

We Are Done Dying:
The NAACP Cultural Campaigns of the Early Twentieth Century

by

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Public History

Middle Tennessee State University

April 2023

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Dedication

Henry Lee Rainge and Carmen Elena Megill, my parents, who taught me the power of a counternarrative that expressed the creativity and dignity of our people.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful for the love and support of my husband and children. I am also grateful for the intellectual collaboration with students and educators of The Schools For Community Action. Further, I offer a special thanks to Dr. McCusker and Dr. White who encouraged and guided me through my growth as a Public Historian. Thank you to my dissertation committee, that believed in my continual growth as a scholar.

ABSTRACT

The NAACP Cultural Campaigns of the Early Twentieth Century is a historical consideration of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's, NAACP, use of the arts as a stage for a racially empowering counternarrative. This dissertation traces the understudied history of the NAACP's use of the arts and humanities to support campaigns advocating for African Americans. The organization's cultural work acted as a counter-narrative to popular media, which aided in the normalization of race-based violence by presenting blacks as characters that mocked their humanity and placed whites as the ideal image of humanity. The NAACP understood that to combat oppressive policies, an attack of racist rhetoric and cultural practices must coincide. Thus, the organization supported a counternarrative that educated the public on African American history, culture, and contributions to American culture. The research will augment historiography that connected art and creativity to African American humanity and citizenship as a response to racist oppression by analyzing the NAACP's discourse and campaigns.

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In the gallery called, “Wade In the Water,” at The National Museum of African American Music, there is an iconic picture of Marian Anderson singing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. The section of the museum that features the Marian Anderson image is titled “Themes of Freedom in Spiritual and Gospel Music.” Anderson won first place in a 1925 singing contest at Philadelphia’s Union Baptist Church. Her win gave her the opportunity to appear with the New York Philharmonic. By the 1930s, she gained international acclaim through her European concert tour. Yet, with her international and domestic recognition as an exceptional contralto, she was not permitted to sing in Washington, D.C.’s Constitutional Hall because she was Black.¹ The image and experience of Marian Anderson is representational of many narratives, particularly the relationship between cultural work and civil rights and the implications for public history. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), especially its president, Walter White, had an integral role in constructing the moment captured in the image, which represents the belief that the arts are an important part of Black humanity. When the NAACP did civil rights work, they used the arts to express Black humanity and to show how racism degraded it. This body of research is intended to

¹ *Wade In the Water*, “Themes of Freedom in Spiritual and Gospel Music,” *National Museum of African American Music*, Nashville, TN.

extend the present discourse about the NAACP, and the work the organization has done for racial justice.

Historiographies about the Progressive Era explain the social and political period that set the stage for the founding of the NAACP. Progressive Era philosophies and leaders also influenced the creation of the NAACP as well as the organization's views of advocacy. Historian Nell Irvin Painter's book *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919* [is there something missing here?] combination of period literature, source material from African Americans, women, and immigrants during the Progressive Era shows the contrasting views held by Progressives. Upper-middle-class- white Progressives felt it was their civic duty to help the poor, the African American, and the new immigrant. Still, they struggled with their belief in the equality of these groups, including white women of economic privilege. The increased research that reflected the experience of oppressed groups during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries created a vivid portrait of the period. Painter's work affords deeper comprehension of the contentious relationship ordinary people or marginalized groups had with political and economic policy. Painter's work, like other Progressive Era histories, reflected the foundation for the twentieth century's advocacy work. For example, Mike McGerr's *A Fierce Discontent*, published in 2003, is a history centered on how individual families experienced the era. McGerr, detailed the effects of laws and political events on Americans to demonstrate the stress industrialization had on ideologies before the period and how new ideologies were crafted in the period. McGerr categorizes the period into four battles: forced assimilation, control of big business, class conflict, and a segregated

society. His work reinforces the notion that the Progressive Era was not an age of reform but a stage for the century's conflicts around race, class, and gender. Three years after McGerr's book was published, historian Rebecca Edwards published a work that expands the historical discourse about the non-elites of society. Her book *New Spirits: Americans in the Gilded Age, 1865-1905*, begins with Reconstruction and ends in the Progressive Era. Edwards' work, like Wiebe, connects the Progressive Era to the Gilded Age. Similar to Painter, Edwards looks at both domestic and foreign policies of the time. Edwards used various source materials that captured popular cultural representation of different groups in America to photographs that show the daily experiences of middle-class African Americans to a variety of ethnic groups' working classes. Cartoons and popular advertisements are also used to demonstrate the historical narrative of race/ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality conflict. This research used similar materials to understand the battle against popular culture African Americans were up against in the Progressive Era and throughout the twentieth century.

Historians of the Progressive Era often discussed many influential citizens' commitment to social reform. In his book, *Freedom's Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle against Racism in America, 1909-1969*, Gilbert Jonas referred to "the call." In 1909, after a series of violence toward African Americans perpetrated by European Americans, there was a call to renew the struggle for a more equitable society. The call was especially heard by veterans of the abolitionist movement, African American leaders, intellectuals, religious leaders, and muckraking reporters. While this group of respondents was a minority, their desire for social advocacy is an example of the social commitment the Progressives had. Jonas' work on the National Association for the

Advancement of Colored People, NAACP, is followed by Patricia Sullivan's work that also sheds light on the organization and its founding. Sullivan, like Jonas, uses lectures, speeches, and popular newspapers from both the black and white presses to tell the organization's story. The history of the NAACP looks at a century of work that is told through the people of the organization, centering the narrative of the organization on the people that are in the organization. A pattern that twenty-first-century historians have done is telling the history of this organization through the biographies of the men and women that fought for the organization's creation and later work. Authors like Paula Giddings, Mia Bay, Barbara Ransby, J. Todd Moye, and David Lewis explore memories and historical facts hence building on the inquiry model of social histories to create cultural biographies. The infusion of biographies in telling the tale of an organization like the NAACP enables the connection between institutions that influence political and economic life to cultural histories. Cultural and social histories create a portrait of a historical period that tells the nuances of a plural culture and the diverse actors within the period.

Paula Giddings *Ida: Sword Among Lions* in 2009 and Mia Bay's *To Speak The Truth Freely* wrote biographies that illuminated the commitment of African American women to the Call. Gilbert Jonas described the commitment of a minority of Progressives to civil rights. The biographies of Ida B. Wells, by Bay and Giddings created a more precise portrait of the time. In Patricia Sullivan's *Lift, Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*, her research creates a narrative of who was brought together to discuss the social problems that would be the reason for the formation of the NAACP. She described the role of Ida B. Wells as a civil rights veteran but was

left out by the Committee of Nominations. This committee would be the folks that created the NAACP. In comparison, Jonas and Sullivan capture the tension between WEB Dubois and Booker T. Washington as well as the tension between white Progressives and black Progressives in the formation and later work of the NAACP. The story of Ida B Wells enables readers to learn of the African American women's role in the Progressive Era and the laying of a foundation for the civil rights movement in the twentieth century. Pertinent because the discourse influenced the history of the NAACP and the philosophical roots of the organization that Wells played a significant role in. Her essential role was not as clear because she was not allowed to be a part of the original board, as Sullivan, Giddings, and Bay explain. It was Wells' biographies that better explained the tension Blacks of the period felt about race work and the racial sensitivity of White Progressives.

An organization like the NAACP has a historical story with a broad scope. It spans a century of history and within the organization encapsulates the experience of young people and women throughout the century. Hence the work of Barbara Ransbury and J. Todd Moye, authors of biographies about Ella Baker. Baker's biography, like Wells' biographies, created an opportunity to understand the roles and experiences of African American women in community organizing and the civil rights movement. In 1993 author David Lewis wrote a W.E.B Dubois biography that enabled readers to garner a greater understanding of the black experience throughout the twentieth century as well as the role of the marginalized in the creation of a democracy with increased accountability. Then ten years later, Barbara Ransby expands historical comprehension of the endeavor to create plurality in American democracy by tracing the life of a woman

in what was to become the civil rights movement. Ransby draws from the papers of NAACP leaders, civil rights leaders, and a diverse body of people from Myles Horton and Kenneth Clark to create a portrait of a female voice in predominant male circles. Moyer's biography, published after Ransby, *Ella Baker: Community Organizer for the Civil Rights Movement*, expresses Baker's growth into a political consciousness that centers on youth organizing. Moyer uses Ransby as a source and looks at similar sources to particularly look at her growth as an organizer, especially a youth organizer. Youth organizing within the NAACP is further studied in Thomas Bynum's *NAACP Youth and the Fight for Black Freedom, 1936-1965*. Bynum's history of the NAACP's youth organizing enables a clear look of an organization that telescopes a historical timeline through the twentieth century. The narrative about racial inequity is given a richer analysis by historians that articulate the twentieth century's system of racial subjugation.

Primary source material about the organization's belief in the arts' power to show African Americans' dignity and creativity reflected African Americans' popular view. African American newspapers published like the *Chicago Defender* and the *Pittsburgh Courier* are examples of source material that informed this research. Also referenced are the following archives to show the NAACP's discourse on the power of black voice and art: Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries; The New York Public Library Digital Collection: Schomburg Center Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division; and Library of Congress: NAACP promotional and publication materials online exhibition titled *NAACP: A Century in the Fight for Freedom*.

Central to the research was the digitized collection of the NAACP papers. The organization's papers also illuminated the organizational leaders' concerns, opinions, and initiatives that grew into NAACP campaigns. These primary sources informed the dissertation's assertion of the significant role arts and humanities played in the organization's work. Additional resources that revealed the organizational leaders' views were their publications, for example, the works of W.E.B DuBois. His book *Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880*. Black Thought and Culture Du Bios' work about America's reconstruction period informs the twentieth century's politics. another founding member of the NAACP, Mary White Ovington's, *How the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Began*, also revealed the influence the founders' support of education, humanities, and the arts had on the organization's work. The NAACP papers have a series of correspondence from and about James Weldon Johnson and Carter G. Woodson, which demonstrated the organization's view that the humanities are essential to any race advocacy campaign. James Weldon Johnson's, *The Book of American Negro Poetry: Chosen and Edited, with an Essay on the Negro's Creative Genius*, provides historical research about the period relevant discourse on black intellectualism and creativity. Published a year before Johnson's book in 1921, Carter G. Woodson's book *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, provided primary source insight into the problems caused by the marginalization of African Americans. Both works were seminal in describing the views that drove the discourse and actions of black intellectuals of the early twentieth.

The research about the NAACP combined the traditional approach of studying elites of the era with the narrative of ordinary people within intimate life experiences, connected political and cultural histories. Cultural histories about the NAACP painted a description of the period in history that brought Progressive Era leaders together to grapple with America's race problem. In Gilbert Jonas' work, *Freedom's Sword: The NAACP and the Struggle against Racism in America, 1909-1969*, he described the organizers of the NAACP as people that answered "the call." Jonas' work begins with the understanding that many of the folks that founded the NAACP come from families and intellectual communities that were abolitionists. Gilbert Jonas takes time to trace the history of the phrase "the call," which pointed to the deep sense of spiritual and social responsibility that the abolitionist felt in the nineteenth century. He connects the abolitionists' sense of social responsibility to the Progressive Era leaders, twentieth-century leaders that form the NAACP. Both Patricia Sullivan and Gilbert Jonas write a history of the NAACP that begins with understanding the era that the organization was formed. The Progressive Era was a period had a variety of social reforms were created to meet the needs of diverse groups that made the United States. To understand the motives and actions of the NAACP founders, Progressive Era historians like Nell Irvin Painter, author of *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877-1919*, wrote a social history of the Progressive Era that described the period's diverse actors. Unlike the political or economic histories that highlight the late- nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the histories that describe the ordinary people's experiences in America illuminate the founders of the NAACP's call and the experiences or challenges the folks the NAACP served faced.

James Weldon Johnson, the noted Fisk University professor and writer of both literature and song, stated, "Nothing will do more to change the mental attitude and raise his status than a demonstration of intellectual parity by Negro through the production of literature and art."² Johnson's assertion, published in 1922, reflected a similar sentiment of many National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) leaders. As a Field Secretary in 1916, Johnson spent the next few years working with its leadership and eventually became its leader. His leadership of the organization reflected the belief that to stop race-based violence and institutional inequity, the black voice must be heard. The agency of speaking out against oppression should be visible in American culture, both academic and popular. The intellectual voice in schools and textbooks was as important as the artistic expression on stage and in print. The NAACP's goal was to facilitate a counternarrative to the racist one that drove acts of violence and marginalized African Americans. Another influencer of the NAACP was Carter G. Woodson, whose communications with the organization reflected his view on African American historical research's importance. Woodson believed that a complete historical narrative told the social conditions of the period. The NAACP did not credit Woodson for the collection of data about the social conditions, yet, this, like their lynching campaign, became a distinctive campaign for the organization.

Leaders' perspectives outside the organization, like Ida B. Wells-Barnett, are important because they influenced the founders and early leaders of the organization. Journalist and activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett was a part of the early discussions that would

² David W. Gilbert, *The Product of Our Souls: Ragtime, Race, and the Birth of the Manhattan Musical Marketplace* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 223.

create the NAACP. After the creation of the organization, her contribution was marginalized, as author Paula Giddings asserts. Giddings points to Wells-Burnett's strategy and perspective on lynching as an influencer on the NAACP's adoption of an antilynching campaign. While the organization took care not to credit Wells-Burnett for their plan, her belief in using the press as an avenue to educate the public of the injustice perpetrated by whites towards blacks was evident in the NAACP's publication of *The Crisis*.

Another distinctive action on the part of the NAACP is its organizational structure, specifically field offices, which became a means of collecting field data. The field office collected and issued information about African Americans' social conditions to support civil rights initiatives like their antilynching campaign. *The Crisis: Record of the Darker Races* is another example of the organization's endeavor that mirrored African American leaders' belief of the vital role the humanities played in the fight for equality. The NAACP magazine also facilitated the explicit articulation of African American experience and recommendations of policy that would increase equity in America. An organizational magazine was a reflection of NAACP leadership and the people who influenced the organization's comprehension that the call to advocate for African Americans was a battle of information. For decades popular narratives were seen in literature, performance stage, and textbooks that dehumanized black people. The characterization of black people on the minstrel stage and the degradation of black humanity in social Darwinism's assertions were viewed as the theory that supported the pervasive practice of violence towards black people.

W.E.B. Dubois' work to cultivate the NAACP's magazine into a platform to educate the public about African Americans' issues reflected the pivotal role black voices had on race advocates of the era. Like Wells-Barnett, he worked to shed light on the violence African Americans faced. The articulation of the diverse racist effort to degrade African Americans were considered essential in the fight for racial justice. The Crisis Magazine was the organization's platform to deliver the black experience to people nationally. W.E.B. Dubois accepted the call to fight against African Americans' dehumanization with the Crisis Magazine when he became the editor. The Crisis articles and images dispelled the science, politics, and popular images that supported African Americans' inferiority. Author Maurice Berger asserted that the NAACP's "founding members understood the innate power of visual cultures, especially the influence of the nascent medium of film."³

W.E.B Dubois described the effects of popular media when it was used to present dark-skinned people as characters that mocked their humanity while whites are placed as the dominant image of humanity. In 1903 Dubois wrote that "this American world, a world which yields him no true self-consciousness but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world."⁴ The adverse effects of the misrepresentation of black people's humanity were researched and presented by the NAACP and African American newspapers of the first half of the twentieth century. The NAACP's campaigns against minstrel representations of black people and the legal battles like school integration and

³ Maurice Berger, *For All the World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 40.

⁴ W.E.B Dubois, *Souls of Black Folk*, (New York: Dover, 1994), 3.

the Scottsboro boys reflect a half a century of the battle against the degradation of African American humanity. This research will explore DuBois' assertion that "the constant coupling or complex play of racial fear and desire, othering and identification, ambivalence and attraction."⁵ Through period relevant newspapers that had a majority white readers and newspapers with majority black readers, I will identify the desire and fear of African Americans that dominate Americans had. Also included in research are the letters NAACP sent to the organization about the degrading images they encountered.

Another collection of primary sources this research will review are period the representations of African Americans in popular culture, especially in spaces like the stage, songs, posters, advertisements, and movies. This research will then draw a connection between African American intellectual discourse about how to address the racial bias and misinformation about the remedial intellectual ability and moral consciousness of black people to the NAACP's actions. The NAACP papers' major campaigns reveal multiple decades of organizational discussions about the importance of addressing the misinformation about race. The organization countered misinformation that inundated popular culture through conferences, support of the New Negro Movement, the organization's publications, and efforts to change textbooks that send an implicit black inferiority message. Histories about the organization's leaders reveal a mirrored belief between African American intellectuals of the early twentieth century and NAACP leadership. Both saw a path to ending the prolific violence and inequality black people faced through the expression of the African American experience and diverse

⁵ Eric Lott, "Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy," *Representations*, no. 39 (1992): 23.

artistic abilities. The combination of arts, literature and social science was one of the many formulas used to preserve and improve black life.

A question posed by Black creatives that were race advocates in the 1920s and 1930s was: who will tell the intimate tale of the New Negro?⁶ The intimate tale of inequity and pain is told by the people who lived the experience to a greater audience of people that share these experiences and to folks that could not imagine it. The tale was told in a song, news article, government report, convention, photo, in motion pictures, and the stroke of a paintbrush. The articulation of the Black experience through diverse creative expressions were the kind of qualitative data that race advocates sought to articulate. NAACP leaders from W.E.B Dubois to Walter White reflect decades of the organization's goal, to tell the truth about the black experience in America. An accurate account of African American life conveyed through diverse platforms like the classroom to the stage. All platforms were viewed as tangible ways to create support for legal and legislative campaigns that would secure civil rights. Lawrence Schenbeck's book, *Racial Uplift, and American Music: 1878-1943* outlines the significant role the arts, especially music, had in the elevation of African Americans. Schenbeck's work is an example of the scholarship referenced in my dissertation, research that aids in articulating how African Americans viewed the arts and humanities during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The research will then draw on the earlier stated point that it is essential to understand who influenced the NAACP to see the role the humanities had on racial advocacy.

⁶ David L. Lewis, *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, (New York: Knopf, 1980), vii.

From the rampant racial terror African Americans faced to the New Negro Movement; chapter one traced the societal conditions that would call for racial advocacy groups in the Progressive Era. The chapter revealed early discourse on the relationship between violence and systemic inequity African Americans faced with racist representations of Black people. Chapter two was an inquiry into the cultural work the NAACP did to address the racist challenges faced in the 1930s in the midst of an economic downturn and the court cases involving the Scottsboro Nine. Then the work of racial advocacy during the 1940s was addressed in chapter four, examining the ways that Double V influenced the NAACP and its cultural work. The final chapter connected the four decades of racial advocacy and cultural work to African American museums. Before the construction of a museum of African American history and culture, the NAACP, in collaboration with advocates in the Black community, created spaces of belonging. The battle to receive the promises of democracy and defend Black humanity put the NAACP on a path that enabled the organization to support the work of education, celebration, and preservation of Black culture and history. The arts, humanities, culture, and history used to degrade Black people were the very tools used to empower them. Art, history, and cultural expressions all supported voice, creativity, and solidarity as a counter to the degradation and dispossession of racism in the physical space of exhibitions, first, then radio, and then permanent physical spaces like a brick-and-mortar museums. This dissertation course of study will uncover how African Americans and the NAACP's popular views aligned in their belief that the arts and humanities were instrumental tools in supporting the organization's political campaigns during the first half of the twentieth century. It then considers how this early twentieth century's racial advocacy continued in

the work of Black museums. Racial advocacy, through the arts, humanized the disposed of, and the study of the NAACP's cultural work is a reflection of the transformational power of a platform for the Black voice.

Chapter 1: The NAACP's Birth and Cultural Work

I have stepped within the Veil, raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses,—the meaning of its religion, the passion of its human sorrow, and the struggle of its greater souls. All this I have ended with a tale twice told but seldom written, and a chapter of song.⁷

In 1903 W.E.B DuBois wrote about raising a veil, informing the world and especially the United States of the Black experience. While he was not the first nor the last to explicitly outline the Black experience, he was amongst the first to connect music and the arts to the narrative. The outline of DuBois's book, *Souls of Black Folk*, reflected the connection between the Black experience, their cultural habits, and contributions to the battle against racial violence as well as civil liberties. When DuBois wrote of the lifted veil, he expressed the freedom African Americans declared for themselves in the twentieth century. In this new century, the Black freedom movement intertwined music and other art forms with autonomy, agency, and civil rights in response to the minstrel stage that perpetuated false, inhumane representations of African Americans. The combination of the minstrel characterizations of Black Americans, Social Darwinian theory and eugenics created false narratives that influenced the academic community and popular culture. The tools and spaces used to discredit African Americans' humanity were

⁷ W.E.B DuBois, *Souls of Black*, (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1904) viii.

the new century's tools and spaces for African Americans to lift the veil and address the hate and violence perpetrated on them with truth and creativity.

This chapter explores the political and cultural conditions that brought together like minds to battle the issue of race in America, specifically, the initial meetings and people that would form the National Organization for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The NAACP linked popular culture and the arts to the dehumanization and humanization of African Americans. The NAACP then drew a connection to artistic expression's role in the organization's initial tactics to battle racial violence. Hence, the question posed and answered is why the NAACP viewed the arts, popular culture, and the humanities as important spaces for their advocacy work. The arts, popular culture, and the humanities shaped both Black and White people's views of who Black people are, thus these were important tools for racial advocacy.

The arts had long been used to transmit a narrative of White superiority and Black inferiority, especially seen on the minstrel stage. Minstrelsy, a popular form of entertainment in the mid-nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, came in the form of dance, song, comedy, and dramatic skit. Minstrelsy employed derogatory depictions of African Americans and their culture for entertainment. Author Eric Lott viewed minstrelsy as a "starting orientation for inquiry into the great complexities of racism and raced subjects in the United States."⁸ Minstrels fed a narrative that Black Americans were remedial and vulgar while White audiences watched in fascination with

⁸ Eric Lott, "Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy," *Representations*, no. 39 (July 1, 1992), 23.

the other, the African. In the United States, White audiences saw a minstrel performance that had a:

spirit [that] depended at the very least on the suggestion of black male sexual misdemeanor, and the character of white men's involvement in this institutional Other of genteel culture.⁹

Eric Lott points out that:

Whites were at a loss for language to embody the anxiety that in effect constituted the color line, and this indicates how extreme the consequent defensiveness must have been.¹⁰

The extreme consequence of White racial anxiety was the racial violence Black people faced at the turn of the twentieth century. The pejorative characterization of Blacks was seen in the character,

Sambo [who] was, then, an illustration of humor as a device of oppression, and one of the most potent in American popular culture. The ultimate objective for whites was to effect mastery: to render the black male powerless as a potential warrior, as a sexual competitor, as an economic adversary.¹¹

The Sambo and other minstrel characters were pervasive in American culture. For example, they were “in journals, weeklies, newspapers, magazines, travel reports, diaries, brochures, and broadsides, there was sambo.”¹² Minstrel characters were also found “in novels, children’s tales, essays, and pamphlets.”¹³ The ubiquity of this negative characterization of Blacks was clear to African Americans who advocated for the race; if they wanted to secure civil rights, they must challenge the creative spaces and stages that dehumanized Black people.

⁹ Ibid, 27.

¹⁰ Ibid, 29.

¹¹ Joseph Boskin, *Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 14.

¹² Ibid, 10.

¹³ Ibid, 11.

