

**The Project in Interpreting the Texas Past
Dr. Martha Norkunas, Project Director**

**African American Texans
Oral History Project**

Interviewee: Berl Handcox

Interviewer: Rick Taylor

Date of Interview: February 23, April 5, 2004

Place: Mr. Handcox' residence, 5202 Rambling Range, Austin

Recording Format: Digital audio tape (reformatted to compact disc)
(Audio clips accompanying these text passages are also saved in: .wav, .aif, and .rm)

Questions developed by Rick Taylor, Spring, 2004

Teacher Questions

1) Race and Local Politics

How was race a factor in Austin City Council decisions?

Audio running time - 2:40

RT: So I get the impression that race was only one factor for you as a City Council person? And it wasn't even necessarily the overriding factor?

BH: I think race for me was the overriding factor. I wanted to be professional about it, I wanted to be honest about it. I wanted honesty in my deliberations with myself and others. I'm not one to believe because all Blacks and all issues if it's Black, you're right on all issues. I don't subscribe to that theory at all. No, you know, and somebody's got to say it when you find it to be different, to that Black person who wanted to be a certain way and I can't go along with that. And I don't think, you know, I don't think anyone can, really. I think most

people who can do things like that, or say things like that, are people who's not running for anything, and who's just on the sideline making a lot of noise. Ruff – ruff – ruff, woof – woof – woof. You know, because when you have to, these kind of things happen in families. You don't always agree with your brother, or even your mother. And you may [laughs] relinquish your position, and let your mother prevail, even though you don't agree with her. That's human nature. And for everybody out there to agree with me, everybody "in East Austin," or everyone Black to agree with me, no, that's not realistic. That's not going to happen. But I'm not going to agree with them either. And since I got to have the vote, then I've got to make the statement for myself, and I've got to sleep well at night, regardless to who I've offended. If I've done the right thing, then I think, I can manage the rest of it, if I think I've done the right thing. Now, with another set of circumstances, I may have done something differently. But that's not the case. I have to deal with these circumstances, including race, today, now.

2) Activism

What did it mean to be an activist?

Audio running time – 1:40

RT: Do you, or did you consider yourself an activist?

BH: Somewhat, yeah. I'd like to think that I could be a fox, and an activist. I could be a sneaky activist.

RT: How's that?

BH: Well, I could do it best in convincing people to try to see it my way if it's one on one. I don't think you have to be in the middle of the pit with a loud voice to be an activist. You can do that sometimes better, I mean, actually, when I think about it, kind of like on the big scene, on the national scene, you got all these quote, unquote, lobbyists? You don't see them on the floor, raising hell. You invite somebody to a cocktail party, or to your house, or to a fishing trip, or hunting trip, or whatever turns them on, where you can bend their ear one on one, and try to get your point across. Are you an activist for doing so? I think so, if you can be successful in doing. You don't have to be loud and rude and obnoxious to be an activist, I don't think. And that's the road I would travel.