

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

**African American Texans  
Oral History Project**

**Interviewee:** Dorothy McPhaul

**Interviewer:** Amber Abbas

**Date of Interview:** February 21, February 28, April 7, 2005

**Place:** Mrs. McPhaul's home 1708 32<sup>nd</sup> Street Austin, Texas

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**Transcriber:** Amber Abbas

Questions developed by Erin Murphy, Summer, 2006

**Teacher Questions**

**1) Kinship Relations and Race**

**What kind of relationship did Dorothy McPhaul have with the families her mother worked for in the 1930s and 1940s? How did these relationships shape her view of racism and how she acted towards segregated establishments?**

**Running Time: 6 min 23 sec**

DM: I had a good lifetime. When I was small my mother worked for the best people. They didn't have any children so I was their baby. And I had a chance to go places where a lot of Blacks never went because they would carry me everywhere they went. They'd carry me to the movies, they'd carry me to the

operas, they'd carry me shopping. They bought my clothes from Neiman Marcus. They loved me but my mother, they sent my mother to school, but my mother loved them. My mother took care of them until they passed. Because they were so used to eating mother's food, Mother would take their food by the week and they'd put it and the people that worked for them at that time would fix that, you know, just warm it up. And just [share?] their supplies. And Mother took care of them, she loved them from the time, and I loved them.

AA: But she had not been a cook in their home, she'd been cooking for their business?

DM: She cooked in their home. This was a, these were private individuals.

AA: Okay, okay

DM: Uh, huh. It was the Ludecks and the Moores and the Northrups. So she worked for all of them.

AA: Tell me, tell me more about what it was like growing up here and what it was like with your family?

DM: Well, now with my family, we're a real close knit family. Family was first. That was the number one, regardless of what the family member did, how the family member progressed. Whenever one family member was down, the next one helped them up. And we always helped one another. If you would go somewhere and see something that one family member might like you'd always try and get it for them. As far as, when one family member couldn't pay a bill, another family member would get together and pay that bill. We've always been a closely knit family. And my grandmother made sure that all the family members stayed together. We had meals, big family meals every Christmas we'd have family dinners. Every, like first, my grandmother's birthday. Everybody would have a big meal on her birthday. On Thanksgiving we'd have a family gathering. It'd be family gatherings and friends. And this would be not just for our family, it'd be close friends and at that time it was, and that was when there was a lot of prejudices going on, we'd have Whites and Blacks. Cause we, we had close friends in all races.

AA: Do you think that Austin was, I mean, was it friendly to that? Or did people look twice when you did that? I guess that's what I'm trying to ask.

DM: Well see, when I was coming up it didn't affect me that much for the simple reason that the people my mother exposed me, that my mother worked for exposed me to so much so I really didn't see the prejudice part because they

would tell me, "Dorothy, never think about race because all of us the same and we love you. Only things different between us is our skin color." So actually, they wouldn't let me, because they kept me while my mother worked.

AA: Okay, I wondered about that.

DM: Yeah, see, they kept me, mother was young. They kept me, they kept me while my mother did their work. I was just like a part, I didn't know what race I was! I knew I didn't have to fear anything so I really wasn't exposed to a lot of that. And I'm going to tell what, what it did though. By not knowing, knowing any different and being able to go regardless whether it was White or Black. Now my mother never felt that because they was denied access to different places but I wasn't. So I don't know that thing. Now the first time that that came to my realization was in '57. When I first started working in La Grange. Okay? On some of the stores they had fountains where it was "Colored Only," "Whites Only." Well, with me, I just ignored that! I wouldn't let it, I just go and drink me some water, didn't care, no one never stopped me. And I think it wasn't so much, those were signs that had never been removed. And then one time I had an allergy, a sinus allergy [sudden noise] and I had to go to the doctor. Well, in the front of the doctor's office was Whites only. To the back it was Colored. So you go into, but I never would let myself go in through that back entrance. I went right in through the front, sit down with the regular customers and nothing

was ever said, never. And I think it was those signs and those habits had been there so long that they just went along with the program. They just didn't think of no other way but they was always used to going to the back so they always continued. By me coming in town not knowing any better, I just went in, in through the front because I just, just didn't want to go to the back.

## 2) Race, Racism, and African American Business Owners I

**What were Ms. McPhaul's family's experiences as African American antique dealers in the first part of the century in Austin, Texas? How did her father acquire some of his pieces? What problems does Ms. McPhaul run into even today? How does she respond to these experiences?**

**Running Time: 7 min 33 sec**

AA: Did you ever, or did your grandfather or anyone ever have problems being a Black business owner in Austin?