The Sambo, and other minstrel characters, demonstrated Whites' attempt to dehumanize Black people and render them powerless.¹⁴ For example, White tenant farmers found it difficult to compete with Black farmers which became an excuse for an aggressive anti-Black view that ignored the vigorous work and diligence of the newly freed African Americans. Many White southerners struggled to regain the wealth lost in the Civil War and often found it profitable to rent, at a higher rate, to African American tenant farmers. To add insult to injury, in the eyes of southern Whites, the census pointed out that Black farmers improved the land by double the amount of White farmers.¹⁵ This created resentment amongst Whites, who were inundated with false representations of African American inferiority in the fields of science, humanities, and popular culture. Popular acts on minstrel stages assigned a spectrum of negative characteristics to African Americans that supported hate-filled actions toward the Black community. Angry Whites had to contend with the rhetoric that Blacks were lazy, ignorant, and conniving through the caricatures of Jim Crow, Zip Coon, Mammy, Sapphire, Jezebel, Picaninny, and Sambo. Popular culture, songs, literature, and science all feed the false narrative that Blacks were less than Whites and that Blacks' existence endangered Whites.

The 1905 book, *The Clansman: Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, by Thomas Dixon, is an example of the power pejorative notions that constructed negative images of race had on society displayed by creative White forces. Thomas Dixon sought to tell a truth about Reconstruction, which placed White supremacy as necessary and positioned White southerners as unfairly disenfranchised because of the Civil War and Radical

¹⁴ Ibid, 14.

¹⁵ Joel Williamson, *A Rage for Order: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*, (Cary: Oxford University Press, 1986) 92.

Republicans' Reconstruction policies. Central to this argument was the need to protect the White position of economic and political superiority to preserve the social balance. As a preacher, Dixon often associated his beliefs with Christian values and had the ear of influential public leaders such as President Woodrow Wilson. In turn, this enabled his writing to have a great deal of political influence; it was an excuse for the terror the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) committed. Moreover, Dixon's depictions of African Americans were immortalized through the film *Birth of a Nation*, five years after the formation of the NAACP. The film was a central protest campaign of the NAACP during the organization's early years and an example of their cultural work.

Through cultural work, the organization hoped to create a counter-narrative to support an antilynching campaign. Racist rhetoric about African Americans resulted in attacks on African American communities. Between 1894 and 1895, there was the New Orleans Dockworkers' Riot; in 1898, the Virden, Illinois Race Riot; in 1898, the Wilmington Race Riot; in 1899, the Newburg, New York Race Riot; in 1900, the New Orleans Race Riot; in 1900, New York City; in 1906, the Atlanta Race Riot and in 1908, the Springfield, Illinois, Race Riot. The depravity of these attacks on Black communities inspired an interracial call to action. Journalist William English Walling and his wife, Anna Strunsky, traveled to Springfield, Illinois, after the race riot; their investigation inspired an article that read, "The spirit of the abolitionists, of Lincoln and Lovejoy, must be revived, and we must come to treat the Negro on a plane of absolute political and social equality."¹⁶ In 1910, at the birthplace of both the "Great Emancipator" and the

¹⁶ William English Walling, *The Race War in the North*, https://www.eiu.edu/past_tracker/AfricanAmerican_Independent65_3Sept1908_RaceWarInTheNorth.pdf, accessed February 8, 2021.

Springfield Race Riot, an interracial meeting between social advocates decided to take collective action. The action came in the form of racial advocacy that described Black people's oppression and a discourse on possible solutions. An example of DuBois' work of racial advocacy through research and discourse, was the Atlanta Conference. At the conference, DuBois attempted to "make the science of human action," through the presentation of social investigations about Black life.¹⁷ A similar discourse occurred at annual meetings in Buffalo, New York, that began in 1905, called the Niagara Movement. At these annual conventions, Black leaders had a discourse centered on the following topics: progress, suffrage, civil liberty, economic opportunity, education, courts, public opinion, health, employer and labor unions, protest, color-line, "Jim Crow" cars, soldiers, war amendments, oppression, the church agitation help, and duties.¹⁸

In response to the pervasive dehumanization African Americans faced, a group of African Americans met to discuss the issue of race in America after the horrors of the Springfield riots. Simultaneously, White Progressives such as Oswald Garrison Villard, a social advocate who descended from an abolitionist family, called for "the formation of an organization" that continued President Lincoln's work. In an article published by The New York Evening Post, Villard referenced what historian Gilbert Jonas referred to as "civil rights lore" through "the call," the summoning collective work to address the bloody devastation Black communities faced in these raced-based attacks. Others, such as W.E.B. DuBois and Mary Church Terrell, signed a "call upon all the believers in

¹⁷ W.E.B DuBois, *The Atlanta Conference*, <http://www.webdubois.org/dbAtlantaConfs.html>, accessed February 8, 2021

¹⁸ W. E.B DuBois, Niagara Movement Declaration of Principles <https://credo.library.umass.edu/view/pageturn/mums312-b004-i092/#page/3/mode/1up>

democracy to join in a national conference for the discussion of present evils, the voicing of protest, and the renewal of the struggle for civil and political liberty."¹⁹ A year later, those who answered the call formed an organization named the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, NAACP.

Who Answered the Call?

The NAACP's work of racial uplift reflected the Progressive Era's distinct views of reform that directly influenced the political, economic, social, and cultural landscape. One side had a continued view of the Jeffersonian-Jacksonian Ages, which highlighted individual determination. On the other side of the political spectrum was the opinion that the social and economic environment influenced an individual's experience, an opinion that the Progressives often shared. The founders of the NAACP were Progressives who believed society was better when the masses were educated, and an aspect of social uplift was a fluid notion of agency, creativity, and intellectualism. Progressives, for example, were influenced by early music education advocates such as Lowell Mason, who believed that "the study of music from its very nature, cultivates the habits of order, and obedience and union."²⁰ Hence, the founders of the NAACP saw that the humanities, literature, music, visual arts, and entertainment would be important means for the education of the public on the Negro Question. In Anna Julia Cooper's 1902 speech titled "The Ethics of the Negro Question," she points out that the question of how should America treat

¹⁹ NAACP: A Centuary in the Fight for Freedom. Founding and Early Year, accessed Febuary 27, 2023, <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/naacp/founding-and-early-years.html>.

²⁰ Carol A. Pemberton, *Lowell Mason: His Life and Work*, (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1985) 65.

African Americans or the “Negro question” reveals the nation’s hypocrisy.²¹ Cooper stated that the African American must “survive in the face of colorphobia that heeds neither reason nor religion and a prejudice that shows no garter and allows no mitigating circumstances.”²² The colorphobia Cooper spoke of, the attempted survival in the face of racial hate and violence is what called White and Black race advocates together.

Answering the Call and Addressing the Negro Question

The following people answered the call to form the NAACP: the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison; the famed social workers Jane Addams and Lillian Wald; Livingston Ferrand, the president of Cornell University; Agent E. Wooley, the president of Mount Holyoke College; the philosopher and educator John Dewey; the muckraking newsman Lincoln Steffens; Brand Whitlock, the mayor of Toledo, Ohio; the philanthropist J.G. Phelps Stokes; the journalist and southerner William English Walling and wife, Anna Strunsky, both of them socialists; Moorefield Storey and Albert E. Pillsbury; Bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church Alexander Walters; Rabbi Stephen E. Wise; the journalist Mary White Ovington, William Monroe Trotter and Ida B. Wells-Barnett; the social reformers John Haynes Holmes and Henry Moscowitz; Charles Edward Russell; and Joel Spingarn and Arthur Spingarn.²³ The

²¹ Anna Julia Cooper, “The Ethics of the Negro Question Speech,” Digital Howard @ Howard University, https://dh.howard.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1018&context=ajc_addresses page 12, accessed February 2, 2021.

²² Anna Julia Cooper, “The Ethics of the Negro Question Speech,” Digital Howard @ Howard University, https://dh.howard.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1018&context=ajc_addresses page 8

²³ Gilbert Jonas, *Freedom's Sword: The NAACP and The Struggle against Racism in America, 1909-1969* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2005), 12.

Committee of Forty, also known as the National Negro Committee, had six Blacks and omitted Ida B. Wells-Barnett and William Monroe Trotter. The two had voiced their concern over the White members' conservative visions of racial advocacy and justice. The financial power of White members such as Villard enabled the dissenting voices of Trotter and Wells to be omitted. W.E.B DuBois became editor to the NAACP's magazine, and it was through the magazine's content that the organization's cultural work was carried out. The NAACP's magazine, *The Crisis*, enabled the consistent presentation of Black voice and creativity while reporting on the organization's political advocacy work; thus, the marriage of cultural work and social action began.

Many of the NAACP's founders believed that misinformation about African Americans' criminality and inferiority drove the violence and inequality in the United States. The social activists and political reformers that formed the NAACP believed that education would be an essential tool in the work of racial advocacy. Educating people about the Black experience was central to NAACP founders, such as Mary White Ovington. Ovington researched the African American experience for her book *Half A Man: The Status of the Negro in New York*. In the forward, anthropologist Franz Boas wrote:

The Negro of our times carries even more heavily the burden of his racial descent than did the Jew of an earlier period; and the intellectual and moral qualities required to ensure success to the Negro are infinitely greater than those demanded from the white, and will be the greater, the stricter the segregation of the Negro community.”²⁴

²⁴ Mary White Ovington, *Half a Man: The Status of the Negro in New York* (United Kingdom: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1911), viii.

Ovington's work displayed her conclusion that African Americans thought that "it should be his part to struggle for his ideal, vigorously to protest against discrimination, and never complacent, to submit to the position of inferiority."²⁵ Ovington's research saw that an important part in the battle for African American equality was the demonstration of African Americans of their humanity, intellect, and creativity. Her belief that African American creative expression was an integral part of their agency was evident through her commitment to the NAACP and her support of W.E.B. DuBois's work with the organization's magazine. Her support for Black autonomy in racial uplift did not stop the omission of vocal Black leaders such as Trotter and Wells.

While Trotter and Wells were not leaders in the NAACP, their ideas lived in the NAACP's work. The mass information campaign to gain support for federal anti-lynching legislation was especially reflective of the work of Ida B. Wells. The racial solidarity and uplift of the arts also demonstrated reflected the work of James Monroe Trotter. A participant in the meetings that formed the NAACP, Trotter expressed a correlation between critical expression and music in his 1880 book, *Music and Some Highly Musical People*. Trotter's book opens with an assertion that the work "was a much needed service" because:

The haze of complexional prejudice has so much obscured the vision of many persons, that they cannot see (at least, there are many who affect not to see) that musical faculties, and the power for their artistic development, are not in the exclusive possession of the faire -skinned race.²⁶

²⁵ Mary White Ovington, *Half a Man: The Status of the Negro in New York* (United Kingdom: Longmans, Green, and Company, 1911), 100.

²⁶ James M. Trotter, *Music and Some Highly Musical People* (Boston, MA: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1878), 4

Historian Jon Michael Spencer reflected Trotter's point when he asserted that:

the firm hold of this essentialist color line was helped by the proliferation of the theatrical and literary minstrelsy of the day, from which he believed whites received their only perceptions of blacks, perceptions of them as people of heightened emotion and feeble intelligence.²⁷

The notion that the arts, music especially, was a tool to teach the ignorant was reinforced when Trotter noted, "music is one of the greatest educators in the world."²⁸ He exemplified the Progressive view that reform was centered on the accessibility of musical literacy to the masses. Progressives and advocates for African American agency viewed music as an educational tool while it was also a form of entertainment.

Cultural expression as a site for political agency

Historians have discussed music and cultural materials as a site for political and cultural change in the twentieth century. Lawrence W. Levine connected the role the arts, popular arts, and entertainment had on the establishment of "necessary agencies for the diffusion of a new culture a better culture a culture of a higher order, and work for the moral education of the people."²⁹ Levine's point reflected how the arts and humanities promoted critical engagement and thought through self-expression and creativity, two characteristics systemically denied to African Americans for centuries. The assertion of self-expression and creativity defined the New Negro, a generation of African Americans who sought to live the promise of civic efficacy. In past centuries, music enabled African Americans to express an inspirational voice of hope, cultural transmission and increased

²⁷ Jon Michael Spencer, *The New Negroes and Their Music: The Success of the Harlem Renaissance* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 38.

²⁸ Ibid, 38

²⁹ Lawrence W Levine, *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 204.

opportunity. To Trotter, music gave Black people the ability "to turn from a view of the dark and receding past to that of a rapidly-dawning day, whose coming should bring for these singers, and all others of their race, increase of opportunities, and therefore increase of culture."³⁰ Many of the White Progressive founders of the NAACP did not agree with many of Trotter's assertions, yet, they did agree in art forms' (like music) and education's significant role in social reform. For example, the founder of the Boston Symphony, Henry Lee Higginson, was similar to the Progressives who founded the NAACP in that he believed music and education would improve society. Higginson stated that music had the power to "educate and save ourselves and our families and our money from mobs."³¹ The notion that education, whether it was music education or the humanity of African Americans, was a solution to social problems was a popular view of Progressives. Central to the work of social advocates, such as Progressives, was that access to education, especially the arts, and humanities, would help address social inequalities.

The Celebration of Cultural Work As A Tool For Racial Uplift

The goal of race advocates was to tell the truth about the humanity of African Americans, thus their highlight African American artists that gave voice to the Black experience in America, for example, Charles W. Chestnut's *The Marrow of Tradition*. This novel described the 1898 race riot in North Carolina. Chestnut published a series of novels on the African American experience that caused the NAACP to celebrate his distinguished literary achievement with the Spingarn Medal. The Spingarn Award was

³⁰ James M. Trotter, *1842-1892 Music and Some Highly Musical People* (Boston, MA: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1878), 7.

³¹ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 205.

created in 1915 by the NAACP to highlight the achievement of African Americans and inspire future generations to follow in the footsteps of citizens that have accomplished extraordinary feats in the fields of medicine, sports, politics, the military, arts, and entertainment. A 1925 recipient of the Spingarn Medal, James Weldon Johnson, like Charles Chestnut, also used the fictional literary space to shed light on the diverse challenges of Black people in both the rural South and urban North. In Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, he used literature to express African Americans' diverse experiences; the marginalized narrative was given central attention. DuBois often wrote about the need for a paradigm shift in multiple American institutional spaces. According to DuBois, to achieve work in social advocacy for African Americans, their voices must be seen and heard in educational spaces, cultural spaces, economic and political spaces. African American representation was and is especially pertinent in "a nation-wide university attitude has arisen by which propaganda against the Negro has been carried on unquestioned."³² The NAACP's magazine became the vehicle for which the organization presented a counter to the misinformation the country learned about African Americans. Respectable representations of African Americans became a political platform as well as a form of racial solidarity.

Artistic expression as a form of racial solidarity

By the twentieth century, the association of African American expression and agency continued. Mary White Ovington pointed to the normative use of arts for the assertion of Black voice and topics correlating to racial enfranchisement. Ovington wrote,

³² W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America: Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 642.

“literature is the poetry of Dunbar, the writing of [Booker T.] Washington and Dubois, the literature of the Negro question, and art is largely comprised in Tanner’s paintings.”³³ Along with the NAACP’s call for direct action in response to the violence and oppression African Americans faced, the new century hosted a new collective movement of creativity and expression in the humanities, arts, and popular culture. The expression of Black voice was associated with racial solidarity and cultural action that was complementary to political action. Racial solidarity in artistic expression became intuitive once popular art began to reflect the derogatory narratives of literature and the minstrel stage. As stated earlier, the popularity of Dixon’s 1905 book *The Clansman: Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* became the popular 1915 film by D.W. Griffin titled *Birth of a Nation*. Griffith’s film was released multiple times from 1915 through the 1940s. The film was central to the NAACP’s cultural work to stop negative representations of African Americans as well as draw an explicit correlation between these representations and the battle against lynching.

The NAACP’s Campaign Against *Birth of A Nation*

When the film *Birth of a Nation* was released, members of the NAACP saw a direct correlation between the film and White violence toward Blacks. The bloodshed of the race riots that inspired the forming of the NAACP was feared to reoccur with the film. The idea that Whites would want to show Blacks their subservient place was well

³³ Mary White Ovington, *Half A Man: The Status of the Negro in New York*, (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911), 100.

known to NAACP organizers, and the film highlighted themes of White victimization.³⁴ The film celebrated organizations, such as the KKK, as if they were the last defense against Black criminality. As early as 1915 and well into the 1930s, the organization battled against the presentation of the movie as well as the themes the movie promoted in its battle to protect the Black body. It was clear to the NAACP that the race-based violence African Americans incurred was due to false information about African Americans found in a variety of spaces, from movies to textbooks, science to entertainment, all perpetuated a phobia towards the unruly Black. The popularity of the book *The Clansman* and the film adaptation *Birth of a Nation* was seen to be an example of racial agitation, noted in the opinion section of *The Crisis* in 1915. The article demonstrated the film's misinformation with the statement that:

people have been presently lied to for a generation. Even the most eminent historians suppress the truth about it, in the interest, I suppose, of national harmony. I mean the reconstruction period; the leading purpose of the book, and presumably of the play, being to instill the belief that the reconstruction period; the leading purpose of the book, and presumably of the play, being to instill the belief that the reconstruction acts of Congress were not only foolish but wicked, as inspired by malice or revenge or a determination to perpetuate the power of the Republican party by humiliating the white people of the south.”³⁵

The NAACP's fear that the book, play, then the movie would influence the rollback of civil rights was very real. For example, President Wilson resegregated federal offices that in the past were integrated. Also, with the meticulous account of mob violence, lynching still existed with the attendance and participation of everyday White citizens. The pervasiveness of anti-Black rhetoric and behavior was the reason for a three-decade-long

³⁴William English Walling, *The Race War in the North*, https://www.eiu.edu/past_tracker/AfricanAmerican_Independent65_3Sept1908_RaceWarInTheNorth.pdf, accessed August 8, 2019.

³⁵ “*The Birth of A Nation*,” *The Crisis*, Vol. 10 No. 2 (New York: NAACP, June 1915), 69.

campaign by the NAACP to stop the viewing of the film every time it reentered the theaters.

The NAACP's antilynching campaign was done alongside their work to censor the film *Birth of a Nation*, reflective of the power of both literature and the arts. An advertisement for the film was posted in Time Square, New York City, which demonstrated the influence the film had on popular culture beyond the South.³⁶ On November 2, 1915, Mary Childs Nerney, Executive Secretary of the NAACP, wrote a revealing letter that showed the national campaign of local organizers protesting the film. The letter stated:

In regard to "The Birth of A Nation" being booked for your city, and are sending you under separate cover two pamphlets which were gotten out by our Boston Branch and which we think will help you in your fight.³⁷

Also included in the correspondence was an article written by Mary White Ovington titled "The White Brute," where she laid out an argument against the film, citing its false representation of African Americans that could be incendiary. Nerney's secretary continued by reminding the Boston branch that "in Philadelphia five hundred police were necessary to quell the disturbance which it caused."³⁸ Through the passing out of pamphlets that informed the public of the racist characterization of Black people and a letter-writing campaign of local political leaders, the NAACP was successful in stopping

³⁶ Richard Brody, "Fought Against D.W. Griffith's 'Birth of A Nation,'" *The New Yorker*, February 6, 2017 <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/richard-brody/the-black-activist-who-fought-against-d-w-griffiths-the-birth-of-a-nation/amp>

³⁷ *Secretary to Mary Nerney to Burton Branch*, letter, November 2, 1915, FOLDER: 001421-033-0143, page 6, Group I, Series C, Administrative File, 1912-1939, Part 11: Special Subject Files, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. <https://congressional.proquest.com/histvault?q=001421-033-0143&accountid=4886> (known here after as NAACP Papers, Folder 001421_033_0143)

³⁸ NAACP Papers, Folder 001421_033_0143, page 6.

the viewing of the film in Chicago, Providence, Pittsburgh, and Gary in 1915. For places the organization could not stop viewing the film, they asked that the worst scenes in the film be removed, specifically “the worst scene is the one in which “Gus” chases the white girl.”³⁹ The film was the first to be screened for the president at the White House, a demonstration of the film’s ability to find sympathetic audiences in powerful spaces.

World War I and the African American Soldier as a symbol of change

The NAACP’s campaign against the film *Birth of a Nation* centered on stopping the spread of false concepts of Black ignorance and criminality through the representation of Black intellect and noble citizenship. The Black soldier became a model symbol to contrast with anti-Black rhetoric. During World War I, *The Crisis Magazine*’s 1912, 1916, 1918, and two 1919 editions all had African American soldiers featured on the front cover. The covers reflected the racial pride African Americans felt with the African American soldier. In *The Crisis* of 1917, the editorial section told a story of the valor of Black soldiers when the article noted that Theodore Roosevelt’s Rough Riders would not have survived without “the Colored 9th and 10th cavalry regiments, who were not White men.”⁴⁰ In the 1918 edition, the magazine read:

This war is an End and, also, a Beginning. Never again will darker people of the world occupy just the place they have before. Out of this war will rise, soon or later, an independent China; self-governing India and Egypt with representative institutions; an Africa for the Africans, and not merely for business exploitation. Out of this war will rise, too, an American Negro, with the right to vote and the right to work and the right to live without insult.⁴¹

³⁹ NAACP Papers, Folder 001421_033_0143, page 6

⁴⁰ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Crisis* Vol. 14 No. 3 “Editorial” (New York: NAACP, May 1917), 112.

⁴¹ W.E.B. DuBois, *The Crisis* Vol. 16 No. 2 “Editorial” (New York: NAACP, May 1918), 60.

The words in the NAACP magazine reflected the hope of some African American leaders. A common view was the belief that the insults of the past, the oppression of Jim Crow, and the violence of the lynch mob could not continue. The Black soldier was a representation of hope, frustration, and dignity; thus, fertile soil for the growth of the New Negro.

The NAACP and the New Negro

Writer, educator, and philosopher Alain Locke wrote the New Negro Movement supplied a counter-narrative to the pejorative representations of African Americans and the NAACP used the movement's diverse forms of artistic expression to support its political campaigns, particularly the organization's anti-lynching campaign. The autonomy in the creative voice was an appealing tool for organizations like the NAACP; through the arts, a revolution could occur. Rather than meeting the violent racism of so-called race riots, the New Negro did "not come to wage a strife. With swords upon this hill. It is not wise to waste the life. Against a stubborn will. Yet we die as some have done. Beating a way for the rising sun."⁴² These words from the New Negro Movement poet Arna Bontemps demonstrated the belief Black artists had of themselves. They saw their work as tools to battle racism; thus, they became soldiers. This view of racial solidarity was essential in the Black Freedom Movement. Racial pride and solidarity united people, especially in the face of racial terror like lynching.

⁴²Arna Bontemps, "The Day Breakers," *The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader* (New York: Penguin Publishing, 1994), 224.

Violence in the first two decades of the century came from the culture of oppression that supported the institution of slavery in the 1800s. However, the dehumanization of African Americans continued into the 1900s and was reinforced in political, cultural, and educational institutions. The organization connected the racist propaganda found in entertainment and educational institutions that perpetuated the violence seen in the early twentieth century. The NAACP desired to counter racism with information about the inhumanity African Americans faced and the desire to showcase the arts that demonstrated their humanity. In 1916, author Williams Pickens wrote that "if the average American knew, he would be opposed to lynching; else the average American is not human."⁴³ The sentiment expressed by African Americans to tell their truth became a central theme in the 1920s as well as a distinctive quality of the New Negro Movement. The 1920s was a period of racial pride and agency that was visible artistically, economically, and politically; it was a period that saw a new generation of Black people who sought to dispel centuries' past oppression and assert themselves through creative voice.

