

MAMA, ACTIVIST, AND FRIEND: AFRICAN-  
AMERICAN WOMEN IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS  
MOVEMENT IN DALLAS, TEXAS,  
1945-1998

By

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
I. HISTORIOGRAPHY . . . . .	9
II. JUANITA CRAFT, 1935-1985 . . . . .	23
III. EVA McMILLAN, 1921- . . . . .	41
IV. YVONNE EWELL, 1927- . . . . .	57
V. AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN AND THE FEMINIST MOVEMENT . . . . .	75
VI. CONCLUSION . . . . .	82
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	87
APPENDIXES	
APPENDIX A--JUANITA CRAFT, BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH . . . . .	94
APPENDIX B--EVA MCMILLAN, BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH . . . . .	96
APPENDIX C--YVONNE EWELL, BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH . . . . .	97

## Introduction

You may write me down in history  
With your bitter, twisted lies,  
You may trod me in the very dirt  
But still, like dust, I'll rise.<sup>1</sup>

So wrote Maya Angelou in the wake of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Her words inspired many African-Americans during their struggle for freedom. The era of civil rights activity produced revolutionary political, social, and legal changes for African-Americans--so much so that historian C. Vann Woodward termed it the Second Reconstruction. This period "addressed itself to all the aspects of racial relations that the first one attacked and even some that the First Reconstruction avoided or neglected."<sup>2</sup> After the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, African-Americans across the United States came together, hoping to speed the process of desegregation and achieve full citizenship. The victory of the *Brown* decision made many African-Americans realize that accommodation was not the only way to combat racism; thus, the non-violent resistance movement that characterized the early years of the civil rights movement emerged with Martin Luther King, Jr. at its helm.<sup>3</sup>

Sociologist James A. Geschwender classifies the civil rights movement as one of the major social movements of the twentieth century. He defines a social movement as "a continuing, collective attempt to restructure some basic segment of the social order through means other than institutionalized channels. . . .encompass[ing] both organized and unorganized elements working toward a common goal."<sup>4</sup> Geschwender rejects the "Vulgar Marxist Hypothesis," claiming that social movements occur in response to worsening conditions; instead, he holds that the civil rights movement follows the theory of the "Rising Expectations Hypothesis" which predicts rebellions occur due to improved conditions of life.<sup>5</sup>

Since the late nineteenth century, African-Americans witnessed slow, yet gradual, progress in obtaining equal rights. With income, education, and job opportunities becoming more accessible, they became hopeful and increasingly more active in organizations that fought for their legal and civic equality. Yet, for many blacks, the 1954 decision promised to break down the legal restrictions that prevented complete emancipation. In decades following the *Brown* case, African-Americans organized *en masse* to change a society that did not readily comply with the Supreme Court ruling. While a variety of civil rights organizations developed during the movement, many with competing ideologies, each sought the legal, social, and economic freedom of blacks. Yet these groups did not create the civil rights movement; instead the momentum of the struggle created and established its own necessary organizations and leaders. Vital to the success of the movement were the individual leaders who put their time, energy, and soul into securing rights for blacks throughout the United States.<sup>6</sup>

Although men held the majority of leadership positions in civil rights organizations, women were also active in the battle for equality. Only recently have historians sought to explore the contributions of women during the civil rights struggle. While Rosa Parks, Fannie Lou Hamer, and Daisy Bates are among those women who gained national recognition for their activism, there were hundreds of other women who devoted themselves to securing rights for African-Americans. In fact, more black women than men participated in the movement.<sup>7</sup> Thus, it is time to recognize these women's roles in order to legitimize their contributions. Such a study does more than merely acknowledge their role and include their names on the list of civil rights heroes. In addition, it "adds to an understanding of Black women's collective experiences."<sup>8</sup> The experiences of African-American women in the United States are highly unique. Perhaps no other group experienced oppression on the same level. Having to face both sexual and racial discrimination, they were neither recognized as separate from black men, nor as a part of the larger group of women in the United States. Yet, according to sociologist

Belinda Robnett, “it is this very limitation that served to catapult and sustain the identity, collective consciousness, and solidarity of the movement.”<sup>9</sup>

The roots of African-American women’s participation during the civil rights movement originate in the history of the black community. Many historians note the strong community ties that blacks brought with them from Africa. Many African-Americans placed great value on marriage, family unity, kinship bonds, social responsibility, and devotion to the extended community. Women often took the duty of maintaining a strong family unit and educating the children. Black women frequently had to defend the honor and welfare of their children and men.<sup>10</sup> Having repeatedly witnessed the denial of the black man his dignity, African-American women moved to the forefront to fight for “the dignity and survival of the Black man, woman, and child.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, when the civil rights movement began in earnest during the 1950s, women eagerly participated.

The activities of African-American women during the movement often varied; yet, their contributions all served to unify and educate the community. Terese Nance identifies three categories of black women’s activities during the struggle: the mama, the activist, and the friend. The “mama” took the civil rights workers into her home, fed them, and introduced them into her neighborhood. Many of these women fought racism long before civil rights leaders entered their community. The “evolutionary product” of the black experience, the mama embodied the strength of a community’s past and its hope for the future.<sup>12</sup> Strong-willed and self-sacrificing, she was “outspoken, understanding, and willing to catch hell, having already caught her share.”<sup>13</sup> Women also served as activists. They became leaders and organizers, fulfilling the community’s needs. Black women played a vital part in the boycotts, mass demonstrations, and voter registration drives, often initiating them.<sup>14</sup> Robnett defines their role as that of bridge leaders--those who tied the formal leadership of the movement to the community. Although these women did not get national or media recognition, they were the activists

who “served as the catalysts for the civil rights movement throughout the country.”<sup>15</sup> Finally, African-American women provided friendships for one another, ensuring community survival. The tradition of the extended family, a result of the harsh racial and economic plight of blacks since slavery, prompted women to care for, feed, educate, and nurture members of their community, particularly children. Caring for other’s children in the community was a significant role for African-American women. It often helped ease the pain of discrimination. By providing meals, participating in demonstrations and meetings, and supporting one another, many African-American women did not garnish personal accolades; yet, these activities allowed the male civil rights activists to focus on combating racism.<sup>16</sup>

The primary activity of African-American women during the civil rights movement was that of nonformal education. LaVerne Gyant defines nonformal education as “any organized, systematic educational activity outside of the formal school system and sponsored by organizations such as the NAACP or SCLC. . . .for the purpose of helping disenfranchised groups learn how to become empowered and productive citizens.”<sup>17</sup> The tradition of nonformal education in the black community was not new. Denied a formal education, slaves learned to read and write at night in churches or in someone’s home; thus, women often took the responsibility of passing knowledge to their children and grandchildren. Consequently, education became a high priority among many black women. In the twentieth century, sociologist Janice Hale finds that African-American mothers encouraged their children to excel in academia more than white mothers. Many black women recognized education as the tool for greater political, social, and economic freedom. Accordingly, women during the civil rights movement sought to continue this education by teaching classes in churches and homes throughout the community. It was also black women who explained the struggle for civil rights to the children.<sup>18</sup> Women’s roles during the struggle proved merely a “continuation of historical roles played out in slavery and reconstruction.” Through the education of

youths and voters, African-American women became a vital mobilizing force during the crusade, considered by many the movement's "bricklayers" instead of merely its "handmaidens."<sup>19</sup>

While most women did not hold leadership positions at the national forefront, the work of women like Juanita Craft, Eva McMillan, and Yvonne Ewell provides an example of what many females were doing at the local level--educating the children of their community. Although relegated to "hidden" jobs, the majority of black women did not view their roles as sexist; accordingly, many failed to join the women's liberation movement that grew out of the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Craft, McMillan, and Ewell all found their particular struggle for civil rights in Dallas, Texas. Each one dedicated their lives to gaining equality for blacks.

The first chapter explores the existing scholarship that has been produced on the civil rights crusade. While most of the works cover the entire movement, a few focus on the struggle in Dallas. Within the historiography, however, there is a glaring lack of works that focus on the contributions of African-American women.

Chapters two through four examine the roles of three black women who actively participated in the civil rights crusade in Dallas, Texas--Juanita Craft, Eva McMillan, and Yvonne Ewell. Each woman participated in a different aspect of the movement. Juanita Craft found her role in the NAACP Youth Council; Eva McMillan helped support the more radical SNCC organization; and Yvonne Ewell's career centered on the process of desegregating Dallas schools. Although each woman's experience differed, they all helped African-Americans in Dallas push for civil rights.

The last chapter studies the various viewpoints each woman held on the predominantly white feminist movement that grew out of the civil rights struggle. Each woman had her own reasons for not joining the movement. Yet, Craft, McMillan, and Ewell, like many African-American women, maintained that feminism failed to focus on

the primary needs of the black community. Thus, instead of splitting black men and women along gender lines, the civil rights movement, instead, served to unify them.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup>Maya Angelou, The Complete Collected Poems of Maya Angelou. (New York: Random House, 1994), 163.
- <sup>2</sup>C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 9.
- <sup>3</sup>James W. Zanden, "The Non-Violent Resistance Movement Against Segregation," in James A. Geschwender, ed. The Black Revolt: The Civil Rights Movement, Ghetto Uprisings, and Separatism. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1971), 136-37.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid, 2.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid, 39.
- <sup>6</sup>Kenneth B. Clark, "The Civil Rights Movement: Momentum and Organization," in The Black Revolt, 47.
- <sup>7</sup>LaVerne Gyant, "Passing the Torch: African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement." Journal of Black Studies 25 (May 1996): 630.
- <sup>8</sup>Teresa A. Nance, "Hearing the Missing Voices." Journal of Black Studies 26 (May 1996): 544.
- <sup>9</sup>Belinda Robnett, "African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965: Gender, Leadership and Micromobilization." American Journal of Sociology 101 (May 1996): 1689.
- <sup>10</sup>Carrie Allen McCray, "The Black Woman and Family Roles," in The Black Woman. La Frances Rodgers-Rose, ed. (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980), 70.
- <sup>11</sup>Gyant, "Passing the Torch," 643.
- <sup>12</sup>Nance, "Missing Voices," 544-46.
- <sup>13</sup>Clayborne Carson, In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 75.
- <sup>14</sup>Jacqueline Jones, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the

Family from Slavery to the Present. (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985), 279.

<sup>15</sup>Robnett, "African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement," 1664.

<sup>16</sup>Nance, "Missing Voices," 548; *Ibid*, 548-49; McCray, "Family Roles," 72; Janice Hale, "The Black Woman and Child Rearing," in The Black Woman. La Frances Rodgers-Rose, ed. (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980), 82-83; Nance, "Missing Voices," 554.

<sup>17</sup>LaVerne Gyant, "Contributions of African-American Women to Nonformal Education During the Civil Rights Movement, 1955-1965" (Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1990), 5, 107.

<sup>18</sup>Hale, "Child Rearing," 83; Gyant, "Passing the Torch," 633; Nance, "Missing Voices," 544.

<sup>19</sup>Zita Allen, Black Women Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. (New York: Franklin, Watts, Grolier Publishing, 1996), 7.

## Chapter One

### Historiography

Since the height of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, historians have examined and analyzed this unprecedented push for equality. They have explored the origins, the actions, and the major figures that brought the dilemma of the blacks in American society to the forefront. While many questions have been raised and many conclusions drawn, historians still grapple with the successes and failures of the civil rights movement. Many recent works attempt to evaluate the movement based on its accomplishments and shortcomings, as well as the factors that led to its eventual demise.

Benjamin Muse's 1968 work, The American Negro Revolution: From Nonviolence to Black Power, 1963-1967, is one of the first major attempts to put the movement into historical perspective.<sup>1</sup> Muse does not strive to evaluate the problems of black-white relations, but instead to "present a history of the American Negro Revolution from its nonviolent manifestations of 1963 through the crescendo of violence in 1967."<sup>2</sup> Muse's work successfully traces the major events of the civil rights movement such as the Civil Rights Bill of 1964 to the events in Selma, Alabama, to the Watts Riot of 1965, and the riotous summer of 1967. According to Muse, 1966 witnessed the greatest change in the movement as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee [SNCC], the Congress on Racial Equality [CORE], and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference [SCLC] participated in the protest against Vietnam. Also, the "Black Power" slogan encouraged black nationalism as leaders such as Stokely Carmichael gained the spotlight. White reaction to more militant black action was often negative and viewed with suspicion. By 1967, the civil rights movement had splintered and many were claiming that the movement was dead.<sup>3</sup>

First published in 1955, C. Vann Woodward's The Strange Career of Jim Crow offers an interesting perspective into the civil rights movement. Although Woodward's work traces Jim Crow from the time of Reconstruction, the third revised edition, published in 1974, attempts to bring the story up to date. Woodward has termed the civil rights movement of the twentieth century the 'Second Reconstruction,' which he views as having two distinct phases. President Truman, issued forth the first phase in the late 1940s with his executive order that desegregated the military. The Supreme Court's desegregation rulings in 1954 and 1955 marked the beginning of the second phase, as the federal judiciary "took the lead in. . .calling for ever greater exercise of federal power."<sup>4</sup>

Woodward traces the important events of the movement from 1954 to the 1970s, particularly focusing on the role of judicial action in bringing about the legal emancipation of the African-Americans. The author views the "Negro awakening" of the 1960 as a more spontaneous uprising. It was not merely a revolt against whites, but a "generational rebellion, an uprising of youth against the older generation, against the parental 'Uncle Toms' and their inhibitions."<sup>5</sup> This rebellion took the form of sit-ins, and boycotts in the 1950s, followed by marches, and, eventually, outright violence during the turbulent 1960s.

With the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Woodward claims, "Jim Crow as a legal entity was dead." With the violence that accompanied the Watts riot and the urban uprisings the following years, blacks alienated the white working and middle classes with whom they might have formed a genuine radical political coalition. Published in 1974, Woodward concluded that the position of blacks in the country as still having much to be desired.

Similarly, John Hope Franklin's last chapter of Racial Equality in America examines the effects of the civil rights movement of the twentieth century. While Franklin's work provides a short, although rather comprehensive, study of the inequality of blacks in America, he does not attempt to detail the movement. Instead he offers an

overview of the struggle for black equality. Franklin views the real thrust of the movement beginning in World War II.<sup>6</sup> In the face of the racism of Hitler and Mussolini, many Americans, particularly blacks, became outraged at “the hypocrisy of the American position in the war,” as racism and segregation of blacks continued throughout the military and the country.<sup>7</sup> Unlike a society who had previously met one or two civil rights leaders and forced a compromise (a trend he calls the ‘Booker Washington Syndrome), America in the 1950s was confronted with “several million angry, impatient, aggressive blacks who were willing to risk everything in the battle to achieve equality”--it was time for a Black Revolution.<sup>8</sup>

The action of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the government brought about the enactment, in 1964, of “the most far-reaching civil rights bill ever passed.”<sup>9</sup> Instead of an evaluation of the gains made or those still needing to be made, Franklin’s work is a call to Americans to cease their preoccupation with race--a preoccupation “that has been obsessive, and the costs have been incalculable.”<sup>10</sup> The author hopes to implore readers to acknowledge the necessity, the importance, and the inevitability of racial equality in America.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, various scholars undertook the task of evaluating specific events, organizations, or leaders that played crucial roles in the civil rights movement. David Garrow’s Protest at Selma is one such study. He focuses upon the events at Selma, Alabama, and their impact upon the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Garrow examines the Voting Rights Act and how it came into being; for the act “revolutionized black access to the ballot. . . [and] in doing so, it changed forever the politics of those states, and indirectly, those of the entire nation.”<sup>11</sup>

Garrow’s study consists of a day-by-day account of the events at Selma in March of 1965. Yet, Selma alone was not responsible for the legislation. The author insists that President Lyndon B. Johnson had already planned to implement the Voting Rights Act before the events at Selma, but the violence that accompanied the marches and protests

helped to push the legislation through Congress faster. Garrow lends great weight to the role of the media in the successful passage of the Voting Rights Act. It was through television and newspapers that millions of Americans, particularly Congressmen, witnessed the violence and brutality that was inflicted on the peaceful demonstrators. The outrage that followed made many Americans realize that something had to be done.

Despite the success of the Voting Rights Act in giving blacks political emancipation, Garrow, like Muse, views the greatest problem that was not addressed or solved was the economic situation of the African-Americans. In Lowndes County, Alabama, “the major problem facing black citizens was their very limited supply of economic resources.”<sup>12</sup> Although blacks gained political and representational power, their economic status had changed very little by the time Garrow published his work in 1978.

Clayborne Carson’s In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s, also provides a more narrowly focused study on one of the major organizations of the civil rights movement. Carson’s book is an attempt to trace SNCC’s radical evolution. Carson divides his book into three parts that he feels depict the three stages of the movement, and the titles speak for themselves: “Coming Together,” “Looking Inward,” and “Falling Apart.”