DM: Yeah! A lot, a lot of problems!

AA: Because in 1918 there couldn't have been too many--

DM: Oh, of course it was, but I tell you what, even though there were a lot of people, see, like Papa, they would buy cheap. Now, regardless whether you're Black or whatever color, if you have something good that's cheap, and you're getting more, way more than your money, it didn't make any difference what

race you was, see? So that's the way Papa started his business. He could find it cheap, he'd sell it cheap. Plus, he worked it different, you know, you had to work at, this was just his love of selling. But yeah, he had a hard time, he had a hard time. But I think the way Papa and my auntie overcame that is having good merchandise at cheap prices. You know you could find it, you could buy it cheap. You could get, there's a lot of people would even give stuff. But it was people's antiques, you understand. Plus you go in at sales and things and buy. Within the Black community there was antiques because a lot of times, you know, when you worked on a job, a lot of times they would give Blacks a lot of their antiques. You know?

AA: Like the rugs that your mother got?

DM: Like the rugs, like furniture that they no longer wanted. They would give it to their maids and glassware and stuff that they no longer wanted they would give to the maids. So that's how a lot of stuff came up.

AA: It stayed in the community.

DM: It stayed in the community. And that's the way we mostly bought at that time, was from Blacks that no longer wanted it either. You see, and didn't know what they had. It was just like in the period that the furniture was made of and

antiques are structured so much better than modern, to me! You have skill in antiques, it's man made. You know, it wasn't factory. When automation came in, everything factory made, well, most antique pieces are handmade with love and patience, you see? Where now they just send it through a machine (laughs).

AA: Right, right, everything looks the same...

DM: Everything looks the same. You have reproductions and stuff but it can never take the place of antiques. You can tell right away. I can tell. So yeah, we've had a hard time. And right now you have a hard time.

AA: Really?

DM: Yeah! For the simple reason sometimes, and I know I have good merchandise. And sometimes just by me being a Black, having real nice merchandise, they just as soon, I can have, let's take this picture. I can have this picture for, I might have it for, let's say a hundred twenty-five dollars. Another picture a person might have, a Caucasian might have this same piece and her piece might be two hundred and some-odd dollars. With the same signatures and the same things, they as soon buy it from that person than buy it from, from me. Yeah!

AA: That doesn't make any sense! (laughs)

DM: It doesn't make any, it doesn't make any sense but it's a reality. And with me, everybody want to know, "Where do you find this stuff?" and a lot of times, it all depends on how the children was raised. If they was raised under prejudices, they'll be prejudiced. And a lot of times they'll just look at, once they find out, I can. Look here, a good example: if I invite you to my booth, and you and I are sitting in my booth, we'll have customers come in, and rather than come to me, asking me about, "Let me see something," (snaps her fingers) Every time they'll ask, they would ask you!

AA: You think so?

DM: I know so! Because a Black can't have this. (laughs) I have it all the time! Because see I have many, many friends, you know, that doesn't, doesn't care anything about, and myself, it never, it never bothers me. Now, now I'll let you know that it never bothers me, for the simple reason all of my life, I've been around all different races and the people that my mother worked for would always tell me, "Jean, you never look at race or color or anything. You have the same," You know, she'd, I love her. A lot of my values come from the people that my mother worked for. Because they said race is not a issue with anything. You make it an issue. You see? So I respect each other's, each person's rights to

believe the way they want to believe. If you don't like Blacks, that's your business. I still respect you as a person. You understand what I'm saying? So I wasn't born in slavery, so I don't have anything to worry about any of that. Uh-huh. And I like a person for who they are, not for the color of any skin tone or anything. And I think the majority of my customers that know me like me for myself, regardless of what race. Because most of the shows that we do, it's mostly it's mostly one Black dealer, or maybe two or three dealers, Blacks.

AA: Out of hundreds ...

DM: Out of hundreds. And when we first started it used to be only just us in this show. And it never made any difference because everyone accepted us as dealers. You see. So, I just, if you start thinking about race you'll never get anywhere. You can't dwell on what's happened. You just have to better yourself and accept everything and have God on your side. That's all I can say.

### **3) Race, Racism and African American Business Owners II**

**According to Ms. McPhaul, why are so few African Americans interested in antiques and the antique business? Why weren't Ms. McPhaul and her family discouraged? What is Ms. McPaul's attitude toward objects associated with painful periods in the past? Why is it important to remember and discuss the difficult parts of history?**

**Running Time: 8 min**

AA: Now, do you think that's specific to the antique business? That it's not a business that a lot of Black folks want to go into? How do you explain that?

