

**John Phillip Crawford, Sr.**  
**May 17, 1929 – April 3, 1996**

Former assistant Texas State Attorney General John Phillip Crawford, Sr. was born in Chicago, Illinois, on May 17, 1929 and passed away on April 3, 1996, at the age of 66. He was educated in the public schools of Texarkana, Texas, attended Prairie View A&M University and graduated from Southern University.

Mr. Crawford earned his Juris Doctor (J.D.) Degree at The University of Texas School of Law in 1957. A patriotic American, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant and faithfully served his country in the Korean War for 16 months with the United States Army Second Infantry Division. Mr. Crawford was awarded the National Defense Service Medal, the Korean Service Medal, the Combat Infantry Badge, and the United Nations Service Medal.

John Phillip Crawford, Sr. was the first African American to be admitted to the Travis County Junior Bar Association. He later became a member of the Travis County State Bar Association and the State Bar of Texas. J. Phillip Crawford was an active member and officer of NAACP's Austin branch who encouraged his friend, Volma Overton, to take over the presidency of the Austin branch.

Overton, in the summer of 1963, found the Austin NAACP taking part in the integration of the Bastrop State Park, just thirty-two miles east of Austin, because of the numerous complaints received of discrimination from individuals in outlying communities. J. Phillip Crawford, Austin branch NAACP Attorney, wrote a letter concerning the situation to Mr. Weldon Berry, Attorney-at-law in Houston, informing him "of the desire of the Austin Branch to investigate, negotiate, and settle or litigate the rights of African Americans to utilize the facilities of Bastrop State Park at Bastrop, Texas. This matter has been brought to our attention by several African American persons who have attempted, but were refused utilization of the golf course." Later that summer, history was made when Volma and several fellow golfers, drove members of his Boy Scout Troup #70 to Bastrop State Park. They became the first African Americans to successfully integrate Bastrop State Park facilities without being asked to leave because of their race.

Ms. Dana Jean Smith, a May 1962 graduate of Anderson High School in Austin, attempted to enroll in to Southwest Texas State College (now, Texas State University). She was academically qualified to apply for admission but, in a letter dated June 22, 1962, the President of Southwest Texas State College (SWTC), Dr. John G. Flowers, indicated that her application had been rejected because of the

whites only provision in the charter which established the college in 1899 did not allow him to admit someone of her "racial background." President Flowers also informed Ms. Smith that only an act of the State Legislature or a court order could make it possible for the college to admit her and other students.

J. Phillip Crawford, in law practice with Virgil C. Lott for several years, was retained by Daniel Smith; Ms. Smith's father, to file a complaint against the college on his daughter's behalf, alleging that the college's whites only admissions policy abrogated rights granted to her under the United States Constitution. In August 1962, Crawford filed suit No. 1305 in the U.S. District in Austin, Texas. Donations were collected by the Gay Paree Club to assist Mr. Smith with the legal expenses. Crawford's class action suit was intended to make educational opportunities available at SWTC not only to his client, but to all qualified African Americans. Defendants in the suit included the President of the college, Dr. John G. Flowers, Registrar Clem Jones, and the Board of Regents. Assistant Attorney General Scranton Jones represented the defendants.

On Monday, at approximately at 2:30 p.m., February 4, 1963, the Federal District Court ordered for Southwest Texas State College to open its doors to Ms. Smith ending segregation. In CIVIC ACTION NO. 1305, Styled Dana Jean Smith, Minor et al, V. John Garland Flowers, President, Southwest Texas State College, et al, The Honorable Ben H. Rice, Presiding Judge stated, "IT IS ORDERED, ADJUDGED AND DECREED that the defendant forthwith admit and enroll the said Plaintiff, Dana Jean Smith, to said Southwest Texas State College, and to the utilization and participation in all of the educational facilities of the said Southwest Texas State College on the same basis as all others entitled thereto."

As reported in a February 8, 1963 *Capital City Argus February 7, 1963* article, "On that same day, February 4, 1963 by 3:15 p.m., Dana Jean Smith was enrolled that afternoon for the Spring Semester at Southwest Texas State College. "The law of the land having been enunciated by the Court, compliance was immediate, complete and without fanfare. Since the Southwest Texas State College was a state supported school, it was ordered to open its doors to Ms. Smith." With the ruling of this civil case, it helped other African American students in similar situations to be able to enroll.

In July of 1963, John Phillip Crawford was hired by Texas State Attorney General Waggoner Carr, and became Texas' first African American Assistant Attorney General. From scrapbook (2): 5/30/60-8/6/66, *Carr, Waggoner (Briscoe Center for American History)*, which contains one of only three clippings from May 1960 to November 1962, the article mentions about the new appointment of J. Phillip Crawford. "As mentioned in a June 29, 1963, *Houston Post* article, "Atty Gen Carr Names First Negro Assistant," concerns the appointment of J. Phillip Crawford, a

1957 graduate of the University of Texas Law School, to the position of Assistant Attorney General in the state and county affairs section of the department.” Noted for his excellence and dedication to his work, Assistant Attorney General Crawford had numerous responsibilities, including keeping the Attorney General and the Governor advised about all bills in the United States Congress and all federal court decisions which might affect Texas.

Energetic and enthusiastic, John Crawford earned the respect and friendship of his colleagues. On August 10, 1967, Volma Overton, President of the Austin NAACP, wrote a letter to the Office of Economic Opportunity in Washington, D.C., concerning “a number of complaints of unequal distribution of employment in the administrative staff of the Gary Job Corp Training Center San Marcos, Texas, with the respect to African Americans.” This letter pointed out the disparity between whites and African Americans in policy-making and administrative positions: “The opinion of the Austin NAACP is that more African Americans should be employed in the administrative positions and that these corrections be made immediately ...” While serving as Assistant Attorney General and a result of the NAACP’s complaint, John Crawford was appointed Center Director. He worked for Gary Job Corp until he returned to private practice in 1972. J. Phillip Crawford retired from practicing law in 1987 and also retired from the U.S. Army Reserve with the rank of Colonel.

He married Bettye Raphael Crawford on May 22, 1958, and the devoted couple made a warm home for their two children, Phillicia Yvette Crawford and John Phillip Crawford, Jr. A gentleman of strong convictions and unwavering faith, Crawford was a longtime member of Saint James Episcopal Church in Austin, where he served on the Bishop's Committee. He believed in giving something back to his community, Crawford served with the Capitol Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America and he supported all activities that created a better environment in order to unify people. Attorney Crawford leaves a legacy of compassion and commitment to the Austin community and the State of Texas that will be remembered with gratitude by all those who knew and loved him.