Carson maintains that during the early 1960s, SNCC provided a ‘gathering point’ for idealistic youths who sought to attack southern racism; furthermore, the organization was not a homogeneous sect. Yet the ideological differences in the group proved to be its weakest point. SNCC divided itself between those who sought a more militant revolutionary action with greater structure and direction, and those who held fast to King’s nonviolent protest ideals and wanted to work to help local organizations.

By 1964, SNCC had become involved in other national movements such as the Free Speech movement and the women’s struggle. They began to look inward and strive to find ways to reorganize and change to fulfill their goals. The third stage witnessed the completion of SNCC’s radical development. By 1966 Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap

Brown popularized the separatist ideology of many of SNCC's members. The disagreement between what direction the movement should take occurred not only within SNCC itself, but throughout the entire black community. Therefore, due to the internal strife that divided the group, SNCC "withered in the face of the same tactics of subtle co-optation and ruthless repression that stifled the entire black community."<sup>13</sup>

Carson attributes a variety of reasons for the breakup of one of the major civil rights organizations. The urban violence that accompanied the late 1960s helped divide and defeat the movement, a split which was compounded by the death of two of its leaders, King and Malcolm X. Furthermore, the more militant SNCC became, the more it began to join the "ranks of social movement organizations throughout history which sought to impose their worldview on people who were struggling to think for themselves."<sup>14</sup> Most detrimental, however, was the change of focus from the South to the urban areas. By losing touch with its southern roots, SNCC "hastened its own decline."<sup>15</sup>

In more recent years, many historians have returned to detailing the broad civil rights struggle. Harvard Sitkoff's synthesis, *The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1980*, is a very beneficial and interesting overview of the movement. Focusing primarily on the South, Sitkoff examines the motives, actions, and effects of the movement as well as its triumphs and failures. He begins by giving a brief outline of the civil rights struggle up to 1954. While men such as W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, and A. Philip Randolph made great strides for the black community, many blacks, particularly in the South, still faced extreme prejudice and oppression. However, the author's starting point for his study, 1954, marks the year that the Supreme Court ruled segregation unconstitutional in *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education*. This monumental case spurred many blacks throughout the country to challenge the existing order and push for a desegregated world that seemed to never come.

The following year, Rosa Parks opened the door for many Civil Rights activists and leaders. By refusing to give up her seat to a white person on a Montgomery, Alabama, bus, a seemingly isolated incident sparked national interest as blacks across the country began to stand up for their rights and demand freedom. Most important was Martin Luther King, Jr., and his policy of nonviolent protest that became the driving force for the civil rights movement. Sitkoff interestingly details the bus boycotts, the sit-in movement, the freedom rides, and the freedom marches that became characteristic of civil disobedience. Included are the horrifying reactions of white supremacists and others who fought against desegregation. This era gave birth to what Sitkoff terms, the “new Negro”—one who sought peaceful protest teamed with spiritual and intellectual guidance.

The majority of Sitkoff’s work finds its focus in the South, particularly the Deep South states of Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and Louisiana. According to the author, the policy of civil disobedience was the main ideology of the civil rights movement until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Afterwards, divisions within the black movement and its leading organizations, CORE, SNCC, and SCLC, as well as disillusionment with King’s nonviolent protest, all created a form of black militancy. Tired of patiently waiting for integration, blacks began to follow militant leaders such as Malcolm X and the Black Panthers. The split within the movement, the white reaction to the violent black outburst, such as the Watt’s Riot, and the impact of King’s death in 1968, eventually weakened their cause.

Like Muse and Garrow, Sitkoff views the main failure of the civil rights movement as being the lack of economic progress for the black community. The gains made during the 1960s, Sitkoff claims, were made because of an expanding economy, and not due to any sacrifice of whites. Yet, due to the remaining economic inequality of the black community, Sitkoff calls for a Third Reconstruction—“a renewed battle would

be needed to hold prior gains and to expand them so that the mass of blacks who have not shared the fruits of the struggle can do so someday.”<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the scholarly debate on civil rights, a symposium on the civil rights movement was held at the University of Mississippi on October 4-5, 1985. The articles presented were collected and published in a work edited by Charles W. Eagles, The Civil Rights Movement in America. The work consists of articles from various leading southern scholars such as Clayborne Carson, John Dittmer, David Levering Lewis, Nancy J. Weiss, Charles V. Hamilton, and William H. Chafe. The works examine various aspects of the movement, such as the origins and causes, the leadership, the role of the federal courts, and the politics in Mississippi.

From the articles collected, Eagles is able to draw a universal conclusion-- “Though the civil rights movement did not solve what Gunnar Myrdal termed the ‘American dilemma,’ it did alter the status of blacks in southern society; it so changed relations between races the C. Vann Woodward has called it the ‘second reconstruction.’”<sup>17</sup> William H. Chafe’s article, “The End of One Struggle, The Beginning of Another,” most clearly deals with the failure of the movement to alter significantly the economic status of blacks in the United States. Although he credits the decades of the 1960s and 1970s as legally ending discrimination, expanding the franchise, and giving blacks full legal citizenship, the movement and the war on poverty, while giving some relief, “remained a disappointment overall, with blacks who were concentrated in the poorest neighborhoods in the nation actually seeing their condition deteriorate rather than improve.”<sup>18</sup> Although the movement proved a success in providing individual freedoms, it lacked the achievement of economic equality

Very recent works on Civil Rights have provided extensively researched material spanning crucial years of the movement. In 1988, Taylor Branch published Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63. His work is a detailed look at the civil rights movement from the *Brown* decision of 1954 to John F. Kennedy’s assassination in

1963. Branch provides more than just a political study of King's years; he attempts to give an in-depth look at the role of Martin Luther King, Jr., as a moral and religious leader; he does not, however, attempt to portray all of the leaders in an ethereal light but demonstrates their shortcomings as well as their accomplishments. Moreover, the author stresses throughout the important role that the black church had in the organization and success of the movement. He also extensively researched the FBI and Hoover's attempt to silence and undermine King.<sup>19</sup> The study is an excellent detailed overview of some of the critical years of the movement. However, the work ends before the militant factions of the movement actually gained a voice. Branch also tends to include events, such as the Suez Canal and the Hungarian revolt, that often appear irrelevant. Furthermore, because of its cut off date, 1963, Branch gives no broad analysis of the failures and accomplishments of the movement. Yet, overall, the work provides a well-researched, well-written account.

Conversely, Robert Weisbrot's Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement is primarily a political evaluation of the struggle. In it, he attempts to focus on the "turbulent relations between black activists and white liberals. . . [and] to relate the civil rights movement to broader currents in American political reform. . . .," particularly the Great Society.<sup>20</sup>

Beginning with the sit-ins, Weisbrot devotes considerable time to black nationalism, Malcolm X, and "Black Power." He also successfully covers both the Northern urban and Southern movements. Throughout he draws links between the events of the movement and Kennedy and Johnson's administrations. Furthermore, Weisbrot's work ends in approximately 1965, after Selma and the Voting Rights Act. Yet he does have comments on how blacks failed to make substantial economic progress during the movement. Weisbrot's study, like Branch's, provides a valuable, although somewhat limited, overview of Civil Rights in America.

Finally, Fred Powledge's Free At Last?: The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who Made It, is yet another broad sweeping study. Powledge's main concern is to demonstrate a movement that was not comprised and led by one person, namely Martin Luther King, Jr., but that it was a collective action by numerous members of the black community. Unlike Branch, who bases his book on King's actions, Powledge searches for those participants who represent the majority of the activists. The people he interviews were not those at the forefront, but those in the background who carried out the task set before them.

As a journalist, Powledge produces a work that is exhaustively well-researched and well-written. Yet, the most outstanding contribution of the book is the oral histories that he sporadically includes throughout. His personal accounts are highly valuable. They not only provide excellent primary sources, but they personalize and humanize the history of the movement.

Paring down the larger studies, historians increasingly have started to examine the movement in specific states and regions. Although the majority center on the Deep South, a handful of scholars traced the movement in border states, such as Texas. Most studies on the Texas's civil rights era are relegated to a few articles and sparse mentions in national studies; however, a recent dissertation by Martin Kuhlman provides a fairly detailed account of the civil rights movement throughout Texas. From the violent protests and riots in Houston and Marshall, to the more peaceful and successful demonstrations in Austin and Dallas, the author attempts a sweeping overview of African-American's struggle for equality from 1950 to 1964. Additionally, two early theses examine the history of Jim Crow in the state. Artis Hill's "Jim Crowism in Several Areas of Twentieth Century Texas Life" and Leonard Brewster Murphy's "A History of Negro Segregation Practices in Texas" examine the origins, actions, and overall effects of segregation in the state of Texas. Although dated, both provide valuable historical background and justification for the coming civil rights movement.<sup>21</sup>

At the local level, little has focused on major cities such as Dallas. Most studies examine the power structure of the city and its role in desegregation. An article by Robert Calvert, "The Civil Rights Movement in Texas," presents a brief overview of the movement in Texas and mentions activities in Dallas. William Brophy's, "Active Acceptance--Active Containment," provides a more focused analysis of the civil rights era in Dallas. Brophy argues that the peaceful period in Dallas was a result of the accommodating nature of African-Americans to the white business leadership. Marvin Dulaney's piece, "Whatever Happened to the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas?" concurs with this interpretation. Dulaney suggests that the civil rights movement bypassed Dallas almost completely, as the accommodations made resulted in few gains for African-Americans.<sup>22</sup>

The interpretation that the white business structure controlled the civil rights movement in Dallas is perhaps most articulated in Jim Schutze's The Accommodation. Wanting to maintain the image of a virtuous city, Dallas business leaders agreed to peacefully accept desegregation to avoid the violence and riots that characterized other Southern cities. With the preservation of peace came prosperous business. Schutze provides valuable background on the history of African-Americans in Dallas, as well as an informative, if not critical, analysis of the white power structure. Although Schutze's interpretation is not novel, he provides ample support for his argument. Scholars will find the absence of notation and a bibliography highly disappointing. Despite the various, although sparse, scholarship on the civil rights movement in Dallas, no works have been produced that center on its leaders.<sup>23</sup>

In recent years, scholars recognize the absence of works on African-American female civil rights activists and have attempted to fill the void. A series of articles published in Women in the Civil Rights Movement provide interesting and valuable accounts from women participants. As a part of the Black Women in United States History series, the volume offers numerous articles by historians, sociologists, and

women who participated in the movement. Many of the articles focus on specific women, such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, Septima P. Clark, and many others. Letters from the South and Zita Allen's Black Women Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement also provide interesting perspectives by women who were active in civil rights. Jacqueline Jones work, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow, provides the history of African-American women in the United States from slavery to the present, and Gayle Hardy's bibliography gives biographical and source information on sixty-eight female civil rights leaders. Furthermore, many female participants detailed their experiences in their memoirs. Anne Moody, Daisy Bates, and Rosa Parks all rose to prominent positions within the movement, and their own stories provide excellent first-hand account of women's roles in the struggle.<sup>24</sup>

Since the 1960s, histories on the civil rights movement have been steadily growing. While the scholarship on women's participation in the struggle increases, there is still a need to provide works that focus on the invaluable role of African-American women. Furthermore, as works on the civil rights crusade in Alabama, Mississippi, and other Deep South states become exhausted, many scholars are looking to local communities throughout the country to understand the entire story of the movement in America.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Benjamin Muse, The American Negro Revolution: From Nonviolence to Black Power,

1963-1967. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968).

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 1-3.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid, 271.

<sup>4</sup>Woodward, The Strange Career, 139.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 170.

<sup>6</sup>John Hope Franklin, Racial Equality in America. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

<sup>7</sup>Ibid, 89.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid, 97-98.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, 101.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid, 104.

<sup>11</sup>David J. Garrow, Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), 1.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid, 211.

<sup>13</sup>Carson, In Struggle, 3.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, 287.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, 300.

<sup>16</sup>Harvard Sitkoff, The Struggle for Black Equality, 1954-1980. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 234, 237.

<sup>17</sup>Charles W. Eagles, ed., The Civil Rights Movement in America. (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1986), ix.

<sup>18</sup>William H. Chafe, "The End of One Struggle, The Beginning of Another," in The Civil Rights Movement in America. (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1986), 134.

<sup>19</sup>Taylor Branch, Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).

<sup>20</sup>Robert Weisbrot, Freedom Bound: A History of America's Civil Rights Movement. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), xiv.

<sup>21</sup>Martin Herman Kuhlman, "The Civil Rights Movement in Texas: Desegregation of Public Accommodations, 1950-1964" (Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University, 1994); Artis Hill, "'Jim Crowism' in Several Areas of Twentieth Century Texas Life Relative to the Negro: Transportation, Eating, and Lodging Places, Public Parks, and Movie Theaters" (MA thesis, Abilene Christian College, 1969); Leonard Brewster Murphy, "A History of Negro Segregation Practices in Texas, 1865-1958" (MA thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1958).

<sup>22</sup>Robert Calvert, "The Civil Rights Movement in Texas," in The Texas Heritage. Ben Procter and Archie P. McDonald, eds. (St. Louis, MO: Forum Press, 1980), 146-164; William Brophy, "Active Acceptance--Active Containment: The Dallas Story," in Southern Businessmen and Desegregation. Elizabeth Jacoway and David R. Colburn, eds. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982); W. Marvin Dulaney, "Whatever Happened to the Civil Rights Movement in Dallas?" in Essays on the American Civil Rights Movement. W. Marvin Dulaney and Kathleen Underwood, eds. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1993).

<sup>23</sup>Jim Schutze. The Accommodation: The Politics of Race in an American City. (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1986).

<sup>24</sup>Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods, eds., Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965. (Brooklyn, NY: Carson Publishing Inc., 1990); Clarice T. Campbell, Civil Rights Chronicle: Letters from the South. (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1997); Zita Allen, Black Women Leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. (New York: Franklin Watts, Grolier Publishing, 1996); Jones, Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow; Gayle J. Hardy, American Women Civil Rights Activists: Bibliographies of 68 Leaders, 1825-1992. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., Inc., 1993); Allen, Women Leaders; Anne Moody, Coming of Age in Mississippi. (New York: Dial Press, 1968); Daisy Bates, The Long Shadow of Little Rock: A Memoir. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1987); Rosa Parks, Rosa Parks: My Story. (New York: Dial Press, 1990); David Rubel, Fannie Lou Hamer: From Sharecropping to Politics. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Silver Burdett, 1990).

## Chapter Two

### Juanita Craft, 1935-1985

Many historians overlook the civil rights movement in Dallas because it appeared to lack the deep segregation of other Southern cities. In fact, a 1991 Texas Monthly article claims that the movement bypassed Dallas.<sup>1</sup> Yet, the historical record indicates that blacks in Dallas experienced the same discrimination as African-Americans in other parts of the South--Dallas maintained "a system of racial violence and segregation that was not much different from that which they experienced during slavery."<sup>2</sup> By 1970, Dallas still ranked fourth as one of the twenty most segregated cities in the nation. Before the *Brown* decision of 1954, Jim Crow maintained a strong foothold, legally segregating state parks, education, transportation, showers in coal mines, and outlawed miscegenation.<sup>3</sup> Although there were only five Jim Crow laws, Juanita Craft recalls that, "they had the strength of a thousand. And they were doubly enforced by tradition."<sup>4</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s, while other Southern states reluctantly integrated public facilities, Dallas lagged behind, forcing blacks to live in conditions similar to those at the end of the Civil War. Most African-Americans worked as janitors or domestics, receiving considerably lower wages than whites. Women's jobs were overwhelmingly relegated to the service sector. As in most Jim Crow cities, whites barred African-Americans from eating in restaurants, trying on clothes in department stores, and using public restrooms and drinking fountains. Cemeteries and housing were also segregated, forcing blacks to live in the South Dallas area of Oak Cliff. Although one of the state's largest cities, Dallas had a small percentage of blacks compared to other Southern cities. In 1960, they constituted approximately 19 percent of the total population in Dallas. Yet, by 1970,

although they only made up 24.8 percent of the population, they ranked the highest of any group, 44.5 percent, comprising the Dallas Independent School District.<sup>5</sup>

With the *Brown* decision of 1954, Dallas whites recognized that desegregation was inevitable. After the violence that the nation witnessed in Selma, Birmingham, and Little Rock, whites in Dallas decided to take the process of integration upon themselves. By the 1960s, the city's government was run by a small group of white non-elected businessmen and clergy. Known as the "Dallas way," these men governed the social, economic, and political structure of the city. Hand-picking African-Americans, they sought an integrated council that would peacefully oversee local desegregation. The white business leaders had one primary goal--preventing violence in order to promote business.<sup>6</sup> With the tragic assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas, citizens realized they must make a change in order to restore the city's image. Moreover, the leading newspapers, including the African-American Dallas Express, agreed not to report any activities or demonstrations that might lead to violence.<sup>7</sup> Dallas businessmen were willing to undertake any task in to maintain a good image for its city and keep prosperous business relations. Thus, when the civil rights movement started to gain strength locally, it needed strong, intelligent, and dedicated leaders who were willing to fight the white business structure in to gain their legal rights and end segregation. Juanita Craft proved to be the perfect choice.

