The History of the NAACP

Founded February 12, 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest, largest and most widely recognized grassroots–based civil rights organization. Its more than half-million members and supporters throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, conducting voter mobilization and monitoring equal opportunity in the public and private sectors.

Founding group
The NAACP was formed partly in response to the continuing horrific practice of lynching and the 1908 race riot in Springfield, the capital of Illinois and resting place of President Abraham Lincoln. Appalled at the violence that was committed against blacks, a group of white liberals that included Mary White Ovington and Oswald Garrison Villard, both the descendants of abolitionists, William English Walling and Dr. Henry Moscowitz issued a call for a meeting to discuss racial justice. Some 60 people, seven of whom were African American (including W. E. B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells-Barnett and Mary Church Terrell), signed the call, which was released on the centennial of Lincoln's birth.


Echoing the focus of Du Bois' Niagara Movement began in 1905, the NAACP's stated goal was to secure for all people the rights guaranteed in the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the United States Constitution, which promised an end to slavery, the equal protection of the law, and universal adult male suffrage, respectively.
The NAACP's principal objective is to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality of minority group citizens of United States and eliminate race prejudice. The NAACP seeks to remove all barriers of racial discrimination through the democratic processes.

The NAACP established its national office in New York City in 1910 and named a board of directors as well as a president, Moorfield Storey, a white constitutional lawyer and former president of the American Bar Association. The only African American among the organization's executives, Du Bois was made director of publications and research and in 1910 established the official journal of the NAACP, The Crisis.

**The Crisis**

Du Bois founded The Crisis magazine as the premier crusading voice for civil rights. Today, The Crisis, one of the oldest black periodicals in America, continues this mission. A respected journal of thought, opinion and analysis, the magazine remains the official publication of the NAACP and is the NAACP's articulate partner in the struggle for human rights for people of color.

In time, The Crisis became a voice of the Harlem Renaissance, as Du Bois published works by Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen and other African American literary figures. The publication’s prominence would rise.

Now published quarterly, The Crisis is dedicated to being an open and honest forum for discussing critical issues confronting people of color, American society and the world in addition to highlighting the historical and cultural achievements of these diverse peoples.

In essays, interviews, in-depth reporting, etc., writers explore past and present issues concerning race and its impact on educational, economic, political, social, moral, and ethical issues. And, each issue is highlighted with a special section, "The NAACP Today" reporting the news and events of the NAACP on a local and national level.

**Growth**

With a strong emphasis on local organizing, by 1913 the NAACP had established branch offices in such cities as Boston, Massachusetts; Baltimore, Maryland; Kansas City, Missouri; Washington, D.C.; Detroit, Michigan; and St. Louis, Missouri.

Joel Spingarn, one of the NAACP founders, was a professor of literature and formulated much of the strategy that led to the growth of the organization. He was elected board chairman of the NAACP in 1915 and served as president from 1929-1939.
A series of early court battles, including a victory against a discriminatory Oklahoma law that regulated voting by means of a grandfather clause (Guinn v. United States, 1910), helped establish the NAACP’s importance as a legal advocate. The fledgling organization also learned to harness the power of publicity through its 1915 battle against D. W. Griffith’s inflammatory Birth of a Nation, a motion picture that perpetuated demeaning stereotypes of African Americans and glorified the Ku Klux Klan.

NAACP membership grew rapidly, from around 9,000 in 1917 to around 90,000 in 1919, with more than 300 local branches. Writer and diplomat James Weldon Johnson became the Association's first black secretary in 1920, and Louis T. Wright, a surgeon, was named the first black chairman of its board of directors in 1934.

The NAACP waged a 30-year campaign against lynching, among the Association's top priorities. After early worries about its constitutionality, the NAACP strongly supported the federal Dyer Bill, which would have punished those who participated in or failed to prosecute lynching mobs. Though the bill would pass the U.S. House of Representatives, the Senate never passed the bill, or any other anti-lynching legislation. Most credit the resulting public debate—fueled by the NAACP report “Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1919”—with drastically decreasing the incidence of lynching.

Johnson stepped down as secretary in 1930 and was succeeded by Walter F. White. White was instrumental not only in his research on lynching (in part because, as a very fair-skinned African American, he had been able to infiltrate white groups), but also in his successful block of segregationist Judge John J. Parker's nomination by President Herbert Hoover to the U.S. Supreme Court.