DM: I explained it, because, I really, they think it's, first thing they think antiques is real expensive and hard to buy. And you have to spend a lot, it's a lot of money to even get started in. I think that's one of the bad stigma. Another is a lot of Blacks have been around old stuff so much that they, they don't want to be around it anymore. That's another stigma because Blacks get rid of a lot of good stuff. Okay, and the third stigma I'd say, would be that its hard, hard work. It's not a easy job. You have to love it. And that might cut out a lot of people because it's so much to learn in the business. Okay? And that, just the interest. When they come to the shows they don't see, see hardly any Blacks so they think it might be just only for Whites.

AA: Right, and you've been in it for so long, that you're just a part of it.

DM: I've never known, I'm a part of it! Because you see, just think, I've never been disadvantaged, even as a kid when times were hard. So I knew no difference in White and Black. Because even though those stigmas was out there and those prejudices was out there and those Blacks and White signs only was out there I never was a part of it because they carried me everywhere they wanted to go. I went everywhere they wanted to go, Black or White. If they had

a White child, this little Black baby was with her White. And they didn't because of there was money there. So and it's good I was raised up like that because I know no color, I've never been prejudiced in my life. I treat every individual as an individual. If I have a falling out and dislike, it's not because of race, it's just maybe a personal thing. You understand what I'm saying? And my friends, they know me so well, if I want to talk about this person over here, and she happen to be a Caucasian that's alright. If she want to talk about this Black because and don't have to slight me, she can do it because we're friends we can do it, we have freedom to speak the way we want to speak. Why would we want to have to be so intimidated to say things? So we, we just, we just, I don't care about Black jokes. You can tell as many Black jokes because I know Black and White jokes. You see? So, nothing has ever intimidated me or made me feel bad.

I can remember one time having a display. You know how they used to portray the little Black kids with little pickaninnies all over their heads, and I mean black as my shoes? And a lot of Blacks would just hate to see that. "How can you have so-and-so-and-so?" And I said, "Look here, look at that picture and look at you. Do you look like that?" So, you take the image the way you want it. I said, "That's just the way they used to portray." I said, "You know that's a part of your history, that you've always been portrayed. So you know you've never been like that so why would it hurt you?" Plus it's a part of history! I collect, I've got a lot of little pickaninny Black babies. And I love them! And a lot of

Blacks, that's what they collect. So why would you, you, feel hurt because you see it.

I had, let me see, one other thing, I had a German swastika and I had a letter opener with a German thing. I had quite a few German memorabilia in my case.

And this time, we was doing a show at, it was at, what's that? Baytown?

Lakeline Mall! We was doing a show at Lakeline Mall. This was on the Jewish holiday, I think. And this young man came over and he saw those things in my case and he had a fit. Oh, he threw a fit about me having those. And was loud and was fast going, "Why would you have so-and-so-and-so-and-so?" And I said, "Look here, young man," I said, "These things is a part of history. How can you erase history?" I said, "Even though you didn't have any part, you might not like anything," I said, "But that's a part of history. Even the things that you dislike is a part of history." I say, "History can't be erased. These things will be somewhere else regardless of whether I have them in my case or not." So, that's the only incident that I've had with that one, but he come out, I told him, "No, I won't remove this." I said, "Because people are looking for historical facts.

History can't be erased, it can be added on to. But it can't be erased. I say, "You're not a part of this. And you're standing here. Did you endure any of those things that happened during the part that you hate so? So that's a part of your background. That's not a part of what you, you're not enduring it now."

AA: Right. Just like slavery.

DM: Yeah, that's right, that's right. You can't, just like, yesterday, everything that happened yesterday is a part of our history, you know. So, how can we erase what happened yesterday? We can't. We can make it better. If we made a mistake yesterday, like if you, you had a test yesterday and flunked it, you had a chance to make it over again today, you going, you going, what?

AA: Do your best.

DM: Do your best to correct that which you did yesterday. Because that's there. That's gone. Forgotten. Past. So that's what we have to do in this day. We have to, we can remember what happened to add onto our heritage but go forward because we know how much we've accomplished. And that our battle is still not over because everyday should bring about some type of accomplishments you've made. That's what you should do, too.