A native of Texas, Juanita Jewel Craft was born in 1902 in Round Rock. The granddaughter of slaves, she strived to receive an education, eventually graduating from Prairie View Normal and Industrial School in 1921 with a certificate in dressmaking. After a brief marriage, she moved to Dallas in 1925 and got work as a bellmaid at the Adolphus Hotel, twice attending Eleanor Roosevelt. After watching her mother die after being refused entrance to an all-white hospital, Juanita Craft decided to become actively involved in the struggle for black equality.<sup>8</sup>

In 1935, Juanita Craft joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples [NAACP] and began her long, dedicated fight for civil rights. In the 1940s, the NAACP had two primary goals--ending discrimination in the Texas Democratic Primary and expanding educational opportunities for blacks. In 1945, Craft embarked on a massive NAACP membership campaign in Dallas, expanding its rolls to 7,000 in 1946. The NAACP also appointed Craft as state organizer in 1946, an unpaid position that she held for eleven years.<sup>9</sup> Traveling from town to town, Craft called meetings, solicited contributions, and organized new chapters--she was "like a blood transfusion to a very weak patient."<sup>10</sup> By 1958, she had organized 182 new branches in Texas. She was also instrumental in voter registration drives. As the first black woman to be deputized to sell poll taxes, as well as the first black woman to vote in Dallas County, she traveled throughout the state, convincing African-Americans it was worth the \$1.50 to vote.<sup>11</sup> She recalls, "You had to put on your best argument to convince a lot of people that it was worth it."<sup>12</sup> With the aid of A. Maceo Smith, the NAACP Executive Secretary, Craft sought to revive the NAACP in Dallas and promote it statewide. Thus, the Dallas chapter of the NAACP became the center from which the efforts to integrate the University of Texas, overturn the Democratic primary, and equalize African-American teacher's salaries flowed. Although Craft organized numerous branches and held a number of important positions, she never became president of the Texas NAACP. Only in recent years has the NAACP and the city of Dallas recognized Craft for her work.<sup>13</sup>

The most important position Craft held within the NAACP was that of youth advisor. Through the NAACP, Craft's goal was to end de facto segregation in Dallas, giving African-American youths equal opportunity in education, in jobs, and in social situations. Therefore, she readily accepted the position of youth director in 1947 with the hopes of reviving the program. Although the NAACP Youth Councils served primarily as social organizations, Craft sought to make them an educational instrument as well.

She viewed the Council as a training program for the youth, teaching them about the NAACP and the many doors the organization opened for blacks. The children also served an important role for the NAACP.<sup>14</sup> The youths were more than merely future NAACP members, they were “vitally needed as plaintiffs in school cases as well as discrimination suits involving employment and recreation facilities.”<sup>15</sup> Only through training of the young people could the NAACP succeed in its efforts. Education was the key to prepare the youths for school integration and to reduce prejudices.

Craft devoted herself to promoting education in the NAACP Youth Councils. Besides organizing new local and collegiate chapters, she encouraged young people to attend the NAACP national conferences. Holding youth meetings in her backyard, Craft sought to teach children about the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship. At one time, as many as one hundred youths gathered in her yard to socialize; in turn, they became active members in the NAACP and the civil rights movement.<sup>16</sup> From these backyard meetings came perhaps the most memorable event of Craft’s term as youth director--the desegregation of the State Fair of Texas, held annually in Dallas.

In 1955, the Youth Council, under the direction of Craft, proposed to demonstrate against the Negro Achievement Day at the State Fair. Negro Achievement Day provided for blacks a day set aside to enjoy the State Fair and promote their school organizations, apart from whites. Yet, many African-Americans viewed this day as a form of discrimination. Thus the young people hoped to make whites recognize the “burden and humiliation of a one day restriction.”<sup>17</sup> Although blacks were allowed to attend the State Fair on any given day, they still experienced discrimination--a problem the State Fair’s board of directors claimed had not existed since 1953. Yet, James H. Stewart, general manager of the Fair, admitted in 1955 that two rides remained closed to blacks because they entailed physical contact with whites. Furthermore, some eating establishments customarily did not serve African-Americans, and those that did forced blacks to eat standing or perched on stools.<sup>18</sup> Stewart justified these actions as maintaining “harmony

and good operations,” preventing any situation that “would lead to violence.”<sup>19</sup>

Ironically, Stewart concluded by stating that the State Fair “belongs to everyone and is open to all people at all times regardless of race, creed or color.”<sup>20</sup>

In 1955, the Youth Council decided to investigate the validity of Stewart’s statement. They further agreed that if they found no discrimination, they would not picket Negro Achievement Day. However, the investigation proved Stewart’s pronouncements false, when they discovered concessions did not serve them consistently. The Fair employees allowed some of the black children to ride, eat, and drink, while refusing others. Pepsi Cola consistently refused to serve blacks, and all were denied access to the two rides that put them in direct contact with whites. The youths also discovered that Stewart issued a letter the day before their investigation, warning all concessions to “be nice to them.”<sup>21</sup> Concluding that the State Fair practiced inconsistent, but obvious, discrimination, the young people decided to set up a picket line at the State Fair on Negro Achievement Day. Carrying signs that read, “This is Negro Agrievement [sic] Day at the Fair--Keep Out,” “Racial Segregation is Un-Clean, Un-American, and Un-Moral--Stay Out,” and “Don’t Sell Your Pride for a Segregated Ride--Stay Out,” the youths peacefully marched throughout the day.<sup>22</sup>

The Youth Council also sent blatant warnings throughout the state to African-Americans who planned to attend Negro Achievement Day. The Parrott, the NAACP Youth Council’s newsletter, cried, “Up to date Negroes have been too dumb and stupid to see through the whole scheme of the Negro Achievement Day.”<sup>23</sup> Stating that even one incident of segregation was too much, the paper discouraged blacks from stepping over the picket line.<sup>24</sup> The Dallas Express warned blacks that their attendance would “encourage the officials of the Fair to further insult every intelligent Negro in the state of Texas, and will do irreparable injury to our children.”<sup>25</sup> The larger grievance, however, claimed that a day set aside for African-Americans was “segregation within itself, aside from the fact of discrimination.”<sup>26</sup> Although many high school bands turned

away from the picketed gates, several blacks continued to participate in Negro Achievement Day.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, Craft found that not all Texans approved of the demonstration; moreover, African-Americans did not agree on the issue of picketing. The Texas Citizens Council condemned the NAACP's tactics. Stewart claimed he did not understand the picketing, stating the State Fair "has been a pioneer in making available to Negroes. . . facilities that are not open to them anywhere in the state."<sup>28</sup> Even more discouraging, African-Americans did not overwhelmingly support the picket. The Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce wavered on its stand, first denouncing the picket, then supporting it. Also, not all blacks turned away at the gates, and many crossed the picket line. Furthermore, the Dallas Express and the Dallas Morning News debated whether the demonstration actually discouraged attendance. Three days after the event, the Morning News claimed that a larger crowd attended the 1955 Negro Achievement Day than the previous year, rendering the picket unsuccessful. In rebuttal, the Express stated that the participants noticed far fewer people than the previous year, and many who attended did not know about the picket or they would have stayed at home. The Dallas Express concluded that the issue of picketing the State Fair split blacks throughout the state.<sup>29</sup>

Regardless of its success, the picket demonstrated the discontent of African-Americans with the segregation and discrimination at the State Fair; however, the picket in 1955 did not change the Fair's policies. Therefore, the following year, Craft encouraged another statewide boycott of the Fair. Urging members of the Youth Council to discourage people in their churches, organizations, and homes from attending, Craft offered a prize to the person who brought the most people to help picket. However, due to problems within the state NAACP organization, the Youth Council canceled the demonstration in 1956. Youths continued their campaign the following year, mailing out letters discouraging attendance and sponsoring a dance to compete with Negro Achievement Day. When the Fair finally desegregated in 1963, adults had taken over

picketing; yet, they remembered it was the Youth Council who had initiated the fight in desegregating the State Fair; thus, the first picket line in Dallas for the purpose of direct action against segregation was led by Juanita Craft and the NAACP Youth Council.<sup>30</sup>

Juanita Craft also worked with the NAACP to desegregate the University of Texas and North Texas State University. In 1946, Herman Marion Sweatt, encouraged and supported by the NAACP, applied for the University of Texas Law School. When he was denied, the NAACP took direct action, demonstrating and picketing.<sup>31</sup> Craft's purpose was to organize the youth for demonstrations and help raise funds for Sweatt's suit--a case he triumphantly won in 1950, four years before the *Brown* decision.<sup>32</sup>

Although the demonstrations remained peaceful, it was a time Craft remembered as "the most traumatic period" of her NAACP activity.<sup>33</sup> Craft, through the NAACP, also desegregated North Texas State University in 1955. In July, she took an African-American student to the University to enroll. Denied, the young man and Craft attempted to get the administration to admit they would not enroll him because of his race. Although the interview proved unsuccessful, a letter written by the university a few days later explicitly stated that they would not accept the young man for that very reason. The NAACP and Craft filed suit against the university, winning that December. Although Craft never participated directly in the public school desegregation cases in Dallas, she attended many of the NAACP meetings and listened to the deliberations, the majority of which proved successful.<sup>34</sup> As a strong proponent of education, she hoped to "get young Negroes to see the importance of a first-class education."<sup>35</sup>

In the 1960s, Juanita Craft and the Youth Council turned their attention to the desegregation of lunch counters. The young people developed a simple tactic. The NAACP lawyers told the youths that they could not be denied service unless the owners displayed a sign stating "No Negroes Allowed." The majority of stores in Dallas did not display such a sign. Therefore, the youths purchased an item, then walked to the lunch counter and asked for a coke. When the waitress refused, they questioned why they

could buy items at any counter except that one. When they asked to speak to the manager, two more waited outside to repeat the process. In the meantime, others called, inquiring about the store's lunch counter policy. Deciding that the process of desegregating restaurants should be an adult experience and not relegated to the children, adults joined the sit-in movement by summer. The young people's goal was not only to draw attention to discrimination, but also to frustrate the employees and slow business. In order to prevent the disruption of business, stores agreed to serve African-Americans. By July, thirty-six restaurants and lunch counters peacefully desegregated, including the up-scale Zodiac Room at the Neiman Marcus department store.<sup>36</sup> Although African-Americans claimed a few Dallas lunch counters still practiced segregation after July, it was the Youth Council that initiated the sit-ins, prompting Dallas "on its way to integration."<sup>37</sup>

Soon after the Youth Council began the lunch counter sit-ins, they also started their attack on the Majestic and Palace theaters and staged freedom walks. As with the sit-ins, the Council had a system. Every Sunday, the black youths got in line to purchase a ticket. When the ticket seller refused to sell them one, they put their money back in their pockets and went to the end of the line. They continued this throughout the day, causing one clerk to cry in frustration, "I cannot take this any longer." Highly effective, these "stand-ins" caused business to slow. The youths also staged a freedom walk at Ferris Plaza downtown. They peacefully walked in a circle, clapping hands, singing, and praying for "Freedom-- NOW!" As the young people demonstrated throughout the day, some of them wearing holes in their shoes, Craft tried to hustle food for them.<sup>38</sup> During one walk, the Dallas Express noted "traffic cruised to a near halt as they watched the peaceful but effective demonstration."<sup>39</sup> The protests forced whites in Dallas to realize that the time for integration had arrived. When asked the meaning of the stand-ins and freedom walks, Juanita Craft offered, "these kids are tired of not enjoying the full rights

of democracy and want their Freedom--Now."<sup>40</sup> By the mid-1960s, most public facilities in Dallas desegregated, largely in part to the efforts of Craft and the Youth Council.

After 1963, Craft focused her attention on educating her community and getting them to vote. She continued to put her energy primarily into educating the youth.<sup>41</sup> In one of the many speeches she made to high schools, she frankly told the children, "no matter how many doors are open you can't go in them unless you have some money, and you're not going to have the money if you don't have the education."<sup>42</sup> Part of Craft's educational activities with the Youth Council was to take them on trips every summer. Not only did she take them to observe the various businesses in Dallas, she traveled with them across the country to NAACP national conferences. She took more than one thousand black youths coast to coast during the 1960s, funded by donations made by local businesses.<sup>43</sup> In 1968, she sponsored the first integrated bus on a trip to Atlantic City, stopping in Washington, D.C., to attend a coke party in Senator Ralph Yarborough's office in their honor. Craft viewed the trip important. She hoped the kids might "know the people that are governing them. Let them see their Congress in action."<sup>44</sup> She gave many African-American children their first opportunity to see the United States and to be exposed to their government.

Craft also organized a number of programs for the Youth Council. She understood the difficulty of teaching African-American children, who had been kept in the background for so long, that they were ready to come forward and accept the responsibilities of full citizenship and freedom. Thus, Craft did everything possible to prepare the children. In 1967, the Youth Council sponsored a 'Stay in School' program. They plastered bumper stickers reading "Stay in School," and "Learn and Earn; Stay in School," around town. They also went to the public pools, parks, and playgrounds wearing sandwich signs stating "I'm Going Back to School. What About You?" In 1968, the groups sponsored a program that honored thirteen African-Americans--the first black postman, the first black policeman, first black to attend class at University of Texas, and

others who had made contributions to the civil rights struggle. Craft also worked hard to find clothes for needy children in her community, and she got scholarships and jobs for those who wanted them.<sup>45</sup> Having no children of her own, she dedicated herself to those in her community. She considered them her family. In 1975, she told an interviewer, “I don’t have any children of my own. They’re all mine. I’m in better shape than the old lady who lived in the shoe.”<sup>46</sup>

Many historians consider the civil rights movement in Dallas to be peaceful; the efforts of Juanita Craft are at least partially responsible for controlling militant youths. The New York Times reported that curbing militancy was perhaps one of the major contributions of African-Americans in Dallas in the desegregation process. In 1964, the all-white Citizens Council feared violent protests. Concerned that a visit by the NAACP executive secretary, Roy Wilkins, would spark violence, the Dallas businessmen decided to establish the bi-racial Committee of 14. When whites picked African-Americans for the committee, they selected Juanita Craft primarily because of her work and close contact with youth. Although the Committee played an instrumental role in helping desegregate Dallas, its primary function was to prevent riots. Craft feared that if the Committee of 14 had not been successful, the same violence that swept the country during the late 1960s would have reached Dallas.<sup>47</sup>

In 1967, as riots swept major cities throughout the country, Craft and other African-Americans leaders were trying to find effective ways to prevent violence in Dallas. Craft also feared racial violence. Taking a bus load of teenagers to Watts in 1966, she wanted them to see what happened when violence got out of control. She told them, “Remember that when you are burning down houses, you are burning down your houses.”<sup>48</sup> The youth advisor felt that young people’s charges of white domination did not justify violence. Craft spoke frankly to the youngsters, telling them that they were not old enough to know of white domination. She argued that “if your mind cannot be dominated, then you can’t be dominated. Now, this is up to you whether or not you’re

going to let somebody tell you that you're inferior. . . ."<sup>49</sup> Her most successful effort to curb violence was an "Anti-Riot" program in the summer of 1968. The Youth Council and Craft diligently distributed approximately 20,000 bumper stickers and placards reading, "Keep it Cool. Don't Be A Fool," "Think Before You Act," and one that just said "Don't." Craft also tried to quell rumors. She told the kids to talk to their parents or to her if they heard rumors of violence. Although Craft never considered herself a follower of Martin Luther King, Jr., she preached that violence and riots proved detrimental to the gains and goals of the NAACP.<sup>50</sup> Talking to the youths, she told them that the NAACP's "slow but steady" legal route resulted in the major civil rights legislation. She also reminded them that it was the NAACP that "bailed CORE freedom riders out of jail."<sup>51</sup> Craft strongly believed that the "glamour of dissent is not the way to reach equality."<sup>52</sup> She never felt that African-Americans should not fight for their freedom--only that they should do it within the legal framework. She once said about herself, "I'm violent only with words. I work within the system and play by its rules."<sup>53</sup> The New York Times applauded the success of African-Americans in Dallas in their attempt to "curb militancy."<sup>54</sup>

Juanita Craft's work did not go unrecognized. In 1956, Roy Wilkins presented Craft with two awards for her distinguished achievement in the NAACP youth activities; the awards recognized her "valiant fight" against segregation. Craft also received four White House invitations--two from Kennedy, one from Johnson, and one from Nixon--to attend conferences that dealt with the growing problems and concerns among the nation's youth.<sup>55</sup> When Kennedy took his fateful trip to Dallas in November of 1963, Juanita Craft was among those invited to a luncheon to honor the President and Mrs. Kennedy. Amid Craft's honors, the most notable was the Linz Award, Dallas's oldest civic honor. In 1968, she began a campaign to attack and expose fraudulent trade schools. These schools lured young people to Dallas, promising luxurious housing, food, and jobs; the reality was poor housing, no food, and no jobs. As Craft sheltered, fed, and found

employment for the youths who were misled by the trade schools, she provided authorities with information to shut the schools down. Her work resulted in the passage of state, local, and federal legislation that regulated trade schools.<sup>56</sup> The following year, she received the Linz for her success.

