded. Bartle was virtually a folk hero from his decades of Boy Scout leadership. It became a minor Civil War, almost with brother against brother in some cases.

One of the leading law firms in the City was Rogers, Field & Gentry. Lyman Field had served on the Police Board with Dutton and was one of Dutton’s strongest proponents. Reed Gentry had served on the City Council with Ike and was one of his strongest proponents. The story was told that Bartle found in his mail one day an envelope from Clay Rogers in which was a signed, otherwise blank, check, and a note

saying, "Chief, I don't understand what those two young pups are up to, but fill this in for whatever you need."

*The Star* weighed in heavily, actually running page one editorials supporting Ike in strong terms several days before the primary.

When the votes were counted, Bartle had lost. The remaining battle was between Ike and Dutton.

At this point, the Civil War nature of the battle increased. Probably most of the friends of each man were also friends of both. Ike joked that "This election has split Ward Parkway right down the middle."

Unfortunately for Dutton, while he had many eminent friends among his supporters, the Jackson County Republicans were not a potent political force. With the Citizens having gone for Ike, Dutton had to look for political strength among some of the less savory elements of Jackson County politics. Such support enabled *The Star* to paint the potential election of the IVA candidates as possibly maintaining in power the Democratic factions that had brought the City to its knees.

Such support also strengthened the resolve of the women's groups who were determined to repeat the crusade of 1940 in which the women had played so important a role. On March 19, *The Kansas City Times* reported more than 500 women were going to conduct a doorbell ringing campaign in every precinct of the City.

Again, *The Star* campaigned heavily for Ike and most of the Citizens ticket with several strongly written page one editorials.

However, Dutton proved to be a surprisingly attractive candidate as an individual. In television debates he came across warmly. Even *The Star* as the election neared had to take note of Dutton's appeal. In an editorial on March 18, *The Star* wrote,

*In his campaign speeches Davis has carried his sense of responsibility to the extreme. He has been so careful to avoid wild claims and hollow promises that many persons have criticized his speeches as dull. There is a basis for the criticism.*

On election night, returns for the mayor's race came in agonizingly slowly and agonizingly close. Ike had expected to appear at the Citizens' election watch party at the Hotel Continental around 8:00 p.m. but did not want to appear until the result was known. The election remained too close to call until finally he decided to proceed to the hotel anyway about 9:30. By the time he got there, the Jackson County results were all in. He had won Jackson County, but only by a margin of 1,324 votes out of about 97,000 cast.

Clay County was still on paper ballots, and their results were still out. I knew that a margin of 1,324 votes was one that could be wiped out.

When the results from Clay County were in the next morning, sure enough there had been 4,622 for Brookfield, three times Ike's Jackson County lead. However the early endorsement of the Clay County Republican Committee had held firm despite Jackson County Republican efforts throughout the campaign to get it changed. Together with the white-hat Democrats, we had amassed 5,612 Clay County votes for Ike. The final margin by which Ike became mayor was 2,314 votes from a total of more than 107,000.

From slender threads indeed is the fabric of history woven.

Predictably Ike began his administration immediately after the election without waiting to be formally sworn in. One of his first steps was to persuade Homer Wadsworth to let him borrow Homer's right hand man, Chuck Curran, to move temporarily to City Hall. Chuck's main job was to identify personnel spots needing filling and to assist in finding top quality people to fill them.

One set of appointments Ike handled personally. He often said that the three members of the Park Board were the Mayor's most important appointments.

Miller Nichols had been the chief fundraiser for his election campaign. Ike appointed Davis Jackson, Miller's chief executive officer at the J.C. Nichols Company, to be Park Board president. For the other two spots, Ike remembered the crucial activity of Lew Dysart and me which John Monroe had so bitterly called power politics. He appointed Lew Dysart to one of the posts, and he called me in discuss the other.

We of course knew it would not be appropriate for him to appoint me, his law partner, to so prestigious a position even though it was one without pay. He wanted my recommendation. I consulted with Anita and told Ike we suggested Bob Hodge, a well-established medical doctor with long Clay County ties. Ike concurred and appointed Bob, who eventually became the president of the National Recreation and Parks Association.

Ike turned his full energies to several major issues at once. He had stressed throughout the campaign that the single most urgent issue was that the City was broke and needed money. The answer for both the present and the future was an earnings tax.

