

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

JUANITA CRAFT

civil rights organizer, public servant, politician, activist

“When I finally do leave this Earth, I want them to remember one thing – I raised hell with them.”



COURTESY OF THE CRAFT HOUSE, CITY OF DALLAS

Background Information

Born: February 9, 1902; Death: March 23, 1985

Craft was born in Round Rock, Texas. Her parents were both schoolteachers, and she was the granddaughter of formerly enslaved people. After her mother's death in 1918, she moved to Columbus, Texas to live with her father. Craft graduated high school and then attended Prairie View A&M University, an HBCU. After completing her studies in sewing and millinery, she moved to Austin, Texas to receive her teaching certificate from Samuel Houston College.¹ Craft worked briefly as a Kindergarten teacher, and then as a drugstore clerk.

Craft's Resistance

Craft's journey as a civil rights activist began when she joined the Dallas branch of the NAACP in 1935. Through her dedication and commitment, she was quickly appointed Dallas NAACP membership chairman, and then promoted to Texas NAACP field organizer. In this position, with the help of Lulu Belle White, she organized 182 branches of the NAACP within 11 years.¹

Following the landmark Supreme Court Case, *Smith v. Allwright*, Craft was the first Black woman in Dallas County to vote in the Democratic Party primary.² Through her appointment as Youth Council Advisor of the Dallas NAACP, her work became a prototype for NAACP youth groups nationwide.² While in this position, she was able to advocate for the following changes through legislation: 1. allowing Black students to attend all-white universities, such as North Texas State, and 2. rules against fraudulent trade-school practices in black communities in Dallas.²

Achievements

During her years of service, she received the Dallas's highest civic award, the Linz Award.¹ Craft also received the NAACP Golden Heritage Life Membership Award in 1978 and the Eleanor Roosevelt Humanitarian Award in 1984.¹ The NAACP recognized her again in 1985 for her fifty years of service to the organization.²

Essential Questions

1. Much of her work was achieved through legislative acts.
 - a. Do you think that is the most effective place to advocate for change? Why or Why not?

2. Craft worked closely with youth groups, creating spaces for young people to create change. Within the NACCP Youth Council there was no age limit on activism.
 - a. How can you act as an agent of change now?
 - b. What are the risks and rewards of age inclusion?

3. ***“When I finally do leave this Earth, I want them to remember one thing – I raised hell with them.”***
 - a. What did she mean by this?
 - b. What do you injustice are you willing to “raise hell” over?

¹Juanita J. Craft. (n.d.). Retrieved September 29, 2020, from <https://www.nps.gov/people/jjcraft.htm>

²Abernathy-McKnight, M. L. (n.d.). Craft, Juanita Jewel Shanks. Retrieved September 29, 2020, from <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/craft-juanita-jewel-shanks>