The New Negro Movement's sentiments were clear in the issues of the NAACP's magazine, whose articles topics ranged from politics, and economics, to the arts that directly affected or reflected Black life. For example, in the May 1918 edition of *The Crisis*, there are advertisements for schools, as well as articles about art and culture. In this edition of the magazine, like many to follow, there was an article by Walter White that described lynching throughout the South. Under a photograph of five Black children

⁴³ William Pickens, *The New Negro: His Political, Civil, and Mental Status: And Related Essays* (New York: Neale Publishing Company, 1916), 190

holding a banner that read “Our Foes: Race Hate, Oppression, Race Robbery, Repression, Race Murder,” was an article that described the lynching of Jim McIlherron, an African American man who lived in a community that regularly terrorized the African American members. One day, Mr. McIlherron had an altercation with young White men that ended in gunfire. He shot six shots and two men were wounded. One of those men died of his wounds. The altercation led to a manhunt for Mr. McIlherron, which included the killing of a preacher accused of hiding McIlherron. After days of terrorizing the Black community, the White lynch mob found McIlherron. White wrote that the lynch mob leaders asked that the mob “allow the affair to be a perfectly orderly lynching.”⁴⁴ In White’s description of Mr. McIlherron’s torture, he wrote that the man was “unsexed” and that “the unspeakable torture had now been going on for about twenty minutes.”⁴⁵ In the September edition of *The Crisis*, White wrote about the lynching of Mary Turner in Georgia. Mary Turner had the audacity to wish she knew the names of the men who lynched her husband so that she could go to the courts for justice. The mob lynched her husband because the members believed he was part of a conspiracy that ended in the shooting of a White plantation owner who had a history of mistreating his employees. When the White plantation owner and his wife were shot, killing him only, it sent the lynch mob on a hunt. The justice the mob declared they sought was for a man that was known to be physically abusive to his employees, both men, and women. After at least three Black men were lynched, Walter White continued to write about the horrifying events that led to the lynching of the pregnant Mary Turner. White wrote that “it might be

⁴⁴ Walter White, *The Crisis* Vol. 16 No. 1 (New York: NAACP, May 1918), 19.

⁴⁵ *Ibids*, 20.

mentioned that each detail given is not the statement of a single person but each phase is related only after careful investigation and corroboration.”⁴⁶ White recounted that Mrs.

Turner was in her eighth week of pregnancy when:

her ankles were tied together and she was hung to the tree, head downward. Gasoline and oil from the automobiles were thrown on her clothing and while she writhed in agony and the mob howled in glee, a match was applied and her clothes burned from her person. When this had been done and while she was alive, a knife, evidently one such as is used in splitting hogs, was taken and the woman’s abdomen was cut open, the unborn babe falling from her womb to the ground. The infant, prematurely born, gave two feeble cries and then its head was crushed by a member of the mob with his heel. Hundreds of bullets were then fired into the body of the woman, now mercifully dead, and the work was over.⁴⁷

White told of more lynchings in the same county in Georgia. He noted that the Georgia state governor addressed the legislature on July 3, 1918. The governor “denounced mob violence” and stated that if the state doesn’t suppress this violence, then “Federal intervention will not be long delayed.”⁴⁸ For seven years, an anti-lynching bill battled to get through Congress. In April of 1918, Missouri Congressman Leonidas C.

Dyer introduced a bill drafted by a founding member of the NAACP, Albert E. Pillsbury.

The NAACP’s work to decriminalize Blackness in Film

In 1921, the NAACP launched another campaign against the rerelease of the film *Birth of A Nation*. Theaters that featured the film were protested in places such as New York, Georgia, and Florida. Pamphlets were given to viewers that connected the beliefs of the KKK to the movie. These pamphlets also connected the KKK to peonage

⁴⁶ *Ibids*, 222.

⁴⁷ *Ibids*, 222.

⁴⁸ *Ibid* 222.

cases in Georgia and the killing of Blacks on election day in Florida. The pamphlet also cited a report a Congressional investigation of the KKK:

activities after the Civil War in South Carolina, where the scene of “The Birth of a Nation” is laid, said: “That in the 9 counties covered by the investigation for a period of approximately 6 months, the Ku Klux Klan lynched and murdered 35 men, whipped 262 men and women, otherwise outraged, shot, mutilated, burned out, etc., 101 persons. It committed 2 cases of sex offenses against Negro women. During this time the Negroes killed 4 men, beat one man, committed 16 other outrages, but no case of torture. No case is found of a white woman seduced or raped by a Negro.”⁴⁹

The pamphlet countered the central themes of the film that supported the violence towards Black people as a way of defending Whites from Black criminal behavior. Since the film was distributed throughout the country, the organization found it necessary to dispel any sympathy of the false narrative that Whites were victims of Black men’s brutality. A June 27, 1921, article in the Los Angeles Times quoted the City Prosecutor who stated that the film was “unfair to the Negro and injurious to the public.”⁵⁰

The campaign against the film symbolized the greater battle to dispel notions of Black propensity to criminal behavior; thus, the articulation of who Black people are was as important to the NAACP. In a *Crisis* article published in 1921, W.E.B. DuBois wrote:

We are right in our effort to get just treatment, to insist that we produce something of the best in human character and that it is unfair to judge us by our criminals and prostitutes this is justifiable propaganda on the other hand we face the truth of art we have criminals and prostitutes ignorant and debased elements just as all folks have when the artist paints us he has a right to paint us whole and not ignore everything which is not as perfect as would wish it to be the black Shakespeare must portray his black Iagos as well as his white Othello.⁵¹

⁴⁹*Stop the Ku Klux Propaganda*, NAACP Pamphlet, Jul 01, 1921 – December 31, 1921, FOLDER: 001421-033-0675, Page 53, Group I, Series C, Administrative File, 1912-1939, Part 11: Special Subject Files, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. (Known here after folder 001421_033_0675)

⁵⁰ Folder 001421_033_0675 page 2

⁵¹ WEB DuBois, “Negro Art,” *The Crisis* Vol. 22 No. 2 June 1921 New York NAACP, 55.

Through DuBois's leadership, the NAACP's magazine created a tradition to work as a cultural space that educated the public about the organization's campaigns, such as their anti-lynching and the censorship of the film *Birth of A Nation*. DuBois used the magazine to directly address racist propaganda that was used to support segregation and violence towards African Americans. *The Crisis* was a space for cultural, political, and economic transmission, a stage to make clear Black respectability as a counter to Black criminality. For example, DuBois wrote:

We hate delinquency cruelty and outrage with perfect hatred; and when it is done by blacks, the hurt and shame goes deeper than in any other case, not only because we know that innocent blacks will suffer more than the guilty, but because our ideals for Negro's are high. We welcome and follow with passionate haste any act or law that will prevent crime. But will lynching do it? Only beasts like Tillman say that. Will savage 75 year sentences, and loathsome jails, and dungeons do it? They haven't, on the other hand what causes crime- Negro and white? Every school boy knows: poverty, ignorance, ill health, unjust courts, unintelligent sentences, unspeakable jails. Can we blacks secure better wages in labor, can we abolish child labor and protect mothers, can we secure decent schools, can we protect health, elect good judges and officials? We can at least try, and through N.A.A.C.P and *The Crisis* we are trying day in and day out to do this.⁵²

DuBois laid out the NAACP's commitment to provide a variety of platforms that challenged racism, especially racist representations of Black people. This opinion piece in *The Crisis* is an example of the discourse race advocates had in the important role cultural work had on race advocacy.

The NAACP met the moment through a campaign to inform citizens and leaders of the race-based violence that terrorized African Americans while presenting positive

⁵² Ibid, 57.

representations of Black people as a counter to racist rhetoric. The organization used its network of local organizing throughout the country to raise money and create allies in the lynching campaign. For example, Mary Talbert, as a member of both the National Association of Colored Women's Club and NAACP, traveled the country, attended speaking engagements that informed the public about lynching, and raised money for the NAACP's legal and political work. In a report to the NAACP, her work "addressed groups of representative women in Richmond, Washington, Baltimore, and during July sent out four hundred personal letters. Received approximately nine hundred names of key women from New York, Rhode Island, Indiana, Colorado, Maryland and South Carolina."⁵³ Talbert reported one woman's effort stopped a lynching in Manassas, Virginia, and led to the formation of an organization called the Anti-Lynching Crusaders, whose objective was to unite a million women to stop lynching.⁵⁴ The Crisis Magazine reflected the work the NAACP did, while the campaign for lynching was a major focus of the organization. Unfortunately, it was not the only battle African Americans faced; thus, the organization faced more battles. The Crisis Magazine that featured the articles about lynching had a cover photograph of Captain Austin Thomas Walden. The Captain's photograph was reflective of how positive representations of African Americans were viewed as important in informing the world of the Black experience and the injustices Blacks often faced.

⁵³ *Report of Mary B. Talbert*, NAACP report, Jan 01, 1916 - Dec 31, 1966, FOLDER: 001529-003-0445, page 3, Group I, Series C, Administrative File: Subject File--Anti-Lynching Measures, 1912-1955, Part 07: Anti-Lynching Campaign, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. (known here after as NAACP Papers folder 001529_003_0445).

⁵⁴ NAACP Papers folder 001529_003_0445, page 3.

African Americans create a counter-narrative on the world stage.

The growing consumption of printed music, piano sales, phonographs, and phonograph records created a vibrant market by the end of World War I. The growing market reflected the minstrel stage with African American life caricatures like the "coon songs." Countering the negative representations of Blacks in the early twentieth century were jubilee groups, such as the Fisk Jubilee Singers and bands popularized during World War I such as James Reese Europe's group. James Europe Reese, a symbol of patriotism and African American respectability, was an example of how race and artistic expression intermingled. America could not deny citizens that represented the country's talent so well that "even German prisoners forgot they were prisoners, dropped their work to listen, and pat their feet to the stirring American tunes."⁵⁵ W.E.B DuBois reflected the desire for a counternarrative to challenge dominant depictions of African Americans when he wrote:

We are so used to seeing the truth distorted to our despoite, that whenever we are portrayed on canvas, in story or on the stage as simply human with human frailties we rebel. We want everything that is said about us to tell of the best and highest and noblest in us. We insist that our Art and Propaganda be one.⁵⁶

DuBois's words also illuminated the popular notion that art conveyed a message of African American unity, creativity, and the need for social, economic, and political justice.

⁵⁵ "Echoes of the Great War: Returning Home, James Reese Europe and Jazz," Library of Congress, accessed July 20, 2019. <https://www.loc.gov/exhibitions/world-war-i-american-experiences/about-this-exhibition/world-overtured/returning-home/james-reese-europe-and-jazz/>

⁵⁶ WEB DuBois, "Negro Art," *The Crisis* Vol. 22 No. 2, June 1921, New York NAACP, page 55, accessed July 20, 2019.

Black representation and economic agency

Harry Pace, a founder of Black Swan Records, agreed with his mentor's frustration with the limited representation African Americans faced. Thus, he created a Black-owned record label that he often noted in advertisements for Black Swan Records as an important selling point. Black Swan represented the expression of Black creativity and economic agency with racial solidarity; hence, a formula that fits the NAACP's advocacy mission. Harry Pace's relationship with the NAACP went beyond the relationship of mentorship between DuBois and Pace. Pace worked for Standard Life Insurance Company, where he worked with future NAACP leaders. The company was where African Americans could find financial upward mobility, unlike many other spaces in the South. Pace, along with James Weldon Johnson, Dr. Charles Johnson, and Dr. Louis Wright, started Atlanta's first chapter of the NAACP. While Pace was the first chapter's first president, he hired Walter White to be secretary and he became the future executive secretary of the national organization.⁵⁷ Black Swan Record's reflected a philosophy that music "was both individualistic and social: that music, as an art and a language of communication, could both ennoble and unite people."⁵⁸ The notion of an ennobled and united people is reflected in the record label's advertisement, which stated:

lovers of music everywhere, and those who desire to help in any advance of the Race should be sure to buy this record as encouragement to the manufacturers for their liberal policy and encourage other manufacturers who may not believe that the Race will buy records sung by its own singers.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ David Suisman, "Co-workers in the Kingdom of Culture: Black Swan Records and the Political Economy of African American Music," *The Journal of American History* (March 2004), 1301.

⁵⁸ Ibid 1303.

⁵⁹ Ibid 1302.

The relationship between Harry Pace and the NAACP demonstrates the relationship the organization had with African Americans that saw their artistic work related to their agency. The collection of young people that would build the organization from the original founder's vision reflected a cultural movement. A movement that celebrated artistic expression and taught that the double consciousness that African Americans had must be reconciled. The veil that Blacks wore to be unassuming or not draw White attention, which could turn violent, did not have to exist. By the organization's tenth year, the NAACP's political action reflected the greater cultural movement of the New Negro Movement. The Black Freedom Movement now had members that saw autonomy as cultural, economic, and political weapons. Young African American creatives refused to be intimidated by White violence or misrepresented by minstrel themes.

Pejorative representations permeated all facets of American popular culture, enabling African American dehumanization and brutality. For civil rights organizations like the NAACP, a clear question arose: could the Black body be protected from mob violence like lynching when the representations of Blackness were dehumanizing and objectifying? How could African Americans demand full and equal rights as United States citizens if they were seen as less than human by popular culture? To answer these questions and build a successful strategic plan to address the needs of African Americans, the NAACP's leadership became active participants in the facilitation of Black voice and representation. Hence, the relationship between the NAACP and the New Negro Movement also reflected the connection between representation and the African American advocacy work during the first three decades of the twentieth century. The new

decade continued earlier perspectives on race, especially seen as a paternalistic view of African Americans on the part of European Americans.

African Americans demanded to tell their own experience rather than have the African American experience told by Europeans or European Americans. Alain Locke was the editor of a body of work that represented and named the movement. His book *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (1925) reflected the connection between the arts and humanities with empowerment. Locke wrote that:

The Old Negro, we must remember, was a creature of moral debate and historical controversy. His has been a stock figure perpetuated as an historical fiction partly in innocent sentimentalism, partly in deliberate reactionism. The Negro himself has contributed his share to this through a sort of protective social mimicry forced upon him by the adverse circumstances of dependence. So for generations in the mind of America, the Negro has been more of a formula than a human being—a something to be argued about, condemned or defended, to be "kept down," or "in his place," or "helped up," to be worried with or worried over, harassed or patronized, a social bogey or a social burden. The thinking Negro even has been induced to share this same general attitude, to focus his attention on controversial issues, to see himself in the distorted perspective of a social problem. His shadow, so to speak, has been more real to him than his personality. Through having had to appeal from the unjust stereotypes of his oppressors and traducers to those of his liberators, friends and benefactors he has subscribed to the traditional positions from which his case has been viewed."⁶⁰

The New Negro was the person of worth that Black leaders of the NAACP had been describing to their White allies.

Lyrics, from song to poetry, demonstrate the ability of the arts to empower; express the Black experience; reinforce solidarity through experience; demand change, and express faith. Imani Perry points to music as a tool to educate people about the

⁶⁰ Alain Locke, *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, (New York: Albert & Charles Boni Inc., 1925), 14.

African American experience when she wrote that James Weldon Johnson's Black National Anthem "faced down white supremacy and transformed the nation and the world."⁶¹ James Weldon Johnson felt that "nothing will do more to change the mental attitude and raise status than a demonstration of intellectual parity through the production of literature and art."⁶² Johnson's words first appear in *The Book of American Negro Poetry*, with an essay on African American creative genius. Johnson's statement, published while he was an educator at Fisk University in the 1920s, reflected his view as a Creative Writing instructor. He believed in his students' cognitive ability and that their work was such an inspiration to himself that he felt committed to share it with the world. In a review of Johnson's book by Carter G. Woodson's *Journal of Negro History*, it stated:

In the effort to show "the emotional endowment, the original and artistic conception and power of creating" possessed by the Negro, the author has begun with the Uncle Remus stories, the spirituals, the dance, the folks songs and syncopated music.⁶³

Woodson viewed Johnson's work as an education and celebration of African American history and culture.

James Weldon Johnson provided a collection of work that contrasted the pejorative representations of African Americans and became the first African American

⁶¹ Imani Perry, *May We Forever Stand: A History of the Black National Anthem*, The John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 2018), 72.

⁶² James Weldon Johnson, *The Book of American Negro Poetry: Chosen and Edited, with an Essay on the Negro's Creative Genius* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, publication date), 1922.

⁶³ "The Book of American Negro Poetry James Weldon Johnson," 1923, *Journal of Negro History* 8 (3): 348.

executive secretary of the NAACP. The decade that housed the New Negro Movement also had the NAACP's first African American executive secretary, who was both a writer and educator. The organization had a leader with an affinity for the arts as a tool to educate and advocate.

In the 1920s, the NAACP's leadership had shifted from the White Progressives to Black scholars such as James Weldon Johnson and W.E.B. DuBois, leaders whose work influenced the New Negro Movement and mentored artists who shaped the movement. For instance, Jessie Faust, as literary editor for *The Crisis*, introduced artists including Langston Hughes and Jean Toomer, through the pages of *The Crisis*, in the same editions that discussed education and politics. The organization's magazines highlight of Black artists was evident on their front covers, literature inside and topics; all aspects of the magazine demonstrated the organization's goal to uplift Black dignity and humanity. Author Lawrence Schenbeck explains how an organization such as the NAACP transitioned from a predominantly White led organization to a Black-led one committed to supporting a counter-narrative. Schenbeck wrote that:

well-meaning white progressives embarked on a quest to understand the feelings and values of Black people in ways that would validate their own negative attitudes toward an increasingly materialistic, industrialized contemporary America. Eventually they would seek from Blacks a counterculture that could valorize in opposition to the relentless on set of Babbity in white America.⁶⁴

Schenbeck's assertion is evident in the NAACP's literary work and vision for racial advocacy, a combination seen in the NAACP leadership's work in the 1920s. The

⁶⁴ Lawrence Schenbeck, *Racial Uplift and American Music, 1878–1943* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 24.

commitment to demonstrations of authentic Black voices also intertwined with racial pride. Pride was distinctively different from the dominant narrative of White superiority. Arturo A. Schomburg, historian, collector, and writer during the New Negro Movement, pointed out that:

what is a luxury for the nation as a whole becomes a prime social necessity for the Negro. From him, a group tradition must supply compensation for persecution, and pride of race the antidote for prejudice.”⁶⁵

For many African Americans during the 1920s, the counter to prejudice was racial pride, captured through the transmission of culture. The contrary representation of Blacks created racial solidarity based on a common understanding that Black people were not the minstrel characters that seeped into all categories of American culture. While the New Negro Movement challenged concepts of a monolithic view of African Americans, there was a commonality. Black people had a solidarity in a desire to be free and for the artists, whether literary, musical, or visual, freedom was self-expression and representation rather than the invisibility that the veil, referred to earlier in the chapter, caused. The New Negro Movement, also referred to as the Harlem Renaissance, rebelled with an “unwillingness to reflect mark of slavery with “authentic” renditions of the spirituals, but black audiences and concert reviewers did not seem restricted.”⁶⁶ The arts, specifically music and literature, had been a long-used vessel for cultural transmission.

The New Negro Movement reflected decades of work in racial advocacy. DuBois worked to influence young leaders with his earlier view that:

⁶⁵ Arturo A. Schomburg, “The Negro Digs Up His Past,” *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni Inc., 1925), 231.

⁶⁶ Jon Michael Spencer, *The New Negroes and Their Music: The Success of the Harlem Renaissance.* (Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997) 38.

This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture, to escape both death and isolation, to husband and use his best powers and his latent genius. These powers of body and mind have in the past been strangely wasted, dispersed, or forgotten.”⁶⁷

The explicit expression of cultural pride and frustration at the pejorative view White America had towards Black America created a combination that historian Wilson Jeremiah Moses called Black nationalism. Moses associated The New Negro Movement as Black Nationalism because of the intersection of political resistance with self-expression. In his book *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*, Moses wrote that “the Harlem Renaissance, and the New Negro Movement, attempted to redefine the culture.”⁶⁸ The fight for civil rights was strongly linked to autonomy, a clear desire to no longer depend on White intercession for Black representation.

The same agency that sought self-expression also resisted the oppression of the Jim Crow South through the migration from the South to the North, not only the migration of African Americans to urban centers but also their assertion of diverse artistic expression. It is important to note that the New Negro Movement’s artists resisted conformity because of their color, and their art was explicitly a demonstration of their humanity and the complexity that is associated with being a human being. This body of research does not assert that all Black artists wanted to answer the “Negro question” or address issues of race. The NAACP looked to support the artistic expression that supported their political campaigns and especially showed Black respectability. Their

⁶⁷ W.E.B DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 4

⁶⁸ Wilson Jeremiah Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*. (Archon Books, 1978) 10.

desire to facilitate a message of Black respectability is evident in the pictures, advertisements, and articles in the organization's magazine.

The New Negro and the Cinema

The battle for agency went hand in hand with self-expression, especially in the 1920s. Artists and intellectuals associated with the New Negro Movement became the words and visual examples for the public in the NAACP's battle against racism. The resistance against racist rhetoric in popular culture, like that in *Birth of A Nation*, required an alternative narrative. African American filmmaker Oscar Micheaux provided respectable narratives that were contrary to those that supported mob violence. He created films such as *Within Our Gates* in 1919 in response to *Birth of A Nation*. The film humanized Black women and children, as well as showed the African American reality that they could fall prey to the Klan's terrorization. In true New Negro Movement's plurality of voice, Micheaux created more movies that had mixed race, romance, and action themes. His 1925 film *Body and Soul*, the film that was Paul Robeson's first film as an actor, Robeson would go on to be an important Black male presence in film. The arts made clear to Americans that the Black face they saw in minstrel themes reflected the veil that DuBois articulated and attempted to lift in his work with the NAACP. In 1925, Langston Hughes published the poem "Minstrel Man:"

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter
And my throat
Is deep with song,
You do not think
I suffer after
I have held my pain

So long.
 Because my mouth
 Is wide with laughter,
 You do not hear
 My inner cry,
 Because my feet
 Are gay with dancing,
 You do not know
 I die⁶⁹

The combination of the NAACP's campaigns against *Birth of A Nation* and lynching demonstrated the organization's commitment to African American advocacy through cultural work. The organization's cultural work did not exclude the litigious effort and lobbying work. The NAACP knew that to battle racism, it must attack it on a variety of fronts. The organization's cultural work would not only give voice to the silenced but also connect Black creativity to political and financial agency.

Case in point, in 1926, the William E. Harmon Foundation went further than the NAACP's decade-long recognition of African American contributions in the Spingarn Medal. Both awards hoped to counter the negative depictions of Blacks. The Harmon Foundation's award added a financial reward to further the award recipient's work in literature, music, fine arts, business and industry, science and innovation, education, religious service, and race relations. Many of the Harmon Foundation award winners were published in the *Crisis* before they won the award. The award allowed the artist "a new emancipation . . . that will free the Negro from external restrictions and internal inhibitions, thus enabling him to realize himself in the highest achievement,"⁷⁰ as the

⁶⁹ Langston Hughes, "Minstrel Man," *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: Albert & Charles Boni Inc., 1925), 149.

⁷⁰ "Excellence & Emancipation: African American and the Harmon Foundation," *The Johnson Collection*, TJC Gallery, accessed March 15, 2022, <https://thejohnsoncollection.org/excellence-and-emancipation/>

Harmon Award's superintendent and African American church leader, Dr. George E. Haynes stated. Similar to the early twentieth-century race advocates like Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Carter G. Woodson, non-profits like the Harmon Foundation reflected the same mindset that The NAACP had. The mindset was that the arts, the free expression of Black thought, life, and culture was a tool for liberation. The transformational agency needed to create a more perfect union was through the creation of a space and or a stage for African American creativity.