However such a tax had not just one but two hurdles. Obviously the Kansas City voters would have to approve it, but first the state legislature would have to adopt enabling legislation permitting the issue to be submitted to the voters. The City election had been on March 26. The new Mayor and Council would not be inaugurated until April, but the legislature was already halfway through its session and would be adjourning not long after the inauguration. So Ike took substantially the entire Council-elect to Jefferson City, even before they were officially in office, lobbied with the full strength of the group and eventually secured the necessary state authorization to submit the E-tax to the voters.

The state statute authorizing the local vote did not become effective until October. The first Council meeting after its effective date, the Council adopted the ordinance for an earnings tax and scheduled the election for December 17, the soonest legally possible. Under the chairmanship of George Powell, Sr., an intensive campaign was waged, resulting in a final approval by an 8 to 5 majority.

In the same election five bond issues had also been submitted. All of them secured a majority, but only one of them passed. The fire stations got the requisite 2/3 vote, but the others were short of a 2/3 majority for airports, sewers, streets and redevelopment bonds.

The significance of the earnings tax can hardly be over-estimated. In the original campaign, it was thought it would bring in \$6 million per year. That was for a one-half percent tax. The rate was increased in 1971 to our present 1% rate. But the estimate in

our current budget for the year 2000 - 2001 is that the earnings tax will produce \$158.4 million. That is 18.2% of all budgeted revenue. Just think where we would be without it.

While the E-tax was the most critically urgent need, the local action on it had to await the state legislative process. Having seen first and immediately to securing that state authorization, Ike turned without further wait to the embarrassment that black people still could not buy merchandise at downtown stores or have general access to places of public accommodations.

Ike assembled the Council at an informal meeting at his law office on Tuesday, September 10, 1963. The resulting ordinance was broad, covering virtually all places of public accommodation, except that there was an exclusion for shops offering personal services, primarily intended to be applicable to barbershops and beauty salons. That Friday, September 13, the Council formally adopted the ordinance on a vote of 11 to 2. Only Pratt and Hagan were opposed.

However quiet acceptance was not to be.

Six days later, Fairyland Park obtained a temporary restraining order from a court. Then petitions for a referendum were filed with over 20,000 signatures, collected mainly by the Tavern Owners Association and being almost twice the required number. Either the Council had to repeal its ordinance or schedule an election.

Meanwhile, however, the state authorization for an earnings tax election had just become valid, and Ike and the Council were already in the throes of that campaign for a December election. Trying to keep the two issues as separate as possible, the Council postponed action on the referendum petitions until January of 1964. In January the Council set the vote for April.

Ike assembled a mammoth blue ribbon committee to support the public accommodations ordinance. The co-chairmen were Kenneth Aber, Bill Bartholome and Robert P. Lyons. As honorary co-chairmen Ike had recruited Catholic Bishop Helmsing, Episcopal Bishop Welles, Rabbi Silverman, Methodist Reverend Shrum Burton and a black minister, Reverend Isaiah Henderson, Jr. A campaign committee of over 130 was organized, including Richard L. Berkley, Dutton Brookfield, Donald J. Hall and James M. Kemper, Jr. Also Ike helped the black leaders conduct probably the single most intensive voter registration drive in the black community in the City's history.

The vote was breathtakingly close – 45,758 to 44,144. The ordinance was upheld by a 1,614-vote margin.

Thus, Ike was successful in three of the main elections of his first year, though two of them were squeakers. But he was frustrated on securing new bonding authority for City improvements needed on all fronts. His issues could get simple majorities. But general obligation bonds required a 2/3 vote then and even revenue bonds required a slightly lesser super-majority. Airport bonds had been rejected because of the failure of the super-majority requirement three times. We had a new airport, but could not build a terminal.

So after public accommodations was finally settled, Ike turned heavy attention to bonds. He assembled a major offering of seven principal needs totaling \$32.1 million, each of which had been submitted previously but failed the super-majority requirement.

After several bond failures, Ike had an experienced campaign committee. He called once again on George Powell, Sr., to head this campaign, along with several of the same lieutenants, including Anita Gorman, who had been women's chairman in several of the previous campaigns. Though all of the issues were vital, the committee decided that the airport bonds would have the greatest voter appeal. Anita suggested organizing a special Aviation Day celebration on the site of the new airport, and Mr. Powell appointed her Aviation Day Chairman for the campaign.

