

CITY OF IMPORT



THE BIGGER THE PORT OF HOUSTON BECOMES THE more it disappears. At the turn of the last century, when the port was a fraction of its current size, the city had an intimate relationship with its docks. Now, when the ships themselves rival buildings in scale, many Houstonians never see them.

Consider this: the Port of Houston is, according to its 2011 report, the nation's number one port in terms of foreign waterborne tonnage. It is home to the world's second largest petrochemical complex just behind the South Louisiana Port, a collection of facilities along the Mississippi River's banks upstream of New Orleans. The two ports alternate over recent years between positions one and two in import, export, and foreign trade cargo volume and tonnage, while Houston-Galveston ranks in the top three U.S. ports along with Los Angeles and New York City in import, export, and foreign trade cargo value.

How is it possible so many of us can live in ignorance of what is arguably the defining engine of our economy and our culture? This special section is an initial exploration, a brief foray, into the paradox of Houston and its port.

- Raj Mankad