Chapter 2: The NAACP's Cultural Work During the 1930s

Historian David Kennedy pointed out that "the Depression had begun in the agricultural sector."⁷¹ Many African Americans in the South comprised most of the agricultural labor sector. When the Great Depression began in 1929, the economic downturn disproportionately affected Black farmers. Relief programs did not trickle down to African Americans, as Black Americans' invisibility in civil rights was evident economically. Economic disparities were tangential to inequitable civil rights; hence the NAACP continued to view its work of economic justice as civil rights advocacy.

The nation's prosperity in the 1920s took a turn in the 1930s, and with the economic devastation of the Great Depression, the decade exacerbated decades of past racism. For African Americans, however, the creativity and political assertion of the New Negro Movement in the 1920s did not end. The combination of creativity and political assertions were used to battle the racism that assigned Blacks to second-class citizenship.

⁷¹ David M. Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929-1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001,) 124.

When economic hard times came over the United States, racist policies and social practices intensified the battle for civil rights. The election of 1932 brought a distinctive shift in party affiliation of African Americans when they left Lincoln's Republican Party to support Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), a Democrat. FDR ran on a political platform that promised economic relief, which gave African Americans hope out of the economic inequity they had experienced. In her book about the NAACP, author Patricia Sullivan noted that many Black advocacy groups, such as the NAACP, lost faith in Republican President Herbert Hoover's Administration because of his explicitly racist nominations. An example of Hoover's racist nominations was John J. Parker to the Supreme Court. Parker was quoted as saying that "the participation of the Negro in politics is a source of evil and danger to both races."⁷² In response, Walter White testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee about Park's racist statement. It seemed that the Senate was unmoved by White's testimony until the NAACP collaborated with African American civil rights activists such as Robert Bagnall, a Detroit minister. White also worked with Daisy Lampkin, a Pennsylvania African American woman, who was a member of the Lucy Stone Women's Suffrage League, the National Suffrage League, and the National Association of Colored Women. To collect even more support and possible votes in the African American community, White also called upon the organizing help of William Pickens. With the combined forces of Bagnall, Lampkin, and Pickens, the NAACP seemed to have consolidated a large percentage of the African American vote.

⁷² Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009), 138-139.

The collaboration the NAACP was able to utilize demonstrated the collective power of Black voters, which drew the interest of FDR. Over two hundred Black newspapers and fraternal organizations supported NAACP concerns, gave a national voice to African Americans, and demonstrated the influence that Black Americans had on a large voting bloc.⁷³ The Lincoln Republican Party no longer courted Black votes, hence a voter migration to the Democratic Party with the influence of organizations including the NAACP. It is important to note that FDR would campaign on a Democratic ticket connected to Southerners who firmly adhered to antebellum cultural norms, especially their support of Jim Crow laws. The Democratic Party was a cornucopia of politics, and FDR was able to pull together diverse experiences and needs into one party. The common goal was to survive the destitute situation of the Great Depression, yet where did this leave an organization such as the NAACP?

This chapter will reveal the role of the arts in the articulation of oppression and the influence of popular entertainment, such as film, on the spreading of racist tropes within the decade of the 1930s. The chapter will also discuss the NAACP's cultural work in the presentation of art to inspire people to political action. The goal was to demonstrate and attack anti-Black rhetoric that supported racial bias in the classroom, labor practices, and labor opportunities. It is no mistake that the culture and laws of segregation are called Jim Crow, a minstrel character; entertainment, law, and education were interconnected. In the past, the NAACP expressed opinions on all forces that drove racist behavior. With the limited resources due to the Great Depression, it was necessary for the organization to

⁷³ Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009), 139.

build a focused attack on the infrastructure that supported racial oppression. The NAACP's limited budget called for focused attacks on racism that in the past were done through their cultural work. In the 1930s, the organization's cultural work was a tool to educate the public and promote solidarity in the face of Jim Crow. The racial caste system consisted of cultural, economic and political systems that subjugated Black people. The NAACP's work was to reveal the harm Jim Crow caused throughout the country, specifically in popular cultural behaviors and socioeconomic oppression. The NAACP's work during the Great Depression is evident in the attack on popular films and racist ideas.

The African American experience during the Great Depression reveals the climate that necessitated the work of civil rights organizations, including the NAACP. Art continued to be a diverse platform for the expression of experience, the education of the public, and a tool to garner support for litigious efforts against lynching. The racial and economic depression that African Americans faced, as well as the need for the NAACP to shift how it battled for civil rights, is revealed in the story of the Scottsboro Nine. The African American experience during the Great Depression shined a light on the infrastructure that supported racial oppression. An example of the infrastructure that supported racial oppression was debt slavery, which forced Blacks to work their debt off due to vagrancy laws that criminalized homelessness. By 1932, approximately half the African American population was unemployed, and the lynching of African Americans increased from eight people in one year to twenty-eight in one year.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Library of Congress, "Race Relations in the 1930s and 1940s," accessed March 13, 2021, <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/great-depression-and-world-war-ii-1929-1945/race-relations-in-1930s-and-1940s/>.

The Great Depression Placed Black and White America on The Move and in Competition for Labor

The train cars, specifically the cattle cars, that traveled between Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee carried Black and White people who illegally hopped the trains to find work. This interracial journey was filled with danger due to the desperation of the passengers; for example, a White man stood on Haywood Patterson's hand and almost knocked him off the train. A fight broke out, and the Black travelers forced the White travelers off the cattle cars; quickly, word of the altercation spread in the towns through which the train traveled. When the train reached Paint Rock, Alabama, a mob met the nine Black boys, four of whom knew one another. The nine Black boys were taken into custody in the nearby town of Scottsboro, Alabama.⁷⁵ The boys were accused of raping seventeen-year-old Ruby Bates and twenty-one-year-old Victoria Price; these girls were also traveling to find millwork. If they had not told police they were attacked by the nine African American boys, then they could have been charged with vagrancy and illegal sexual acts without their accusations against the boys.⁷⁶ Racist views of Black criminality and the themes of Black men ravaging White women associated with the movie *Birth of a Nation* and lynching surrounded the nine accused Black boys and men in Scottsboro.

Newspaper titles such as "Lynching Negro Children in Southern Courts" required vigilance in the cultural work designed to counter negative representations of Black

⁷⁵ Alice George, "Who Were The Scottsboro Nine? The Young Black Men Served A Combined Total of 130 Years For A Crime They Never Committed," *Smithsonian Magazine*, accessed March 23, 2021. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/who-were-scottsboro-nine-180977193/>

⁷⁶ Ibid.

people that influence the judicial system.⁷⁷ The NAACP found that they had little influence on the families of the Scottsboro Nine, who had lost public confidence with the NAACP's slow response to come to their aid. As a result, the organization withdrew from the Scottsboro Case and had to contend with internally difficult issues of finances and organizational vision.

The NAACP went through an organizational change with W.E.B. DuBois's increased view that the racial oppression Black people faced required healing that called for a separation from White influence. The view of empowerment through separation, Black Nationalism, had increased interest with diverse perspectives. The 1930s continued the Black Nationalism that historian Wilson J. Moses described within the Harlem Renaissance and is described in the earlier chapter with the autonomy of voice displayed in the New Negro Movement. The concept of Black empowerment without White intercession was unsettling for a variety of reasons. One reason this body of research points to is the threat the Communist Party (CP) posed. The CP parroted the sentiments of Black Nationalism, which contradicted American capitalism, and that created a wedge in the Black Freedom Movement in the United States. Elements in the United States government saw communism as a threat to democracy. This Red Scare influenced Black advocacy work. Black activists had to negotiate racism, economic inequality, and their loyalty to the country, which made hard times to be even harder for African Americans.

"Hard times mean only that we must work harder in the cause of saving the right of colored people," William Pickens, the NAACP Field Secretary, articulated the

⁷⁷ *Lynching Negro Children in Southern Courts*, accessed March 23, 2021. <http://n2t.net/ark:/65665/fd5191778e9-3a2b-4c8c-904c-675804a065c6>

determination of the organization during the Great Depression.⁷⁸ The work required a new analysis of how best to advocate for African Americans while in severe budget constraints. The organization continued its cultural work and developed its youth organizing. These organizational changes were reflective of the struggle the NAACP had with the Scottsboro Case. The case exposed the organization's need for increased public support and confidence, especially within the African American community, without isolating their White donors. A sympathetic cause for the interracial group of people that donated worked and sat on the organization's board was the fight against the film *Birth of a Nation*. The silent film was re-released in the 1930s with sound, and the racist themes of the movie were reintroduced to popular culture. In a memorandum from an NAACP member asked Walter White:

Since the matter of the *Birth of a Nation* comes up so often and has been a matter for our attention since 1915, do you not think this should be one of the things to which Mr. Andrews should give special study, in the same manner as he does Civil Rights Laws?⁷⁹

The organization understood that this film enabled racist thought to influence the public, which in turn influenced American institutions. Thus, the same people that were sympathetic to the movie's themes populated public spaces, including juries and lynch mobs.

“The Birth of a Nation” exalts the infamous Ku Klux Klan and distorts and falsifies history. It is a malicious misrepresentation of colored people, depicting

⁷⁸ *William Pickens to Dr. J. A. Hardin*, letter, March 3, 1932, FOLDER: 001423-014-0928, page 35, Group I, Series G, Branch File, 1913-1939, Part 12: Selected Branch Files, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁷⁹ *Miss Randolph to Mr. White*, memorandum, May 29, 1931, FOLDER: 001421-034-0193, page 33, Group I, Series C, Administrative File, 1912-1939, Part 11: Special Subject Files, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.
(known after as folder 001421_034_0193)

them as moral perverts. It arouses sharp race antagonisms that embitter citizens against each other. It tends to be a breach of public peace.⁸⁰

Public peace had already been breached for the Black community through lynch mobs and miscarriages of justice like in the case of the Scottsboro case. The Scottsboro Nine became an important representational figure of African American oppression in popular culture.

The social, economic, political, and cultural conditions of the Scottsboro Case

The plight of America's poor was invisible in the 1930s; especially invisible were Black people who struggled with the burden of the dehumanization of Jim Crow. The dire economic experience gave an excuse for sympathy toward White supremacist views of Black criminality. The same themes that the NAACP identified as problematic in the film *Birth of A Nation*, Black sexual violence towards White women, played out in real life in the accusations of nine Black boys and men on the part of two White women. The CP took a particular interest in telling the story of poor Black women as a contrast to the press's sympathetic coverage of wealthy White mothers like the Lindbergh family, whose child had been kidnapped, causing a media storm.⁸¹ An article in the United States CP periodical *The Working Woman* told the story of Mrs. Wright, the mother of Andy and Roy Wright, the nineteen and twelve-year-old members of the Scottsboro Boys. The article described the plight of a hard-working mother whose five dollars a week labor often left her body wrecked. With the realization that the coffee, bacon fat, cornmeal, and

⁸⁰ Folder 001421_034_0193, page 34.

⁸¹ Denise Lynn, "Black Women and the Scottsboro Boys," *Black Perspectives*, May 7, 2018, <https://www.aaihs.org/black-women-and-the-scottsboro-boys/>.

white flour were not enough nourishment for her children, she had to let her children of age go to work in search of a lifeline.⁸²

The story of the Scottsboro Nine demonstrated the deeply embedded issues of racial terror and the economic divide within the African American community. In the September 1933 edition of *The Crisis*, W.E.B. DuBois wrote an essay titled “On Being Ashamed of Oneself: An essay on Race Pride.” In his essay, DuBois described the concept of respectability politics as well as the drive of African Americans to separate themselves from images of poverty and ignorance that were central to racist rhetoric. DuBois tells the intimate story of his grandfather being upset with an invitation to a “Negro picnic.” DuBois explained that “it meant close association with poverty, ignorance and suppressed and disadvantaged people, dirty and with bad manners.”⁸³ Yet, the New Negro Movement created an opportunity for there to be a shift in the representation of Black people and Black life. DuBois wrote that seventy years after his grandfather:

Marcus Garvey discovered that a black skin was in itself a sort of patent to nobility, and that Negroes ought to be proud of themselves and their ancestors, for the same or analogous reasons that made white folk feel superior.⁸⁴

Through the first two decades of the twentieth century:

All colored folk had gone through the same experience, for more and more largely in the last twenty-five years, colored America has discovered itself; has discovered groups of people, association with whom is a poignant joy and despite their ideal of American assimilation, in more and more cases and with more and more determined object they seek each other.⁸⁵

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, “On Being Ashamed of Oneself: An Essay,” *The Crisis*, September 1933, Vol. 40, No. 9, 199.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 199.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 199.

The solidarity of race combined with American assimilation set the stage for the:

drawing of class lines inside the Negro race, and it means the emergence of a certain social aristocracy, who by reasons of looks income, education and contact, form the sort of upper social group which the world has long known and helped to manufacture and preserve. The early basis of this Negro group was simply color and a bald imitation of the white environment.⁸⁶

DuBois described the African American culture that would clash internally in the 1930s, because of the social and economic inequality that African Americans faced. Historian Nicholas Toloudis connected the African American class line, respectability politics and radical Black women of the 1930s. Toloudis wrote that:

the twentieth century, such respectability had seemed a promising vehicle for social reform, as Baptist churches, neighborhood organizations, and social clubs became sites for contesting racism and sexism. By the end of the 1920s, however, class tensions within Black communities, along with the persistent failures of reform movements, had weakened the salience of respectability as a political tool.⁸⁷

Toloudis's description of the period reflects the experience of the NAACP and the mothers of the boys and young men that would be known as the Scottsboro Nine.

A segment of Black America saw the relevance of church, and neighborhood organizations as a tool for social reform.⁸⁸ Art once again complicated the spaces used for community, solidarity, and voice. For example, literature, music, and the visual arts were of organizing and cathartic expression that the church primarily was.

The Role of Arts to Articulate Oppression in the 1930s

⁸⁶ Ibid 199.

⁸⁷ Nicholas Toloudis, "Reconfiguring Radicalism: Goldie Watson and the Politics of Respectability, 1931–1960," *Journal of African American History* 106. 3 (2021) 469.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 469.

Literature, music, and the visual arts were outlets for African Americans to find solidarity in a common experience. The solidarity in a common experience reflected the popularity of Blues lyrics for the Southern migrant. Similar to the lyrics in a Blues song, poetry and literature produced by Black people articulated the Black experience. The articulation of the Black experience, especially during a period of racial injustice and economic inequality, afforded a cathartic experience for the artist and the audience. Black people who produced and appreciated Black art were in a sort of call and response about the oppression they faced. The emotional charge of the relationship between Black artists and the Black audience often harkened back to rural or even chattel slavery past that did not represent the polished progress that organizations such as the NAACP had wanted to present. For NAACP leaders, including Charles Johnson and W.E.B. DuBois, all art had a purpose - to counter the racist rhetoric the public was often presented with.

The New Negro Movement primarily occupied the decade of the 1920s. Yet, the spirit of creativity and Black assertion of voice continued into the 1930s. The artistic development, political activism, and community engagement are also described as the Harlem Renaissance. Cultural historians say that the Harlem Renaissance continued into the mid-1930s, hence, the artists famous during the New Negro Movement were relevant during the decade of the 1930s. Their work continued to be an expression of the Black experience. When Gwendolyn Bennett wrote the poem *Song*, she demonstrated the significant role music had in the reflection of the Black experience. Her words:

Shaken from firm, brown limbs, Or heads thrown back in irreverent mirth. My
song has the hush sweetness. Of moist, dark lips. Where hymns keep company
with old forgotten banjo songs. Abandon tells you, that I sing the heart of race

Described is the cultural transmission that song can provide and the belief that songs often reflect the heart of the African American. Bennett identified the use of the same artistic median that were cultural expressions used to express and promote racist views. When Bennett wrote “Clinking chains and minstrelsy,” she made the correlation between the institution that created slavery and the system that created minstrels. Art was the weapon used to promote racism. Thus, cultural work in the 1930s was an important counter-narrative to racism in popular culture. The NAACP understood, as did many other African Americans during the period, that art continued to be a tool to educate, connect to a community, and empower the “dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. This was the common denominator that formed all the arts of the time.”⁸⁹

The battle over the safety of integration in the face of white terror

In the battle to advocate and protect African Americans, W.E.B DuBois questioned the physical and emotional safety of complete integration. Historian Patricia Sullivan wrote that “DuBois noted, a black man born in Boston had a right to protest any separation of schools by color, but what, then of his helpless child, sent into a mixed school.” DuBois continued to point out that “where white children kick, cuff, or abuse him, or where teachers openly and persistently neglect or hurt or dwarf his soul.”⁹⁰

The battle for respectability was one that not only sought a positive view of Black people but also the respectable treatment of Black people. Historian Patricia Sullivan described

⁸⁹ Allan M. Gordon “Interactions between Art and Music during the Harlem Renaissance,” *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 146.

⁹⁰ Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and The Making of The Civil Rights Movement* (New York: The New Press, 2009), 200.

an internal debate the NAACP had as well as the greater African American community.

The debate over integration boiled to the surface of race advocacy movement in the

1930s. Sullivan wrote:

Where blacks had been welcomed at the best hotels in major northern cities in 1910, in 1934 there was not a single northern city, with the possible exception of New York, where Blacks could be guest in a first class hotel.⁹¹

Sullivan points to restrictive covenants throughout the North that reinforced Jim Crow

law's separation of the races and the designation of Blacks to inferior level to Whites.

The desperation of the Great Depression created a problem of respectability and representation for the NAACP because the Association's Black leadership worked to counter negative representations. Yet, they often celebrated narratives that were similar to White Progressives, such as Blacks who could afford for women to play more traditional roles in the home. The NAACP's cultural work was restricted Black representation that the organization deemed refined and less ostentatious, and it favored representatives who were a contrast to working-class Blacks that found that their limitations because of racial oppression worsened with the country's economic downturn.

Plurality in the Black Experience.

The NAACP confronted the domination of White people over American culture and politics through the arts. Artistic expressions like the Blues, and Black spaces of entertainment, like those on the Chittlin Circuit, showed the plurality of the Black experience in America. The New Negro or Harlem Renaissance artists, such as

⁹¹ Ibid, 200.

Gwendolyn Bennett and Langston Hughes, created a diverse body of work that represented the “dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. This was the common denominator that formed all the arts of the time.”⁹² Gwendolyn Bennett’s poem *Song* demonstrated the significant role Black people saw music have in the reflection of their experience. New Negro artists, like Hughes and Bennett, continued to connect Black art, especially song, as a testimony to life experience. Yet, the support for artistic expression changed on the part of NAACP leaders such as Walter White. The artistic expression of artists that were not connected to the humanities, but instead connected to popular entertainment received less support from the NAACP. For example, artists, such as Brookes and Hughes, viewed Blues music as lyrical testimony to the Black experience; but there were few occasions that leaders like White used Blues music to educate and unify people around Black oppression.

Many of the NAACP’s leadership viewed Blues entertainers as not model representations of Black respectability compared to their popularity with the Black working class. Angela Davis explained why an organization such as the NAACP supported artists but rejected many popular artistic expressions, including the Blues.

Davis wrote:

Blues artist[s] like Bessie Smith maintained unashamed bonds with her own southern upbringing, preserving in her music African American folk experiences that many Black intellectuals associated with the racist-inspired stereotypes they were trying to transcend⁹³

⁹² Allan M. Gordon, “Interactions between Art and Music during the Harlem Renaissance,” *Black Music in the Harlem Renaissance: A Collection of Essays* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), 146.

⁹³ Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998), 154.

The organization reflected the reality that to be Black does not mean to be a member of the proletariat. The debate over the role of the civil rights organization within the increasingly necessary labor advocacy movement during the Great Depression was a constant discussion during the 1930s.

Music, As the Voice For the Black Laborer:

The 1930s combined the agency and creativity during a period that was filled with the political disenfranchisement of Jim Crow as well as the added struggle that came with the Depression. Similar to all periods, music gave a stage for the articulation of the Black experience in America. Yet, the cultural recognition of the New Negro continued the work songs of enslaved people, to the field songs and hollers of African Americans during Reconstruction. The tradition of song followed the agricultural laborer that migrated North or West, carrying the rhythm and unfair life experiences of Black Americans. The Blues song is an example of the space Black folk took to articulate their experience as well as the struggle over what is a respectability representation that is Black created rather than White created.

Another appeal that Black Nationalist organizations had was their willingness to take on the plight of the Black worker. The NAACP, in contrast to Black nationalist groups like Garvey's, set a tone for how the organization would deal with Black labor issues with a longhand. An example of labor as a central issue to African Americans nationally was a letter to DuBois from a president of Bluefield Institute, a historically Black College in West Virginia, that the then:

Vice President of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen is to be asked to serve in the Hoover Cabinet as Secretary of Labor. Mr. Doak was for a long time an employee of the railroad yards in the City of Bluefield and in his official capacity

while here there was no man more active and more determined to remove Negro employee from the railroad than Mr. Doak.⁹⁴

There was no NAACP response to the appeal, and Mr. Doak becomes Labor Secretary under the Hoover administration. That same month, letters were sent to NAACP founders like DuBois and William English Walling. Walter White's article in *The Nation* caused an upset. For example, Walling received a letter from the Metal Trades Department of the American Federation of Labor's secretary-treasurer, John P. Frey. Frey was upset because White's article misrepresented the union and did a disservice to Blacks. Frey also wrote:

You may recall my reference sometime ago to an article by Doctor Dubois in *The Nation* which was so inaccurate and untruthful concerning the Molder's Union, that I took up the matter with the editor of *The Nation* and finally forced a traction.⁹⁵

Frey's letter reveals the NAACP's struggle with labor rights organizations and the disconnect the organization had between labor advocacy and their work in civil rights.

Walter White's investigation of lynchings often revealed a story that linked the mistreatment of Black laborers by their White employers. However, the Association, especially Walter White, was dismissive of the concerns of working-class Blacks. He was dismissive of Black working-class women, a group who did not function within traditional feminine roles. The fact that they had to work outside the home needed even before the Great Depression, and hard labor at that, cultivated an attraction to liberation strategies that "embraced liberationist strategies outside women's traditional reform

⁹⁴ *R. P. Sims to Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois*, letter, January 9, 1929, FOLDER: 001418-011-0095, page 5, Group I, Series C, Administrative File: Subject File- Labor, 1913-1939, Part 10: Peonage, Labor, and the New Deal, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

⁹⁵ *John P. Frey to William English Walling*, letter, January 10, 1929, FOLDER: 001418-011-0095, page 8, Group I, Series C, Administrative File: Subject File- Labor, 1913-1939, Part 10: Peonage, Labor, and the New Deal, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

activities.”⁹⁶ In contrast, the Communist Party (CP) embraced the working-class women and the Black nationalist views many working-class people favored. The CP confronted issues that the NAACP was slow to respond to, such as housing evictions, food relief, and inequitable unemployment rates.⁹⁷ The NAACP, before the Great Depression, was an organization that represented the concerns and discourse within the Black community. By the 1930’s, the Black community’s concerns were increasingly diverse, and an increase of advocacy groups occurred while the NAACP was slow to respond to the diverse concerns of the Black community.

To understand the NAACP of the 1930s, it is important to analyze the Scottsboro Nine’s experience. Their story was immortalized in both literature and the visual arts, a reflection of the New Negro Movement’s continued spirit. A pioneer in the New Negro Movement, Langston Hughes told the story of the boys and young men called the Scottsboro Nine through the creation of a pamphlet with a poem, play and artwork by Prentiss Taylor. It was an effort to rally support around young people that seemed to be in a hopeless situation. The expression of the pain, both economic and political, fostered by systemic oppression was expressed in the Blues. The cathartic out cry of the Black experience was heard when Thomas Dorsey wrote and Ma Rainey sang the lyrics, “Blues, please tell me do I have to die a slave? Do you hear me pleadin’, you going to

⁹⁶ Lashawn Harris, “Running with the Reds: African American Women and the Communist Party during the Great Depression,” *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (The University of Chicago Press on behalf of Association for the Study of African American Life and History: Winter, 2009), 25.