Craft's work with young African-Americans not only gained her recognition, but also led to her participation in civic activities. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Dallas mayor Erik Jonsson held a number of conferences entitled "Goals for Dallas," to which he invited Juanita Craft. Jonsson and the committee drew up goals for Dallas in the areas of city government, health, safety, education, and economy. Craft felt honored by the invitation, telling Jonsson that it was the first time she ever felt like an American citizen.<sup>57</sup> She also kept busy traveling throughout Dallas, speaking to white churches of all denominations. Her purpose was to get through "to some of the people that otherwise would not have paid any attention to a Negro."<sup>58</sup> In the process, Craft gained the respect of many Dallas citizens who, in 1975, urged her to run for city council. Her campaign issues included the revitalization of the inner-city and the development of low-interest home improvement loans for South Dallas.<sup>59</sup> Although her age seemed to be an issue for some, Craft responded with, "Stupidity. I've never heard anyone criticize Eleanor Roosevelt because of her age. . . . Old wine is the best wine."<sup>60</sup> Winning at age seventy-five, she became, at that time, one of four African-Americans ever to sit on the Dallas City Council.<sup>61</sup> After three more successful elections, she decided that the civil rights "struggle isn't over yet" and retired from the Council in 1980 to resume her activities and trips with the youth.<sup>62</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Juanita Craft accumulated a number of awards and honors throughout her life, becoming one of Dallas's most respected and admired citizens. The NAACP readily acknowledged Craft's contributions. In 1978, they honored her with the Golden Heritage Life Membership Award, and in 1985 she served as a special delegate to the NAACP national convention where they honored Craft for fifty years of service and

leadership.<sup>63</sup> She also received the Eleanor Roosevelt Humanitarian Award for “public service which best exemplifies the civic example of Mrs. Roosevelt.” When Mrs. Craft died in 1985, at the age of eighty-three, Dallas mourned the loss of a great lady. Among those who spoke at her funeral were Governor Mark White, State Treasurer Ann Richards, state Attorney General Jim Mattox, and United States Senator Ralph Yarbrough.<sup>64</sup>

Juanita Craft actively pushed for African-American’s civil rights throughout her lifetime; more importantly, she always put the needs and education of children first. She fulfilled the role of nonformal educator, encouraging children to become responsible citizens and to recognize the importance of education. Although she worked primarily with the NAACP Youth Council, she reached out to all youths in her community. Before her death, she expressed the importance of working with children: “Everything comes down to the child. . .the child acquires the world, (s)he carries on what we have left, what we have prepared. If we want to know who we are, what we have accomplished, then just look at the children. . . .”<sup>65</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Dana Rubin, "The Ghosts of the Freedmen." Texas Monthly 19 (July, 1991): 146.

<sup>2</sup>Dulaney, "Whatever Happened?," 67.

<sup>3</sup>Alwyn Barr, Black Texans: A History of Negroes in Texas, 1528-1971. (Austin, TX: Jenkins Publishing Company, 1973): 220.

<sup>4</sup>Juanita Craft, interview by David Stricklin and Gail Tomlinson, 29 March 1979, Dallas Public Library, Texas/Dallas History and Archives Division, Dallas, TX.

<sup>5</sup>Dallas Morning News, 14 September 1980, 20; Steve Kenney, "The Struggle for Power." D Magazine (June 1981): 101, 136; Murphy, "Negro Segregation Practices," 47; Juanita Craft, interview by Stricklin and Tomlinson, 23 January 1979, 13-14; J.W. Rice Correspondence, 1954, Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce, Texas/Dallas History Archives Division, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, TX, Box 2; Dallas Express, 25 July 1953, 1; Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, United States Census Population: 1960. Vol. I Characteristics of the Population, Part 45, Texas (United States Government Printing Office: Washington, D.C., 1963): 118; Bureau of the Census, United States Census Population: 1970. Vol. I Characteristics of the Population Part 45, Texas (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C., 1973): 1277; Tasby v. DISD, 1976, Juanita Craft Collection, Box 19.

<sup>6</sup>For more information on the white power structure in Dallas and their attempts at desegregation, see Brophy, "Active Acceptance, Active Containment"; Lewis W. Jones and Herman H. Long, The Negotiation of Desegregation in Ten Southern Cities. (Nashville, TN: Fisk University, 1965); Schutze, The Accommodation; Richard Austin Smith, "How Business Failed Dallas." Fortune 70 (July 1964). 157-163, 211-216, and Carol Estes Thometz, The Decision-Makers: The Power Structure of Dallas. (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963).

<sup>7</sup>Dallas Morning News, 14 September 1980; Patricia Evridge Hill, Dallas: The Making

of a Modern City. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996): 165; Juanita Craft, interview by John Egerton, 10 June 1968, transcript Juanita Craft Collection, Dallas Public Library, Texas/Dallas History and Archives Division, Dallas, TX.

<sup>8</sup>Dallas Weekly, 15-22 February 1995, 9.

<sup>9</sup>Kuhlman, "Civil Rights Movement in Texas," 68; Michael Lowery Gillette, "The NAACP in Texas, 1937-1957." (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1984): 28-29; Juanita Craft, interview by Stricklin and Tomlinson, 5 February 1979.

<sup>10</sup>Gillette, "NAACP," 29.

<sup>11</sup>Juanita Craft, interview by Stricklin and Tomlinson, 5 February 1979.

<sup>12</sup>Dallas Morning News, 30 August 1970, 14.

<sup>13</sup>Juanita Craft, interview by Stricklin and Tomlinson, 20 February 1979; Dallas Morning News, 30 August 1970, 14; Juanita Craft, interview by Stricklin and Tomlinson, 20 February 1979; Dulaney, "Whatever Happened?," 70, 73; Dallas Weekly, 15-22 February 1995, 9.

<sup>14</sup>Gillette, "NAACP," 145, 142; Juanita Craft, interview by Stricklin and Tomlinson, 23 January 1979.

<sup>15</sup>Gillette, "NAACP," 142.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid*; Juanita Craft, interview by Stricklin and Tomlinson, 23 January 1979; Juanita Craft, interview by Egerton, 10 June 1968.

<sup>17</sup>Dallas Express, 12 January 1952, 10.

<sup>18</sup>Dallas Morning News, 14 October 1955, 3; *Ibid*, 16 October 1955, 1, 15.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid*, 17 October 1955, 2

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid*, 16 October 1955, 15.

<sup>21</sup>Dallas Express, 15 October 1955, 10.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid*; Dallas Morning News, 18 October 1955, 1.

<sup>23</sup>Parrott, 15 October 1955, Juanita Craft Collection, Box 23.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid*.

- <sup>25</sup>Dallas Express, 15 October 1955, 10.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid, 22 October 1955, 17.
- <sup>27</sup>Dallas Morning News, 18 October 1955, 1-2.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid, 18 October 1955, 1.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid, 16 October 1955, 1; Ibid, 18 October 1955, 1; Dallas Express, 29 October 1955, 1; Dallas Express, 22 October 1955, 1.
- <sup>30</sup>Dallas Morning News, 18 August 1955, 16; NAACP Youth Council minutes, 10 October 1956, Juanita Craft Collection, Box 23; Kuhlman, "Civil Rights Movement in Texas," 107; Dallas Express, 22 October 1960, 1, 8; Juanita Craft, interview by Egerton, 10 June 1968.
- <sup>31</sup>Juanita Craft, A Child, the Earth, and a Tree of Many Seasons: The Voice of Juanita Craft. Chandler Vaughan, ed. (Dallas, TX: Halifax Publishing, 1982), 17.
- <sup>32</sup>For more information on *Sweat v. Painter*, see Patricia Lefforage Davis, "Sweatt v. Painter: Integration in Texas Higher Education" (M.A. thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 1971).
- <sup>33</sup>Juanita Craft, interview by Stricklin and Tomlinson, 23 January 1979.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid; Juanita Craft, interview by Stricklin and Tomlinson, 24 April 1979.
- <sup>35</sup>Juanita Craft, interview by Egerton, 10 June 1968.
- <sup>36</sup>Craft, A Child, 19-20; Weisbrot, Freedom Bound, 39-40; "Dining in Dallas." Time 78 (August 4, 1961): 15; New York Times, 28 July 1961, 1.
- <sup>37</sup>Dallas Express, 5 August 1961, 8.
- <sup>38</sup>Juanita Craft, interview by Stricklin and Tomlinson, 23 January 1979
- <sup>39</sup>Dallas Express, 25 February 1961, 1.
- <sup>40</sup>Ibid, 6.
- <sup>41</sup>Peyton Davis, "Sunday Q & A." Dallas Times Herald Sunday Magazine. (November 21, 1976): 17.
- <sup>42</sup>Speech notes, Juanita Craft Collection, Box 1.

<sup>43</sup>Juanita Craft, interview with Egerton, 10 June 1968; Juanita Craft, interview with Stricklin and Tomlinson, 23 January 1979; various letters to Juanita Craft, Juanita Craft Collection, Box 9.

<sup>44</sup>Juanita Craft, interview with Egerton, 10 June 1968.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Dallas Morning News, 24 December 1975.

<sup>47</sup>Dulaney, "Whatever Happened?," 79; Kenney, "The Struggle," 139; Juanita Craft, interview with Stricklin and Tomlinson, 20 February 1979; Ibid, 20 March, 1979.

<sup>48</sup>Juanita Craft, interview with Egerton, 10 June 1968.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Dallas Morning News, 1 October 1967, 11.

<sup>52</sup>Dallas Times Herald, 9 February 1972.

<sup>53</sup>"This is Their South." Southern Living 7 (June 1972): 76.

<sup>54</sup>New York Times, 30 July 1961, 1.

<sup>55</sup>Craft attended two conferences under Kennedy's administration that dealt with integration and the prevention of school dropouts. She was also one of the participants in Johnson's "To Secure These Rights" program which sought to promote the civil rights movement and the passage of the Voting Rights Act. Nixon invited Craft to attend his White House Conference on Children, a program intended to encourage youths to achieve their maximum potential.

<sup>56</sup>Ike Smalls Award pamphlet, 1956, Juanita Craft Collection, Box 52; Juanita Craft, interview with Stricklin and Tomlinson, 23 January 1979; Kennedy invitation, 22 November 1963, Juanita Craft Collection, Box 9; Dallas Times Herald, 20 February 1969, 1; "Their South," 76; Dallas Times Herald, 20 February 1969, 1.

<sup>57</sup>Erik Jonsson, Goals for Dallas. (Dallas, TX: Republic Bank Building, 1967); See also, Goals for Dallas: Economic Potentials Handbook. (Dallas, TX; National Planning

Association and Institute of Urban Studies, Southern Methodist University, 1970);

Juanita Craft, interview with Stricklin and Tomlinson, 20 March 1979.

<sup>58</sup>Juanita Craft, interview with Egerton, 10 June 1968.

<sup>59</sup>“Campaign issues,” 1975, Juanita Craft Collection, Box 4.

<sup>60</sup>Dallas Morning News, 24 December 1975, 5.

<sup>61</sup>Juanita Craft, interview with Stricklin and Tomlinson, 20 February 1979; Dallas Morning News, 24 December 1975, 5.

<sup>62</sup>Kenney, “The Struggle,” 140.

<sup>63</sup>Dallas Morning News, 12 October 1984, 21.

<sup>64</sup>Juanita Craft, funeral program, 10 August 1985, Juanita Craft Collection, Box 52.

<sup>65</sup>Juanita Craft, interview with Egerton, 10 June 1968; Dallas Weekly, 15-22 February 1995, 9.

## Chapter Three

### Eva McMillan, 1921-

Eva Katherine Partee McMillan once offered her philosophy on life: “We are indeed our brother’s keeper and as a race we must struggle for self determination.”<sup>1</sup> For Eva McMillan, this struggle has been her life’s quest. Like Juanita Craft, Eva McMillan became actively involved in the battle for civil rights in Dallas; however, her path differed greatly. While Craft worked through mainstream organizations like the NAACP, McMillan found her calling in the more militant Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee [SNCC]. Founded to meet the growing need for the revitalization of the civil rights movement, SNCC sought to harness the energy and vitality of the movement’s young people. Youthful, impatient, and often militant in words, SNCC encouraged more direct action and demonstrated grass-roots organizing in the South. As one of the founders, Ella Baker, was female, SNCC became increasingly more open to women than many of the other civil rights organizations. Yet even more important than the vitality of the younger female activists was the “towering strength of older black women” in the organization. Providing housing, food, and support to field workers was vital to SNCC’s survival and became the task of many of the “mamas” in the community.<sup>2</sup> Eva McMillan proved to be one of the invaluable “mamas” who helped sustain and draw support for the SNCC chapter in Dallas. Through her work with the militant SNCC youths, McMillan became a major participant in the civil rights movement. Her work also prompted her to take on numerous other activities, such as prison reform and food co-ops, as she struggled to gain freedom for her people.

Born in 1921 near Bradford, Tennessee--an area where her ancestors had once lived as slaves--Eva McMillan, along with her five brothers and sisters, moved to Texas

when she was eight years of age. Settling in North Dallas, a former Freedman's town where her uncle owned a large amount of land, her father bought his own property and struggled to raise the family by himself after the death of Eva's mother. Although Eva graduated from high school, unscrupulous business dealings by whites prevented her and her twin sister from attending college. The trickery of a prominent Dallas lawyer and a wealthy elderly woman caused Eva's father to spend eight years in court fighting for his property that he had unknowingly signed away. Consequently, the McMillan family did not have the money to send Eva or her sister to college. However, she recalls that her father stressed the importance of education to his children and was terribly hurt when she and her sister did not get the opportunity to attend a university.<sup>3</sup>

Her father's tribulations were just the beginning of the discrimination that Eva McMillan experienced in Dallas. Having moved to Oak Cliff in south Dallas after marriage, she came into closer contact with daily prejudices by whites. Like other African-Americans, she could not try on clothes in department stores or eat in particular restaurants. A local bank denied her brother a loan to build a house in north Dallas on his family's own land, telling him he had to build in Oak Cliff--the neighborhood designated for African-Americans. Eva McMillan witnessed discriminated not only on a racial basis, but on a gender one as well. She recalls being ignored by a car salesman when she went with her husband to buy a new car. Although she was paying for the automobile, the salesman refused to direct any comments or questions her way. Frustrated, she finally told her husband they were leaving. She was also once denied the right to buy property. Before the start of the civil rights movement, discrimination for Eva McMillan, as for many blacks in Dallas, was a "daily occurrence."<sup>4</sup>

Eva McMillan's participation in the civil rights movement started early in her life. Like Juanita Craft, she became highly involved in voter registration during the 1940s. Working as a clerk at the polling place, she encouraged those in her community to pay their poll tax to vote. She did not work in voter registration drives, but, instead,

recruited at her home. Placing a sign reading "Pay Your Poll Tax Here" on her front lawn, she enrolled many voters in her neighborhood. Many willingly paid the \$1.75 poll tax, although the amount seemed more like \$15 for many of the people in the community. Yet, her tactics proved successful. She proudly recalls, "People knew every year to come to my house if they wanted to vote."<sup>5</sup>

The Progressive Voters League [PVL] also offered a viable organization in which Eva McMillan became active. Working alongside her brother who served as executive secretary, McMillan worked every election for the PVL to gather data on the various candidates. After the PVL members scrutinized the information to determine the best candidate for the community's needs, they lobbied with their constituents about how to vote. The PVL found it highly important to organize in order to not waste the valuable votes. Although they often dealt with racist candidates, McMillan maintains their motto was to elect "the lesser of the evils."<sup>6</sup> The efforts of the PVL paid off, and they maintained a strong voting block in many of the local and state election.<sup>7</sup>

Eva McMillan also worked within other various organizations that helped to better the African-American community. When the bus schedule did not run frequently enough for those in the community--many who could not afford to own automobiles--she helped protest to get the bus schedule changed so that blacks could travel more efficiently. She also joined her community in the denouncement of a policeman who killed an African-American youth for seemingly little cause. McMillan served as a delegate to the state Democratic convention on several occasions. Always involved, she stayed busy collecting for such causes as the heart fund and the polio drive; yet, the birth of her children curbed her activities and prevented her from becoming active in the sit-ins and other demonstrations during the late 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>8</sup> McMillan recalls, "I was so busy making a living for my kids, I was less involved in anything then except family and work."<sup>9</sup>

McMillan's devotion to her family also manifested itself in her encouragement of their education. Although she supported schooling of the community's children through the PTA and the church, her real promotion of education came, like her voting drives, from her own home. With a houseful of kids, her home became the place that many of her children's friends visited, as they often stopped after school and stayed for dinner. In their visits, McMillan helped to educate them by encouraging them to borrow her books. As she "had more books than the library," children often stopped at her house to use them.<sup>10</sup> She always tried to give support to children in her community; however, her divorce left her to raise four children, and Eva McMillan found she had little time. However, when her son left home for college and became involved with the SNCC, McMillan soon found that she would be desperately needed as a community leader and advisor for the organization.<sup>11</sup>

When McMillan took her son Ernest to enroll in Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, SNCC was just starting to make great strides. Encouraged by what the organization was accomplishing, Ernie, a "very young, impressive man," decided to drop out of college and become a field worker for SNCC in the Deep South.<sup>12</sup> However, his parent's divorce and increased crime in south Dallas, prompted Ernie to return to Texas. Witnessing the violence that accompanied many SNCC activities in the South, Eva became relieved that her son's life was no longer in danger. Enrolling in the University of Texas at Arlington, he first made a name for himself by protesting the rebel theme and the rebel yell at the University. Regarded as a troublemaker by many people, Ernest made known his views and gained some support among African-American youths. Thus, he decided to found a SNCC chapter in Dallas. The organization of SNCC, with Ernie as its leader, proved to be a life changing experience for Eva and prompted her to "join, really join formally, the civil rights movement."<sup>13</sup>

For many of the African-American youths in Dallas, SNCC offered a new experience, different from the road taken by the NAACP Youth Council. More willing to

fight against the white establishment than work with it, SNCC and Ernie McMillan took Martin Luther King Jr.'s advice that Dallas needed a "very strong local effort" in order to succeed.<sup>14</sup> According to Ernie McMillan, SNCC was a "spark in a dry field when it hadn't rained for months."<sup>15</sup> In the first year of its existence, SNCC membership peaked around two hundred and consisted of mostly young, energetic students. While the organization depended upon the African-American community for food and lodging, the monies it raised were to be put towards the opening of the Black Dallas Cultural School.<sup>16</sup> The cultural center, Ernie McMillan foresaw, would bring about a "revolution in the mind" within the black community. With its focus on education, SNCC hoped to "instill a sense of dignity" among African-Americans in the city.<sup>17</sup> However, many people in Dallas viewed the organization as too radical and dangerous.

