

THE NAACP: A CENTURY IN THE FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or NAACP, is America's oldest and largest civil rights organization. Founded in 1909, it was at the center of nearly every battle for the rights and dignity of African Americans in the twentieth century. Today, the NAACP honors its heritage of activism and continues to work for civil rights.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1895

Booker T. Washington delivers a speech at the opening of the Cotton States and International Exhibition in Atlanta, Georgia. This speech calls for a moderate approach to race relations, with an emphasis on gradual economic and social advancement for African Americans. After the speech, the scholar W.E.B. DuBois sends a note to congratulate Washington on the speech.

1909

A group of white activists, including the descendants of abolitionists, issues a call for a conference to protest discrimination and violence against African Americans. Some 60 people, seven of whom are African American, sign the call, which was released on the centennial of Lincoln's birth. The call leads to the first meeting of the National Negro Conference, held on May 31 and June 1, in New York City.

1910

The National Negro Conference adopts the name National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The organization names as president Moorfield Storey, a white constitutional lawyer and former president of the American Bar Association. W.E.B. DuBois is selected as the director of publications and research.

1916

The NAACP establishes an anti-lynching committee. In 1918 this committee releases the booklet *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1918*.

1917

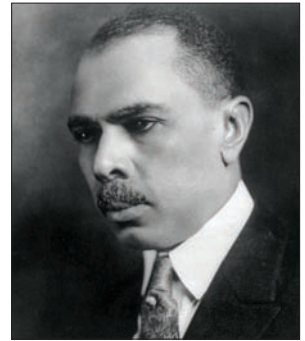
After a deadly race riot in East St. Louis, the NAACP organizes the Silent Protest March in New York, N.Y. Over 10,000 African American men, women and children march to the sound of muffled drums while marchers carry banners calling for justice and equal rights.

1918

Walter White, the Assistant Field Secretary of the NAACP, travels into the south and sends back reports on lynching and other violence against African Americans. Included in his reports are notes on the lynching of fifteen year old Sammie Smith in Nashville, Tennessee.

1920

James Weldon Johnson, the noted writer and diplomat, becomes the first African American to head the NAACP. Also this year the NAACP begins to fly a flag from its office with the words, "A Man Was Lynched Yesterday".



James Weldon Johnson
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/95517919/>

1929

NAACP celebrates its 20th anniversary at the annual conference in Cleveland. By this time, there are 325 branches across the country.

1931-1941

During the Great Depression, the NAACP begins to focus on economic justice.

Walter White, a friend and adviser to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, meets with her often in attempts to convince President Franklin D. Roosevelt to outlaw job discrimination.

1932

The NAACP sends staff to investigate complaints about the treatment of laborers working on the War Department's Mississippi River Flood Control Project. Their report on conditions there, *Mississippi River Slavery—1932*, is followed by a pay raise and shortened hours for many Mississippi levee camp laborers.

1935

Charles Hamilton Houston is named NAACP chief counsel. His strategy on school-segregation cases will pave the way for his protégé Thurgood Marshall to prevail in 1954's *Brown v. Board of Education*. One of the cases Houston will litigate is the case of Donald Murray, who in 1935 became the first African American student admitted to the University of Maryland law school.

1936

Walter White writes to the track and field star Jesse Owens to encourage him not to participate in the Olympics in Berlin. Owens decides to go to the Olympics, where he wins four gold medals.

1939

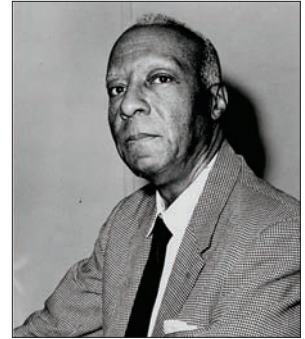
Marian Anderson performs at the Lincoln Memorial after being denied permission to sing at the Daughters of the American Revolution's (DAR) Constitution Hall. Eleanor Roosevelt resigns from the DAR in protest and helps arrange the concert on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

1941

The NAACP decides to support A. Philip Randolph's proposed mass March on Washington to protest discrimination in defense industries and armed forces.

1944

The NAACP has 430,000 members, the largest in the association's history. In the *Smith v. Allwright* voting rights case the Supreme Court states that Lonnie Smith of Houston, Texas, was illegally denied the right to vote in a 1940 primary election. Thurgood Marshall describes his work on this case in a detailed, and often humorous, memo with the subject "Saving the Race."