⁹⁷ Ibid, page 25.

take me to my grave.”⁹⁸ The hopelessness of life is captured in Blues music and the hopelessness of the situation the Scottsboro Nine were in was also captured in a song by famed Blues artist Leadbelly:

Go to Alabama and ya better watch out
The landlord'll get ya, gonna jump and shout
Scottsboro Scottsboro Scottsboro boys
Tell ya what it all about

Go to Alabama and ya better watch out
The landlord'll get ya, gonna jump and shout
Scottsboro Scottsboro Scottsboro boys
Tell ya what it all about

I'm gonna talk to Joe Louis
And it all angered me
Don't even try to think about it
Alabama ree

Go to Alabama and ya better watch out
The landlord'll get ya, gonna jump and shout
Scottsboro Scottsboro Scottsboro boys
Tell ya all about

Go to Alabama and ya better watch out
The landlord'll get ya, gonna jump and shout
Scottsboro Scottsboro Scottsboro boys
Tell ya all about

I'm gonna tell all the colored people
Even the old nigga here
Don't ya ever go to Alabama
And try to live

Go to Alabama and ya better watch out
The landlord'll get ya, gonna jump and shout
Scottsboro Scottsboro Scottsboro boys
Gon' tell ya all about

Go to Alabama and ya better watch out

⁹⁸ Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 243.

The landlord'll get ya, gonna jump and shout
 Scottsboro Scottsboro Scottsboro boys
 Tell ya all about

Go to Alabama and ya better watch out
 The landlord'll get ya, gonna jump and shout
 Scottsboro Scottsboro Scottsboro boys
 Tell ya all about

I'm gonna tell all the colored people
 Livin' in Harlem swing
 Don't ya ever go to Alabama
 Just try to sing

Go to Alabama and ya better watch out
 The landlord'll get ya, gonna jump and shout
 Scottsboro Scottsboro Scottsboro boys
 Gon' tell ya all about

Go to Alabama and ya better watch out
 The landlord'll get ya, gonna jump and shout
 Scottsboro Scottsboro Scottsboro boys
 Tell it all about⁹⁹

While the African American community, especially those that identified with the plight of the laborer, were outraged by the experience of these young boys; especially since their experience was so similar to so many Black people. The NAACP's response was shockingly slow, so much so that organization official William Pickens wrote in the Communist paper, *Daily Worker*, that the trial was a judicial massacre and applauded the International Labor Defense's (ILD) work in support of these young people.¹⁰⁰

"Lynching Negro Children in Southern Courts,"¹⁰¹ read the 1931 pamphlet published by the ILD. Leaders of the NAACP like Walter White felt that this was

⁹⁹ Lead Belly, "Scottsboro Boys," *Song by Song*, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, <https://smithsonianfolkways.tumblr.com/post/111955471987/lead-belly-song-by-song-scottsboro>

¹⁰⁰ Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009), 148.

¹⁰¹ https://www.si.edu/object/lynching-negro-children-southern-courts:nmaahc_2010.55.59

problematic sensationalism on the part of the opportunistic CP. The long-time social advocate and one of the NAACP's founders, Mary White Ovington, thought William Pickens's support of the work of the ILD was disloyal to the NAACP. The CP and the NAACP's struggles between one another left the political and judicial needs of African Americans in limbo during the 1930s, much of the Great Depression and New Deal Era.

Hanging in the struggle were the Scottsboro Nine. Clarence Norris, nineteen; Olen Montgomery, seventeen; Andrew Wright, nineteen; Willie Roberson, seventeen; Ozie Powell, sixteen; Eugene Williams, thirteen; Charlie Weems, nineteen; Leroy Wright, thirteen; and Haywood Patterson, eighteen, left their homes in Georgia and Tennessee to find work instead found themselves involved in a legal lynching. When Walter White finally went to Alabama to meet with the young men's families, he was frustrated with the influence of the ILD and referred to the families' ignorance.¹⁰² White's inability to connect and influence working class Blacks was demonstrated with his lack of work in the Scottsboro case. White was aware of and concerned with the public image of the NAACP; the NAACP's slow response made the organization seem like they no longer reflected the concerns of African Americans.

In the Walter White essay titled "The Negro and the Communists," he outlined a clear path he would take the organization on, the road to battling communism alongside racism. The article did three key things. One told the story of the Scottsboro Nine and detailed the judicial injustice the boys and young men faced. Two reflected sympathy for the women that falsely accused the nine young people of rape:

¹⁰² Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New Press, 2009), 149.

When Victoria Price jauntily told her story, reveling in the exciting spotlight so utterly different from the accustomed dreariness of her work in an antiquated cotton mill, out of the crowd.¹⁰³

Three took aim at the CP:

Judge Hawkins had received a childishly futile and bombastic telegraphic threat from a Communist organization in New York City, the International Labor Defense, which intemperately asserted that the presiding judge “would be held personally responsible unless the nine defendants were immediately released.”¹⁰⁴

The articles continued with a description of the NAACP coming in and saving these boys and young men from communist opportunism and the injustices of the Jim Crow

South. The article reasserted:

There is but one effective and intelligent way in which to counteract Communists efforts at proselyting among American Negroes, and that method is drastic revision of the almost chronic American indifference to the Negro’s plight.¹⁰⁵

White made clear that the jobs, decent living conditions, the right to vote, “justice in the courts, and protection of life and property in Mississippi as well as in New York”¹⁰⁶ is the way to combat the Communist threat.

Cultural Representations of the Scottsboro Boys:

Artistic expression of the Black experience was central to the articulation of the injustice that occurred in the Scottsboro Nine case. For example, in the poem, *Christ in Alabama* by Langston Hughes:

Christ is a Nigger,

¹⁰³ Walter White, “Is the Negro Going Communist”, article, Jan 01, 1931 – Dec 31, 1931, FOLDER: 001422-035-0636, page 105, Group I, Series C, Administrative File: Speech and Article File, 1912-1939, Part 11: Special Subject Files, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. (known hereafter as folder 001422_035-0636-0003)

¹⁰⁴ Folder 001422_035-0636-0003 page 106.

¹⁰⁵ Folder 001422_035-0636-0003, page 134.

¹⁰⁶ Folder 001422_035-0636-0003, page 34.

Beaten and Black--
 O, Bare your back.
 Mary is His Mother—
 Mammy of the South,
 Silence your mouth.
 God's His Father—
 White Master above,
 Grant us your love.
 Most holy bastard
 Of the bleeding mouth:
 Nigger Christ
 On the cross of the South

The desperate situation caused by the Great Depression accentuated the oppressive situation African Americans faced. When resources became scarce, the resentment towards Blacks that was associated with Southern themes of White victimization increased. Dora Apel asserted that:

Just as race was culturally constructed, culture was racially constructed. The link between race and culture was sexuality, in which the stereotype of blackness evoked a sense of an overcharged sexual abundance and fertility that was both attractive and dangerous.¹⁰⁷

Similar to the earlier part of the twentieth century, the visual arts were a tool to counter a negative racial construct. The cultural work done to influence legislation in attempt to

¹⁰⁷ Dora Apel, *Imagery of Lynching: Black Men, White Women And the Mob* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 48.

pass the Dyer anti-lynching bill of 1918 was done again for the 1934 Costigan-Wagner Bill.

The 1934 Costigan-Wagner Bill did not hold individuals responsible for mob violence; instead, it held local officials responsible and fined the communities that participated in the violence. In 1935, the NAACP hoped to move empathetic support to legislative action with an exhibition in New York City titled *An Art Commentary on Lynching*. The exhibit was a departure from the desire to give voice and autonomy to Black artists and tell the story of Black people's experience, seen in the New Negro Movement of the 1920s. By the 1930s Black race advocates are expressing an anger to over the need to articulate their humanity. There is a frustration with America, for not seeing what was so clear. African Americans did not deserve the brutality they faced, and racial progress was regressing. This sentiment is seen in Dubios' assertion that:

it may be and often has been that oppression and insult has become so intense and so unrelenting that there is no alternative left to self-respecting man but to herd by himself in self-defense is forced upon large number of people.¹⁰⁸

DuBois's point that would have him depart from the organization is the problem many Blacks had with the art show. The transformational opportunity to express the pain and horror of lynching was taken away from Black people when Walter White organized an anti-lynching art exhibition that led with an essay by two White writers, Sherwood Anderson and Erskine Caldwell. The exhibition catalogue cover's illustration titled *The*

¹⁰⁸ W. E.B Du Bois, 1868-1963. *Segregation, ca. 1934*. W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (MS 312). Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries <http://credo.library.umass.edu/view/full/mums312-b213-i023>.

Fugitive by John Steuart Curry,¹⁰⁹ another White artist, represented Black people as victims and Whites as mislead perpetrators.

Another difference in the cultural work of the NAACP in the 1930s as opposed to their cultural work of the New Negro Movement in the 1920s was their lack of female artistic expression. Helen Langa wrote that:

the relative absence of lynching images by women and the differences between works by black and white artists are both related, I would argue, to the prevailing characterization of lynch violence in media accounts, sociological documents, literature, and the visual arts as a public spectacle centered on the terroristic subordination of black men.¹¹⁰

Lang combined the lack of female voice, and the muted voice of Black artists that occurred when White artists were featured in the telling of the Black experience, to the NAACP's inability to create an empowering art exhibit.

The struggle between the CP and NAACP was evident beyond the Scottsboro Nine Case; it also defined the NAACP's cultural work. The CP held a show called Struggle for Negro Rights, a show created by the Harlem-based Vanguard group, the John Reed Club, and the International Labor Defense. Their show was like the NAACP's but the antilynching legislation they supported made more demands for harsh punishment of mobs that were responsible for lynching and featured African American artists. A journal titled *New Masses* published by the CP regularly published African American writers, and challenged popular journals and galleries by giving space for Black

¹⁰⁹ Walter White to John Steuart Curry, postal telegraph, March 02, 1935, FOLDER: 001529-002-1404, page 9, Group I, Series C, Administrative File: Subject File-Anti-Lynching Measures, 1912-1955, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹¹⁰ Helen Langa, "Two Antilynching Art Exhibitions: Politicized Viewpoints, Racial Perspectives, Gendered Constraints," *American Art* 13, no. 1 (1999): 20.

artists. Especially important when it was clear to African American creatives and intellectuals, as far back as Carter G. Woodson in the early part of the twentieth century, that Black representation was ignored by elite journals and the art world. Even with the New Negro Movement, Black artists were rarely exhibited in many of the New York galleries, and critics often reflected racist tropes when criticizing Black art. Racist societal views toward African Americans influenced spaces such as the judicial system and the art world.

The April 1935 issue of *The Crisis* articles represents the NAACP's renewed effort in educating the public to influence their litigious and political goals. Their diverse race advocacy approach was evident in, "Fascism and the Negro" an article that connected the fight against fascism to the fight against racism. The same edition also featured an article titled "An Art Exhibit Against Lynching," an exhibit organized by the NAACP that educated the public on the horrors of lynching. While the organization struggled to reflect the diverse social and political beliefs of African Americans in the 1930s, they did carve a clear path for their civil rights work, work that educated the public through articles in the NAACP magazine and sponsored art shows. Walter White's work with the Scottsboro Nine and art exhibition would seem to be limited in the goal of Black empowerment. Still, the Association's art exhibition reflected the goals of the organization to answer a call for an interracial group of people to come together to battle for African American civil rights. The article, "An Art Exhibit Against Lynching" stated that the exhibition received hefty publicity with regionally diverse visitors from: London, England; Copenhagen, Denmark; Hollywood, California; Rome, Italy; Cleveland, Ohio; Louisville, Kentucky; Paris, France; Detroit, Michigan; Bennington,

Vermont; Boston, Massachusetts; and Nashville, Tennessee. It then quoted a New York World-Telegram critic that wrote, “[t]his exhibition may do much to crystallize public opinion” and that “[i]t is an exhibition which tears the heart and chills the blood.”¹¹¹ The NAACP's goal to use art to educate the public about White violence towards Black people through an interracial group of people was successful. Still, the work to influence political, economic, and educational institutions to advocate for civil rights required organizational restructuring.

The Reorganization Plan of the NAACP

In 1935, the Association created a seven-part plan that detailed their future economic activities; structural reorganization; proposals on legal and political activities; the Spingarn Medal Award; educational activities; finances; publicity, research, investigations, and *The Crisis*. The report's sections showed the Association's continued goal to educate the public about social inequality, creating a paradigm shift, that in the past, they hoped art would do. Continued was the assertion that popular notions on race must be addressed to successfully advocate for African American civil rights. In the period of the Great Depression, issues of race collided with economics. The organization “would attempt to get white workers and black to view their lot as embracing a common cause rather than antithetical interests.”¹¹² The Association listed historic success in the fight for economic equity but said it was “conducted as an incidental phase of its civil

¹¹¹ Roy Wilkins, “An Art Exhibit Against Lynching,” *The Crisis*, April 1935, Vol. 42, No 2.

¹¹² Future Plan and Program of the NAACP, report, May 28, 1935, FOLDER: 001446-008-0825, page 15, Group I, Series A, Board of Directors File, 1919-1939, Part 16: Board of Directors, Correspondence and Committee Materials, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. (known hereafter as folder 001446-008-0825)

liberty program.”¹¹³ The reorganized NAACP’s “primary objective as being that of securing for the Negro his rights as an American citizen under prevailing economic and social conditions.”¹¹⁴ The NAACP:

would show white labor that the disadvantages suffered by Negro workmen and frequently supported by white labor not only perpetuate the historic hostility between white and black labor, but also place a reserve of cheap labor at the disposal of employers, serving as dead weight upon the effective unity and organization of labor.¹¹⁵

The work of presenting and teaching a counternarrative to White supremacist concepts that stratified people during the New Negro Movement was done through relational meetings. The restructured NAACP would be more explicit and purposeful in educating the public on a counternarrative to White supremacist rhetoric through the creation of nontraditional learning spaces. For example, the transformation of local branches “from centers of sporadic agitation to permanent centers of economic and political education and agitation, conducting public lectures, forums, the dissemination of information on local conditions, and aiding in the formation of cooperative societies where desired.”¹¹⁶

The NAACP’s local branches became centers of education and the Association would:

build up a literature adapted to the needs of workers in particular communities but designed to connect up their local interests with those of workers throughout the country.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Folder 001446-008-0825, page 14

¹¹⁴ Folder 001446-008-0825, page 15

¹¹⁵ Folder 001446-008-0825, page 18

¹¹⁶ Folder 001446-008-0825, page 22

¹¹⁷ Folder 001446-008-0825, page 21.

In the 1920s, Walter White was known to host gatherings to promote the interaction of Black artists and intellectuals with White allies. The solidarity and education that was produced in these gatherings would become explicit through these educational efforts.

The cultural work that was used to influence legislation would now turn into to legal and educational work that would demonstrate the influence of racism on cultural practices and institutions.

Chapter 3: The NAACP's Cultural Work During the 1940s

In 1939, the NAACP's Spingarn Medal Award Committee released a statement that Marian Anderson was selected as a recipient. The NAACP cited her success and humility as having "added to the esteem not only of Marian Anderson as an individual but of the race to which she belongs."¹¹⁸ Yet, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) refused to allow Howard University's spring concert performance at Constitution Hall because it featured Marian Anderson, a Black artist. Constitution Hall used the excuse that the Hall was booked, and their policy restricted Black performers. Walter White and the Marian Anderson Citizens Committee, chaired by Charles Houston with over fifty representatives of other organizations, worked to expose Constitution Hall's racist policies towards Black Americans. The committee made public that the place named after a document guaranteeing freedom did not allow Black performers. The response was a boycott of Constitution Hall, the resignation of Eleanor Roosevelt from

¹¹⁸ *Discrimination complaints regarding Marian Anderson Concert*, Jan 01, 1939 - Dec 31, Folder: 1941 001441_002_0567, page 22, Group II, Series A, General Office File: Marian Anderson, [1939] 1940-1941, Papers of the NAACP, Part 15: Segregation and Discrimination, Complaints and Responses, 1940-1955, Series B: Administrative Files.

the DAR, and the organization of a concert featuring Marian Anderson on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.¹¹⁹ The iconic image of Marion Anderson singing on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial exemplified the NAACP's battle for integration and their use of the arts as a tool to inform the public of a counternarrative to Jim Crowism.

The NAACP, along with other Black advocacy groups of the 1940s, drew a correlation between the battle against Nazi aggression and Jim Crowism. The overarching theme of this chapter is the NAACP's continued work to connect cultural practices to the disenfranchisement of African Americans. Their work during the 1940s is evident in their challenge of American patriotism in response to the murder of Elbert Williams, and the House Un-American Activities Committee. The work for race advocacy was also seen in the NAACP's opposition to the motion picture industry's use of derogatory representations of African Americans and the labor practices within the industry. The NAACP did not want movies to relegate Black actors to supporting roles. The goal was to see Black people as significant characters as they should be within an inclusive and democratic society. To the NAACP, Black representation was the weapon against Jim Crowism. From the War Department to textbooks to films, the NAACP fought for Black representation as a means of humanization. The decades-long fight for the NAACP was to humanize America's view of Black people in order to support their litigious battle against institutionalized racism.

The NAACP saw the dawn of another world war as a glaring example of institutional racism through the federal government's policy towards Black Americans in

¹¹⁹ Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and The Making of The Civil Rights Movement*, 234-235.

the War Department. Examples of the federal government's racist policies were the policy of racial segregation and the fact that Black Americans only gained a fraction of labor contracts when the nation needed to fill jobs. For many Black Americans, it seemed that the country would do without rather than extend full citizenship and humanity to them. Race advocacy organizations like the NAACP, appreciated allies such as First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. However, the persistent truth that Black Americans still had no federal legislation that protected their continually attacked human rights was a bitter reality. New Deal policies only trickled down to aid Black Americans rather than giving them the economic boost the policy was designed to do; Black Americans continued experiencing disproportionate economic hardships. With racial inequity in mind, NAACP Executive Secretary Walter White, A. Phillip Randolph of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, and T. Arnold Hill of the National Urban League met with President Roosevelt to address the derogatory treatment of Black Americans in the armed services and defense industry.¹²⁰

Once again, it seemed that Black Americans were invisible to America. Walter White recollected:

On October 9th, Stephen Early, White House press secretary, handed to newspaper correspondents an official statement of a new government policy regarding Negroes in the Army and Navy. Far from diminishing Jim-Crowism, the new plan actually extended it! The statement declared that the traditional policy of segregation would be continued and that, except for the three already established Negro regiments, all present and future Negro units in the Army would be officered by whites.¹²¹

¹²⁰ Walter Francis White, *A Man Called White: The Autobiography of Walter White* (New York, NY: Viking Press, 1948), 189.

¹²¹ Ibid, page 187.

After having witnessed the broad mistreatment of Black soldiers during World War I, Black advocacy groups sought to prevent the racist treatment of Black soldiers in World War II. The United States' entrance into World War II was an opportunity to gain national and international support for civil rights. While international and national rhetoric was about the preservation of democracy, Black Americans used this rhetoric to continue the discourse on the extension of a full democratic voice to their community.

Nazism and Jim Crowism

Germany's aggressive march was a physical aggression to gain land but also a spread of past ideologies that found renewed support in the nineteen forties. The Nazis in Europe and the KKK in the United States had similar views that placed White Christians in a superior social caste above all other groups. The view that the Nazis and White southerners had unjustly lost wars to protect their culture and values in the past demonstrated a commonality. The Nazis in Germany and southern White Americans had their Lost Cause narratives that drove their hate. Both groups believed that they had lost a war which caused their way of life to take a downward turn; the combination of economic hardship and racist rhetoric created a lethal outcome. For many Black Americans, World War II was more than a battle against Hitler's aggressive march in Europe; it was a battle against ideas that turned into violent hate actions. Civil rights advocates viewed the derogatory actions of White southerners and the German Nazi Party as similar battles.

The NAACP's *The Crisis* magazine's editorial section reflected the connection of the war effort to the civil rights effort. The magazine stated:

Hitler has given the Atlantic coast cities the jitters, but not seriously enough to disturb the Jim Crow thinking of residents of the District of Columbia. White citizens of our nation's capital are talking already of separate training meetings for air raid wardens and separate bomb shelters for white and Negro Americans.

Another section of *The Crisis's* editorial section was titled "Now Is the Time Not to Be Silent." The article continued with a discourse about Black Americans' loyalty to America and how important it was to speak out against anti-democratic behavior. Rather than viewing civil rights work as anti-American, *The Crisis* and civil rights advocates viewed silence in the face of oppression as anti-democratic. The editorial said that the:

highest expressions of patriotism in these war years will come in critical analysis of our objectives, in the refusal to ignore, now or later, those evils among us which are blood brothers of the evils against which we are warring.¹²²

The Crisis was not alone in its connection of civil rights work to the work to stop the spread of Nazism.

The Pittsburgh Courier articulated comparisons in the fight against both Nazism and racism when the newspaper declared a war for democracy at home and abroad. Through an article in the Pittsburgh Courier, editor Robert Vann connected the domestic battle for civil rights with World War II by declaring support for the war effort as the Double V campaign. Double V stood for victory at home and victory abroad through African American participation in the war effort that would be a battle against fascism. In turn, a battle against fascism abroad was a battle against racism domestically. To support a push for democracy at home and abroad, Vann established the Committee for the

¹²² Roy Wilkins, *The Crisis* Vol. 49, No. 1, "Books About Negroes," (New York: NAACP, January 1942), 7.

Participation of Negroes in National Defense. He published a call for letters to the editor that answered the question, “What do you think of the Double V?”¹²³ Among the response to the editor’s question, James G. Thompson wrote a letter to the editor titled, “Should I Sacrifice to Live ‘Half-American?’” a burning question for many Black Americans.¹²⁴ The question of sacrifice for a country that perpetuated racial terror and inequity challenged the validity of Black participation in the war effort. Especially when, in a wartime poll, many Whites felt that Blacks had equal opportunity.¹²⁵ Meanwhile, “in Liberty, Mississippi, vengeful White southerners bludgeoned a sixty-two-year-old Black preacher to death and cut his tongue out because he was a “Smart nigger” who had hired a lawyer to protect his oil-rich land from local Whites.¹²⁶ It was increasingly clear that there was a continued need to educate and reconcile the difference between White Americans’ perceptions of the Black American experience and Black Americans’ harsh realities. For race advocates, lynchings such as the one in Liberty, Mississippi, were a known reality for Black Americans; yet, White Americans were ignorant or blind to examples of racial terror. Hence, the Double V Campaign was a movement that drew clear connections between the racial terror Blacks experienced in America and the terror Hitler demonstrated in Europe. White America needed to be educated on how Jim Crowism was as anti-American as fascism; further, the civil rights movement needed to capitalize on the patriotism that spread through the country in wartime.

¹²³ The Pittsburgh Courier, *Publisher Robert Robert Lee Vann*, https://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/courier.html.

¹²⁴ https://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/courier.html

¹²⁵ Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 12.

¹²⁶ Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944-1955* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 12.

