



# A Fair to Remember

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## DISCUSSION GUIDE

(64:00)

### Part One (1866 - 1930's)

- The State Fair of Texas began in 1886 as two separate Fairs because the citizens of Dallas couldn't agree where to hold it. This resulted in a divided effort with both Fairs losing money so they eventually joined forces to hold a single fair, the one we have today at Fair Park.
  - Texas relied on agriculture as an economic lynch pin, especially in its early days. The Fair showcased advancements in modern farming equipment such as the barbwire maker and the cotton gin. This exposure helped to play a large role in the progress of Texas agriculture.
  - The advent of the automobile had a huge impact in the way Texans went about their lives. The State Fair played a crucial role in ushering in the age of this modern machine through its massive auto shows and demonstrations. Automakers were able to connect with the public directly and in large numbers by exhibiting their products at the Fair.
  - The State Fair gave Texas ranchers and farmers an excellent platform to showcase their livestock. Auctions were held, and the best examples of the breed often went for premium prices.
  - In 1915 the United States entered World War I. The U.S. army actually set up a post at the Fair and used the large attendance numbers to recruit and bolster its ranks.
  - The Texas chapter of the Ku Klux Klan boasted the largest membership in the country. In October of 1923 the Klan initiated 5000 new members at the Fair and sponsored many events and activities.
1. Why were state fairs important to communities in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century?
  2. Why was it important to combine forces and hold one Fair?
  3. How did the Fair influence people's perception of World War I?
  4. How did the automobile affect life in Dallas and Texas?



## Part Two (1930's – 1960's)

- The Texas Centennial was one of the biggest events in the history of Fair Park, celebrating the State's 100 years of statehood. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, one of the most influential presidents in U.S. history, commemorated the event with a rousing speech.
- In 1939 the State Fair reached an important milestone by recording a million people in attendance for the first time in its history. Today more than three million people from around the world pass through its turnstiles during three weeks every fall.
- At the conclusion of World War II, the State Fair experienced an even larger boom in popularity. A host of new vendors introduced some of the famous foods that we still relish today - corny dogs, candied apples and Belgian Waffles.
- Civil Rights took center stage around the country and at the State Fair in the 1950's and 1960's. Landmark organizations such as the NAACP used the Fair as an opportunity to promote equality.



1. Besides being an excellent place to celebrate Texas becoming 100 years old, what was the significance of holding the Centennial celebration in Dallas?
2. How did Texas change in 100 years?
3. How did the boycott at the Fair reflect what was going on in our country as a whole?

## Part Three (1960's – Present Day)

- Some of the more popular and competitive events at the Fair are the cook offs which showcase exotic recipes and foods. Feminists in the 1970's used these events as an opportunity to promote equal rights for women.
  - Mexican cuisine is widely enjoyed by everyone in Texas and was well represented at the State Fair. Fajitas were introduced at the Fair, and can now be found on almost any menu in the U.S.
  - A favorite among Fair goers are the live performances by entertainers from all over the world. The Fair has hosted an impressive variety of artists from Houdini to Elvis Presley.
  - Big Tex is by far the most famous cowboy to attend the Fair every year since 1952. He is a Texas icon advising folks what to see, do and eat.
1. What importance did cook offs play in furthering feminism?
  2. More important than discovering delicious food, how does the introduction of Mexican cuisine help us understand the significance of diverse cultures?
  3. What classic Texas archetypes does Big Tex represent to visitors from other parts of the country?