

"I have no natural children. I have adopted the world." Juanita Craft is known for her work for Civil Rights, but her focus was for all minorities, the poor, the sick, the young, and the elderly.

1974, Dallas, Texas. On her 72nd birthday, Juanita (Jewel Shanks) Craft was interviewed in her modest, one-story wood frame home by Michael L. Gillette (humanitiestexas.org). Craft lived in this house for 50 years, where both Lyndon Johnson and Martin Luther King, Jr. visited her to discuss the civil rights movement. Gillette and his wife (LeAnne) sat in Craft's kitchen, and while she cooked they listened as she talked about her life.

The files on record at the Dallas Public Library can be quoted "After attending Prairie View College and Samuel Houston College in Austin, Texas, she taught kindergarten and worked as a drugstore clerk in Galveston, Texas from 1922 to 1925. She moved to Dallas in March 1925. From that day forward until her death on August 6, 1985, Dallas was gifted by her strength, tenacity, generosity, and love for mankind."

In an excerpt from the Gillette interview, Craft narrates: "My grandfather's name was William Shanks, and he was the son of a slave. My great-grandfather was sold out of the state of Virginia as a slave into Mississippi. He was sold from a wife and ten children, in the state of Mississippi. He was then married to, or bred to, as I'd like to say, a thirteen-year-old woman. He was termed a "breeder." He was able to get ten more children, of which my grandfather was a son."

"I don't remember his (my grandfather's) name. The two brothers—my grandfather and his brother, Thorton Shanklin—were sold into Travis County. I was about twelve years old before I knew they were brothers, because one slave master kept the name Shanklin and the other called my grandfather Shanks for short, so I didn't even realize that they were brothers. I just knew that this was my uncle Thorton. The family lived there until the deaths of Uncle Thorton's children, when I was quite young. Then there was another brother called Shanklin who in later years came to Austin. I can remember him, but I don't remember his first name. He lived very close to the family, and we did get to know him. The strange thing was that my great-grandmother was also sold with her family from the state of Virginia. They came to Texas in 1859.

My grandmother was Amy Black, and of course, she was married to my grandfather William Shanks. On my paternal side, both [grandparents] came from Virginia and on my maternal side, both sides of the family came from the state of Tennessee. In each case I've lost my family, the beginning of the Shanklin family. My mother's father (a slave) was named James Balfour and [his family] somehow got to Columbus, Texas. We're now negotiating the sale of the old homestead that they bought in 1895."

"My grandmother also came from Tennessee and again, I have very little facts how her family came to Texas. I do know how many children there were. They were a very badly mixed family. I was a great big kid before I knew my grandmother's oldest sister wasn't white. The next sister was all Indian: the high cheekbones, the features were there. The next sister was extremely dark, and then my grandmother was medium brown. So the four sisters portrayed a lot of mixture. The one brother who came and lived here in Fort Worth—I remember him. I remember all of them, but not as vividly as I remember my father's side."

“My grandfather was one of those progressive types, and he finally bought more than three hundred acres of land for himself. He paid more than a dollar an acre for it, but that was in that day. He was a progressive farmer and had all these “hands,” as they called them, that were brought out from Austin to work on the farm.”

In 1918 Craft's mother died of tuberculosis when a San Angelo, Texas, sanitarium refused treatment because of her race. In her interview with Mr. Gillette, Mrs. Craft talked about taking care of her mother during the illness. “Tuberculosis. I had carried her out to San Angelo, Texas, where we didn't have use of their sanatorium and the facilities. We lived in a tent with her for two months that summer to try to give her a little relief. The doctors said she needed to be in a high, dry place. We detected it only four months prior to her death. My father was very much concerned about me then because I took care of her. I did the laundry, and everything had to be boiled. Carbolic acid was the main disinfectant, and we bought it by the pint size, and we had to use every dish that she touched. He was very much concerned about me, and after her burial he took me for a thorough examination, and I came out with flying colors. That's the only incidence of tuberculosis that we have found in our family so I don't know what happened. She died at the early age of thirty-eight.”

Craft tells Mr. Gillette about her parents: “They were very devoted to me, and responsible parents who were interested in my welfare, and thoroughly together on anything that involved me. They wanted the best for me, but not one minute was spent in spoiling me. They were disciplinarians to the nth degree. My mother died when I was sixteen. She didn't believe in a person sitting around being idle, and could always find something to do. If I had swept my bedroom the day before, she would say to go and see if there's anything else out of order. Of course, that part of her training I don't think I have maintained, as you can see. But she always believed in doing something with a needle. At a very early age she taught me to embroider, to crochet, and to knit. I still have a piece of work she did the year that I was born. Beautiful. She made all of our clothing, my father's shirts and all of my clothing until I was thirteen. At thirteen, I took over the chore myself and I've been making my clothing all of my life. After her death, when I entered school, it was my greatest desire to make my father's shirts. It took me about a year to really produce one that he could wear publicly, but the rest of his life I took care of his shirts. I entered into the same procedure with my husband by making his shorts, his shirts, and ties, and bathrobes and things that he wore.”