The NAACP and many civil rights advocates viewed the war effort to mobilize all Americans to fight for civil rights. Robert Vann articulated a battle cry against the racial oppression and terror of Jim Crow when he wrote:

We were at war, and in war you don't have friendly relationships, you're out to kill each other. That's how it was at the Courier. We were trying to kill Jim Crow, and racism. They didn't seem to understand that we had every right to fight for full citizenship at home if we were expected to give our lives overseas.¹²⁷

Similar sentiments could be read in *The Crisis* editorials where editor Roy Wilkins called for people to stand against “breaches of democracy here in our own land.”¹²⁸ Wilkins asserted that the United States “must say the fight against Hitlerism begins in Washington, D.C.. the capital of our nation, where black Americans have a status only slightly above that of Jews in Berlin.”¹²⁹ In one editorial of the first issue of *The Crisis*, the NAACP’s central issues of lynching and inequitable labor practices were connected to the experiences Jews had under Nazi Germany. *The Pittsburgh Courier* and *The Crisis*, like many other Black periodicals, declared World War II as a battle against Jim Crow and Hitler; the Double V Campaign (victory home and victory abroad) was launched. The work of the Double V Campaign would take the education of the public on a narrative of Black Americans that countered the various minstrel characterizations, like that of Jim Crow, as well as a litigious battle against Jim Crow laws.

The NAACP’s support of the Double V Campaign

¹²⁷ https://www.pbs.org/blackpress/educate_event/treason.html

¹²⁸ Roy Wilkins, *The Crisis* 49, 1, “Editorials: Now Is the Time Not to Be Silent,” (New York: NAACP, January 1942), 7.

¹²⁹ Roy Wilkins, *The Crisis* 49.1, “Editorials: Now Is the Time Not to Be Silent,” (New York: NAACP, January 1942), 7.

The NAACP worked to help facilitate positive representations of Black Americans and saw the war effort as an opportunity to associate their work with patriotism. The Double V campaign especially represented the collective voice of African Americans that connected their work for civil rights to American patriotism. The NAACP's posters during the 1940s reflected how the organization spread the notion of victory home and victory abroad. For example, the NAACP published a poster to advertise a conference in Houston, Texas, to discuss the issues Black Americans faced during wartime. The title of the conference was The Negro In National Defense NAACP Conference, and the poster contained the slogan, "fight now for action!" The next poster, published in 1944, drew an explicit correlation between fighting Jim Crow and the war effort.¹³⁰ The image on the poster is of a black crow with the words Jim Crow in the center, strangled by a hand that is labeled NAACP. The crow's feet had a Nazi flag and a Japanese flag, an image that demonstrated the organization's campaign to connect the fight against Jim Crow to the fight against fascism in the United States. To the NAACP field organizer, fighting racism is like the soldier fighting fascism. Civil rights work became synonymous with American patriotism due to the rhetoric of civil rights organizations like the NAACP and newspapers such as the Pittsburgh Courier.

White Americans' support for the war looked different than Black Americans' support because of the question, "Should I Sacrifice to Live Half-American?" The Double V campaign married the patriotic work of civil rights with military service. Black support of the war effort was evident in the course work at historically Black

¹³⁰ Louise E. Jefferson, artist, *The Negro in national defense NAACP conference, Houston, Texas, June 24-29* / Louise E. Jefferson. Houston, Texas, 1941. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2010648421/>.

colleges, which participated in federal programs. Courses in physics, mathematics, management, engineering, and chemistry all worked to provide a generation of Black intellectuals that could lend their minds to winning the war. The change in curriculum to reflect the war effort demonstrated the institutional support which came with the desire to live as free citizens in the United States.¹³¹ In the Fisk News: Published by Fisk University in the Interest of Alumni, an article titled “Some steps Taken By Fisk To Participate in The War Program” described the concerns that Black Americans had about the war effort, specifically around Black participation. The Fisk University News wrote of:

The application for the establishment of a Senior Infantry ROTC unit at Fisk University, forwarded by your Ist Indorsement of April 7, 1942, file 326.6 Fisk University, has been received and filed for future consideration. The present law requires at least one hundred enrolled students for the maintenance of a unit. Due to the size of the school, present regulations preclude favorable consideration.¹³²

The school’s alumni newspaper continued with a description of a preliminary survey for aviation training, where the university qualified to serve:

As Ground School Contractor with courses taught by certified aircraft instructors and mechanics in meterology [sic] (24 hours); aerial navigation (24 hours); civil air regulations (18 hours); and general service of aircraft (6 hours)¹³³

Fisk University is representative of the opportunity Black institutions saw with Black participation in the war. Similar to Black people, Black institutions saw their students’ participation as an opportunity for positive representation. The Black soldier was a

¹³¹ “The Double V Victory,” WWII The National WWII Museum: New Orleans, <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/double-v-victory>.

¹³² T.M. Brumfield, *Some Steps Taken By Fisk To Participate In The War Program*, Fisk News: Published by the Fisk University in Interest the Interest of Alumni, Volume XVII, No 1, December 1943, page 3.

¹³³ Ibid, 3.

counternarrative to any racist trope about Black people. The rallying cry for victory against racism at home as the country battled fascism abroad required an explicit attack on the culture that supported Jim Crowism. The NAACP understood that while America mobilized for the war effort, the civil rights organization could not ignore its domestic work to counter racist representations of Black people. Jim Crow, the minstrel character that went beyond the stage and became the name of a system that placed Black people into an oppressive caste system, needed to be eradicated. The visual and literary representations of Black people educated the public, and the NAACP understood that these prevalent forms were negative.

The Reinforcement of Jim Crowism in Educational Materials

Documents from the NAACP's archive revealed the extent of cultural and political practices that influenced discourse surrounding racist textbook materials as well as films during the war. Racist tropes in films and textbooks inspired the NAACP to campaign for more accurate representations of Black life and culture. For example, beginning in the 1940s, the NAACP's *The Crisis* magazine published a reading list that countered racist representations of Black people. Correspondence from Walter White articulated that the objectives of *The Crisis*:

to combat the spirit of persecution which confronts colored people and other minority groups in the United States; and to safeguard their civil, legal, economic, and political rights, and secure for them equality of opportunity with all other citizens.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ Walter White, correspondence, Jan 01, 1941 – Dec 31, 1943, FOLDER: 001459-008-0325, page 23, Group II, Series A, General Office Files: Justice Department-White Supremacy, 1940-1955, Part 18: Special Subjects, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

In the January 1940 edition of *The Crisis*, the reading list the NAACP published was titled “Books about Negroes.”¹³⁵ *The Crisis* continued to publish a list of books written by Black people about Black people from diverse age groups and on diverse topics.

The NAACP reading list was in direct contrast to materials that New York City public schools presented to young people. For instance, the president of the Teachers’ Union, William Levner, sent a letter to the NAACP which stated that teachers “were forced to use books, manuscripts, and illustrations which were repugnant to them.” An example of the problematic content was:

His brother; and sisters came to one show after another and clapped their hands when their brother sang such songs as "Jim Crow," "Zip Coon," "Coal Black Rose."¹³⁶

Levner wrote that the approval of such reading material by the New Reading Materials Project of the Works Project Administration, WPA, was:

inconceivable that educators and government officials, who are supposed to know American history and who are sworn to uphold our American principles of democracy and racial equality, could have approved such vicious stuff as is contained in this manuscript.¹³⁷

Levner’s outrage epitomized the larger social discourse that not only identified racism but also connected it to the national and international battle against fascism. Levner, a White man, was outraged by racist tropes that were allowed to invade learning spaces, such as the classroom. Black Americans had allies, alongside Levner, who saw the evidence of systemic racism in educational materials and were outraged. The Double V Campaign

¹³⁵ Roy Wilkins, *The Crisis*, vol. 47, no.1, “Books About Negroes” (New York: NAACP, January 1940), 30.

¹³⁶ William Levner to NAACP, letter, April 17, 1941, FOLDER: 001513-009-0256, page 2, Group II, Series A, General Office File, 1951-1955, Part 03: The Campaign for Educational Equality, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. (Known here after as folder 001513-009-0256

¹³⁷ Folder 001513-009-0256, page 1

influenced a generation of White allies to identify and reform racist educational materials. The Double V campaign created a correlation between racism and fascism which afforded more Americans an opportunity to recognize the United States' hypocrisy as they fought against Nazism abroad.

The NAACP saw that the problem was not only the material but also the instructors. While the Association worked to combat racist representation, they once again worked for Black representation; they wanted to see more Black teachers. The invisibility of Black teachers in the classroom afforded, in part, the racist representation of the Black narrative. Thus, the work of advocacy was about content, policy, and labor practices. The NAACP records demonstrated the organization's view that representation equals voice. In turn, it was important to hire Black people in the motion picture industry, in the various war industries, and as teachers. For there to be a counter-narrative to the popular pejorative characterizations of Black people, America must see and hear Black voices in the classroom. The lack of Black representation in schools was revealed in a:

survey conducted by the Harlem Committee of the Teachers Union in areas scattered throughout New York City reveals that there is a shockingly low number of Negro teachers employed in the city's public schools.¹³⁸

The NAACP wanted to see a shift in practice through policy. The United States needed to create an education policy that ensured racist representations of Black people were not taught in the classroom and increased the hiring of Black teachers.

The NAACP sought a paradigm shift in America about race and that called for a shift in what America learned about Black Americans and who described Black

¹³⁸ William Levner to NAACP, letter, April 17, 1941, FOLDER: 001513-009-0256, page 8, Group II, Series A, General Office File, 1951-1955, Part 03: The Campaign for Educational Equality, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

Americans' experiences. The assertion of the Black narrative by Black people, especially Black teachers, and creatives, was seen as a way to save lives. The racist rhetoric about Black people supported the White terrorization of Black people, evident in the work of:

Dr. Lawrence D. Reddick and Dr. Marie Carpenter, authors of the study, reveal that disparaging terms, biased illustrations and erroneous information contained in the books arouse prejudice and stimulate poor scholarship.¹³⁹

Black Americans were not only represented in a derogatory fashion but often completely left out, invisible. Reddick's and Carpenter's research pointed out that:

social and economic factors conditioning; the position of the Negro in our society receive virtually no attention and point to the serious omission in local school texts of contributions made by the Negro to his country.¹⁴⁰

The NAACP's desire to increase Black visibility represented a popular belief amongst Black Americans and race advocates that the invisibility of Black people in part perpetuated the problem of race in America. When visible, the images and narratives of Black people in America were centered on racist characterizations. Black popular writers reflected the similar assertion of a racist dichotomy. For example, the Black author Ralph Ellison expressed:

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, flesh and bone, fiber, and liquids -- and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Julia E. Baxter, Memorandum, November 03, 1945, FOLDER: 001513-013-0668, page 3, Group II, Series A, General Office File, 1951-1955, Part 03: The Campaign for Educational Equality, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. 6

¹⁴⁰ Julia E. Baxter, Memorandum, November 03, 1945, FOLDER: 001513-013-0668, page 3, Group II, Series A, General Office File, 1951-1955, Part 03: The Campaign for Educational Equality, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. (Known here after as folder 001513-013-0668.)

¹⁴¹ Ralph Ellison, prologue to *Invisible Man*, (New York: Vintage International, 1995), i.

The historical pattern of civil rights organizations' articulation of the violence and inequity that Black Americans faced on a daily basis seemed to remain unheard. After decades of litigious battles to create laws that would protect Black people from racial violence and government complacency, the NAACP was forced to continue their multifaceted fight for civil rights.

Foundational to the NAACP's strategic approach for race advocacy was how Black people are viewed in the United States. No part of the NAACP's work was not influenced by society's perception of Black Americans, so it was essential to re-educate people. In a memo to the NAACP's Roy Wilkins about anti-Black propaganda found in educational materials, Julia E Baxter made clear that the way the country learned the history of slavery and the Reconstruction Era factored in the mistreatment of Black Americans.¹⁴² The memo said that research revealed the infrequent reference to African Americans also led to negative social and economic forces.¹⁴³ The combination of invisibility and only visible through racist caricatures of Black people created the formula for racial violence so prevalent in the United States that the NAACP itself was not exempt.

The Murder of an NAACP Organizer

The realities of racial violence came closer to the NAACP than in the past after the murder of Elbert Williams. Williams was the first known member of the NAACP to be murdered because of his civil rights work in 1940. The organization had to assert that there was a problem, the willingness to enter the war against fascism abroad but struggled

¹⁴² Folder 001513-013-0668, page 4.

¹⁴³ Folder 001513-013-0668, page 4.

to pass an antilynching law domestically. This contrary behavior was especially problematic when the NAACP proclaimed that Mr. Williams “died in defense of democracy in a very genuine sense.”¹⁴⁴ Williams, Rev. Buster Walker, and Elijah Davis were the more active members of the NAACP local branch in Brownsville, Tennessee. They were confronted by local Whites when a Black attorney, Emmet Ballard, was forced to flee town when he attempted to represent a Black man accused of assault on a White man. The NAACP reported that:

the NAACP meantime had been agitating for the right to vote and the president of a local bank had expressed himself to Rev. Buster Walker to the effect that he felt that Negroes had a perfect right to vote but that some of the “red-neck trash” among the White group might cause trouble. They did cause trouble. They murdered Elbert Williams, one of the local leaders. An armed mob set after Rev. Buster Walker but failed to get him before he was informed that they were after him, so that with the help of some friends he was able to get to a neighboring town and eventually North, out of harm’s way.¹⁴⁵

The local mob then harassed Elijah Davis, the owner of a local filling station, who had never had trouble in the past. Yet, he and his family escaped the mob and headed North. No autopsy was done, and lesser charges were made for Elbert Williams’s murder. Thus, another example of lynching as a product of state-sanctioned violence. The NAACP gathered allies in the civil rights movement to honor Mr. Williams through the participation in the laying of a wreath at his grave.¹⁴⁶ Some of the dignitaries invited were A. Philip Randolph, Charles S. Johnson, and professors from Vanderbilt University;

¹⁴⁴ Secretary to Mr. Justice Felix Frankfurter to Philip Graham, letter, April 30, 1941, FOLDER: 001527-027-0578, page 23, Group II, Series A, General Office File: Lynching, 1912-1955, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

¹⁴⁵ Miss Lucy Randolph Macon, letter., April 24, 1941, FOLDER: 001527-027-0578, page 6, Group II, Series A, General Office File: Lynching, 1912-1955, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. Known hereafter as folder 001527-027-0578)

¹⁴⁶ Folder 001527-027-0578, page 10.

Louisville Courier-Journal reporters; Virginius Dabney from the Times- Dispatch of Richmond, Virginia; Congressman Edward Creal of Kentucky and Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt.¹⁴⁷ Even with the list of dignitaries that the NAACP reached out to in order to honor Mr. Williams, the Justice Department found no path to opening an investigation that would lead to a trial. Unfortunately, Elbert William's murder and the terrorizing of Mr. Davis and Rev. Walker was another example of the ability of the justice system and the public to be desensitized to the devaluing of Black life.

The Race Advocate and the House Un-American Activities Committee

In 1941, the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) targeted African American leaders with a history of service to the country and advocated for civil rights. The NAACP took offense that Mary McLeod Bethune, director of the Division of Negro Affairs in the National Youth Administration; William Pickens, promotion specialist for the Treasury Department; and Professor E. Franklin Frazier, Division of Negro Studies, were accused of being leaders in an allegedly Communist-dominated organization. The NAACP responded to these allegations with:

Impugning the loyalty and integrity of the most beloved and best-known Negro women in America would be an infinite service to the Axis, if your statements were to be believed, in destroying the faith of Negroes and of colored peoples in other parts of the world in their belief that the United States is in truth fighting a war for democracy.¹⁴⁸

Their work for the people in America demonstrated the mockery of justice that occurred when HUAC labeled civil rights advocates as un-American. The NAACP viewed the

¹⁴⁷ Folder 001527-027-0578, page 3.

¹⁴⁸ Press Release, September 24, 1942, FOLDER: 001457-012-0001, page 3, Group II, Series A, General Office File, 1940-1955, Part 18. Special Subjects, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

label of Black advocates especially problematic when men like Elbert Williams were murdered and the crime against them was not investigated. To many Black people, the United States government took for granted their efforts to preserve democracy at home and abroad. To understand the audacity of the House committee, it is important to understand the long service Bethune, Frazier and Pickens had to the NAACP, the United States, as well as Black communities nationwide. William Pickens had deep ties with the NAACP from the inception of the organization. In addition to his work as a field secretary for the NAACP, Pickens worked for the U.S. Treasury Department, where he promoted the sales of war bonds.¹⁴⁹ The war effort was funded in part by Americans' purchase of war bonds, yet HUAC questioned his loyalty to America.

The NAACP awarded Mary McLeod Bethune the distinguished Joel E. Spingarn Medal after years of educational service to the country.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, she was president of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASALH). Bethune held leadership roles in civil rights organizations, including the National Urban League (NUL) and the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). A year after the HUAC accusation, Bethune was on the advisory board that created the Women's Army Corps. E. Franklin Frazier was another Black educator accused of being un-American because his research challenged racist notions that supported Jim Crow laws and cultural norms.

¹⁴⁹ Educator and Civil Leader: William Pickens, Department of African American Studies, Yale University, <https://afamstudies.yale.edu/academics/undergraduate-major/william-pickens-prize/educator-and-civic-leader-william-pickens>

¹⁵⁰ Mary McLeod Bethune, Mary McLeod Bethune Council House Historic House National Historic Site, National Park Service, <https://www.nps.gov/mamc/index.htm>

Once again, the HUAC accusation of a Black leader who worked to build a more equitable society was a dangerous reflection of the time.

Another reflection of the time was the significant influence films had on most Americans, which both the NAACP and HUAC understood. HUAC targeted the film industry, similar to civil rights activists, which made the two allies in the anti-communist scare. The NAACP's work to have the film industry include Black film narratives, actors, directors, and crew coincided with the battle for the right to tell stories. The film industry viewed HUAC as a censor, and the NAACP agreed, especially with HUAC's attempt to use interstate commerce to regulate the motion picture industry. For example, the NAACP was presented with a document that stated:

The Interstate Commerce Committee of the U. S. Senate, headed by Sen. Burton K. Wheeler, has set up a sub-committee to investigate motion pictures and the motion picture industry. The purpose of the inquiry, since such an investigation would in all probability not have been approved by the Senate itself, is to determine whether an investigation of the motion picture industry should take place. The legality of the proceedings is therefore very doubtful.”¹⁵¹

The above statement was from the Stop Film Censorship Committee, comprised of artists, citizens and civic leaders such as Tallulah Bankhead, Frank Gilmore, Thomas Lyons, and Elmer Rice. The shared document with the NAACP demonstrates the connection the film industry had with the NAACP. At one time, when the NAACP first protested the content of the film *Birth of A Nation*, antagonists declared the work as censorship. Four decades later, the NAACP's work with the film industry to produce

¹⁵¹ Stop Film Censorship Committee, Folder 001457_020_0809_From_1_to_47 page 16 Group II, Series A, General Office File, Jan 01, 1941 - Dec 31, 1941, Part 18. Special Subjects. Senate film investigation, including anti-Semitism, censorship, and portrayals of Black Americans. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

accurate and diverse representations of Black Americans developed into allies against HUAC.

The Reinforcement of Jim Crowism Through Film

The increased popularity of motion pictures created a new space that had the ability to influence cultural norms. The NAACP, the United States government, and civil rights leaders such as Robert Vann all identified the power of film when educating the public. Historian Karen J. Cox articulated the power of film with:

most scholars of film agree that motion pictures, from their inception, have had a critical impact on American society. Movies revolutionized how different communities of Americans perceived one another and influenced their opinions on race, class, ethnicity, and even different regions of the country.¹⁵²

The influence motion pictures had on race, class, ethnicity and different regions of the country was very clear to civil rights leaders, government officials and the film industry. The far-reaching impact was especially apparent when the film industry felt the attempt of the House Un-American Activities Committee to censor and influence film production. While Hollywood resisted government censorship, the NAACP sought to get the Motion Picture Producers Association “to broaden the roles in which Negroes are permitted to appear in the films.”¹⁵³ The battle against HUAC’s rhetoric of anti-American behaviors and racism all found common enemies during WWII, thus an attempt to join forces. For example, Roy Wilkins, the NAACP assistant secretary and editor of *The Crisis* acted as

¹⁵² Karen L. Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 82.

¹⁵³ Stop Film Censorship Committee, Statement of facts, FOLDER: 001457-020-0809, page 16, Group II, Series A, General Office File, 1940-1955, Part 18. Special Subjects, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

an observer of the Motion Picture Producers Association. The NAACP noted that “nothing has been done by the Senate about anti-Negro propaganda in the movies;”¹⁵⁴ therefore, the HUAC investigation was racist and ignored the oppression and terrorism African Americans continually faced.

Many in the film industry that were the target of HUAC investigations felt as if the committee’s work was an attack on their labor groups, their religious groups, or their color. HUAC was indeed an attack on social advocates. Thus, civil rights advocates and creatives, like actors and singers, had a common threat; the communist label. While the two groups had very different views, both the NAACP and HUAC understood the power that artistic expression in film had on influencing Americans’ views. Actors, especially Black Americans, often found their desire to work was multifaceted in that it was a form of labor, artistic expression and a platform to tell diverse narratives. The commitment to the presentation of multiple narratives and experiences was a direct attack on the singular narrative presented by White supremacists.

Black actors especially had to contend with the discourse of race, representation, and labor practices. The actress Hattie McDaniel represents the diverse discourse that surrounded Black actors. When she played the roles of Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* and Queenie in *Show Boat*, she found herself in a precarious position within the Black civil rights community. McDaniel defended her decision to play the role of a mammy;

¹⁵⁴ Secretary to Stop Film Censorship Committee, letter, September 26, 1941, FOLDER: 001457-020-0809, page 19, Group II, Series A, General Office File, 1940-1955, Part 18. Special Subjects, Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

she felt like she gave voice to narratives within Black womanhood. In an article for the *Chicago Defender*, Daniel stated that her roles were:

Not the modern, streamlined type of Race woman, who attends teas and concerts in furs and silks, but the type of women of the period that gave us Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Charity Still. The brave, efficient type of womanhood which, building a race, mothered Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, Robert Moton and Mary McLeod Bethune.¹⁵⁵

Unlike her White counterparts in film, McDaniel often had the matter of race addressed to her with questions posed in a way that assumed she must take on a responsibility in the battle for positive representations of Black Americans.

The film industry was a space for artistry and employment. For the NAACP, art, and labor intertwined in the work of civil rights. Similar to the organization's view on the importance of Black teachers to battle miseducation in schools, Black actors and directors had a significant role in films and Black representations. Once again, representation was a central issue in the battle against racism. The NAACP's work on Black representation posed the questions about the roles Black actors had and the films they were in: were Black actors main characters or marginal or supporting actors? Did the film's narrative use racist tropes to build the plot? Did motion picture corporations give Black directors opportunities to make films? Were screenplays with Black main characters produced? The questions posed by the NAACP were usually answered in the negative. With the negative response in mind, the NAACP gave an explicit description of the problem with Walter White's assertion that the "restriction of Negroes to roles with rolling eyes,

¹⁵⁵ Hattie McDaniel, "I Like Part in Play,' Says Coast Star," *The Chicago Defender (National Edition)* (1921-1967), May 13, 1939, 21.
<https://ezproxy.mtsu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/i-like-part-play-says-coast-star/docview/492548341/se-2?accountid=4886>.

chattering teeth, always scared of ghosts, or to portrayals of none-to bright-servants.”¹⁵⁶

The press service of the NAACP released a statement that described the organization’s goal and most recent work in relation to the film industry:

Negroes will hereafter no longer be restricted to comic or menial roles in motion pictures, stated Walter White, executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, on his return today to New York from Hollywood, where Wendell Willkie and he held several conferences on the subject with leading producers, directors, writers and actors.¹⁵⁷

Like the labor battle for Black contracts in the War Department, equitable treatment and opportunities for Black soldiers, and the hiring, as well as fair pay, of Black teachers, all the social justice campaigns connected to the NAACP’s goal in supporting a counternarrative to the demeaning narrative of Black people that:

perpetuates a stereotype which is doing the Negro infinite harm. And showing him always as a mentally inferior creature, lacking in ambition, is one of the reasons for the denial to the Negro of opportunity and for the low morale not only of Negroes but of colored peoples throughout the world as it constantly holds the Negro up to ridicule and disparagement.¹⁵⁸

Black actors, such as Paul Robeson, understood the damage, ridicule and harm that stereotypical portrayal of Black Americans caused. Hence, why did Black actors take menial or demeaning roles if it was understood that they were harmful? The opportunity to work drew Black actors into roles that had racially demeaning narratives, and due to the limited options Hollywood motion picture companies gave Black actors. The assertion that the desire to work is a limited perspective on the view of Black actors.