#### **4) Brown v. Board of Education, Desegregation and Integration of Schools**

**What were Ms. McPhaul's experiences as a teacher after Broad v. Board of Education? What did she ask for when she started teaching at her new school? What did she ask of her students? What rules did she have for parents?**

**Running Time: 7 min 8 sec**

AA: Now when you started in La Grange, in 1957, that was right, just three years after the desegregation of the schools in 1954.

DM: Right, that's right.

AA: So did you notice in that, because I thought about this this weekend, did you see any of the effects of that desegregation? Or how was it working in La Grange?

DM: Well, in La Grange at the time, they had, well I first started working in a all Black school, okay. Three years when that period came in where they was going integrate the schools they picked out so many teachers. In fact, from our school they picked out three teachers. There was myself, well no, actually two teachers. It was myself and another teacher. So I went over to the other school. Alright, now, when I went over to the other school.

AA: You went over to the White school?

DM: To the white school. Well, then the Black school was, at that time, closed down. They closed it down the next year, closed it completely down. And all the students went to the other school. There was, it was, it was hard sometimes

for those kids to get along because the Black kids had a little prejudice and the white kids had a little prejudice.

AA: Because they'd never been exposed to each other.

DM: Because they'd never been exposed to each other. Okay, now with me, when I went over knowing, the way I was brought up everybody was equal, well my superintendent, I can always remember with him he was a little prejudiced. But I'm going to tell you he appreciated me because when he asked me what, what do I expect to accomplish at that school and I told him, "One thing I expect to be treated fairly and just like I'm a teacher. No race involved." I'm one of his teachers. I want to be given credit just like everyone else for doing the work that I perform. And I didn't want to be made any different no "Black here," "First Black" or nothing like that. I wanted to be treated as an individual just like he would treat, well he appreciated that. Plus all the teachers, regardless Black and White was afraid of the superintendent! With the exception of me! I figured he was a man just like I was a woman. And I would look him in his eyes and tell him just what I thought, ask him verbatim. So he respected me as an individual. So I never had any personal, because I've always been a friendly type person, but yet still, I'm not going to let you walk over me like I'm a mat. That's one thing I learned from the people my mother worked for. "Jean, you don't have to take anything from anyone! As long as you're doing your job, and doing your job

well, you don't have anything to worry about. And you have to gain respect, you have to demand respect." And those words stuck in my mind all the time and that's the way I succeeded in school because there was no one that didn't like me.

Now, the students, when I first started, now, some of the, well the Black students already knew me. Now some of the White students would tell me, like, if I would give some things, that they wasn't going to do it. But I soon wiped them pronto--put a stop from that. Because I had to gain, if I couldn't get the students' respect, me as a Black teacher, then I'd just as soon quit, and I wasn't going to let that happen. Like I would tell them, my students, "Now when I look at you, I don't see any color at all. I just see a bunch of students in a classroom. Number One: I am the teacher. Number Two: They are the students." And that was the end of that! You can ask, you see all of my students come up now, they'd be, I can't go anywhere without all of my students, and all of my students liked me a lot. Whites and Blacks. And they called me, they used to call me the mean teacher! (laughs) I don't know why, because I was strict. I always believed that where there was a lot of noise and confusion and playing in the classroom there was no learning taking place. So when you walk in my classroom, you walk into a classroom. Kids had fun, but there was no hanky-panky at all. I let the kids, I respected them as students. Now just because I'm a teacher I wouldn't infringe your student rights. Now that's another thing that I got respect for because I would never, I'd never make any differences in my children. That was number

one, no differences at all. Whether you was a slow learner or whether you was above expectation. I never make any differences in my children because I didn't want that, because see that'll come back on you. Every student, White and Black knew that I was fair. I had the parents even behind me. All, both, both races didn't, they liked me. And if I had one prejudiced, I remember I had one prejudiced father come in, and oh, he was really, really up and at 'em. But by the time we finished, I had him on my side. I told him number one: I'm not going to let him walk over me. Number two: I'm going to give him and treat his kids with all the needs that I saw possible to bring him up to his expectations. And number three: he had to follow through. We could communicate together and we could find out the correct means for a situation but I wasn't going to abuse his kid nor was I going to let him abuse me. So we got to be real good friends, and he, and that went on a long time.

#### **5) Race, Racism, and African American Business Owners: Austin During Segregation**

**Ms. McPaul came from a long line of antique dealers. Her grandfather, her aunt Teresa, and her mother were all in the business. How did her grandfather address issues of discrimination? How has the antique district changed in Austin? How have location and taxes directly effected this change?**

**Running Time: 8 min 28 sec**

AA: So did she have a separate shop from Theresa's shop?