White presided over the NAACP's most productive period of legal advocacy. In 1930 the association commissioned the Margold Report, which became the basis for the successful reversal of the separate-but-equal doctrine that had governed public facilities since 1896's Plessy v. Ferguson. In 1935 White recruited Charles H. Houston as NAACP chief counsel. Houston was the Howard University law school dean whose strategy on school-segregation cases paved the way for his protégé Thurgood Marshall to prevail in 1954's Brown v. Board of Education, the decision that overturned Plessy.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, which was disproportionately disastrous for African Americans, the NAACP began to focus on economic justice. After years of tension with white labor unions, the Association cooperated with the newly formed Congress of Industrial Organizations in an effort to win jobs for black Americans. White, a friend and adviser to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, met with her often in attempts to convince President Franklin D. Roosevelt to outlaw job discrimination in the armed forces, defense industries and the agencies spawned by Roosevelt's New Deal legislation.
Roosevelt ultimately agreed to open thousands of jobs to black workers when the NAACP supported labor leader A. Philip Randolph and his March on Washington movement in 1941. President Roosevelt would also agree to set up a Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) to ensure compliance.

Throughout the 1940s the NAACP saw enormous growth in membership, recording roughly 600,000 members by 1946. It continued to act as a legislative and legal advocate, pushing for a federal anti-lynching law and for an end to state-mandated segregation.

**Civil Rights Era**

By the 1950s the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, headed by Marshall, secured the last of these goals through Brown v. Board of Education (1954), which outlawed segregation in public schools. The NAACP's Washington, D.C., bureau, led by lobbyist Clarence M. Mitchell Jr., helped advance not only integration of the armed forces in 1948 but also passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1964, and 1968, as well as the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Despite such dramatic courtroom and congressional victories, the implementation of civil rights was a slow, painful, and oft times violent. The unsolved 1951 murder of Harry T. Moore, an NAACP field secretary in Florida whose home was bombed on Christmas night, and his wife was just one of many crimes of retribution against the NAACP and its staff and members.

NAACP Mississippi Field Secretary Medgar Evers and his wife Myrlie also became high-profile targets for pro-segregationist violence and terrorism. In 1962, their home was firebombed and later Medgar was assassinated by a sniper in front of their residence following years of investigations into hostility against blacks and participation in non-violent demonstrations such as sit-ins to protest the persistence of Jim Crow segregation throughout the south.

Violence also met black children attempting to enter previously segregated schools in Little Rock, Arkansas, and other southern cities. Throughout the south many African Americans were still denied the right to register and vote.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s echoed the NAACP's goals, but leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, felt that direct action was needed to obtain them.

Although it was criticized for working exclusively within the system by pursuing legislative and judicial solutions, the NAACP did provide legal representation and aid to members of other protest groups over a sustained period of time. The NAACP even posted bail for hundreds of Freedom Riders in the ‘60s who had traveled to Mississippi to register black voters and challenge Jim Crow policies.
Led by Roy Wilkins, who succeeded Walter White as secretary in 1955, the NAACP cooperated with organizers A. Philip Randolph and Bayard Rustin in planning the 1963 March on Washington.

With the passage of major civil rights legislation the following year, the Association accomplished what seemed an insurmountable task. In the following years, the NAACP began to diversify its goals.

Assisting the NAACP throughout the years were many celebrities and leaders, including Sammy Davis Jr., Lena Horne, Harry Belafonte, Ella Baker, an NAACP director of branches who stressed the importance of young people and women in the organization by recruiting members, raising money, and organizing local campaigns; Daisy Bates, NAACP national board member, Arkansas state conference president and advisor to the Little Rock Nine; and NAACP stalwarts like Kivie Kaplan, a businessman and philanthropist from Boston, who served as president of the NAACP from 1966 until 1975. He personally led nationwide NAACP Life Membership efforts and fought to keep African Americans away from illegal drugs.

Close of the first century

Wilkins retired as executive director in 1977 and was replaced by Benjamin L. Hooks, whose tenure included the Bakke case (1978), in which a California court outlawed several aspects of affirmative action. During his tenure the Memphis native is credited with implementing many NAACP programs that continue today. The NAACP ACT-SO (Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics) competitions, a major youth talent and skill initiative, and Women in the NAACP began under his administration.

As millions of African Americans continued to be afflicted as urban poverty and crime increased, de facto racial segregation remained and job discrimination lingered throughout the United States, proving the need for continued NAACP advocacy and action.

Dr. Hooks served as executive director/chief executive officer (CEO) of the NAACP from 1977 to 1992. Benjamin F. Chavis (now Chavis Muhammad) became executive director/CEO in 1993, while in 1995 Myrlie Evers-Williams (widow of Medgar Evers) became the third woman to chair the NAACP, a position she held until 1998, succeeded by Chairman Emeritus Julian Bond.

