

## [Southern History and Civil Rights in the News 25 October 2021](#)

Blog Post published by Scout Johnson on Monday, October 25, 2021

Week of 22 October

### This Week's History:

Juanita Craft, the first Black woman in Dallas County to vote in a Democratic primary election and the granddaughter of slaves, was born in Round Rock, Texas in 1902. Her mother died in 1918 after being refused hospital treatment for tuberculosis, during the period when Texas had no state hospitals for Black patients. This experience helped to mold Craft into a lifelong warrior for equal rights. She received degrees from Prairie View State Normal and Industrial College (now Prairie View A&M University) and earned her teaching credentials from Samuel Huston College (now Huston-Tillotson College). After a brief time in Galveston, during which she married and then divorced, she moved to Dallas in 1925. Despite her college degrees, she worked as a hotel maid and dressmaker for most of her professional career.

Craft joined the Dallas branch of the NAACP in 1935 and remained actively engaged in membership and advocacy for the final fifty years of her life. Her first responsibilities in the organization centered around increasing membership and outreach, first serving as the membership chair in Dallas, and then in 1946 she was promoted to the position of field organizer for the state. Over the subsequent eleven years, she helped to organize 182 new branches of the NAACP throughout Texas.

Also in 1946, Craft was appointed as Youth Council Advisor for the Dallas NAACP. Despite her success in other areas, it was in this role that Craft made her biggest impact in the fight for civil rights. Her work was recognized nationally and served as the prototype that other NAACP chapters used in organizing their own youth work. Her charges engaged in a wide variety of advocacy and agitation. She worked with several students attempting to integrate North Texas State College (now University), which though unsuccessful at the time, did lead to judicial victory several years later. Perhaps most famously, the group spearheaded the successful picketing of the Texas State Fair beginning in 1955. At that time, the Fair was segregated, and African Americans were allowed to attend only one day each year, on "Negro Achievement Day." Additionally, the Youth Council members held sit-ins at lunch

counters, restaurants, theaters, and public transportation to protest segregation during the early 1960s.

While her work with the NAACP continued, Craft also served other facets of the local, state, and national communities. She served as precinct chair for the Democratic Party from 1952-1975, at which point she was elected to the first of two terms on the Dallas City Council. She joined and served with the League of Women Voters and the National Council of Negro Women. She also served with the Urban League and the Governor's Human Relations Committee. Her work brought her national attention, and she was invited to meet at the White House with Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Carter.

Her home of fifty years was donated at her death and became a National Parks Service site, The Juanita J Craft Civil Rights House. It was also the home where she received President Lyndon Johnson, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, and Thurgood Marshall, for talks on furthering civil rights at the national level. Her legacy also includes the Juanita Jewel Craft Recreation Center in Dallas, The Juanita Craft Foundation, and the thousands of young Texans that she mentored in the fight for civil rights. When asked about not having biological children, she often responded that she didn't need to have children as she had "adopted the world."

#### References and Further Reading:

[Craft, Juanita Jewel Shanks](#), Mamie L. Abernathy-McKnight, *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association,

[The Juanita J Craft Civil Rights House](#), National Parks Service

["Juanita Craft Helped Integrate the Texas State Fair—And Inspired the Next Generation of Civil Rights Activists,"](#) Emily McCullar, *Texas Monthly*

[Juanita Craft's Life-Long Fight for Equality Left an Impact on Dallas](#), WFAA

[Juanita Craft Collection](#), Dallas Public Library

"Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Juanita Craft vs the Dallas Elite," Stefanie Decker, *East Texas Historical Journal*, Vol. 39, no. 1, (March 2001), 33-42.

News Links:

Southern History

[“New Study Shows Impact of Lynching History on Life Expectancy Today,”](#) Equal Justice Initiative

[“The Karankawa Were Said to Be Extinct. Now They’re Reviving Their Culture,”](#) *Corpus Christi Caller Times*

[“The Driest State,”](#) Alice Drive, *The Bitter Southerner*

[“Bobbie Gentry’s Odes to Mississippi: A Musical Autobiography of Place, 1942-1967,”](#) Kristine M McCusker, *Southern Cultures*

Civil Rights

[“150 Years Later: Civil Rights Activist Octavius Catto’s Legacy Lives at West Philadelphia Church,”](#) WPVI, ABC Affiliate, Philadelphia

[“That Little Light of Hers Shines On and On: How Fannie Lou Hamer Rocked Mississippi for Civil Rights,”](#) Ann Marie Cunningham, Mississippi Center for Investigative Reporting

[“Small, Historically Black Town in Oklahoma Joins a National Coalition Studying Reparations,”](#) Kristi Eaton, *The Daily Yonder*

[“Elaine Massacre Descendants Call for Backing up Repentance with Resources,”](#) Olivia Paschal, *Facing South*

[“USC to Apologize for Sabotaging Its Japanese American Students’ Educations in WWII,”](#) Kimmy Yam, *Yahoo News*

[“This Historic Raleigh Church Has Been Supporting LGBTQ+ Equality Since the 1950s,”](#) Tim Pulliam, WTVD, ABC Affiliate, Raleigh, NC

Until next week, take care,

Michele “Scout” Johnson

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*This series of posts to H-South, "Southern History and Civil Rights in the News," aims to generate and track informed public discussions of southern history and civil rights. To recommend a reading, please email Dr. Michele Johnson at [mrj028@uark.edu](mailto:mrj028@uark.edu)*

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