DM: Well, no. Well, at that time Theresa was already in business because she had taken over. After my grandfather passed she took completely over that shop on Red River. Well, adjacent to her shop, she built another little part of it on the side so my mother could have her shop there. So that's how the two sisters had their shops. Now, Red River today is nothing like it was then. Because it was, at that time it was only my auntie's shop on one corner and the old bakery was still there, but no Brackenridge Hospital, there were no concert, symphony buildings on that street, there were no parks or anything because where the park is, that's where our shop was.

AA: Waterloo Park.

DM: That's right. That's where the shop was. And at that time there used to be Victoria's Antiques which is really, really highly known, too. She was a lady that had fine antiques also. And at the time, you remember the time when they had that, that, at the Tower when they had the sniper? Was shooting? Well, at that time I was keeping the shop.

AA: You were right there!

DM: Right there! And we could've gotten shot! Mmmm, hmm. So going back to that time and we have old pictures of Red River, what it used to be. But that's

how my mother got started. That, that would've been, my auntie was the second generation in antiques, and just like I was telling you, all those houses up around the Capitol and around the Governor's mansion and all those old houses over there, a lot of those antiques and things came from our shop! And there are stories of people where they used to, my grandfather, to get fine antiques, when he would go to the house to take them antiques or buy stuff. To keep him from coming in and buying stuff from in the house, they would set a table outside, but he would always carry something that he knew that they wanted, to get inside the house to buy something (both laugh). So we would buy the stuff that they had outside, plus he would get something inside also (both laugh). So he was a, a, shrewd, and everybody around the county called him Simon. And so he's known and Theresa took over his business. But my auntie, first she was going, mother was going to start in just used stuff because see we was all raised up in antiques. I just know antiques now.

AA: I know that the city of Austin didn't always make that very easy.

DM: No. They don't. They don't. You have a hard time being a small business in Austin. Because in the first place, the taxes is too high, in fact you can't afford the insurances hardly on the business! And it's tax over tax. Just like, okay now, when, when, just like take Red River, okay? That was a productive street where hundreds, thousands of people enjoyed that location of antique shops. Allright,

now they changed that, they took all that property for a park where hardly no one goes to. So they killed a part of history when they did away with Red River. What they should've done was to maybe have them to upgrade the shops and refine that area and kept that a part of history, because it dates way back. And you talk with any elderly person here in Austin and even some of the ones that's like in their sixties, they remember Red River. And mostly all of them can, their parents can tell you about Red River. Where, you see? So they should've just revamped that place. So now they have a few clubs on one end, which they could've had clubs on Sixth Street. You see? So, to me they just destroyed a part of history. Where they should've upgraded that, because they had antique dealers, it was convenient for the people to go on one street, they could go from one antique shop to the other, to the other. And if you notice, a lot of these different cities and towns are doing it like that.

AA: Sure.

DM: Having the whole street, well see, that's been destroyed.

AA: Wow.

DM: Now they've started on Congress, you know, the far end of Congress they have one little, but it's nothing like Red River. There's maybe seven or eight shops where Red River was all antiques.

AA: Do you think most of the businesses on Red River were White owned or Black owned businesses?

DM: It was mixed. There was two Blacks and all the rest Whites. And they got along good. You know they traded with, you know, from dealer to dealer. We are our best customers (laughs). So it's just, buying from one another. Because see, you have something, they might have something that your customers and clientele want, so you buy from them. And that's a part of history that I think the City of Austin kind of destroyed. And I just don't know. And the taxes are so horrible, I mean you pay, okay, (sigh) you'll pay, just like on, you pay tax on your merchandise. Well, you have the same merchandise every year. Before long, the city owns the merchandise because you've already paid for it! You see? Pay taxes on your merchandise, pay taxes on the property, this is every year. Plus you have a Controller's tax to stay in business. And then on that, you have to, that's on everything you buy and sell where, whereas they've already taxed that, your merchandise, so it's another tax on what you sell! They've taxed it oh, so many, it's the same merchandise over and over and over again. The Controller's is what you sell, they don't tax what you bought, but that's divided

out, but you've already paid tax on everything, you understand? So yeah, it's hard to stay in business. By the time you finish paying your taxes you can't hardly afford the fire insurance because the fire insurance is too, too much for businesses where you can't afford. So it is hard. It is hard. It is hard. Where every little thing with business has to be so sky high just because you're in business, you understand? Like, it's a hike up on everything. I just, it's hard. But we manage.