In 1996 the NAACP National Board of Directors changed the executive director/CEO title to president and CEO when it selected Kweisi Mfume, a former congressman and head of the Congressional Black Caucus, to lead the body. The elected office of president was eliminated.

Former telecommunications executive Bruce S. Gordon followed in 2005. [NAACP General Counsel Dennis Courtland Hayes would serve the Association well as interim national president and CEO twice during changes in administrations in recent years.]
In May of 2008, the NAACP National Board of Directors confirmed Benjamin Todd Jealous, a former community organizer, newspaper editor and Rhodes Scholar, as the 14th national executive of the esteemed organization.

Heading into the 21st century, the NAACP is focused on disparities in economics, health care, education, voter empowerment and the criminal justice system while also continuing its role as legal advocate for civil rights issues.

Yet the real story of the nation's most significant civil rights organization lies in the hearts and minds of the people who would not stand idly by while the rights of America's darker citizens were denied. From bold investigations of mob brutality, protests of mass murders, segregation and discrimination, to testimony before congressional committees on the vicious tactics used to bar African Americans from the ballot box, it was the talent and tenacity of NAACP members that saved lives and changed many negative aspects of American society.

While much of NAACP history is chronicled in books, articles, pamphlets and magazines, the true movement lies in the faces---black, white, yellow, red, and brown---united to awaken the consciousness of a people and a nation. The NAACP will remain vigilant in its mission until the promise of America is made real for all Americans.
Benjamin Todd Jealous
NAACP President and CEO

Benjamin Todd Jealous grew up believing that there was no higher calling than to further the cause of freedom in this country and in the world. It is a mindset he inherited from his parents and grandparents. Their drive for community betterment blazed the trail for Jealous' own deep commitment to social justice, public service and human rights activism. Now, as the 17th President and Chief Executive Officer of the NAACP, and the youngest person to hold the position in the organization's more than 100 years of existence, Jealous is well positioned to answer the call.

During his career, he has served as president of the Rosenberg Foundation, director of the U.S. Human Rights Program at Amnesty International and Executive Director of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), a federation of more than 200 black community newspapers. From his early days of organizing voter registration drives up until his nomination and election as NAACP president, Jealous has been motivated by civic duty and a constant need to improve the lives of America's underrepresented. All things considered, Jealous' leadership roles and active community involvement have well prepared him for his current duties as president of the NAACP. In fact, his path through journalism and the Black Press is not unlike several other former NAACP presidents, including Roy Wilkins, Walter White, Ida B. Wells and W.E.B. Dubois.

As a student at Columbia University, he worked in Harlem as a community organizer for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. On campus, Jealous led school-wide movements, including boycotts and pickets for homeless rights, a successful campaign to save full-need financial aid and need-blind admissions when other national universities were cutting such programs, and an environmental justice battle with the University. These protests ultimately led to the suspension of Jealous and three other student leaders. Jealous used this time off to work as a field organizer helping to lead a campaign that prevented the State of Mississippi from closing two of its three public historically black universities, and converting one of them into a prison. He remained in Mississippi to take a job at the Jackson Advocate, an African American newspaper based in the state's capital. His reporting -- for the frequently firebombed weekly -- was credited with exposing corruption amongst high-ranking officials at the state prison in Parchman. His investigations also helped to acquit a small black farmer who had been wrongfully and maliciously accused of arson. His work at the Jackson Advocate eventually lead to his promotion to Managing Editor.

In 1997, Jealous returned to Columbia University and completed his degree in political science. With the encouragement of mentors, he applied and was accepted to Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar where he earned a master's degree in comparative social research.
Jealous eventually went on to serve as Executive Director of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA). While at the NNPA, he rebuilt its national news service and launched a web-based initiative that more than doubled the number of black newspapers publishing online.

Prior to his tenure at the NAACP, Jealous was President of the Rosenberg Foundation, a private independent institution that funds civil and human rights advocacy to benefit California's working families. Prior to that, he was Director of the U.S. Human Rights Program at Amnesty International. While there he led efforts to pass federal legislation against prison rape, rebuild public consensus against racial profiling in the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks, and expose the widespread sentencing of children to life without the possibility of parole.

Active in civic life, Jealous is a board member of the California Council for the Humanities, and the Association of Black Foundation Executives, as well as a member of the Asia Society. He is married to Lia Epperson Jealous, a professor of constitutional law and former civil rights litigator with the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund. They presently reside in Washington, DC with their young daughter.
Roslyn M. Brock is Chairman of the National Board of Directors for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She made history in February 2010 when she became the youngest ever and fourth woman to serve as Chairman of the National Board of Directors.