Throughout later years Ike loved to recount the story of Aviation Day. He reported that "the ladies" had called on him in his office and calmly asked him to arrange for TWA to furnish a Boeing 707 for display. This was 1964, and the 707 was the latest technological marvel of aeronautical science. In terms of relative cost, it was probably about equivalent to the B-52 stealth bomber of today.

Ike said he gulped but picked up the phone and called Charles Tillinghast, the Chairman of TWA. Ike said the response was an audible gasp, and "Do they have any idea how many thousands of dollars per minute it would cost us to have a 707 sitting there?" Ike allowed as how they probably did not, but they were trying to enable an airport TWA wanted built alongside the overhaul base that TWA was already operating there, and they thought this would be necessary. Somehow Tillinghast became convinced, and the ladies had the base they needed from which to assemble a mammoth air show, including planes ranging from TWA's 707 and a United Caravelle jet to a 1940 Waco open cockpit biplane.

The bond election was to be February 23, so Aviation Day was set for the preceding Sunday, February 21. Sunday never dawned. The weather was that of a typically horrible February day, bitterly cold and rainy. I was at my office that morning and had not intended to attend, but I felt so bad for Anita's bad luck with the weather that I picked her up to take her so I could at least add one more to the expectably sparse crowd.

Barely north of Riverside, traffic became heavier. By the time we got to what is now about 64<sup>th</sup> Street, still at least eight miles from our destination, we were bumper to bumper in stop-and-go traffic. What really rotten luck, we thought. On top of the weather, we had to have a traffic accident holding things up.

Ike had the beginnings of a cold, and the bitterness of the weather had made him decide to stay home. Unbeknownst to us, Bea had come on, probably largely for the same reason I had, to keep Anita from feeling too lonely with the poor turnout. Bea was in the same traffic jam about a dozen cars behind us. Only as we finally got to the vicinity of the approach to the turnoff for the airport did it dawn on us, this traffic jam was all for Aviation Day.

The police estimated the crowd at 120,000 to 160,000 people. They explained they could not estimate the people directly, because the people were wandering all over the airport from plane to plane and in and out of the overhaul base. So the police estimated that there were between 30 to 40 thousand cars and that they had an average of four people in each car. *The Times* next morning said

*The outpouring brought on a massive traffic jam that at one point stretched from Mid-Continent to North Kansas City along U.S. 71. Some people even walked more than two miles from Highway 71 to the runway.*

Two days later, election day brought more bad weather, a heavy snow. But on Wednesday *The Times* broke out a banner headline clear across the page in a type font that had been thought reserved for the Second Coming. "VICTORY FOR CITY [AND] SCHOOL BONDS." A three-line subhead read, "The \$32.1 Million City Proposals Get Heavy Majorities, Far Exceeding the Two-Thirds Requirement in Most Cases, Despite Weather Which Cuts the Turnout." The airport bonds led the victory, being approved by 46,800 votes yes to 10,700 no. All issues were well over 2/3. Ike finally had his bonding authority for trafficways and boulevards, cleanup of blighted areas, municipal court and police facilities, sewer rights-of-way, street rights-of-way and General Hospital.

By way of quick summary, in the two years beginning March, 1963, Ike had won his own election by 2,300 votes from over 107,000; won an earnings tax election reasonably handily; sustained a public accommodations vote by 1,600 votes from nearly 90,000; secured passage of at least eight bond proposals, the last seven by overwhelming majorities; and secured outstanding department directors to refill the ranks at City Hall depleted during the preceding four years.

These accomplishments occurred with the support of a generally united council. But a departure was at hand.

In May 1964, a report had been filed by a special Fire and Water Committee Ike had appointed. The report urgently recommended an increase in water rates of 28%. Ike turned his attention to the issue shortly after the bond victory in February 1965. In March 1965, the Council Finance Committee responded with an interim report to the Mayor stating, "This Council committed itself during the earnings tax campaign that it would hold the line on other increases if that tax were voted."