From its beginnings in the late 1960s, the Dallas chapter of SNCC met with strong resistance by both the white and black communities. SNCC's ideology of black control of businesses in African-American neighborhoods and its refusal to support the war in Vietnam did not gain the organization popular support. Ernie McMillan's office to advise black men not to be drafted made the city "very, very unhappy."<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the group also stressed 'Black Power' and viewed the NAACP and the Dallas Negro Chamber of Commerce as 'Uncle Toms' who cowed to white leadership. Ernie McMillan contends that the Dallas Morning News did not always present SNCC correctly, either. With the newspapers printing misleading information about the group, people in Dallas began to fear them. Witnessing the burning and riots that occurred in cities throughout the United States during the late 1960s, some citizens feared that SNCC promoted burning down their city. Although SNCC never promoted violence--Ernie claimed that they did not want to burn their resources, they wanted to use them--Dallas citizens, nevertheless, became "genuinely afraid" of them.<sup>19</sup> Leading the group was Ernest McMillan--the "nearest thing Dallas had to a black militant activist."<sup>20</sup>

Trouble for SNCC and Ernie McMillan continued to escalate during the summer of 1968. Eva McMillan claims that J. Edgar Hoover's order to destroy all SNCC chapters in the United States resulted in the daily arrest of SNCC members, particularly Ernie.<sup>21</sup> Stopping, searching, and arresting SNCC members became a daily activity for the Dallas Police Department. Eva McMillan later testified that police constantly harassed Ernie, arresting him for minor traffic violations and then, when he stopped driving, simply picking him up while he walked down the street.<sup>22</sup> The group relied on members of the community to post their bail. As SNCC members "stayed in jail as much as they were out," the community's funds soon became exhausted.<sup>23</sup> Eva McMillan estimates that the community spent approximately \$100,000 bailing SNCC workers out of jail in the brief time the organization was active in Dallas. Furthermore, police began to stake out SNCC's weekly meetings, waiting atop buildings with machine guns in hand. Eva McMillan soon realized that these young people, most of whom were eighteen and nineteen years old, needed help.<sup>24</sup>

With the little community support SNCC acquired already waning, Eva McMillan decided that the group needed her undivided support and attention. She decided to quit her job at the exclusive Chapparel Club to devote her full attention as SNCC's advisor. While Eva did not organize protests, she attended meetings and supported their decisions. She also told them when to "draw the line" on some of their more radical ideas and protests.<sup>25</sup> Eva McMillan recalls one evening receiving a phone call from one of the groups members. Panicked, he related that their meeting was surrounded by police and that they feared for their lives. Eva McMillan immediately began calling prominent people at Southern Methodist University, the Chief of Police, and the FBI, demanding that SNCC be left alone. She also got others to get on the phone, contacting "everybody in the city, the state, the county police--everybody."<sup>26</sup> McMillan's efforts proved successful, and the police soon left. Eva then realized how vital she was to the survival, as well as the safety, of many of the young people in her community

In the role of advisor for SNCC, Eva McMillan found her most important job was getting community support for the organization. She learned that many African-Americans did not understand SNCC; in fact, many would ask her, "You have such a nice family, what happened to Ernie? Why is he so bad?"<sup>27</sup> She felt that they did not foresee for what SNCC was fighting. Thus, she worked to educate the adults in the community and obtain their moral and financial support. Her efforts soon gained increasing encouragement, if not sympathy, from the African-American community. Eva remembers that the actor, Ossie Davis, once left a movie shoot in New Orleans to come to Dallas, offering support to SNCC after hearing about the trouble the group was having. Spending the night at Eva McMillan's home, Ossie helped organize a program the next morning at a local church to garnish more understanding and support for the group.<sup>28</sup> She recalls, "that was really the first support, citywide and statewide [for SNCC]. And to come from such a national figure as Ossie Davis. . . that was really an uplifting situation for them."<sup>29</sup> Soon African-Americans in the community came forth and organized around them, giving SNCC, and Eva, much needed moral support.

Working with SNCC, Eva McMillan became a liaison between the organization and the people--a community "bridge leader."<sup>30</sup> She provided the youth with an accessible and supportive source from which they could reach their community. She came to be known throughout the community as "Momma Mac," a name affectionately given to her by a player for the Dallas Cowboys, and by which she still is known.<sup>31</sup> Eva McMillan recalls that she "became a friend to all the civil rights movement."<sup>32</sup> Yet, despite her attempts and the community's growing support, SNCC soon faced a trial that it was unable to overcome.

In 1968, an unsuccessful attempt by SNCC to protest at a local grocery store led to the group's, and Ernie McMillan's, unfortunate demise. In July, SNCC decided to boycott the OK Supermarket chain that owned various stores in South Dallas. Although the market served the African-American community, the owners were white, and the

store refused to hire or promote blacks to managerial positions. Furthermore, the chain had a reputation of selling rotten food and raising prices on the days welfare and social security checks were delivered to black mothers and elders. Eva McMillan was present at the fateful meeting at which SNCC decided to boycott OK Supermarkets. While the youths agreed to protest with a picket and signs, a young man from California, Matthew Johnson, who had helped Ernie McMillan in the leadership role, suggested a more radical approach.<sup>33</sup> The organization decided to load up carts of food, abandoning them when they reached the front of the check-out lines with excuses such as, "Oh, I'm late. I was supposed to be at work," or "My baby-sitter's supposed to get off now. I have to go."<sup>34</sup> The students left the supermarket filled with numerous carts loaded with perishables. Unfortunately a few members of SNCC did not protest without some destruction. Eva McMillan claims that the students only broke a bottle of grape juice and split a watermelon; however, the store claimed that damages totaled more than \$200. Due to the owner's fear of the youths, the supermarket refused to file a complaint, but, the next day, the City of Dallas pressed charges against SNCC's two leaders, Ernie McMillan and Matthew Johnson.<sup>35</sup>

As news about the protests spread, city leaders became outraged and used it as a weapon to weaken, and eventually destroy, the SNCC chapter. The local newspapers readily reported the incident. The Dallas Times Herald called the boycott a "raid" while the Morning News described it as a "bottle smashing campaign."<sup>36</sup> The already negative image SNCC had procured was intensified by Ernie McMillan's announcement the following week that SNCC planned to buy the supermarket chain. Although the owners gave SNCC sixty days to make the purchase, the group was unable to raise the \$300,000 needed to buy the stores. Dallas youths, in the midst of a criminal trial in which McMillan and Johnson were being used as examples, began to lag in enthusiasm and community work.<sup>37</sup> By May 1969, membership dropped to only twenty to thirty hopeful young people, and the "sentiment of a thousand adults."<sup>38</sup>

The trial in August of 1968, as well as new and severe charges brought on McMillan the following year, only served to demonstrate the white community's disdain, and the blacks' lagging support for, the organization. Fearing the worst, Eva McMillan went straight to the NAACP to obtain legal aid for her son and Matthew Johnson; however, the NAACP refused to give legal council until the two defendants made a formal, written request. Therefore, Eva marched down to the county jail and waited while Ernie and Matthew wrote their request on what the prison gave them--a rough piece of paper and a pencil. Later, at a meeting held by the community to see what measures to take for the two men, Eva McMillan questioned why the NAACP had still done nothing. She was abruptly told that her son's request was unacceptable because it was not a formal, typed letter. Eva became furious and recalls, "They [NAACP] tore their pants with me. I never asked them for another favor."<sup>39</sup> Thus, the legal defense of her son and Johnson was put in the hands of a white lawyer. The prosecuting attorneys' argument proved too convincing for the jurors, and they agreed that the two black men were "revolutionists who were aiding in rushing civilization to hell at a hundred miles an hour."<sup>40</sup> Although the official report estimated the damages at \$211, Ernie McMillan and Matthew Johnson both received ten year terms for destruction of private property.<sup>41</sup> What frustrated Eva McMillan the most, however, was that a group of white teenagers in Plano had recently destroyed merchandise at a store in their community, only receiving "a slap on the hand."<sup>42</sup> Justice in Dallas proved it was not color blind.

Trouble for Ernie McMillan and his mother only increased the following year. While the two SNCC leaders were free on an appeal bond, the police charged them with violation of federal firearms law the following April. Moreover, in 1968, Ernie McMillan failed to appear before the draft board because he was in a Dallas jail at the time. Thus, McMillan found himself indicted by a federal grand jury for violating the Selective Service Act. Scheduled to appear before the court for draft evasion in July 1969, Ernie failed to appear. Thus began a twenty-nine month chase by law enforcement

agents, as McMillan traveled to Europe and Africa, and was finally nabbed in Cincinnati, Ohio, in December of 1971. It was Ernest's three year jail term, (one spent in Leavenworth, Kansas), that brought forth a new chapter in Eva McMillan's life--prison reform.<sup>43</sup>

Witnessing the abuse and horrible prison conditions that her son experienced, Eva McMillan embarked on a prison reform campaign that proved highly successful in reforming the Texas prison system. After learning of an experience in which Ernie and other inmates were beaten by prison guards and thrown into solitary, Eva McMillan decided to help her son and other prisoners who suffered at the hands of prison officials. With the backing of State Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson, an African-American woman from Dallas, Eva worked for the People United for Justice of Prisoners (PUJP) and the Anti-Death Penalty Coalition. Traveling throughout the state, the group held meetings, denouncing the inhuman practices within the Texas prison system and making the public aware. She also helped her son win the first case against the Texas Department of Corrections through organizing and raising money for the Ernie McMillan Legal Defense Fund.<sup>44</sup>

Eva McMillan then turned her attention to helping family members with loved ones who were incarcerated. She distributed information in the prisons on visiting days, hoping to educate family members and visitors about the harsh treatment of prisoners. McMillan also offered advice to families. People, particularly mothers, would call Eva to ask her the steps to go about getting their child parole. She even helped a mother whose son could not get out of solitary by personally going down to the prison and demanding his release into the general population.<sup>45</sup> Eva laughingly remembers, "I was a little skinny. . . but when I'd walk up, they'd [prison officials] start shaking. They couldn't even light a cigarette. They didn't like me. They hated me. But for some reason they feared me."<sup>46</sup> Momma Mac became well-known around local prisons as a woman to whom both inmates and relatives could turn, knowing she would fight for their rights.

She found that her efforts proved successful. Many of the prisons implemented reforms and were often under investigation for violations of prisoners' rights. Eva McMillan feels that the prisons today have come a "long way toward liberation" since she began her fight in the early 1970s.<sup>47</sup>

Yet, prison reform was only one of the many endeavors that Eva McMillan became involved with during the 1970s and 1980s. During the 1970s, she joined the Black Women's United Front (BWUF), a coalition of African-American women in Dallas. The group sponsored various programs to educate and unify black women, holding round table discussions and other educational programs. The group also actively participated in the Anti-Klan Coalition and the Anti-Apartheid movement. Perhaps most memorable of Eva's activities with BWUF was the organization of the first African-American food co-op in Dallas. On Saturdays, the women gathered food for the community's poor and took orders for the next week.<sup>48</sup> For Eva, it was a time when women "came together and had a cause to get educated."<sup>49</sup> Often political in nature, the organization pushed away some women who wanted the focus to remain primarily social. Although the group folded after a couple of years because of internal discord, McMillan remembers it "served a good purpose and it was a wonderful experience."<sup>50</sup> Eva also used her talents in the Southern Christian Educational Fund (SCEF). Founded in the 1930s to aid indigents, the organization continued to work to get social security, money for the poor, and clothing and shelter to those who needed it in Dallas. During her activity, Eva served on the board of SCEF. Unfortunately, McMillan says she began working with the organization at the start of its demise. It began to lose support as many African-Americans felt that the civil rights struggle was over after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other legislation which guaranteed the social and political rights of blacks. Eva McMillan, however, realized that the struggle was not complete and continued to work promoting civil rights.

The results of Eva McMillan's hard work has been felt throughout her community. In recent years, women have sought Eva out to thank her for changing their lives. One woman extended her sincere gratitude for helping her son get paroled; as a result, the woman's son turned his life around. Another young woman, who had become a drug counselor, thanked Momma Mac for all her hard work in the BWUF food co-op. McMillan reflects, "It never occurred to me that someone would want to thank me. It made me feel so good."<sup>51</sup>

Eva never wavered in her constant support and devotion to Ernie, who was eventually released from prison. Today, he works as a community leader in Houston, sponsoring educational programs for the city's poorest neighborhoods. In the early 1990s, he received the Barbara Jordan Award for his work in the community and with its youth. Asked if her early work with the poll tax prompted Ernie's active involvement in the civil rights movement and SNCC, she offers, "That's a questions we've asked each other. . . . I became involved in the civil rights movement because of my son. My son says, 'No, I became involved in the civil rights movement by looking at the way you operate.'"<sup>52</sup> The relationship appeared to be a reciprocal one of love, support, and encouragement in the effort to emancipate African-Americans in Dallas. However, unlike his mother, Ernest's community has formally recognized his devotion and hard work.

Today, Eva McMillan is proud of what she has accomplished; yet, she has some misgivings. She feels African-Americans have made great educational advances since the 1960s, but she fears that integration also broke down the cohesiveness of the black community.<sup>53</sup> Before integration, "We had unity among blacks. We had black role models. . . . since integration, those people who were role models have left the community, and they are sorely missed."<sup>54</sup> She feels that today's youth have a disturbing lack of knowledge about the civil rights movement. She states, "These young people growing up now. . . .they know nothing about history. Education from the school is needed, [as well as] education from the parents, the homes, and the churches."<sup>55</sup> During

the civil rights struggle, McMillan felt that the community came together and worked for common goals, even if they often disagreed on the means to get there.

Like many women active in the civil rights movement, Eva McMillan never considered herself a leader; yet, her contribution was invaluable to SNCC and her community. Momma Mac was recognized throughout the community as a dedicated, strong, African-American woman who truly cared about the struggle for civil rights. Although she has not garnished accolades and civic awards like Juanita Craft and other black women in the community, Eva McMillan does not feel slighted. She offers, “You do this thing, not realizing what good you’re doing. You do it because it needs to be done--you’re not looking for praise, you’re just working hard.”<sup>56</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>“Living Legend Honoree,” Eva McMillan folder, Dallas Public Library, Dallas/Texas History Archives Division, Dallas, TX.

<sup>2</sup>Evans, “Women’s Consciousness,” 13.

<sup>3</sup>Eva McMillan, interview by author, tape recording, Dallas, TX, 14 February 1998.

<sup>4</sup>Eva McMillan, interview by author, tape recording, Dallas, TX, 8 August 1997, Dallas Public Library; Dallas Weekly, 15-22 February 1995, 9.

<sup>5</sup>McMillan, personal interview, 8 August 1997.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid; “Living Legend Honoree,” Eva McMillan folder.

<sup>9</sup>McMillan, personal interview, 8 August 1997.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>McMillan, personal interview 14 February 1998.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>McMillan, personal interview, 8 August 1997.