¹⁵⁶ Motion picture industry and Black Americans, news clippings and press releases. Group II, Series A, General Office File. Motion picture industry and Black Americans, news clippings and press releases. Jan 01, 1942 - Dec 31, 1942. Papers of the NAACP, Part 18. Special Subjects, 1940-1955, Series B: General Office Files: Abolition of Government Agencies-Jews. Library of Congress. page 3(Known after as folder 001457_018_0654) page 3.

¹⁵⁷ Folder 001457_018_0654 page 2.

¹⁵⁸ Folder 001457_018_0654_From_1_to_36 page 3

They were artists and had a desire to demonstrate their craft, which was an assertion made by Hattie McDaniel. Paul Robeson was another celebrated Black actor who worked on popular films that fostered false narratives like *Show Boat*. In contrast to his work in the successful Broadway play turned into the film *Show Boat*, Robeson spoke at public engagements to raise both awareness of the dangers of racist narratives in films, fascism and the cultural contributions of Black people.

The contrast between Robeson's political views and roles he played in movies such as *Show Boat* was often excused because of Black actors' limited work opportunities. In the 1942 documentary *Native Land*, which Paul Robeson narrated, he detailed violent acts committed by so-called law and order groups, the Ku Klux Klan and strike-breaking gangs that represented American fascism.

Hollywood had a southern formula that capitalized on a nostalgic past, which romanticized antebellum life, often had similar themes of the Lost Cause narrative discussed earlier, assigned Blacks to supporting roles to White characters, and reinforced racist minstrel tropes. Historian Karen Cox pointed out that films like *Birth of A Nation*, *Show Boat*, and *Gone with the Wind* all found box office success on the themes of the antebellum South as a period of better southern times. The use of plantations as the pastoral backdrop of White southern aristocracy juxtaposed to minstrel characterizations of the Black mammy and the lazy dandy created an influential message about race and class.

In the same year that Elbert Wilbert was murdered, White southerners celebrated antebellum-southern history with the film *Gone with The Wind*. This was especially problematic in a time when Black Americans challenged these notions of caste, White

terror and superiority. Popular media was in direct contrast to the Black experience in America and that could not be articulated enough by civil rights leaders. Many Whites that enjoyed minstrel comedies and the romantic themes of antebellum South movies often participated in lynch mobs and upheld the oppressive patriarchal, paternalistic system through violence. The message of an oppressive South seemed to be asserted by the “super-sensitiveness so far as race and color is concerned.” The NAACP understood that:

Many Negro characters and performances in fiction and on the stage which seem to be in the American cultural tradition are in reality misrepresentations of the Negro, often stereotypes, and often contribute to the maintenance of the undesirable status quo in which the Negro finds himself.¹⁵⁹

An example of this status quo in the face of Black loyalty is the Selective Service Act that did not prohibit segregation in the armed forces. The act introduced clauses that prohibited discrimination but not segregation, and officer training programs were opened to Blacks only if there was a position opened over a Black unit.¹⁶⁰

In 1943, the NAACP produced a film that highlighted the contributions of African American soldiers. A year later, a group of White producers created a condescending film titled *We’ve Come Along Way*. These combined creations reflected the pivotal role of movies, beyond entertainment; movies became the space to win the hearts and minds of the American public. Thus, the NAACP had three concerns:

1. favorable representation of Negro life,

¹⁵⁹ NAACP protests of racially derogatory minstrel shows, Papers of the NAACP, Part 15: Segregation and Discrimination, Complaints and Responses, 1940-1955, Series B: Administrative Files, Jan 01, 1946 - Dec 31, 1949. Part 15: Segregation and Discrimination, Complaints and Responses, 1940-1955, Series B: Administrative Files (Known here after as folder 001441-013-0550) page 4

¹⁶⁰ U.S. Congress. *United States Code: Selective Training and Service Act of, 50a U.S.C. 302-315 Suppl. 1. 1940*. Periodical. <https://www.loc.gov/item/uscode-1940-005050a003/>.

2. the deletion of Negro actors in the Southern exhibition of films which integrate Negro and white actors in scenes and
3. the use of Negro stereotypes to the exclusion of individualized characterization.¹⁶¹

Consistent with the NAACP's view of the importance of representation, the organization saw the battle against marginalization of the Black narrative significant in its work. The lack of positive images was important to the image in the White mind but Black people felt a sense of anger, humiliation, disheartening and dejection due to the pervasiveness of negative representations. Then, with the war, Black Americans saw the dignity of soldiers be reduced and the question became: What more must we do to deserve human dignity? The frustration of Black Americans reached a new level when a riot broke out in New York City, reflecting the expectation that racist indignities should not occur to a body of the American population that has demonstrated sacrifice and patriotism through service. To witness, read, and hear Black soldiers and veterans suffer from racist indignities and violence outraged numerous Blacks citizens. Walter White wrote:

someday we of New York will awaken to all that the South's pattern of race proscription is doing our thinking and acting. Someday we will stop reproducing Poland's and Hitler's physical, mental and spiritual ghettos for our own racial and religious minorities."¹⁶²

The pejorative view of Black Americans was not limited to southern states and the riots in New York reflected the pervasiveness of racism. Black New Yorkers, similar to their Detroit and Los Angeles counterparts, had experienced racial inequity that was not the

¹⁶¹ Leonard C. Archer's, *Black Images in the American Theatre: NAACP Protest Campaigns-Stage, Screen, Radio, & Television*, [1st ed.]. Pageant-Poseidon, 1973. page 210

¹⁶² Group II, Series A, General Office File: Racial Tension. Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, (known here after as folder 001527_028_0730) page 20.

legalized de jure segregation of the South.¹⁶³ Rather, the North's segregation was de facto, driven by cultural norms that were easily reinforced by the misinformation of racist stereotypes in both educational materials and popular media. Northern cities, such as New York, Detroit, and Los Angeles, were homes to large populations of Black Americans that migrated to these cities for generations in hope to live in a more egalitarian America than their southern roots.

The treatment of Black Americans as second-class citizens was a problem and the unabated violence towards African Americans was a continuous struggle. The violence at the hand of lynch mobs was also mirrored by police. While previous decades had seen police and the courts turn a blind eye to mob violence, many police officers were members of the mobs. Both northern and southern Blacks were able to point to many experiences where public servants, including the police, treated them in a derogatory and violent way. In a letter written by Walter White, he stated that:

There are certain facts which we must face: Negroes are justifiably resentful of the terrible discrimination in war industries, segregation in the armed forces, the brutalities of lynchings and the race riots within recent days in Detroit, Beaumont, Marianna, Fla.; Los Angeles and other places. Our nerves are frayed by years of persecution.”¹⁶⁴

While White explained the source of the riots., NAACP representative Gilbert J. Rhodes, in correspondence with Mayor LaGuardia, gave specific recommendations to prevent future riots by “the proportion of colored policemen on the New York City Police Force be considerably increased and in direct ratio to the population.”¹⁶⁵ Once again, Black civil rights correlated to Black representation; similar to the need for Black teachers, the

¹⁶³ Folder 001527_028_0730 page 5

¹⁶⁴ Folder 001527_028_0730 page 5

¹⁶⁵ Folder 001527_028_0730 page 39

NAACP felt that the equity came in the form of Black police officers. Racist tropes in popular culture heavily influenced the views of White police officers as they served and protected Black communities.

Since the creation of the NAACP, Black Americans worked to show America their productive role in the country, especially highlighted in the Black soldier. Black GIs' service for the country and battle against fascism was indisputable and organizations, such as the NAACP, presented these facts to influence action through policy. Historically, the NAACP found it difficult to gain legislative protections against White terror, especially in the form of an anti-lynching bill. Yet, the organization found an opportunity to create civil rights protections and equity through executive order in the Truman administration. The Double V Movement had created a consensus amongst Black GIs that they would not return home to live as second-class citizens. The determination of returning veterans was in part the reason that the NAACP saw a significant increase of local chapters in the 1940s. College students and the NAACP's youth organizing, combined with the returning veterans, created a renewed vigor in the area of civil rights.¹⁶⁶

The End of the war and the increase in civil rights activity

The NAACP met with President Truman to discuss civil rights armed with a knowledge that their significant growth had an ability to leverage a significant Black electorate. The end of World War Two marked another migration of Black Americans away from southern White violence and oppression to the North. Yet, race based

¹⁶⁶ Jeffrey D. Gonda, *Unjust Deeds: The Restrictive Covenant Cases and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015,) 114.

economic disparities and social biases perpetuated by racist tropes permeated all parts of America. While civil rights organizations had articulated this dilemma for decades, it was the Truman administration that established a commission to research civil rights in the United States. The President agreed the committee would “investigate the entire subject of violation of civil liberties and to recommend a program of corrective action.”¹⁶⁷ Notably, Truman planned on maneuvering around the congressional filibuster that had historically blocked civil rights legislation when dealing with the commission. The NAACP was asked to advise on the appropriate members of the fourteen-person committee and in ten weeks the President’s Committee on Civil Rights (PCCR) was formed.¹⁶⁸ The committee’s subsequent report, *To Secure These Rights*, published less than a year after the committee’s creation, was thought to be “the most courageous and specific assessment of the nation’s racial problems and potential remedies ever created.”¹⁶⁹

In 1948, President Truman established the Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services. The President’s actions worked to integrate the Armed Services and created a greater discourse within the national government of racism’s pervasiveness. The cultural work the NAACP did for decades created a popularity that could mobilize an electorate that Truman needed. Thus, the NAACP had an ally in the president, and could influence policy while they battled in the courts. A presidential commitment in the area of civil rights, although limited, was a success. After

¹⁶⁷ Ibid, 117.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid

¹⁶⁹ Ibid

years of unsuccessfully passing anti-lynching legislation, executive policy would finally reflect the need to understand the Black experience in America.

Chapter 4: The NAACP's Cultural Work Is Reflected In the African American Museum

President Truman's Commission on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services, 1948, and the integration of the Armed Forces ushered in a renewed sense of progress for the NAACP. Its work after World War II focused on education, especially school integration and supporting the education of the public about African American culture and history. My earlier chapters traced the NAACP's cultural work that supported racial advocacy. The collection, preservation, and presentation of African American cultural artifacts were in direct correlation to race advocacy. Therefore, the newly designed campaign to create African American museums was in concert with the NAACP's cultural work since both acted as a support to its post-World War II civil rights work. This chapter focuses on racial advocacy, education, the discourse on Black preservation, and exhibitions to the creation of museums with African American history and cultural themes. The move to museums mirrored its successes in the courts. After the multiple decade-long battles against Jim Crow laws, and racist tropes in popular culture, the NAACP made significant strides in its litigious work; evident in the Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*. The court case used research that demonstrated the harm Jim Crow laws, specifically school segregation, did to children. The research

presented in the Brown decision and museum work facilitated an educational opportunity that shaped the NAACP's middle to late-twentieth-century race work.

This work reflected the century-long discourse on the importance of an education that incorporated and valued African American history and culture. The NAACP recognized the work to build an egalitarian society came in many forms. The postwar era emphasized racial empowerment through cultural organizing and the acquisition of heritage knowledge. By the end of the twentieth century, the building of new Black spaces like museums of the Black Freedom Movement, civil rights, socioeconomic and political empowerment was all outcomes of traditional and nontraditional spaces of learning.

Through the twentieth century, the American museum developed into a traditional and nontraditional learning space for the public. Racial discourse, both racist and non-racist, were found within exhibitions and preservation work. Radical discourse is the discussion that challenged hegemonic notions of Black identity. The articulation of the African American experience directly contrasted with the efforts of the dominant society before and during the Jim Crow Era. Thus, any effort to give voice to a silenced group is a social and political effort, and the cultural effort of museums was and continues to be political work. W.E.B DuBois' essay "Criteria of Negro Art," reflected the significant role the presentation of Black voice and experience had on civil rights. DuBois's belief that the exhibition of Black art, and in turn, Black voices, was "the one true method of gaining sympathy and human interest."¹⁷⁰ In the struggle for justice, Carter G. Woodson

¹⁷⁰ W.E.B DuBois, "Criteria of Negro Art," *The Crisis*, Vol. 32, October 1926: pp. 290.

agreed that education on the Black narrative was a powerful tool for civil rights. In his book *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, he wrote that the “crusade for Black history and culture education] is much more important than the anti-lynching movement, because there would be no lynching if it did not start in the schoolroom.”¹⁷¹ The view that cultural work is the education of the public on the Black perspective led to the work of the Black museum. My previous chapters looked at how the NAACP used cultural work as a tool for race advocacy from the organization’s inception to World War II. This particular chapter continues with the connection of the NAACP’s work to the work of the African American museum in the mid to late 20th century.

A History of the American Museum and its Civil Function

The work of the NAACP to counter racist tropes with positive representations of Black people that Black people produced is a key component of the Black museum concept. The work of the counter-narrative now had to have a building. The twentieth century encapsulated a discussion on the social-political significance of museums and an adjacent conversation to racial empowerment. At the start of the twentieth century, John Cotton Dana, a librarian and museum director, wrote about the significant role museums had in the United States. To demonstrate the social-political significance of the museum, he described examples of European museums in his book *The Gloom of the Museum*. Dana asserted that who and what a country valued was evident in the treasures placed in

¹⁷¹ Carter Godwin Woodson, *The Mis-education of the Negro*, (United States: Associated Publishers, 1969) 24.

the museum. He referred to the museum as a building like a temple or a castle where the items that were on display in European royal's castles would be found in a museum.

The museum's exhibition celebrated the original owners, royals or elites, through their artifacts. Dana wrote:

In Europe, therefore, we find museums to be, either old buildings of the royal palace type or later constructions copying the palace or the Greek temple, containing priceless originals in all lines of art, craftsmanship and archaeology, arranged as the characters of the several buildings compel, guarded with extreme care, dutifully visited by serious-minded tourists and used sparingly by a small number of special students.¹⁷²

The development of the American museum started as an imitation of the European institution. For example, in the Louvre Museum in Paris, France reflected Dana's point that:

the museum idea as it embodied itself in Europe when the subject of museums began a few decades ago to be taken up seriously in America. It was inevitable that the first wish of all our museum enthusiasts should be to produce imitations of European institutions.¹⁷³

The African American museum contrasted with European museums that were temples filled with the elite's artifacts; rather, it was the building that held the artifacts of the marginalized. The African American museum was the space that valued the Black narrative in a country and often periods of time, that devalued African Americans. The temple for the marginalized became a building for advocacy. The museum building created a space for belonging, a radical act when created by and for people that were disempowered by racism.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² John Cotton Dana, 1856-1929. *The Gloom of the Museum*, (Woodstock, Vt. : Elm Tree Press, 1917) 11.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 18.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid, 12.

The Black museum's collection and exhibitions were the evidence of Black contributions, intellect, and creativity. The Black museum serves as a space created as a testament to the significance of the socially marginalized. Further, in the Black museum, the testament was taught to diverse audiences in a variety of learning modalities. The early twentieth century was an era that promoted education as a national interest, in turn, an essential policy. In the Progressive Era to the New Negro Movement, an educational policy was discussed as a social policy that strengthened the nation. Progressive Era social advocates pointed to the civic value of museums because of their ability to transmit common cultural knowledge through the exhibition of artifacts. Therefore, museums were an important learning space for race advocates.

In a museum, the public of all ages experienced information in multiple learning modalities. In turn, the museum enabled the public to be taught what it meant to be an American by seeing, hearing, and reading about American culture and history. John Dewey, an educator and early museum educator, viewed the museum as a learning space with a social function. Similar to John Cotton Dana, John Dewey believed "that the school system, from the elementary grades through the university faculties, supplied the patriotic citizen."¹⁷⁵ Hence, educating the public in traditional spaces like schools was valuable, and the museum, as an educational space, furthered that value. Museums had the ability to convey a value system that was connected to a democratic culture. The complicated notion of plurality and equality that made the United States distinctive as a democracy needed to be taught to the masses. He asserted that "studying it [history] in

¹⁷⁵ John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, (United States: Macmillan, 1916,)109.

process of formation makes much that is too complex to be directly grasped open to comprehension.”¹⁷⁶ Teaching and studying history helped the complex social concepts, like race, become manageable for the public to process. Through African American cultural work, this kind of education was a tool for the paradigm shift needed to address racial inequality.

The function of a museum to transmit value and cultural appreciation was discussed throughout the twentieth century. In 1913, three years after the NAACP’s founding, Arturo Schomburg published a “plea for the establishment of a chair of Negro history in our schools and colleges.” Schomburg’s plea, titled *Racial Integrity*, was first posed to educators at Cheney Institute. Cheney, a historically Black college that graduated African American educators, was an important location to connect race advocacy to the education of Black history. Like the Black artist’s significant role in race work to DuBois, so was the important role of the Black educators to Schomburg. To race advocates like Schomburg, educators unpacked the complicated narrative of race through the presentation or exhibition of Black history and culture. Also, Black history education gave an account of the humanity of Black people and challenged the dehumanization perpetrated. While the NAACP connected the work of racial advocacy to cultural work, Schomburg specified the need for the collection, preservation, and education on African American history and culture. For racial equity to occur, society had to have a racially unincumbered view of Black people, especially important when what was known about Black people was influenced by misinformation. Schomburg contended:

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 251.

We need a collection or list of books written by our men and women. If they lack style, let the children of tomorrow correct the omission of their sires. Let them build upon the crude work. Let them, because of the opportunities that colleges and universities grant, crystalize the crude work and bring it out flawless.¹⁷⁷

Schomburg believed that the study of Africans throughout time enabled the paradigm shift needed to see Blacks in America more equitably, including:

the practical history of the Negro Race, from the dawn of civilization to the present time. We are reminded that the earliest instruction was imparted orally, and this system is still found. extant in Africa and among other Oriental nations. It is useful, because it trains the mind to listen, and retain. “

His goal was to train the mind to learn oral histories, African tradition and history, as well as African American history and culture as positive. Opposite of the pejorative view that was perpetuated by racist rhetoric about Black people. For example, Schomburg referenced the famed ancient storyteller and fabulist, Aesop. He contended that if society viewed Aesop as the African that he was then society would assign intellectual competence to Black people. By training the mind to listen and retain Black history trained the nation of the Black role in making America. The exhibition method of educating was an important method of training the mind to listen and retain a practical history of Black people. Thus, the element of education in cultural work is a way to create a shift in social thought of Black people's humanity.

Historical roots of the Black Museum Movement in Exhibitions of the World's Fair

The exhibition in the United States had two forms, Black as well as White, and was divided, similar to how Jim Crow laws divided the nation by color. Exhibitions about

¹⁷⁷ Arthur Alfonso Schomburg, *Racial Integrity: A Plea for the Establishment of a Chair of Negro History in Our Schools and Colleges, Etc.* (United States: Black Classic Press, 1979), 7.

Black people, done by White people, reflected the racism in popular culture. Case in point the 1893 Chicago's Columbian Exposition:

sought to celebrate four hundred years of Western "progress" or rather conquest and social Darwinist belief by putting the world's people on display arranged in a "sliding scale of humanity" with "Darkest Africa" at the very bottom.¹⁷⁸

Benga was exhibited as an artifact that demonstrated an example of the Darkest Africa.

Another example the World's Fair in 1904, when Ota Benga was objectified in an exhibition. Then in 1906, Mr. Benga was placed in a cage within the Bronx Zoo's

Monkey House where:

white crowds numbering forty thousand gawked at and taunted the twenty-three-year-old Benga, who shared a cage with a monkey, and more than once a group of visitors chased him around the grounds jeering at him, tripping him, and poking him in the ribs.¹⁷⁹

A group of African American ministers protested the treatment of Mr. Benga and demanded his release. After a month on display at the Bronx Zoo, Mr. Benga was taken from the zoo and placed in New York's Black orphan asylum with children.¹⁸⁰

The racist lens many White Americans saw Black people through was later evident in the 1906 Bronx Zoo exhibition of a human being in the zoo's monkey house. On display with animals or inanimate objects like museum labels, this man from the Congo withstood the gawking of White Americans.¹⁸¹ In a country where lynching was

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 41.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid

¹⁸⁰ Ibid

¹⁸¹ Karen Sotiropoulos, "'Town of God': Ota Benga, the Batetela Boys, and the Promise of Black America," *Journal of World History* 26, no. 1 (March 2015): 41–76, Page 1.

prevalent, segregation was pervasive, and minstrelsy's racist tropes were ubiquitous, Mr. Benga experienced What it was to be Black in America.

Even with these horrific, white-sponsored exhibits, the World's Fairs from 1900 through the 1960s represented an opportunity to reveal African American humanity and contribution to the US. Further, the progress in science, the humanities, and the significant battle for freedom throughout United States' history was viewed as an important part of racial pride in these exhibitions. For example, the 1900 Paris Exposition, where DuBois curated three hundred and three images.. Dubois thought an aspect of race work was the exhibition of:

empirical evidence of the economic, social, and cultural conditions of African Americans. He believed that a clear revelation of the facts of African American life and culture would challenge the claims of biological race scientists influential at the time, which proposed that African Americans were inherently inferior to Anglo-Americans.¹⁸²

DuBois, along with African American Library of Congress librarian Daniel Murray, were commissioned to curate the exhibit by Thomas J. Calloway, an official for the Exposition's American Pavilion. Also included in the work to build the exhibition were educators like Booker T. Washington and students from historically Black colleges.¹⁸³ Many African Americans throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century agreed that it was important to educate the public about African American history and

¹⁸² "African American Photographs Assembled for 1900 Paris Exposition" Prints & Photographs Online Catalog (PPOCC) Library of Congress, Text prepared by Dr. Shawn Michelle Smith for an exhibit, Photography on the Color Line, held at the Center for the Humanities, Oregon State University, 1999. Materials Compiled by W.E.B DuBois.

¹⁸³ Jacqueline Francis, and Stephen Hall, G. W.E.B. Du Bois in Paris: *The Exhibition That Shattered Myths About Black America: On the Aesthetics of Research*. Literary Hub. <https://lithub.com/w-e-b-du-bois-in-paris-the-exhibition-that-shattered-myths-about-black-america/>

culture. Further, it was especially important that a narrative about Black people come from Black people in these public events.

The history of exhibitions in the United States mirrored the minstrel stage. They both perpetuated racist troupes that have dehumanized Black people. Race advocates, like the NAACP, worked to counter the false representations that minstrelsy promoted. The objectification that occurred in popular public education spaces like zoos and museums is evident in the Bronx zoo's decision to display a human being. While the zoo is a different space than a museum, the use of a human being in an exhibition space designed for animals is reflective of popular views. The objectification and degradation of the Black body was pervasive, and visible in White exhibition spaces, and lynching for which the NAACP displayed daily reminders "A Man Was Lynched Today."¹⁸⁴ The abuse towards Black people, both mentally and physically, was intentionally pervasive. This was evident in the racist behaviors found in American public education spaces like zoos and fairs. To counter the racist rhetoric the cultural work the NAACP employed had footprints in the effort to interpret, educate, and preserve Black culture. For example, the NAACP magazine *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races*, the NAACP sponsored anti-lynching art exhibit, and the organization's role on the interracial committee on the World's Fair.

