



Student Name:  
Class Period:  
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## Meet the Originals

*Texas Originals* is a radio series about people who made an impact on Texas. You can hear it online and on radio stations around the state. Read or listen to the episode on Billy Lee Brammer. Then, answer questions about it.

### Billy Lee Brammer 1929–1978

Though Billy Lee Brammer's novel *The Gay Place* is a work of fiction, it remains one of the most revealing accounts of Texas politics ever written.

Brammer was born in Dallas in 1929. He earned a degree in journalism from the University of North Texas, then worked as an editor for the *Texas Observer* before moving to Washington to serve as an aide to then-Senator Lyndon B. Johnson.

*The Gay Place*, which takes its title from a poem by F. Scott Fitzgerald, was published in 1961 to great acclaim. The novel paints a vivid picture of the compromises, strategy, and horse-trading that we call politics. And Brammer based the characters on people and places he knew in Austin in the fifties, including the writer Willie Morris and the popular watering hole Scholz Garten.

The novel's moving force, Governor Arthur Fenstemaker, was an amalgam of LBJ and former Louisiana governor Earl Long. Fenstemaker's political tactics were, as one reviewer noted, "not exactly taught in civics class." Fenstemaker lectures a young congressman by saying, "The first principle is you've got to learn to rise above principle."

Brammer never followed up on the success of *The Gay Place*; in fact, he never finished another book. But he remained a fixture on the Austin literary and political scene until his death in 1978. His collected papers are archived at Texas State University in San Marcos.

**Check for Understanding:** Answer the questions below based on evidence from the episode on Billy Lee Brammer. Refer to the text included above if needed.

1. What was the source of the title of Billy Lee Brammer's novel?
2. How did real life influence Brammer's writing?

**Going Further:** Write or discuss your answer to the question below, supporting your answer with evidence from the episode or additional information you have learned in class.

3. **Making Inferences.** According to the main character in *The Gay Place*, "The first principle is you've got to learn to rise above principle." What does this suggest about how Brammer saw politicians?