<sup>14</sup>Dallas Times Herald, 21 April 1975.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid, 29 October 1990.

<sup>16</sup>Hard Core News, May 1969, Juanita Craft Collection, Box 20.

<sup>17</sup>Dallas Times Herald, 17 November 1968.

<sup>18</sup>McMillan, personal interview, 8 August 1975.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid; Dallas Times Herald, 29 October 1990, 7

<sup>20</sup>Ibid, 14 January 1975.

<sup>21</sup>For more on the FBI’s policies towards civil rights groups see Kenneth O’Reilly, ‘Racial Matters: The FBI’s Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972. (New York: The Free Press, 1989).

- <sup>22</sup>Eva McMillan, personal interview, 8 August 1997; Dallas Times Herald, 21 April 1972.
- <sup>23</sup>McMillan, personal interview, 14 February 1998.
- <sup>24</sup>McMillan, personal interview, 8 August 1997.
- <sup>25</sup>McMillan, personal interview, 14 February 1998; McMillan, personal interview, 8 August 1997.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup>McMillan, personal interview, 14 February 1998.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup>Robnett, "African-American Women in the Civil Rights Movement," 1665.
- <sup>31</sup>Eva McMillan, personal interview, 14 February 1998.
- <sup>32</sup>Eva McMillan, personal interview, 8 August 1997.
- <sup>33</sup>Dallas Times Herald, 26 July 1968, 29, 33; McMillan, personal interview, 8 August 1997.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup>Dallas Morning News, 12 July 1968.
- <sup>36</sup>Dallas Times Herald, 26 July 1968; Dallas Morning News, 13 July 1968.
- <sup>37</sup>Dallas Times Herald, 26 July 1968; New York Times, 26 July 1968, 39.
- <sup>38</sup>Hard Core News, p. 1.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup>Dallas Morning News, 24 August 1968.
- <sup>41</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup>McMillan, personal interview, 8 August 1997.
- <sup>43</sup>Dallas Times Herald, 8 July 1969; Ibid, 9 December 1971.
- <sup>44</sup>McMillan, personal interview, 14 February 1998.
- <sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid.

<sup>48</sup>McMillan, personal interview 8 August 1998.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>McMillan, personal interview, 14 February 1998.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>McMillan, personal interview, 8 August 1997.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

## Chapter Four

### Yvonne Ewell, 1927-

Public accommodations were not the only area that faced strict segregation before the civil rights movement. Even after the *Brown* decision of 1954, many school systems throughout the country still remained segregated. The Dallas Independent School District [DISD] remained untouched by desegregation laws until the early 1960s. Thus, it was left to the efforts of local black teachers and civil rights workers to break the barrier of segregation and give African-American children an equal opportunity at education. At the forefront of the school desegregation efforts in Dallas stood a woman who embodied strength, resolve, and determination--Yvonne Ewell. A teacher turned administrator, Ewell's entire career "has been couched in desegregation."<sup>1</sup> Unlike Craft and McMillan, Ewell did not fight against the system; instead, she devoted her career as an educator to aiding the desegregation of Dallas schools and fighting for quality education for minority students.

Yvonne Amaryllis Ewell was born in the small East Texas town of Frankston on September 19, 1927.<sup>2</sup> Isolated on a farm in an area she refers to as the "citadel of racism," Ewell's mother tried to shelter her children from discrimination in her younger years.<sup>3</sup> Raised by a protective mother, Yvonne and her three siblings were exposed early to the importance of education. Both Ewell's maternal grandparents taught school, as did her mother. Due to her mother's strong influence, Ewell knew she wanted to go to college. In 1947 she graduated with an degree in Elementary Education from Prairie View A&M College and took her first teaching job in the small town of Ladonia, Texas--"another horrible place."<sup>4</sup> During her time in Ladonia, she recalls a sign that hung over the town center that read, "The Blackest Land and the Whitest People."

Discrimination and racism were no strangers to Ewell when she decided to move to Dallas in 1954. It was perhaps a strange coincidence that she moved to Dallas the same year that the Supreme Court ruled segregation unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education*. It proved to be a court case that directed her career and changed her life.<sup>5</sup>

Like Craft and McMillan, Ewell experienced similar incidents of discrimination in Dallas. She remembers the daily indignities of not being able to try on hats in stores such as Neiman Marcus and A. Harris. During her early days in Dallas, Ewell tried to insulate herself and avoid any situations in which she might experience overt discrimination. Yet, she could not escape such incidents. Upsetting Ewell the most was the segregation of the Majestic Theater. An avid lover of the arts, she resented being forced to sit in the upper balcony. Twenty years later, when she was involved with the Park Board's renovation of the Majestic, she refused to go back to the theater. The memories of years of discrimination remained too strong. Ewell recalls, "That's the issue about racism--it sort of colors you for life and what you enjoy."<sup>6</sup>

While Ewell experienced discrimination similar to many African-Americans, she did not directly participate in outright civil rights activity. Although she helped protest an election in which a black candidate, George Allen, was refused his rightful seat, Ewell's participation in demonstrations remained limited. One of the primary reasons was that the DISD discouraged its teachers from participating in civil rights organizations, particularly the NAACP. When Ewell interviewed for a teaching position after she moved to the city, she remembers having to lie to the superintendent about her membership in the NAACP. Although she was a member, outright activity or support of the organization would result in the loss of her job. As an employee of the system against which the NAACP was pushing with its desegregation cases, Ewell privately endorsed the NAACP's actions although she could not actively participate in them.<sup>7</sup> She recalls, "I was always visible there whenever something was going on, but I was not always leading the march. . . . I do think there's a difference in getting the door opened then

making sure you get in the door and do something once you're there."<sup>8</sup> Thus, Yvonne Ewell decided that she would find her own personal way to protest by working through the DISD to get better education for minority students.

One of the first steps Ewell took was to gain an academic understanding of racism. During her early years in Dallas, she read many books and attended several conferences that examined the problem. For her, the study proved highly liberating. She found the problems of racism to be with the oppressor, not with those who were oppressed. Once she stopped internalizing that the problem was her color, she found that she could begin to work on changing the system.<sup>9</sup> She decided that, although it was going to be a long struggle, that it was "a privilege to struggle. ... because the system is always resistant to change."<sup>10</sup> And the DISD proved highly resistant to the changes brought on by desegregation.

The desegregation of Dallas public schools proved to be an extensive courtroom battle that has lasted four decades.<sup>11</sup> The desegregation process in the city contained aspects similar to those in Houston, Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, and Philadelphia: white flight, a lack of minority teachers, a school board and administration controlled by whites, denial of structural racism, and resistance to desegregation by the white power structure. However, Dallas did have its unique elements. For one, there was an absence of violence. There was also a shift in leadership from whites to multi-ethnic representatives, and a federal judge's refusal to release DISD from its lawsuit until minority students' standardized test scores demonstrated a major improvement.<sup>12</sup> Such was the backdrop against which the NAACP filed its desegregation cases. The first litigation in *Bell v. Rippey* reached the court as early as 1956, but it produced little results when the judge told the district to integrate with "all deliberate speed."<sup>13</sup> It was not until 1961 that the court accepted a "stairstep plan" that integrated the Dallas schools one grade a year. At that time Dallas remained the second largest segregated school district in the nation.<sup>14</sup>

The desegregation efforts in 1961 faced mixed reviews in Dallas. One African-American newspaper called them tokenism and insufficient. One poll found that 30 percent of whites in Dallas still opposed the issue of segregation.<sup>15</sup> Although only eighteen African-Americans attended previously all white schools that year, the Dallas Morning News claimed it was the city's "historic first step toward desegregation."<sup>16</sup> Yet, the DISD administration was still hesitant to embrace integration. The superintendent told teachers that they would not be forced to teach a segregated class.<sup>17</sup> Four years later, the judge who issued the order still warned blacks to have "horse sense" and "manners" and not to enter "places they have not reached nor yet been invited."<sup>18</sup> On the surface, Dallas appeared to have begun a successful and peaceful integration. Even Attorney General Robert Kenney praised the city's efforts as a "truly outstanding job."<sup>19</sup> In reality, the schools remained far from integrated. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, African-Americans began pushing for faster and complete desegregation of the DISD.

Desegregation cases against the DISD continued to plague the courts during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In 1967, a judge ruled total desegregation of the DISD, but in 1971, another judge found that "vestiges of a dual system remained in the DISD," and a new plan was adopted to remedy the situation.<sup>20</sup> The same year student busing began in Dallas. Despite the judge's ruling, "institutional racism"<sup>21</sup> was still found to exist in the DISD as late as 1974, resulting in new desegregation plans and increased busing implemented. Since 1981, no new desegregation orders have been issued for DISD; yet, it was not until 1994 that the courts finally declared the district desegregated by granting it unitary status.<sup>22</sup>

During the decades in which lawsuits against the DISD pended, Yvonne Ewell was directly involved with the process of desegregation. She remembers when she first heard about the *Brown* decision: "It was like the heavens opening up. It seemed that here was our [African-Americans] chance to become human, because we could be

free.”<sup>23</sup> Ewell began her career as an elementary teacher at Phyllis Wheatley Elementary School, moving to Lincoln in the early 1960s where she became the first black female principle. During this period, she completed her work for a Masters degree from the University of Colorado and began work on a Doctorate. In 1965, Ewell was appointed as Elementary Education Consultant for the school district, becoming the first African-American woman to join the administration. One of her major jobs during her term as Consultant was to supervise ethnic groups. As Director of Ethnic Studies, Ewell implemented ethnic studies courses, such as black history, in the high schools and junior high schools. She worked closely with blacks, Hispanics, Native-Americans, and Asians to create a more inclusive curriculum. She diligently put together study guides and teaching materials; and, although she admits it may not have been the best program, it was the only multi-cultural program the schools in the DISD had at that time. In the first nine years in her administrative position, Ewell attempted to change the curriculum of Dallas schools to include minority students, who were slowly integrating. Yet, it was not until the 1970s and 1980s, a time when the courts finally forced the DISD to desegregate, that Ewell emerged as a vital element in the integration process.<sup>24</sup>

While the DISD received its main desegregation order in 1961, a variety of court rulings helped to push the process of desegregation along, and with the Hughes Order on Racism in 1974, Ewell became directly involved in integration. When Judge Sarah Hughes received the 1974 annual report on the DISD, it demonstrated that black students experienced more severe punishment in public schools and that the suspension rate was remarkably higher for black students than for whites. The judge ruled that “institutional racism” existed within the system, and the court ordered the administration to adopt a new plan to end it. Yvonne Ewell and her staff had the responsibility of implementing a new plan, the Affirmative Action Program. In it she established the issue of inclusion, bilingual education, and allotted within the budget \$50 per student. For the following two years, she bought materials on racism and conducted training sessions for her staff

that aimed at eliminating racism in the district. Much of the plan remains in place today; but, while it helped minority students, the program did not solve the problem of racism.<sup>25</sup> Dallas public schools continued to be split along racial lines.

With yet another desegregation order in 1976, the court established the subdistrict of East Oak Cliff, and the superintendent decided Ewell was the prime choice as its Assistant Superintendent. East Oak Cliff, a predominately black subdistrict, was intended to be a “special place,” heavily funded and staffed to ensure equality; however, the NAACP argued that the subdistrict isolated black students in one-race schools. During her tenure at East Oak Cliff, Ewell was responsible for the education of 27,000 students--one fifth of the DISD. Her primary goal was to make systemic changes within the school, and she wasted no time getting started. With a staff of fifteen to twenty members, Ewell implemented various programs that dealt with language and teaching students how to read. She also developed a program, sponsored by the Department of Labor, about African-American women who made significant contributions to society. Through it, and other programs she started, she hoped to teach African-Americans, as well as other minorities, about their heritage and history. Furthermore, Ewell put together the first K-3 Early Childhood Education program for the district. The Assistant Superintendent never doubted that her programs would be a success.<sup>26</sup> She recalls, “I had to convince myself, because before that it was just theoretical. . . . So there was no evidence that you really could educate black kids to an equal standard. I know it can be done. Quickly.”<sup>27</sup>

By 1977, Ewell’s efforts proved successful. She was promoted to Associate Superintendent, making her one of four associate superintendents below DISD Superintendent Nolan Estes. The Dallas Morning News praised Nolan’s decision, claiming the promotion gave Ewell “a title befitting a person who is the superintendent of the district [East Oak Cliff] that (if it were an independent one) would be in the 30 largest districts in the state.”<sup>28</sup> East Oak Cliff witnessed considerable academic achievement over the next

two years. Achievement tests in 1978 demonstrated “clear significant gains” by elementary students. The Dallas Times Herald, while maintaining that the extra staff and money did help, gave Ewell credit for being a goal setter and a “harsh taskmaster who expects a great deal from those who work for her.”<sup>29</sup> She discovered at East Oak Cliff that black children could make “quantum leaps” in education and that “we [African-Americans] can achieve academic excellence, because in that period, we did achieve excellence.”<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately, Ewell’s role as superintendent of East Oak Cliff ended in 1981 when Judge Barefoot Sanders eliminated the subdistrict. Although the judge maintained that he was trying to integrate the schools without busing, Ewell had her own views on why the subdistrict was dissolved.<sup>31</sup> She recalls, “It was very clear to me, though, that it was another case of racism. The district over here was doing so well that men, mainly white men, felt that we shouldn’t be separate because the children in this district were out-performing all black kids in the Dallas schools.”<sup>32</sup> It appeared to Ewell, as to other African-Americans in Dallas, that the districts were reunified in order to eliminate achievement. She thus realized that “poor achievement is no accident.”<sup>33</sup>

Although Ewell’s role as superintendent at East Oak Cliff had ended, the administration decided to use the energetic educator in another capacity. In still another court ruling in 1982, the court mandated that DISD’s primary concern was to be the education of all children, particularly minorities. Due to Ewell’s “sensitivity” to the problems of minority children, former Superintendent Nolan Estes promptly suggested that she take the job of special assistant to the superintendent in the role of desegregation monitor. Although some African-Americans in her community viewed her decision to accept negatively, Ewell felt that the district needed examples of how to effectively educate black children.<sup>34</sup>

As desegregation monitor, Ewell’s primary job was to evaluate the progress of school program changes and efforts towards desegregation. In that capacity she

developed a handbook of new program recommendations, mainly dealing with reading and math, to incorporate into the schools' curriculums.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, Ewell's outspokenness against racism never gained the support of conservative Superintendent Linus Wright. As she was not allowed to directly work with the implementation and evaluation of her programs, Ewell had a difficult time effectively carrying out her role--her position as desegregation monitor remained "symbolic and with no real authority."<sup>36</sup> Thus, in 1983, when Judge Sanders ruled that her job did not fulfill its purpose, Wright took the opportunity to demote Ewell. He promptly took her out of the role of desegregation monitor and put her in charge of developing a program at a magnet school.<sup>37</sup>

Wright's decision outraged many African-Americans in Dallas; however, Ewell attributed his decision to their inability to reconcile their differences. The Afro-American Advisory Committee, who worked with the school district on the desegregation issue, questioned Wright's commitment to integration. For many blacks, Ewell's removal became "a symbolic act which meant that anyone who spoke for an educationally sound desegregation program would be removed."<sup>38</sup> Professionally, Wright and Ewell differed on the type of study programs to be offered to schools in the DISD. While she wanted to implement programs based on the ones she set up in East Oak Cliff, Wright felt that the court intended a wider variety of programs from which to choose.<sup>39</sup> Although personally Ewell viewed Wright as a good man, she felt "he just didn't understand the race issue. . . .and I worked too hard to try and retreat on things I know about race--what is wrong, what is right."<sup>40</sup> Yvonne Ewell decided to retire in 1985.

Throughout her career in the DISD administration, Ewell's focus remained clear--to provide an equal education for minority children. She consistently stressed the importance of education, both to the administration and to parents. She contended that a high quality education needed to be pushed in inner city schools in particular. Ewell felt

that nobody was making educational demands of children in inner city schools because no one felt they could accomplish anything. This reason was precisely her motivation for implementing the programs at East Oak Cliff--she wanted to prove that African-Americans were as capable as whites at obtaining a quality education.<sup>41</sup> As late as 1997, she still had concerns about the education of minorities. She commented, "I am concerned about whether our children are getting the type of education they need. I am fatigued because not enough people are involved in the process."<sup>42</sup> Throughout her professional career, Ewell has tried to get parents, teachers, and the administration involved in the education of minority students.<sup>43</sup>

During her early years as teacher and principle, Ewell tried a variety of projects to give minority children a better education. She sponsored annual field trips for students in all grades, hoping to give them "the opportunity for cultural experiences beyond their immediate community."<sup>44</sup> During the 1963-64 school year, she took a group of elementary school children on a trip to the Dallas Civic Opera to attend a production. She hoped to instill in the children an appreciation of the fine arts and to expose them to new experiences. Her students were the only African-American group to participate in the program. Ewell also encouraged the Parent-Teacher Association [PTA] of Arlington Elementary to purchase school supplies for needy children, long before this was done by civic and social groups.<sup>45</sup> Throughout her career she has also stressed the need for minority children to learn about their own cultures and history. A pamphlet she received in the early 1960s inspired her to wipe out racism in school curriculums. It read, "Children cannot get over racism if we are feeding them gentle doses everyday."<sup>46</sup> Thus, Ewell has consistently pushed for a multi-ethnic curriculum to be implemented at all levels.