Ike acknowledged the "no other taxes" pledge had been made, but he distinguished water rates from taxes. The City Charter required the Water Department to be self-supporting. It should therefore set the rates necessary to be so. Its rates were simply the prices it charged for its merchandise. Increasing those prices would be no more a tax increase than Hershey's increasing the price of its chocolate bar from five cents to ten cents would be a tax increase.

In an extremely rare instance, I thought Ike was on the wrong side on this one. Though his position was intellectually sound, the water bill was still a payment to the City, and I felt that average citizens would consider that the earnings tax promises meant that charges by the City would be contained. I let Ike know how I felt early on, and as best I can recall, neither of us ever mentioned the issue to the other again for the rest of his life.

Ike stood by his experts' recommendations; but the Council in a special night meeting on March 24, 1965, voted 9 to 3 to maintain water rates at current levels. Jeff Hillelson was absent, and only Maguire and Ridpath stood with Ike.

The next morning *The Kansas City Times* reported Ike's reaction:

*'And with that, the progress of the City is brought to a grinding dead halt,'  
Mayor Ilus W. Davis said as he adjourned the meeting.*

Following Ike's re-election in 1967, one of the first acts of the new Council was to increase the water rates by a vote of 9 to 4.

Fortunately contrary to Ike's prediction, the progress of the City did not come to a grinding halt in 1965. In the two years remaining of his first term, the City progressed marvelously in dozens of ways albeit less dramatically than in the first two. The details would make a good book someday.

Before we knew it, it was time for the voters to pass their judgment on Ike's administration in the 1967 City elections. For once Ike did not have to wait out a cliffhanger. No candidate with organized support filed against him. In both the primary and the general elections, Ike got almost 2/3 of the vote.

Ike's second term was more a building and consolidation period than the revolution that his first term had been. But there were two dramatic events that occurred more or less simultaneously.

Probably most people remember the 1968 riots more vividly than any other aspect of Ike's two terms as Mayor.

In April, 1968, Martin Luther King was assassinated. On the day of his funeral numerous black students, urged on by several black provocateurs who were not students, demanded that schools be closed. When the schools did not close, the students and their instigators began a march toward City Hall. One of the most dramatic photos of Ike's life showed Ike perched atop a car, bullhorn in hand, attempting to talk to the mob.

The mob turned uglier and uglier. Downtown was looted. I remember watching from my office on the tenth floor of the Dwight Building at 10<sup>th</sup> and Baltimore as small bands of wild youths roamed the streets. An elderly lady stepped out from the First National Bank onto the 10<sup>th</sup> Street sidewalk and was knocked down by a gang of three or four who grabbed her purse and ran. A man came out from the bank, helped her up and led her back into the bank. Comparable incidents were occurring all over. The National Guard was ordered in. I remember looking out my office window and seeing the helmeted troops with rifles standing guard at 10<sup>th</sup> & Main.

Later some hindsighters suggested that the problem was the fault of the police who used tear gas too quickly when the mob refused to disperse. As one who saw some of what went on, that suggestion ranks with me alongside the suggestions of those who blame Harry Truman for dropping the atom bomb to save the lives that would have been lost on both sides in a prolonged war. Some ideas simply don't merit discussion.

We saw little of Ike around the office for several days. His command post was over in City Hall. Later he would tell us that one thing helping hold the public forces together was a curious coincidence. The three officials with primary City responsibility, Ike as Mayor, Clarence Kelley as Police Chief, and Joe Kelly (no relation to Clarence) as President of the Police Board, were all Sigma Nu's. I have never been sure how serious Ike was about that theory, but given the unusual strains and tensions inherent in the circumstances, I can suppose that every little extra grain of mutual trust probably helped.

The other most memorable act in Ike's second term became intertwined with the riots. I refer to the fair housing ordinance. In 1967 the City Council had unanimously passed a fair housing ordinance, prohibiting discrimination in the showing or selling of houses or rentals except by owners of single family dwellings acting without a real estate agent.

Even though the Council's action had been unanimous, this was still Kansas City. Petitions had been filed requiring a referendum, and the Council, long before Martin Luther King's assassination, had set the election date for April 30, 1968. The riots had occurred on April 9 to 13, three weeks before the scheduled election. The black community was widely seen as responsible for them, even though only a very small percentage of blacks had taken part. In 1965, the public accommodations ordinance had been upheld by the slim margin of only 1,614 votes. As they say, it did not require a rocket scientist to figure out how the referendum election of April 30 would go in 1968.