A. Philip Randolph
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97519529/>

1947

Harry S. Truman addresses the NAACP's thirty-eighth annual conference, in Washington, D.C. A year later he will sign two executive orders: One institutes fair employment practices in the federal government and the second directs the armed services to provide equality of treatment and opportunity to all personnel.

1954

In the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision the Supreme Court states unanimously that school segregation is unconstitutional.

1957

Daisy Bates, the president of the Arkansas State Conference of NAACP Branches, leads the fight to desegregate Arkansas schools. In September, Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, is integrated.

1970

The NAACP affirms its commitment to universal suffrage and begins work to amend the Voting Rights Act.

1989

NAACP holds a Silent March to protest U.S. Supreme Court decisions that have reversed many of the gains made against discrimination. This is modeled after the 1917 Silent Protest protesting against the East St. Louis riot.

2001

The NAACP joins a class action lawsuit against the state of Florida alleging voter irregularities in the 2000 presidential election.

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

The documents in this set can be used to help students explore the history of the NAACP and the many different struggles in which the organization participated. Study several items and discuss what can be learned from them about any of the following.

- Issues;
- Strategies the organization;
- Victories and setbacks;
- Motivations;
- Participants.

For any of the above, what changed over time? What questions do the items raise? Choose a specific time period reflected by materials in the set – what else was happening in the United States at that time? Write a letter responding to a letter, memo, or page of notes. You might comment on what the person wrote, ask the person questions, or reflect on how the person’s actions have influenced your life. Focus on a particular activity reflected in the materials. How would life be different for you if that activity had not occurred?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



NAACP: A Century in the Fight for Freedom

<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/Pages/Default.aspx>



From Slavery to Civil Rights: A Timeline of African American History

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/presentations/civil-rights/>



The African American Odyssey: A Quest for Full Citizenship

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aahtml/exhibit/aointro.html>



Civil Rights Themed Resources

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/themes/civil-rights/>

Civil Rights Resource Guide

<http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/civilrights/home.html>

PRIMARY SOURCES WITH CITATIONS



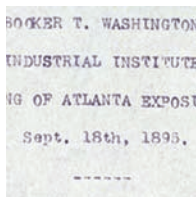
"Silent protest parade, 1917." Photograph. N.Y.: Underwood & Underwood, 1917. From Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog.

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3a34294>



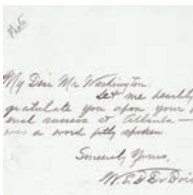
Batley, C.M. "Booker T. Washington." Photograph. 1917.

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3a26544>



Washington, Booker T. *Address by Booker T. Washington, At Opening of Atlanta Exposition.* Manuscript. September 18, 1895. From the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division *Booker T. Washington Papers*.

<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/prelude/ExhibitObjects/BookerTWashingtonSpeech.aspx>



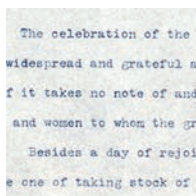
DuBois, W.E.B. *W.E.B. DuBois to Booker T. Washington.* Letter. September 24, 1895. From Library of Congress, Manuscript Division *Booker T. Washington Papers*.

<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/prelude/ExhibitObjects/DuBoisCongratulates.aspx>



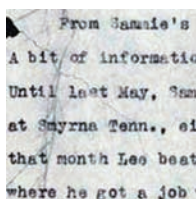
"William English Walling, a NAACP Founder." Photograph. [Between 1910 and 1936]. From Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division *NAACP Collection*.

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsca.23824>



Villard, Oswald Garrison. *"Call" for a National Conference to Address Racial Inequality.* Manuscript. February 1909. From Library of Congress, Manuscript Division *Roy Stannard Baker Papers*.

<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/earlyyears/ExhibitObjects/NationalConference.aspx>

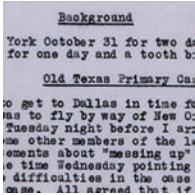


White, Walter. *Notes Concerning Lynching.* Manuscript. [1924]. From Library of Congress, Manuscript Division *NAACP Records*.