Although Ewell accepted the responsibility of education for minorities, she also encouraged the schools to husband the moral well-being of students. In 1977 she announced her vision that the schools should also be responsible for creating moral,

decent men and women.<sup>47</sup> She stated, “The people who created Watergate graduated from some of the best universities in this land”--stressing that the education of the soul proved just as important as the education of the mind.<sup>48</sup> One of her primary focuses was to educate blacks about racism. She contends that one of the basic problems with racism is that students, parents, teachers, and the administration do not spend enough time trying to understand the problem. Ewell feels that if she can “just help get the blacks to understand what they need to do to help inform the whites who are willing and open, [then they could sit down and] study together.”<sup>49</sup> Through her example of devotion and her fight for equality, she has provided a model for African-American children that they can succeed in academia.

Besides her work in the school system, Yvonne has been very active in community activities that work for the betterment of children. In the 1960s, she worked with the Council of Jewish Women who instituted the first early childhood education centers in Dallas. The centers were later institutionalized and spread virtually everywhere. She also served on the Board of Directors of the Dallas Childcare Association, helping to develop daycare programs to aid single mothers. Although the organization was eventually dissolved, Ewell was also a member of the Dallas County Community Action Committee which served as a clearinghouse for federal anti-poverty programs such as Head Start. Throughout her career, she served on numerous boards that helped open doors of opportunity for children throughout the district.<sup>50</sup>

Ewell, who has never married and has no children of her own, says that she put her personal life on hold and stayed institutionally focused. One reason for her decision was that she felt the African-American community needed more people who were committed to education. After her retirement in 1985, she devoted herself to find more educational solutions for indigent and minority children.<sup>51</sup> Her reasons for unselfishly devoting herself to institutional change is clear: “My struggle has been in public schools

because I think they're the saving grace of this nation. Had it not been for public schools-- black, white, or brown--we wouldn't be where we are [today]."<sup>52</sup>

Like Craft and McMillan, Ewell also became highly involved in community activities. She was noted a "dynamic" speaker and traveled to various organizations, particularly women's groups, making speeches.<sup>53</sup> She also participated in the Dallas chapter of YWCA. At the YWCA National Convention in 1970 she was nominated for the National Nominating Committee. In 1973 the organization elected her to the Board of the YWCA, where she co-chaired the office of Racial Justice with Dorothy Haight, who is now President of the Council of Negro Women. During that time, the organization spent a lot of time studying the phenomenon of racism. The YWCA was only one medium through which Ewell tried to educate the community on racism. In 1969, a group of African-American women held a meeting to discuss black unity and to study the frightening effects of discrimination. Ewell helped plan the forum and served as its discussion leader.<sup>54</sup> With her constant participation in groups such as the Dallas Council of Churches, Dallas Museum of Fine Arts, National Board Council of Negro Women, Park and Recreation Board of the City of Dallas, U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, and the Greater Dallas Community Relations Committee--just to mention a few--Dr. Nolan Estes told her, "You're on so many boards, Yvonne, they're going to call you Establish- ment."<sup>55</sup> In between time, she has traveled extensively, visiting many countries. Her trips to Africa had the greatest impact on her. Today, she gives speeches about her visit there, hoping to make people realize the extreme poverty that exists and encouraging them to give aid to Africa. Ewell has tirelessly devoted herself to her community during the past four decades.<sup>56</sup>

Although Ewell retired in 1985, her work in the DISD did not end--in 1987 the Dallas community elected her to the school board. When a group of people petitioned Ewell to run for the board, she agreed. At the age of sixty, she won. One of the pleasant ironies for Ewell was that the superintendent who had removed her as desegregation

monitor, Linus Wright, became her employee.<sup>57</sup> Yet, victory was not Ewell's reason for running. She told a local newspaper, "The issue is not who likes me and who doesn't. The issue is how do we teach reading tomorrow. The issue is how do we test the children, and do we or do we not test administration."<sup>58</sup> As a DISD School Board member, she planned to use her office to promote her agenda of inclusive, integrated, pluralistic education.

Yet, Ewell's term on the school board, on which she still resides, was not without conflict and controversy. Even in her early days, she gained a reputation as an outspoken, controversial leader. Her advocacy of "black power" and her promotion of affirmative action was not embraced by many conservative administration members and business leaders. Ewell, like many blacks in Dallas, felt that the African-American community too often cowed to the demands of the white business structure that wanted to control the process of integration.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, during her term at East Oak Cliff, some claimed that she was not interested in education. Instead, she was "empire-building."<sup>60</sup> Ewell refused to let criticism change her approach. For her, professional criticism "just goes with the territory."<sup>61</sup> As a member of the school board, she continued to speak out against racism that she felt still existed in the DISD.

One of the major controversies that Ewell faced was a dispute with another member of the school board, Ed Grant. The problem began when the Dallas Morning News obtained letters that Ewell and Grant had sent one another, accusing each other of racial insensitivity. While she claimed that Grant was "ridiculous" and did not understand the meaning of racism, he charged that Ewell's accusations of racism were "outdated" and "out of touch with reality."<sup>62</sup> With local papers covering the dispute, it was apparent that the racial tensions were damaging the ability of the board to effectively govern.<sup>63</sup> Another controversy in 1995 resulted in the minority members of the school board, including Ewell, walking out of a board meeting to protest "racist control" by the "white majority."<sup>64</sup> Some observers claim that Ewell's outspokenness helped to

intensify racial tensions. She responded to the accusations by explaining, "I have found it very difficult to accept injustice without trying to speak to it."<sup>65</sup>

Perhaps one of the most controversial and longest debates within the DISD has been over unitary status. The grant of unitary status took the district out of court supervision and lifted the desegregation order. As early as 1988, the school board petitioned the court to declare the DISD integrated. African-Americans, such as Ewell, opposed the court's granting unitary status, claiming that racism and discrimination still existed. In 1989, she spoke outright against the case and called for an audit to determine the quality of education in DISD. Ewell dreaded the results. She feared that, with the poor board relations and the issue of racism still present, the white majority on the board would be able to wipe out any minority programs or achievements with just one vote. Thus, she encouraged African-Americans in the community to become more involved in the court case on unitary status to protect the interests of minorities. Despite Ewell's efforts, in 1994 Judge Sanders ruled in favor of unitary status for DISD although he did maintain that the district would remain monitored until 1997. Refusing to attend the press conference at which the ruling was announced, she, as well as other African-Americans, felt that they could no longer count on the courts. Despite minority protests, the DISD was declared desegregated after almost thirty-five years in court.<sup>66</sup>

Although Ewell's stand on issues proved sometimes controversial, the community of Dallas has recognized and awarded her for years of dedication and hard work. In 1966, she was awarded Zeta Phi Beta Sorority's "Woman of the Year" for her work in education. Texas State Teachers Association honored her in 1979 with the TSTA Human Relations Award for her twenty years of service. At that ceremony, Ewell received a twenty minute standing ovation. She also received an Honorary Doctor of Laws by Bishop College. Numerous other awards include the first NAACP's National Distinguished Service Award, Sojourner Truth Award, the International Who's Who of Intellectuals and Who's Who Among Black Americans, Forty-Fourth Annual Service

Award, and the Dallas Black Chamber of Commerce Community Service Award.<sup>67</sup>

While there are countless other honors, each award thanked Ewell for her service and dedication to Dallas. In her forty-plus years of service, she has become a “model to assist young black women in knowing what life can become.”<sup>68</sup>

Although some of Ewell’s professional life has been shrouded in controversy, she is proud of what she has accomplished and continues to struggle to change the system. Maintaining that desegregation is critical to the survival of a democratic society, she often pushed the DISD to take action and integrate by implementing programs that proved African-American children could succeed in school.<sup>69</sup> She recalls, “In retrospect I agree with what I did. . . . I guess in many ways I was fortunate that I could push the edges and yet be a part of the system.”<sup>70</sup> While she did not participate in overt civil rights demonstrations or sit-ins, Ewell fought her own civil rights battle--sometimes single-handedly. Perhaps her career is best summarized by Johnnie Marie Grimes, a former trustee of the state Board of Education: “She holds the mirror and points the way; she works on all the things that really matter in our community; as an educator, she sharpens our skills and helps us define priorities as we tackle difficult problems in education, welfare, job opportunity and criminal justice.”<sup>71</sup> Yvonne Ewell still remains at the forefront of the struggle for quality education in Dallas.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Dallas Morning News, 15 September 1985, 21.

<sup>2</sup>Who's Who Among Black Americans, 8th ed. (Detroit, IL: Gale Research, Inc., 1996): 458.

<sup>3</sup>Yvonne Ewell, interview by author, tape recording, Dallas, TX, 26 February 1998.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid; Dallas Morning News, 14 September 1980, 20; Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998.

<sup>8</sup>Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>For a more complete study of school desegregation in Dallas, see Glenn M. Linden, Desegregating Schools in Dallas: Four Decades in the Federal Courts. (Dallas, TX: Three Forks Press, 1995).

<sup>12</sup>Linden, Four Decades, ix.

<sup>13</sup>Murphy, Negro Segregation Practices, 190-94.

<sup>14</sup>"Summary of School Desegregation Court Cases," Juanita Craft Collection, Box 19; Linden, Four Decades, 39.

<sup>15</sup>Dallas Express, 16 September 1961, 1; Dallas Morning News, 6 September 1961, 2.

<sup>16</sup>Linden, Four Decades, 47.

<sup>17</sup>Dallas Morning News, 6 September 1961, 1.

<sup>18</sup>Dallas Express, 31 July 1965, 8.

<sup>19</sup>Dallas Morning News, 7 September 1961, 15

<sup>20</sup>Eddie Mitchell Tasby, et al v. Dr. Nolan Estes, et al, Juanita Craft Collection, Box 19.

- <sup>21</sup>Dr. Dan Dodson defined institutional racism at a local symposium as “Not just prejudice. . .not just segregation. . . [it] is any institutional policy or practice which gives on ethnic group of the community an advantage over the others.” “Symposium on Institutional Racism and the Community” (Dallas, TX: Dallas Chamber of Commerce and the Dallas Independent School District, 1975, typewritten), 9.
- <sup>22</sup>Linden, Four Decades, 82-83; Ibid, 227-31.
- <sup>23</sup>Dallas Times Herald, 29 October 1978.
- <sup>24</sup>Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998; Dallas Express, 17 July 1965, 14; Dallas Post Tribune, 14-18 February 1993, 13; Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998
- <sup>25</sup>Linden, Four Decades, 97; Dallas Morning News, 15 December 1974,1; Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998.
- <sup>26</sup>Dallas Times Herald, 29 October 1978; Linden, Four Decades, 130; Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998.
- <sup>27</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>28</sup>Dallas Morning News, 14 December 1977.
- <sup>29</sup>Dallas Times Herald, 29 October 1978.
- <sup>30</sup>Dallas Post Tribune, 19-25 February 1998, 8.
- <sup>31</sup>Linden, Four Decades, 162, 155.
- <sup>32</sup>Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup>Linden, Four Decades, 171; Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998.
- <sup>35</sup>Linden, Four Decades, 171.
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup>Dallas Times Herald, 6 April 1987.
- <sup>38</sup>Linden, Four Decades, 175
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid.

- <sup>40</sup>Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998.
- <sup>41</sup>Dallas Times Herald, 29 October 1978.
- <sup>42</sup>Shawn Lane, "Battle Weary, but Afraid to Walk Away," Dallas Examiner, 19 June 1997, 1, 3.
- <sup>43</sup>Dallas Morning News, 13 November 1977, 35.
- <sup>44</sup>Dallas Express, 19 February 1966, 1.
- <sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>46</sup>Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998.
- <sup>47</sup>Dallas Morning News, 13 November 1977, 35.
- <sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup>Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998.
- <sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*; Dallas Times Herald, 25 May 1988, 1.
- <sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*; Dallas Morning News, 15 September 1985, 21.
- <sup>52</sup>Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998.
- <sup>53</sup>Dallas Post Tribune, 17 July 1965, 1; See also Dallas Post Tribune, 27 November 1965, 10; Dallas Express, 17 July 1965, 14; Dallas Morning News, 24 April 1974; Dallas Weekly, 15 November 1990, 15.
- <sup>54</sup>Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998; Dallas Morning News, 10 December 1969, 9.
- <sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*, 15 December 1974, 1.
- <sup>56</sup>Dallas Post Tribune, 19-25 February 1998, 8.
- <sup>57</sup>Dallas Times Herald, 6 April 1987, 1.
- <sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*
- <sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 29 October 1978; Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998.
- <sup>60</sup>Dallas Times Herald, 29 October 1978
- <sup>61</sup>Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998.
- <sup>62</sup>Dallas Morning News, 5 September 1992, 38

<sup>63</sup>Linden, Four Decades, 203.

<sup>64</sup>George Farkas, Human Capital or Cultural Capital?: Ethnicity and Poverty Groups in an Urban School District. (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1996), 68.

<sup>65</sup>Dallas Morning News, 13 February 1985.

<sup>66</sup>Linden, Four Decades, 190-92; Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998; Dallas Examiner, 19 June 1997, 1; Linden, Four Decades, 213-14.

<sup>67</sup>Dallas Express, 19 February 1966, 1; Dallas Morning News, 23 October 1979; Yvonne Ewell, personal letter to author that included Vita, 1 March 1998.

<sup>68</sup>Dallas Morning News, 26 March 1978.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid*, 15 December 1974, 1.

<sup>70</sup>Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998.

<sup>71</sup>Dallas Morning News, 26 March 1978, 20.

## Chapter Five

### African-American Women and the Feminist Movement

Like many women who participated in the civil rights movement, the work of Craft, McMillan, and Ewell did not gain them much national recognition or prominent leadership roles within civil rights organizations. Yet, by educating children, feeding and housing civil rights workers, and working within civil rights groups, each woman performed invaluable jobs for the movement. Yet very few emerged as recognized leaders of the movement. Instead, it was African-American men who held leadership titles and offices. Surprisingly, very few black women felt resentful that they performed subservient roles within the movement. Therefore, the lack of support given by black women to the feminist movement perplexed many white women. The historical relationship between black and white women was complicated by the failure of African-American women, such as Craft, Ewell, and McMillan, to join the feminist crusade during the 1960s.

Twice in United States history did a black civil rights struggle become the “midwife” for a feminist crusade. The early push for women’s equality during the nineteenth century grew directly out of white women’s participation in the abolitionist movement.<sup>1</sup> A similar relationships occurred when white women began participating in the civil rights movement during the 1960s. As many white women participated in the civil rights movement, they, like many African-Americans, found empowerment and longed for equality.<sup>2</sup> When Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it assured legal protection of both African-Americans and women against discrimination, grouping them together in what seemed a logical coalition. The actions of the National

Organization for Women paralleled those of the NAACP, while the left wing feminist groups seemed to parallel the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). White women also felt that they had a connection with African-Americans.<sup>3</sup> To white feminists, both women and blacks experienced similar oppression; thus, African-American women exemplified the “quintessential victims of sexist oppression.”<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the strength and determination of the black “mamas” became new role models, if not mother figures, for many white women. However, to the dismay of many white feminists, the majority of black women did not share this view, and they failed to join the movement for numerous reasons.<sup>5</sup>

Although whites denounced the failure of African-American women to acquire strong leadership positions as sexual discrimination, black females did not view their roles within the movement as sexist. Although assigned ‘traditional’ roles, such as caring for children, black women embraced the opportunity to “inspire our men, educate our children, and participate in the social development of our nation.”<sup>6</sup> Black women sought to encourage blacks to attain education and accept their family responsibilities. Even when Stokely Carmichael made his infamous remark, stating that the proper position for women in SNCC was “prone,” few African-American women took offense. Although the comment became a source of embarrassment for Carmichael, Clayborne Carson maintains it merely demonstrated the “lack of seriousness” given to feminist concerns by most blacks.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, knowing the suffering the black man incurred at the hands of white racists, African-American women were not willing to denounce him as a “male chauvinist.”<sup>8</sup>

African-American women also did not join the women’s liberation movement because of strongly held feelings of hostility towards white women. Many black women viewed white women, who “for hundreds of years demeaned [them] in the kitchens of America,” as their greatest enemy.<sup>9</sup> Due to historical traditions, African-American women had experiences apart from whites, particularly white females. Consequently,

many African-American females were resentful that white women saw themselves as victims of oppression.<sup>10</sup> Many African-Americans considered the feminist movement to consist of “just a bunch of bored housewives,” who wanted to take attention away from the black struggle. The greatest animosity, however, was over the women’s relationships with black men. White women’s sexual involvement with black males created even more anger and hostility among black women. The beginning of violence within a black community was often related to the extent of which white women were involved in the crusade.<sup>11</sup>

However, the primary reason African-American women did not join the women’s liberation movement was that they viewed the abolition of racial discrimination as more important than the problem of sexual discrimination. Many black women felt that race, not sex, constituted the primary source for their oppression. Thus, the racial barriers had to be broken first--the concerns of the women’s liberation seemed “pale by comparison.”<sup>12</sup> Black men were more threatened by racism than women were by sexism.<sup>13</sup> Also, many African-American females did not understand what exactly white women wanted. Cynthia Washington recalls, “It seemed to many of us . . . that white women were demanding a chance to be independent while we needed help and assistance. . . we definitely started from opposite ends of the spectrum.”<sup>14</sup> The majority of African-American women chose to support their men and fight for the freedom of their race, as opposed to the emancipation of their sex. Likewise, the views of Craft, McMillan, and Ewell reflect those of many African-American females. While all of them were sympathetic to the women’s movement, none of them chose to join it.