Ike however was determined that hooliganism would not win. He had the Council repeal both the original fair housing ordinance and the ordinance which had set the date for the referendum election. The Council then passed a new fair housing ordinance with an emergency clause based upon the emergency created by the riots and their aftermath. The benefit was that an ordinance passed with an emergency clause was not subject to referendum. All three of these Council actions were passed unanimously.

If the Earnings Tax saved the City's finances, Ike's legal legerdemain with fair housing may well have saved its soul. If he had permitted a vote to occur which was certain to enrage the entire black population of the city, it takes no imagination to visualize riots that would have far overshadowed in bloodshed and damage the ones that had occurred less than three weeks before.

Amazingly, the foregoing remarks have barely skimmed a surface mention of only a few of the important actions during Ike's eight years as Mayor. And he had a career full enough for most people after he left City Hall. But consideration of those events must await other treatments on other days. I'm sure that if you weren't before, you are by now grateful I decided to limit this lecture to the City Hall years.

Even so, we have a number of lessons available to us just from those years, if we will but learn.

Some of these lessons will seem politically incorrect, and some will be absolute anathema, to some listeners today. Therefore these lessons need more supporting argument than time permits right now. But perhaps it may be useful at least to trigger some thought processes by a simple, unelaborated listing of the seven lessons I see.

Lesson 1. Ike had an outstandingly qualified Council. Good government requires a team. To be sure, it needs a leader too. But as the water rate issue showed, when the team breaks down, nothing gets done.

Lesson 2. In the context of Kansas City, having a good team requires a city-wide organization capable of winning throughout the City.

Lesson 3. Without intending any criticism of any particular individual, past or present, I suggest that as a system, we are paying too much to our mayor and council. Ike's outstandingly qualified council members were paid only nominal salaries. The City

needs better councilmen than we will get if we attract those who seek the job for the money.

Lesson 4. It is more than coincidence that Ike's Golden Era occurred in a time with no Sunshine Law. Ike conducted many informal council meetings at our law office. Today it is unfortunate when public officials are not permitted to discuss explorative thoughts together on a tentative and confidential basis, without having to take prematurely public positions, the publicity of which emphasizes dissension rather than consensus.

Lesson 5. The people charged with seeing the City is run well, namely the mayor and council, have the duty to see that the City has or gets the funds necessary to permit the City to do what cities should. Two weeks ago *The Star* ran a lead news story on great forthcoming projects from private foundations in the area. I could not escape the irony of this story's appearance in the same month the City Council adopted a budget which cut millions from the Park Department and which left health services for the needy so precarious that Bea Davis felt it necessary to run ads for their protection. I fervently hope we get a new cultural arts center and the other foundation projects mentioned. But grand structures will become hollow facades if we remain for too long a city that, for example, fails to provide a single city-owned swimming pool for half its area.

Lesson 6. Last week the City Council adopted a resolution to appoint a new Charter review commission. We will hear much about the alleged need for a strong mayor government. Assertions that such powers are needed are emphatically debunked by Ike Davis' record. Consider this summary from *The Kansas City Times* in 1985:

*Even in a 'weak mayor' city, he was able to win voter authorization of some \$230 Million in bonds, launching construction of Kansas City International Airport and dozens of lesser projects; build a sewage treatment system that would stop the dumping of raw sewage into the Missouri River; rebuild the City Hall staff; revive the City's Municipal Art Commission; double the City's park land; and win passage of the first public accommodations ordinance in the nation.*

Not bad for a bespectacled professor whose speeches were dull.

Which brings us to Lesson 7, our final and the most important of all. We can tinker with systems, we can fund them with money, but making them work requires people of good character.

The challenges faced by the "Greatest Generation" molded good characters aplenty.

Our challenge is to pass on to our children the lessons and examples of good character to be learned from the Ike Davises and the Charlie Kimballs of the "Greatest Generation." If we meet that challenge, there will be many more Great Generations ahead.

Thank you.

# WHMC-KC

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Questions about the use of or donations to the Collection should be directed to David Boutros, Associate Director of the Kansas City office. (816) 235-1543.

**Cover Photo:** Ilus Davis and wife, Bea, ca. 1970. *Ilus W. Davis Papers (KC375), WHMC-KC*

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