“I was brought up in a home that believed in the dignity of man and this is all I've ever known. My parents taught me if I went to a grocery store to never divulge their first names. In other words, my father used his initials, D. S. Shanks. Oft times people would ask me what the D. S. stood for. I would say, “I don't know. D. S. Shanks. My mother used her initials, E. L. Shanks, Eliza Lydia Shanks. But again, I only knew to say I didn't know because at that time there was no way that a title would have been given either one of them. It was the practice in the community for those persons to attempt to find out your first name. I realized at an early age that there was something wrong, having heard of slave stories and so forth and things that had happened in the community. I think I was about fifteen years old, or maybe sixteen, when we were having riots and burnings and lynchings of people, and you would hear the common expression, “Well, did you hear about the lynching last night?” as if they were talking about an ill neighbor. Naturally, that caused me to have some inner feelings. I couldn't understand the meaning of

lynchings and burnings and how you could take a human being and torture him, drag him down the street burning.” (To read more of this personal interview, visit the Humanities Texas website where there are links and further personal information. <http://www.humanitiestexas.org>).

Seven years after her mother died, Craft moved to Dallas. In 1925 she began working as a bell maid at the Adolphus Hotel (remodeled in 1980) and later she work as a seamstress and dressmaker like her mother (from 1925-1934). In 1977, fifty-two years later, she would return to the hotel for a reception to announce her intentions to run for re-election as city council representative place 6.

In 1935 Craft joined the NAACP, and embarked on her journey for change with the Civil Rights’ Movement. Craft (along with Lulu Belle White) would become instrumental in organizing 182 branches, or chapters, of the NAACP over the course of eleven years in rural areas around the state.

In 1942, Craft became the Dallas NAACP membership chairman.

In 1944, Juanita Craft became the first African-American woman in Texas to ever vote in a public election.

In 1946 the Dallas NAACP appointed Craft as Youth Council advisor. Craft opened a dropout preparation program in Dallas. Her service with young people became the model for other NAACP youth groups throughout the U.S. Ms. Craft served as a delegate to the White House Conference on Children and Youth, and as a member of the Governor's Human Relations Committee.

The Dallas Public Library further states “Mrs. Craft, a widow since 1950, did not closet herself in her home in South Dallas, Her efforts from Youth Clean-Up Campaigns to Voters' Registration Drives was not unrecognized.”

Juanita Craft joined demonstrations against the segregated University of Texas Law School and North Texas State University, each resulting in successful lawsuits in 1950 and 1955. *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) was a [landmark United States Supreme Court](#) case in which the Court declared state laws establishing separate public schools for black and white students unconstitutional.

Juanita Craft organized a group of young people and picketed the State Fair of Texas to protest their policy of admitting blacks only on “Negro Achievement Day.” Craft also organized protests and pickets of segregated lunch counters, restaurants, theaters, and public transportation. Ms. Craft traveled by train often, and would sit in "whites only" sections refusing to move.

As a tribute to her anti-discrimination efforts, the City of Dallas dedicated a city park, the Juanita Jewel Craft Recreation Center, and a U.S. Post Office in southeast Dallas in her honor.

With hundreds of people there to share in the ceremony, which is noted to have been full of “Pomp and protocol,” prayers bracketed the ceremony, and a band serenaded the gathering. Officialdom turned out in force: the mayor and members of the city council, a congressman, state senators and representatives, county commissioners, judges, and other dignitaries. Roy Wilkins, the NAACP’s national

leader, sent a message praising Mrs. Craft's years of dedication to the cause of civil rights and her inspiration and leadership to youth. Senator Oscar Mauzy introduced Juanita Craft."

Juanita Craft said to Gillette, "For the first half of my life they wouldn't let me in the parks. Now they're naming one after me.", Dallas named a city park and recreation center after her.

The humanitiestexas.org website describes the dedication ceremony and how Juanita Craft would pause during the ceremony to interject personal memories and recognize people who had been key in helping her. "She even singled out several individuals who had shared more challenging times with her. "Tommy! Where are you? Tommy Teal!" Craft shouted, summoning a young man to stand. She then identified him as "the little culprit" who had led the picketing of the segregated state fair—under her direction, of course. "Only on Negro Achievement Day had African American children been allowed to enjoy the fair." She went on to say "He spent sixteen years overseas in the service, but he came home to be with his mama today. I'm so proud of him, because it was difficult to tell a young person about this system when it denied him the basic right of riding on a merry-go-round. We've changed things, Tommy. Welcome home."

In 1975, at the age of 73, she was elected to the Dallas City Council, where she spent the next two years working to improve the status of Hispanic and Native Americans.

1978 Craft was awarded the NAACP Golden Heritage Life Membership Award

1984 Juanita Craft was honored with the [Eleanor Roosevelt](#) Humanitarian Award

Mrs. Craft was the recipient of other awards: Sojourner Truth Award, Mayor's Award, Woman of the Year, and the first black to receive the Linz Award.

It is well known that her efforts were to "fight for opportunity, not welfare," and that she accepted these awards "not for personal glory but as an acceptance of her goals."

Juanita Craft was recognized by the NAACP for her fifty years of service shortly before her death at the age of 83 on August 6, 1985.

<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/123564-1>

<http://northdallasgazette.com/2012/02/16/the-journey-of-juanita-craft-from-seamstress-to-civil-rights-activist/>

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