Juanita Craft was sympathetic to feminist crusade, but never became actively involved. She maintained that women should get paid equally to men, and she also believed that women should not be relegated to menial jobs, but she never considered herself a “woman’s libber.” She felt that radical feminists were not acting as women should. Craft did not agree with women taking traditionally male roles, such as climbing

telephone poles.<sup>15</sup> She stated, "Women are something special; however, many have fallen from the high pedestal upon which God placed them."<sup>16</sup> For Craft, the women's movement often deviated from her definition of womanhood. Furthermore, she never experienced any problems on the basis of her sex. She recalls, "I got by with murder because I was a woman. . . ."<sup>17</sup>

The feminist movement also did not appeal to Yvonne Ewell. For Ewell, feminism simply did not address the needs of African-Americans. Although she attended a few meetings, she felt the white middle class women were only concerned about themselves and their own agenda, and they failed to focus on the community or family. For Ewell, many of their issues were "superficial."<sup>18</sup> She also felt white women already had opportunities that blacks never experienced. She offers, "I felt that white women were already there [liberated]--the men that were running this country were their husbands and sons and lovers. . . .white children already had equity in the economic issues, so they [feminists] could give themselves to lesser issues."<sup>19</sup> While Ewell has recently led discussion groups examining sexism within the African-American community, she never felt compelled to join the feminist crusade. Black women, according to Ewell, were so busy fighting for their children and their families, they simply did not have time to support a feminist agenda.<sup>20</sup>

Of the three women, McMillan proved to be the most sympathetic to the women's struggle. Part of the reason may be that SNCC was the civil rights organization that was the most inclusive of women. SNCC offered leadership positions to women, and in turn, became an "opening salvo" of the feminist movement.<sup>21</sup> In 1964, female SNCC members half-seriously protested the fact that few women held national leadership positions within the organization.<sup>22</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that McMillan had a greater understanding about the problem than did Craft or Ewell. She recalls that she held no feelings of animosity towards the women's movement, and that the Black Women's United Front and SNCC both promoted multi-national togetherness. The Black

Women's United Front even participated in a march with the National Organization of Women. However, problems over whether to join the feminist movement was one of the major divisions among the women in the organization and helped lead to its eventual demise. Although she and her son, Ernie, often had heated discussions over the lack of female leadership in SNCC, she never considered herself a feminist. Instead, McMillan overlooked the problem of sexism in the black community and work towards the larger goal of civil rights.<sup>23</sup>

Despite issues of sexism against black women, the civil rights struggle served to unify African-American men and women. Sociologist Bell Hooks claimed that the "bonding between black women and men was part of the anti-racist struggle."<sup>24</sup> The cooperation between men and women gave the movement solidarity and strength, as an oppressed people drew together to fight a common enemy--racism. The goals of the civil rights movement addressed the needs of the entire African-American community. As one African-American woman frankly stated, "With all the new 'lovemaking' between black women and men, there is little room for women's lib."<sup>25</sup>

Like many African-American women involved in civil rights activity, Craft, Ewell, and McMillan never considered themselves feminists. They willingly worked alongside men, allowing them the spotlight. In reality, they were far too busy working for the freedom of their people and their children to bother fighting sexual oppression. Yet, they each had a clear idea about what a woman should be: educated, involved, concerned, patient, proud, sincere, courageous, understanding, reasonable, and one who votes, volunteers, and reads. They were proud to be women and never viewed their gender as an obstacle.<sup>26</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Sara Evans, "Women's Consciousness and the Southern Black Movement." Southern Exposure 4 (Winter 1977): 10.

<sup>2</sup>For more information on the origins of the women's liberation movement, see William Henry Chafe, The American Women: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972); Sara Evans, Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979); Mary Lou Thompson, ed, Voices of the New Feminism. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970).

<sup>3</sup>William H. Chafe, "The End of One Struggle, the Beginning of Another," in The Civil Rights Movement in America. Charles W. Eagles, ed. (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1986), 139.

<sup>4</sup>Phyllis Marynick Palmer, "White Women/Black Women: The Dualism of Female Identity and Experience," in Ronald Takaki. From Different Shores: Perspectives on Race and Ethnicity in America. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 167.

<sup>5</sup>Evans, "Women's Consciousness," 14.

<sup>6</sup>Helen King, "Black Women and Women's Lib." Ebony 26 (March 1971): 75.

<sup>7</sup>Carson, In Struggle, 148.

<sup>8</sup>King, "Women's Lib," 70.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, 74.

<sup>10</sup>Charlayne Hunter, "Black Women and the Liberation Movement." The Black Politician 2 (January 1997): 15

<sup>11</sup>Evans, "Women's Consciousness," 13.

<sup>12</sup>King, "Women's Lib," 70.

<sup>13</sup>Nance, "Missing Voices," 551.

<sup>14</sup>Cynthia Washington, "We Started at Opposite Ends of the Spectrum." Southern

Exposure 4 (Winter 1977): 14.

<sup>15</sup>Juanita Craft, speech notes, Juanita Craft Collection, Box 1.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Speech notes, Juanita Craft Collection, Box 1; Juanita Craft, interview with Sticklin and Tomlinson, 5 February 1979.

<sup>18</sup>Ewell, personal interview, 26 February 1998.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Carson, In Struggle, 148.

<sup>22</sup>Evans, "Women's Consciousness," 14.

<sup>23</sup>McMillan, personal interview, 14 February 1998.

<sup>24</sup>Nance, "Missing Voices," 551.

<sup>25</sup>King, "Women's Lib," 70.

<sup>26</sup>Juanita Craft, speech notes, Juanita Craft Collection, Box 1.

## Chapter Six

### Conclusion

While the civil rights movement in Dallas, Texas lacked the violence of other Southern states, African-Americans still faced harsh discrimination that they struggled to overcome. Dallas--a city with "one foot in the Old South and one in the West"<sup>1</sup>--slowly accepted desegregation, but only after being forced by local blacks, civil rights organizations, and the courts. Craft, McMillan, and Ewell encountered many instances of racism before the 1960s. These experiences colored their lives and prompted them to fight for the dignity and freedom of their people--particularly their children.

Each woman fulfilled the roles prescribed by Robnett. Every woman was a mama. They became known as community leaders that both adults and children felt they could come to for guidance and help. As models of strength and determination, they encouraged and inspired other African-Americans. The three women were also activists. Each directly participated in their own civil rights struggle. Craft became active in the NAACP; McMillan worked hard protecting and defending SNCC; and Ewell dedicated her life to desegregating public schools. Finally, each woman served as a friend to other black women. Their involvement in civic organizations, particularly black groups, helped unify the women in their quest for freedom. Their friendships helped to sustain each other and created a network of support for black women.

The NAACP offered Craft her greatest outlet for her civil rights struggle. She began by working on voter registration drives during the 1940s. She soon accepted the role of NAACP youth advisor and maintained that position throughout the movement. In this capacity, Craft helped the youth protest the segregation of Fair Park and other places of discrimination in Dallas. She helped educate and motivate black children to push for

equality without the use of violence. Her hard work and dedication garnished her many awards, including a seat on the City Council.

Likewise, Eva McMillan began her civil rights activity working on voting registration drives; however, her son's involvement in SNCC took her to another, more militant, area of the crusade. She became the organizations' advisor, supervising their meetings and curbing their militancy. With her son's imprisonment and inhumane treatment at the hands of prison officials, Momma Mac shifted her focus to the struggle for prisoner's rights--many of whom were minorities. Also, her active participation in community organizations gained her recognition as a woman full of compassion for mankind, who was willing to fight for the rights of minorities.

Ewell took a different road from Craft and McMillan. She did not find her role in civil rights organizations such as NAACP and SNCC. Instead, she chose to fight within the system, specifically the system of public education. As a former teacher and principal promoted to the administration, Ewell dedicated her career to finding better means of educating minorities. She implemented multi-cultural programs and even helped write part of the desegregation order for DISD. As desegregation monitor, she attempted to oversee the peaceful and effective integration of Dallas schools. Retirement did not conclude Ewell's career. She has devoted her time to serving as a Trustee on the Dallas school board. There, she continues to fight for equal education for minorities.

The three women often accepted traditional roles within their community and acquiesced the leadership positions to men. Despite all of Craft's work within the NAACP, she never received a prominent office--the role of local leadership was held by A. Maceo Smith. Likewise, Eva McMillan only worked with SNCC in the capacity of adult advisor. She supported her son, the leader of the organization, and fought for his name and position. Although Ewell did acquire professional positions that had not formerly been held by a black woman, she still remained under the supervision of male leadership.

In order to truly understand the civil rights movement in America, the roles of women must be examined. Black women often worked in the shadow of male leadership. They fed, clothed, and housed workers; they participated in marches and demonstrations; and they assumed the responsibility to educate and watch over the children in the community. Without women's active participation and dedication, African-Americans may never have witnessed the legal, social, and political gains of the 1950s and 1960s. As Mary McLeod Bethune proclaimed, "Whatever the achievements of the Negro man. . . he cannot but share them with his sister of darker hue. Whatever glory belongs to the race for a development unprecedented in history. . . a full share belongs to the womanhood of the race."<sup>2</sup>

Although black women often did not acquire leadership positions within civil rights organizations, African-American females did not choose to join the women's liberation movement and fight for sexual equality. For most black women, the feminist movement did not address the needs of the black community. Feminists were middle class housewives who had no experience with real injustice and discrimination. Furthermore, black women chose to support their men who were fighting for the equality of themselves and their children. The civil rights crusade served, instead, to unify black men and women in the pursuit of a common goal.

The struggles of Craft, McMillan, and Ewell demonstrate what hundreds of African-American women did during the civil rights movement. For many black women, education of children was the primary concern, as they taught them to accept the responsibilities and privileges that accompany citizenship. They also worked to instill pride and self-respect in many of the children, encouraging them to become active in the civil rights movement. Most black women willingly acquiesced the leadership roles in civil rights organizations to men. Accordingly, the majority of African-American women chose not to participate in the women's liberation movement, as racial discrimination

proved more important an issue than sexual discrimination. African-American women chose to fight their battles one at a time.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>New York Times, 8 September 1961, 18.

<sup>2</sup>Gerda Lerner, ed. Black Women in White America: A Documentary History. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 580.

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## Appendix A

### Juanita Craft Biographical Sketch

#### Education:

Attended high school in Austin, Texas, and completed two years of college at Prairie View A&M College. Received a teaching certificate at Samuel Houston College, Austin, Texas.

#### Personal:

Parents, David Shanks and Eliza L. Balfour Shanks, natives of Texas. Moved to Dallas in 1925. Married Johnny Edward Craft in 1937 (d. 1950).

#### Memberships:

Munger Avenue Baptist Church  
National Council of Negro Women  
League of Women Voters  
Democratic Women's Club  
Women's Dialogue National Conference of Christians and Jews  
Precinct Chairman  
Parent/Teacher Association  
Young Women's Christian Association  
Honorary Member of United for Action

#### Boards:

Dallas United Nations Association  
Community Council of Greater Dallas  
Urban League of Greater Dallas  
Episcopal Center Board  
West Dallas Centers (5)  
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People  
A Beautiful Clean Dallas  
Governor's Human Relations Committee  
Dallas Design Committee  
Goals for Dallas Committee  
Urban League of Greater Dallas

#### Awards:

Sojourner Truth  
NAACP Advisor  
NAACP Distinguished Service  
South Dallas NAACP Youth Council  
Ike Smalls Award  
Dallas Cosmetology

Awards (continued)

YWCA Outstanding Woman  
Golden Apple (classroom teachers)  
Committee of 100  
Prairie View Alumni  
Prairie View Club  
Texas Conference NAACP  
Linz Award  
Mayor's Award  
Woman of the Year Club (Florence Brooks)  
Dallas Times Herald News Maker (1967-75)  
Dallas Times Herald Honor Roll (5 years)  
Four Invitations to the White House  
Scholarships to workshops  
    University of Oklahoma  
    University of the Americas in Pueblo, Mexico  
1976 Dallas Independent School District Award  
1976 Humane Award--Beta Nu Sigma Sorority  
1976 Tremont Older Achievers Hall of Fame Award

Printed in Register to the Juanita Craft Collection, Texas/Dallas History and Archives Collection, Dallas Public Library, Dallas, Texas.

## Appendix B

### Eva McMillan Biographical Sketch

#### Personal:

Born in Bradford, Tennessee, 1921. Moved to North Dallas, Texas at eight years of age where she graduated high school. Later moved to South Dallas. Served as clerk of her district's polling place, carrying out voter registration and collecting poll tax. Officially joined civil rights movement in 1968 as a supporter of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee [SNCC]. Mother of four, grandmother of eight, and great-grandmother of one.

#### Memberships:

People United for Justice for Prisoners [PUJP]  
Anti-Death Coalition  
Citizens for Human Dignity  
Black Women's United Front [BWUF]  
BWUF Food Co-op  
Anti-Klan Coalition  
Comanche 3 Movement  
Ida Delany Defense Committee  
CURE--prison reform

#### Boards:

Southern Christian Educational Fund--later served as President  
Operation Freedom

Cited from her own notes, 1997.

## Appendix C

### Yvonne Ewell Biographical Sketch

#### Education:

Attended high school in Frankston, TX. Received Bachelor of Arts degree from Prairie View A&M College and Masters of Arts degree from the University of Colorado at Boulder. Presented with Honorary Doctor of Laws by Bishop College.

#### Professional:

Began teaching career in Ladonia, Texas. Moved to Dallas, Texas in 1954. Served as teacher and later as principle at Phyllis Wheatley and Lincoln Elementary. Appointed to Elementary Education Consultant; Director, Secondary Reading; Director, Ethnic Studies, Deputy Assistant Superintendent, Instruction; Assistant Superintendent, East Oak Cliff; Associate Superintendent, East Oak Cliff; Monitor, School Desegregation and Planner, Townview Magnet Center.

#### Memberships and Committees.

Dallas Black Chamber of Commerce  
Dallas County Community Action  
Greater Dallas Community of Churches  
Mayor's Task Force on Criminal Justice  
American Cancer Society  
Texas Advisory Committee  
U.S. Commission on Civil Rights  
Munger Avenue Baptist Church

#### Boards:

Dallas Independent School District, Board of Trustees  
YWCA National Board  
National Board of the National Council of Negro Women  
Park and Recreation Board of the City of Dallas  
NSBA Council of Urban Boards of Education  
Dallas Museum of Art  
KERA Public Television, Board of Directors  
Mothers Against Teen Violence

#### Awards:

Black Texas Women  
Winegarten 150 Most Influential, Daughters of Dallas  
Dallas Times Herald, 1990 Distinguished Alumni Citation Award

NAACP, First Annual National Distinguished Service Award  
Woman of the Year, South Dallas Business and Professional Women's  
Trailblazer Award  
Sojourner Truth Award  
Texas Black Women Hall of Fame, 1986  
International Who's Who of Intellectuals  
Who's Who of American Women  
Southeast Dallas Business and Professional Women  
First Annual Dream Maker's Award, Zonata Club of Dallas  
Forty-Fourth Annual Service Award, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.  
Outstanding Delta, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.  
Dallas Black Chamber of Commerce Community Service Award  
and African-American Award  
Interdenominational Ministers' Award

Cited from Yvonne Ewell, personal letter to author, 1 March 1998.

VITA

Stefanie Lee Gilliam

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: MAMA, ACTIVIST, AND FRIEND: AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN DALLAS, TEXAS, 1945-1998.

Major Field: History

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Odessa, Texas, on April 5, 1973, the daughter of Patrick and Sharon Gilliam.

Education: Graduated from Borger High School, Borger, Texas in May 1991; received Bachelor of Arts degree in English and History from Texas Christian University, Ft. Worth, Texas, in December, 1995. Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts degree with a major in History at Oklahoma State University in July 1998.

Experience: Employed by Oklahoma State University, Department of History as a graduate teaching assistant from 1996 to 1998.

Professional Memberships: Phi Alpha Theta, Phi Kappa Phi.