Over the past twenty five years, Brock has served the NAACP in several leadership roles. She is a Diamond Life Member of NAACP and joined the Association as a freshman at Virginia Union University where she was elected President of the Youth and College Division from the Commonwealth of Virginia. One year later, she was elected as a Youth Board Member from Region 7 - representing the District of Columbia, Maryland and the Commonwealth of Virginia. During her tenure as a Youth Board Member and Vice Chairman of the NAACP Board Health Committee, Brock led the policy debate to recognize access to quality health care as a civil rights issue that resulted in the National Board's ratification and inclusion of a Health Committee as a Standing Committee in its Constitution.

In 1989, under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Benjamin Lawson Hooks, Brock wrote her Master's Thesis on "Developing a NAACP Health Outreach Program for Minorities." Brock is a skilled grant writer and has secured more than $2.7 million dollars in grants since 1991 for NAACP programs that initiated the Health Symposia held annually at NAACP National Conventions; publication of more than 200,000 copies of "HIV/AIDS and You" educational materials distributed to NAACP Units; research and media work associated with documenting the history of the NAACP; support for ACT-SO and the NAACP Law Fellows programs; and commissioned the 2007 NAACP Perceptions Survey just to name a few.

In 1999, Brock was appointed Chair of the Board Convention Planning Committee. In this role, she led the Committee to institute fiscal policies that resulted in the Convention becoming a profit center for the Association with average net revenues of $1 million dollars a year.

In 2005, Brock created the Leadership 500 Summit with several other young adult members of the NAACP. The Summit's goal is to recruit, train and retain a new generation of civil rights leaders aged 30 - 50 to the NAACP. Since its inception, Leadership 500 has contributed more than $650,000 to the NAACP National Treasury to support 2009 Centennial activities.

As Chairman of the Board Centennial Committee, Brock provides oversight for publication of Centennial calendars and paraphernalia; commission of Centennial artwork; and creation of the Centennial logo and theme for marketing and public relations.
Brock is member of the Board of Trustees for the Catholic Health Association of the United States of America and the NAACP Special Contributions Fund Board of Trustees. She's served on the boards of community mental health; family and children's services; senior services and faith based community ministries. She's also a member of several professional and civic organizations including the American Public Health Association; American College of Health Services Executives; American Hospital Association's Disparities in Healthcare Task group; Association of Healthcare Philanthropy; Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., and The LINKS, Inc.

A recipient of numerous healthcare, community service and leadership awards, Brock's leadership skills have been recognized by several national publications and organizations. In April 2008, Brock participated in the United States Department of Defense's 75th Joint Civilian Orientation Conference (JCOC) reserved for American leaders interested in expanding their knowledge of the military and national defense. She toured U.S. Southern Command, responsible for providing contingency planning, operations and security cooperation for Central and South America, the Caribbean, Cuba and the Bahamas, and their territorial waters.

She was a guest lecturer on "Alleviating Global Poverty" in Rome, Italy at the 2007 Martin Luther King, Jr. Conflict Resolution Conference co-sponsored by the Lott Carey Foreign Missions and the Baptist Union of Italy.

From 2003-2005, Brock served as a Young Leaders Fellow for the National Committee on U.S. - China Relations to build cross-cultural understanding and professional networks with young Chinese leaders while exploring substantive issues and developing enduring friendships.

Other highlights include: Wrote the Foreword for the 2008 Edition of Who's Who Among African-Americans Directory; Featured in December 2007 Forbes Magazine article on Diversity and Economic Parity for African Americans; Recipient of the Network Journal's "40 Under Forty Achievement Award"; Martin Luther King, Jr. Medal for Human Rights, the George Washington University; Outstanding Alumna, Virginia Union University; Honorary Chairperson, National Black Family Summit; Ebony magazine's "Future Leader Award"; and Good Housekeeping's "100 Young Women of Promise."

Brock is employed as Vice President, Advocacy and Government Relations for Bon Secours Health System, Inc., in Marriottsville, Maryland. Prior to working at Bon Secours, Brock worked 10 years in Health Programs at the W. K. Kellogg Foundation in Battle Creek, Michigan.

She graduated magna cum laude from Virginia Union University; earned a master's degree in health services administration from George Washington University, an MBA from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University and a Master of Divinity degree from the Samuel DeWitt Proctor Theology at Virginia Union University.

Brock's goal in life is embodied in an African proverb "Care more than others think is wise, Risk more than others think is safe, Dream more than others think is practical and Expect more than others think is possible."