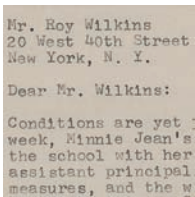
<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/newnegromovement/ExhibitObjects/InvestigationLynching.aspx>



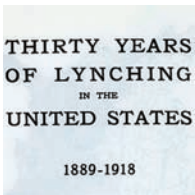
Cole, photographer. "NAACP Officials Celebrating Twentieth Anniversary." Photograph. June 26, 1929. From Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division *NAACP Collection*.
<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsca.05523>



Marshall, Thurgood. *Defending Voting Rights in Texas*. Memorandum. November 17, 1941. From Library of Congress, Manuscript Division *NAACP Records*.
<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/worldwarii/ExhibitObjects/DefendingVotingRightsTexas.aspx>



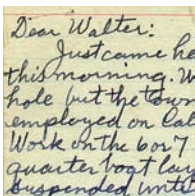
Bates, Daisy. *Daisy Bates to Roy Wilkins*. Letter. December 17, 1957. From Library of Congress, Manuscript Division *NAACP Records*.
<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/civilrightsera/ExhibitObjects/DaisyBatesLittleRockNine.aspx>



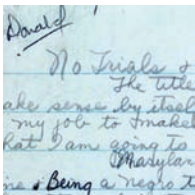
Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States. New York: National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, April 19, 1919. From Library of Congress, Manuscript Division *NAACP Records*.
<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/earlyyears/ExhibitObjects/ReportonLynching.aspx>



"Flag, announcing lynching." Photograph. [1936.] From Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division *NAACP Collection*.
<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3g04734>



Schulyer, George. George Schulyer to Walter White. Letter. December 23, [1932]. From Library of Congress, Manuscript Division *NAACP Records*. Wilkins, Roy. Roy Wilkins to Walter White. Letter. January 5, 1933. From Library of Congress, Manuscript Division *NAACP Records*.
<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/greatdepression/ExhibitObjects/MistreatmentofBlackWorkers.aspx>



Murray, Donald. *No Trial and Tribulations*. Manuscript. ca. 1936. From Library of Congress, Manuscript Division *NAACP Records*.
<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/greatdepression/ExhibitObjects/DonaldMurraysFirstDay.aspx>

My dear Mr. Owens:
Will you perm
that I read in the
to you saying that
games even if they
I trust you will n
the hope that this

I fully reali
to give up the tri

White, Walter. *Walter White to Jesse Owens*. Letter. December 4, 1935. From Library of Congress, Manuscript Division *NAACP Records*.

<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/greatdepression/ExhibitObjects/WalterWhitetoJesseOwens.aspx>



Marian Anderson singing at Lincoln Memorial. Photograph. World Wide Photo: April 9, 1939. From Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs *NAACP Collection*.

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsca.23838>

My dear Mrs. Roosevelt:
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Anderson concert on Sund
thrilling experiences of
marred it-- that you can
understand thoroughly th
OCEAN.

We were delight
yesterday in your statem
that if you were asked t
to present the Spingarn

Walter White. *Walter White to Eleanor Roosevelt*. Letter. April 12, 1939. From Library of Congress, Manuscript Division *NAACP Records*.

<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/greatdepression/ExhibitObjects/WalterWhitetoEleanorRoosevelt.aspx>



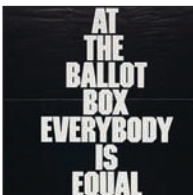
Randolph, A. Philip. *A. Philip Randolph to Walter White*. Letter. March 18, 1941. From Library of Congress, Manuscript Division *NAACP Records*.

<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/worldwarii/ExhibitObjects/Ideafor1941MassProtest.aspx>



"George E.C. Hayes, Thurgood Marshall, and James M. Nabrit, congratulating each other, following Supreme Court decision declaring segregation unconstitutional." Photograph. Associated Press: 1954. From Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division *New York World-Telegram & the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection*.

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c11236>



At the Ballot Box. Poster. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: [between 1970 and 1980]. From Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division *Yankee Poster Collection*.

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsca.19870>



NAACP's Symbolic Silent March. Poster. D.C. NAACP Branch: 1989. From Library of Congress, Manuscript Division *NAACP Records*.

<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/renewalofstruggle/ExhibitObjects/Flyerforthe1989SilentMarch.aspx>



Mfume, Kweisi. *Kweisi Mfume to Amy T. Billingsly*. Letter. January 30, 2001. From Library of Congress, Manuscript Division *NAACP Records*.

<http://myloc.gov/Exhibitions/naacp/towardsanewcentury/ExhibitObjects/RemovalofConfederateFlag.aspx>