Also, significant to the counter of racist rhetoric was Black voice in the education of Black people is evident in the NAACP's correspondence with Carter G. Woodson. Woodson wrote to James Weldon Johnson, in 1922, during Johnson's tenure as a leader

¹⁸⁴ "A man was lynched today" <https://naacp.org/find-resources/history-explained/history-lynching-america>.

of the NAACP, that the Association of Negro Life and Culture was essential. Woodson wrote that:

the Association deserves your unstinted support. If you doubt it, a glance at the contents of these six volumes of the records of the race already published will convince you that we have done so much to secure for the Negro a hearing at the bar of public opinion that every member of the race should get behind this movement and make it a triumphant success.¹⁸⁵

There were communications between Woodson and other NAACP leaders that show a common pursuit of racial justice through education of the public. For example NAACP field secretary, William Pickens in 1926 received a letter from Woodson that stated:

I have your communication with respect to Negro History Week. I am very much interested in what you have to say about the distribution of the pamphlet which we have worked out. I shall be glad indeed to forward a number of them according to your request. I believe that much good will be accomplished in this way.¹⁸⁶

Woodson and Pickens exchange demonstrated the collaboration educational leaders like Woodson had with the NAACP. Additionally, the work done around Negro History Week was the same work done with the World's Fair, an exhibition, and public education on African American people put on by African American people. Woodson viewed the education of the public like a hearing or trial, one that challenges the misinformation or miseducation of the public. The miseducation of Black humanity was what supported the mistreatment of Ota Benga. The misrepresentation of Black people's intellect and contributions in World Fair's exhibits, lynching, and Jim Crow policies. Hence, to

¹⁸⁵ Carter G. Woodson correspondence, Papers of the NAACP, Part 01: Meetings of the Board of Directors, Records of Annual Conferences, Major Speeches, and Special Reports. Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (Known here after as Folder: 001412-028-0303) page 6

¹⁸⁶ Folder: 001412-028-0303 page 12

address lynching and Jim Crow policies, cultural literacy was developed through cultural work like exhibitions.

Cultural work was used to demonstrate the humanity of people who were targets of lynching and Jim Crow policies were popular civil advocacy tools. In a 1938 correspondence with the NAACP, the organization was asked to support the representation of African Americans by African Americans. The request arose because the World Fair exhibitions featuring Africans and African Americans were created by White people and reflected a White supremacist interpretation. The 1938 correspondence from Noble Sissle with the NAACP stated that:

Mr. W. C. Handy, Mr. J. Rosamond Johnson, Mr. Will Vodery and others have been fostering a plan of our own. We are sure you agree in our belief and contention, that if any spectacle is to be presented in the Amphitheatre of the World's Fair, dealing with the life of the Negro race and the part it has played in the development of this country, only our people and none other can have the true and rrom [from] the soul inspiration to write what we have actually experienced.¹⁸⁷

In response to the false representations the World's Fairs had in the past, Mr. Sissle wrote that "our life and history can only be written by we who have known its trials and hardships."¹⁸⁸ Further, Mr. Sissle stated to Walter White that he hoped for the NAACP's support. It is important to note that Mr. Sissle was once a member of The Harlem Hellfighters and performed with the early jazz bandleader and composer, James Reese Europe. Sissle was also known for his work on the first box office hit and all-Black musical, *Shuffle Along*. Mr. W.C. Handy, the "Father of the Blues," composer and author

¹⁸⁷ NAACP on the World's Fair, Papers of the NAACP, Part 11: Special Subject Files, 1912-1939, Series B: Harding, Warren G. through YWCA, Group I, Series C, Administrative File, Subject File, Library of Congress (known here after as folder 001422_034_0487) page 44

¹⁸⁸ Folder 0011422_034_0487 page 44

joined in the desire to work on a World's Fair exhibit about Black people. Included in the group of correspondents with the NAACP was Mr. J. Rosamond Johnson, coauthor of what the NAACP called "The Negro National Anthem." Mr. Will Vodery, another famed composer was also a correspondent. These men were an example of the intra-racial discourse on the importance of cultural work and the belief that the NAACP is an organization to seek out when they sought cultural advocacy alongside civil rights advocacy.

The NAACP responded to the call to have a Black lead World Fair exhibition with their participation on the Committee on Inter-Racial activities in the World's Fair. Arthur B Spingarn, one of the NAACP's founders, was the committee's chairman and advocate for the arts as a tool for racial justice. In a 1938 letter Spingarn described the function of the committee as "to advise the Fair on proposed projects and activities in order to see that nothing is passed the Fair which would be unfair to colored people."¹⁸⁹

The Committee on Inter-Racial activities in the World's Fair was a combination of education and civil rights work and liberation pedagogy. Joyce King referred to the teaching of Black history as a part of the Black Liberation tradition when she wrote about the concept of "returning what we learn to the people."¹⁹⁰ King's research outlined "conceptual tools like "Diaspora Literacy (culturally informed knowledge) and Heritage Knowledge, group memory."¹⁹¹ Heritage knowledge was the power to identify inequities and transformational behaviors that could aid in civil rights efforts through group

¹⁸⁹ Folder 0011422_034_0487 page 122

¹⁹⁰ Joyce E. King, "Education Research in the Black Liberation Tradition: Return What You Learn to the People." *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 86, No. 2, page 95.

¹⁹¹ Ibid

memory. The concept of group or collective was an empowering tool to disempower racial oppression that worked to disenfranchise Black people.

In her reflection of cultural and civil rights work, scholar Joyce King identified activists throughout the twentieth century that did such work. She referenced W.E.B DuBois and Carter G. Woodson. She then continued with 1960s civil rights advocates and educators Septima Clark and Ella Baker. King wrote that DuBois' "educational philosophy emphasized a critical study of history, cultural inquiry."¹⁹² Like his World's Fair exhibition work, King believed that "DuBois implemented his philosophy in 1911 by creating a theatrical pageant, "Star of Ethiopia," to educate the masses about Black history."¹⁹³ King asserted that it was common for Black educators to work on the presentation of a counter narrative. King wrote:

This experience is common among scholars of African ancestry as suggested by the similar conclusion Guyanese historian Walter Rodney (1990) reached when he reflected upon his student experience: It was necessary to come to grips with the way in which one's being, and the presentation of one's being, was so hopelessly distorted in the sources to which one went for scholarship."¹⁹⁴

King reflected a century long belief amongst Black educators when she wrote that "we were assaulted with ideologies of Black people's cultural deprivation and genetic deficiency masquerading as objective scientific theory."¹⁹⁵ King's point can be applied to a historical analysis of Carter G. Woodson and other Black educators of the first half of the twentieth century. Woodson shared his research in a collection of books and programs on Black History. The studies that Woodson created and facilitated received funds from

¹⁹² Ibid, page 97.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, page 96.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

and were popularized by Black clubwomen, teachers, and librarians. Their grassroots efforts supported Woodson's work to create the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History. For example, the students at the National Training School for Women and Girls, founded by Nannie Helen Burroughs, required students to use Woodson's texts on Black history and culture.¹⁹⁶ Another demonstration of the pervasive view that education on Black history and culture was important to civil rights and Black progress. While Black educators worked to incorporate Black history into school curriculum, nontraditional learning spaces like club meetings, church gatherings, and exhibition spaces all hosted such learning.

Developed as a path for cultural literacy while spiritual or core academic literacies were also cultivated, a formula for social justice was developed by this work: public history (collection, preservation, and exhibition) plus collective action equaled race advocacy. By the last half of the twentieth century, Black museums were spaces that told the story of race in America through the African American lens. Black interpretation of history, culture, and lived experience was, and continues to be, an especially transformational act when historically popular media and predominately White institutions often reflected racist troupes. In an effort to counter popular racist tropes, artists, educators, activists, and museums found common ground in their desire to collect, preserve, exhibit, and interpret African American cultural artifacts.

The Black Museum extended the concept of cultural work by the explicit interpretation of Black history, culture, and life by Black people. The collection,

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, page 97.

preservation and interpretation done by Black people about Black people stood in stark contrast to White interpretations of Black people up until the late twentieth century. The NAACP and Black museums shared a similar mission and vision: to reflect Black humanity, highlight Black contributions to society and illustrate Black people's experience in the United States. The work also facilitated interracial pride, appreciation, and community, a place of belonging for a marginalized group.

Leaders of Black Museums were often intellectuals and cultural organizers, like those in the Black women's clubs, that sought to place the Black narrative through the Black lens in popular exhibition spaces like the World's Fair. Their cultural work rendered impotent were the excuses of Black inferiority as the cause for their marginalization when the recognition of Black people's long intellectual history and cultural contributions occurred. Racial and cultural studies advocates saw the discourse of who the African American is as pivotal in both Black and White communities. For the Black community, it reaffirmed their humanity and connection to a dignified past, as well as tradition. The affirmation of culture acted as a weapon on the assault on Black humanity, both physically and intellectually. Race advocates like Schomburg viewed education on Black culture as a path to the eradication of the pervasive racism in society. Historian John Henrik Clarke wrote:

that Arthur A. Schomburg was the antecedent of the Black Studies Revolution and one of the ideological fathers of this generation. He often said, near the end his lectures, in speaking of the lack of protest in oppressed people: "The baby that cries the most gets the most attention."¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ John Henrik Clarke, "The Influence of Arthur A. Schomburg on My Concept of Africana Studies," *Phylon* (1960-) 49, no. 1/2 (1992): 9. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3132612>.

Schomburg's point is a reflection in the relationship education, inquiry, and Black discourse from Black people about Black people has with activism.

The NAACP's cultural work was a method of cultural organizing used for civil action. The concept of civil action through cultural work was evident in spaces like the Highlander School which helped define the work of cultural organizing. The Highlander School was founded in 1932 by Myles Horton. His work at the school in the areas of labor justice and civil rights was influenced by his time at Union Theological Seminary and Progressive Era social advocates like Jane Adams. At the Highlander school, Horton hosted civil rights activists like civil rights activists and educators like Ella Baker and Septima Clark. A key concept of the school's practice was for activists, common people in the community, to have a space to come together, build community and practice that was sustainable to deconstruct the culture and practice of Jim Crow.¹⁹⁸ Dr. John Fleming wrote:

“In order to fully understand how these various movements influenced African American interest in recapturing and preserving Black history, we seek a new paradigm for examining the connection between the struggle for freedom and equality and the efforts to recapture and preserve knowledge that would lead to the development of African American museums.”¹⁹⁹

Thus, to understand the role African American museums in the struggle for freedom and equality is to understand the significance of cultural organizing.

Cultural Organizing

¹⁹⁸ Nico Slate, 2022. “The Answers Come from The People: The Highlander Folk School and the Pedagogies of the Civil Rights Movement.” *History of Education Quarterly* 62 (2): 192. doi:10.1017/heq.2022.4

¹⁹⁹ John E. Fleming, *The Impact of Social Movements on the Development of African American Museums*, THE PUBLIC HISTORIAN, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 44–73 (August 2018). 44

The Highlander school defined cultural organizing as a celebration that “honors people’s spiritual traditions and cultural expression in the work to shift policies and practice.”²⁰⁰ Examples of cultural organizing were the New Negro Movement’s collective work as well as the NAACP’s publication of *The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races* and the anti-Lynching exhibitions hosted by the NAACP. Other social advocacy groups have used the technique of cultural organizing like the Communist Party’s anti Lynching art exhibition, and decades later the Black Power Movement also employed cultural organizing. Museums do cultural organizing when creating museum narratives or scripts that reflect the experiential knowledge of Black people. Further, Black museums create a space for testimonies; recreating a personal experience and through the sharing of the personal experience others have the opportunity to feel empowered. Joyce King described the spiritual tradition, collective memory, cultural organizing and liberation education when she wrote, “I imagine they sang old soul stirring songs like, ‘I know I’ve been changed, the angels in Heaven done signed my name,’ with new meaning.”²⁰¹

The honoring of traditions and cultural expressions was the honoring of people’s past experiences which Joyce King called the pedagogical practice of liberation education.²⁰² King wrote:

Sites of “study and struggle” afforded learning/s from experience that facilitated Black people’s critical historical and cultural consciousness, and bolstered their courage and their collective pride in their identity and humanity as a people.²⁰³

²⁰⁰“Cultural Organizing,” <https://highlandercenter.org/cultural-organizing/>

²⁰¹Joyce E. King, “Education Research in the Black Liberation Tradition: Return What You Learn to the People.” page 101.

²⁰² Ibid, page 98.

²⁰³ Ibid, page 101.

King described a solidarity in race work that was cultural organizing done through liberation education evident in the construction of African American themed exhibits like the ones in the World's Fairs. Liberation education was also found in Carter G. Woodson's work to educate the public on Black history. The cultural organizing that occurred in the collective creation of World's Fair exhibitions is another example of a planned social action. Author of "When Civil Rights Are Not Enough: Building the Black Museum Movement," Andrea Burns wrote that:

Just as African American churches provided a source of leadership and spiritual camaraderie for the growth of the Civil Rights Movement during the 1950s, so a neighborhood's black organizations and places --churches, black history and literary associations, and more informal gathering spaces -- inspired and often funneled volunteers into newly emerging black museums.²⁰⁴

Therefore, the history of African American cultural work continued in the African American museum. The creation of space for liberation education which is cultural work exemplified the integral role Black museums had and continues to have in the Black freedom movements of the twentieth century.

Dr. John Fleming, the Executive Producer for "America I Am: African American Imprint on America," a traveling exhibition, served as the consulting director of the International African American Museum Project in Charleston, S.C. He also served as the senior consultant for the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum and director of the National Museum of African American Music in Nashville, Tennessee. He wrote about the

²⁰⁴ Andrea A. Burns *From Storefront to Monument: Tracing the Public History of the Black Museum Movement*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013.) page 16

importance of cultural activism and the Black freedom movements. He further supported Joyce King's articulation of the liberation education of heritage knowledge with:

Heritage knowledge was also used as a form of group memory to counteract the narrative that African American history and culture did not exist outside of slavery, "intuitive" art (as viewed by whites), and oppression within and outside of Black communities. Many white Americans perceived African Americans as a race devoid of accomplishments, history, culture, and important contributions to society. The establishment of a positive, affirming, and balanced counternarrative served Black and white political and cultural activists as a strategy to gain an equal footing in American society.²⁰⁵

The exhibition of the African American experience was a form of organizing that celebrated and honored peoples' cultural traditions while working to shift policies and practices.

The cultural organizing task of the African American museum was to be the space that held the narrative. The narrative of the African American's humanity, contributions, and experience was counter to the degradation that Jim Crow caused Black people. Dr. Fleming wrote that:

early museums developed in conjunction with the rise of the Civil Rights Movement. Following World War II, a new consciousness emerged within the African American community that challenged Jim Crow.²⁰⁶

By the 1950s, the relationship between cultural work and civil rights to build heritage knowledge had become a significant part of the legal battles against segregation. The NAACP presented research on the harmful effects of segregation and the message a Jim Crow culture has on Black children.

²⁰⁵ John E. Fleming, *The Impact of Social Movements on the Development of African American Museums*, THE PUBLIC HISTORIAN, Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 44–73 (August 2018). 45.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 56.

The NAACP's cultural work was identified as important to civil rights work because it countered the dehumanization of Black people. By the 1950s, there were four decades of discourse about the need to counter the race-based violence Black people experienced. The dehumanization that supported lynching and segregation was destroying the Black child's self-lens. Again, for decades Black people had asserted the importance of building self-respect, the education of Black culture, and social contributions. By 1954 the NAACP had successfully argued the harm segregation had on democracy in the Brown decision. The NAACP's legal defense team in the Brown decision presented psychological research on the harm the indignities of a Jim Crow culture had on Black children. The NAACP presented the research of Dr. Kenneth and Mamie Clark, who designed a study about the harm segregation does to Black children. The study was used for five cases brought to the supreme court by the NAACP. In a speech delivered on April 24, 1954, to the Intergroup Committee on New York's Public Schools, Clark made the following statement about research he participated in:

It was found that as minority group children learn the inferior status to which they are assigned—as they observe the fact that they are almost always segregated and kept apart from others who are treated with more respect by the society as a whole – they react with feelings of inferiority and a sense of personal humiliation. They become confused about their own personal worth. On the other hand, like all other human beings, they require a sense of personal dignity; on the other hand, almost nowhere in the larger society do they find their own dignity as human beings respected by others. Under these conditions, the minority child is thrown into a conflict with regard to his feelings about himself and his group. He wonders whether his group and he himself are worthy of no more respect than they receive. This conflict and confusion leads to self-hatred and rejection of his own group.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁷ Briefs, arguments, and opinion in school segregation cases, and report on effects of segregation NAACP Papers, Part 03: The Campaign for Educational Equality, Series C: Legal Department and Central Office Records, 1951-1955, Group II, Series B, Legal File, Schools, Library of Congress (Known here after as Folder OO1513_022_0330,) Page 11.

The above assertion supported the need for cultural education, further supporting the long assertion that civil rights is won in the courts, legislatures, and minds of all Americans. By 1954 the public were armed with psychological research that supported the necessity for heritage knowledge, the cultural work that took form in Black history education, and the arts. Exhibitions created a platform for educating the public about Black people by being the tool used for a paradigm shift needed to combat public the social construct of Blackness. The rhetoric of Jim Crow, rooted in racist troupes first perpetuated through minstrelsy and then furthered through false science like social Darwinism, needed a counter. The tool and space to create a counter-narrative to racism and a place for the marginalized to belong are African American museums.

The civil rights movements of the 1960s embraced the use of cultural organizing, and this could be heard with the anthems “We Shall Over Come,” “Freedom,” and “Eyes on the Prize.” The lyric, “I know the one thing we did right was the day we started to fight,” was a rally cry for a battle that was for more than legislature but for the society’s mind, especially the Black mind. This ethic informed Black museums. Like the Black church fought for souls, the Black museum fought for minds through heritage knowledge. For example, the DuSable Museum of African American History in 1961 opened with a mission “to preserve and interpret experiences and achievements of people of African descent.” Creator Margaret Burroughs was an example of the drive to create the space to do the liberating work of heritage knowledge. Initially, the museum, which contained African and African American art, was in Burroughs’s house. Still, she worked to gain support from the city parks’ board to build the museum in Washington Park, a historically Black community in Chicago. Burroughs worked with members of the state

legislature to secure financial support for the museum and later for a capital expansion.²⁰⁸ Their legislative support created a precedence for state support for a Black museum. By the late 1960s, the work the community-based cultural organizing was an important part of the mission of the Black Power. In 1967, Black power activists Kwame Ture (once known as Stokely Carmichael) and Charles Hamilton argued, in their book *Black Power*, that Black people “must begin to think of the black community as a base of organization to control institutions in that community.”²⁰⁹ This community based institutional control was to promote empowerment in a community whose history was systemically denied. The goal was to address the harmful psychological effects described in the Clarks’ research.

While the NAACP was not an organization that supported the concept of Black power, they did continue to support heritage knowledge. In 1969, the NAACP’s executive secretary received multiple correspondences from John N. Cooper, who detailed a plan for a national museum of Black history and culture. Roy Wilkins responds in affirmation of a need for such a project:

There is no question that all Americans should be totally familiar with the history of the Negro in these United States and with that particular form of American culture which the Negro has developed because of his peculiar status as an American with a circumscribed relationship to the only country he has known for four centuries.²¹⁰

²⁰⁸John E. Fleming, *The Impact of Social Movements on the Development of African American Museums*, 56

²⁰⁹ Stokely Carmichael and Charles V Hamilton. *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. (New York: Random House, 1967) Page 166.

²¹⁰ Black history museum proposal, Part 28: Special Subject Files, 1966-1970, Group IV, Series A, Administrative File, General Office File, Library of Congress. (Known here after as folder 009056_005_0001) page 97

Wilkins revealed the thrust for heritage knowledge in the period of civil rights and Black Power:

Evidence comes to us from a variety of sources that efforts are being made to tell the Negro story. Perhaps the most dramatic evidence lies in newspaper accounts of Negro demands for "black studies programs" at colleges and universities in all parts of the nation,²¹¹

Wilkins agreed that:

There is no question that all Americans should be totally familiar with the history of the Negro in these United States and with that particular form of American culture which the Negro has developed because of his peculiar status as an American with a circumscribed relationship to the only country he has known for centuries.²¹²

There was a fear that past cultural work to collect artifacts of Black history was not cared for properly. Wilkins told Cooper:

If a "museum of black history and culture" were to be developed it would seem that this could be done most effectively in conjunction with, or in the proximity of, one of the major existing centers of Negro history such as those we have mentioned [Schomburg Collection and Howard University Library]. The importance which the American Museum of Natural History (Central Park West at 79th Street,) enjoys stems from the fact that massive quantities of information are so authoritatively contained and displayed within its walls. splayed within Its walls. We think in order to be effective, planners of a Negro museum must think in terms of magnitude, authoritativeness, effective display, and budget for frequent publication and nationwide distribution.²¹³

By the late 1960s the NAACP's cultural work was not an organizational priority, yet the long work of culture along with civil rights would not be ignored. Rather, Wilkins took a moderate stand on the Black museum. Similar to the discourse about Black studies, many leaders within the NAACP, feared the separation of Black narratives in a course of study or building. As for the concept of the Black museum, it held more support from more

²¹¹ Ffolder 009056_005_0001 page 101

²¹² Folder 009056-005-0001 page 96

²¹³ Folder 009056-005-0001 page 97

conservative civil rights activists than Black studies. While both Black studies courses and the Black museum both promoted heritage knowledge that has been supported for over a century, the segregation topic was a concern. Yet how can a people who have fought for integration ask for a separate course or cultural space?

By the 1970s, the Black Power movement addressed the question with a renewed assertion for racial justice. Dr. Fleming viewed this new movement, that is, after the civil rights movement of the 1960s, as reminiscent of the Harlem Renaissance. The conformity that was synonymous with integration was rejected, especially after the murder of Dr. King and Malcolm X. In the midst of pain and frustration, Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) articulated a new movement which he called Black Power. Black Power, spread through cities of the North, West, and South.²¹⁴ The focus on cultural work or liberation education was a driving force by the 1970s. With the development of Black studies, scholars and community activists sought both progress and change in cultural work. The Black Power movement set a new stage for Black museum work, one that enabled radical discourse due to what scholar bell hooks called radical openness.

In her 1989 article “Choosing the Margin As A Space of Radical Openness,” bell hooks discussed the politics of location, a space that “calls those of us who would participate in the formation of counter-hegemonic cultural practice to identify the spaces where we begin the process of revision.”²¹⁵ The claiming of a space for cultural practice was the Black museum. It was a space that afforded Black scholars the “capacity to

²¹⁴ Fleming, John E. “The Impact of Social Movements on the Development of African American Museums.” *The Public Historian* 40, no. 3 (August 1, 2018): 60.

²¹⁵ bell hooks, “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness.” 1989: *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 36 (January): 15.

envision new, alternative, oppositional aesthetic acts”²¹⁶ to the oppressive acts that produced the psychological harm Dr. Clark presented. The relationship Black studies and Black museums have was centered on bottom-up history. Lonnie Bunch, educator/museum professional and the Secretary of the Smithsonian, called the “New Social History” that many scholars of the last fifty years have participated in “brought new questions and interests that stimulated research, collecting, and exhibitions in African American history from the perspective of that community.”²¹⁷ Thus, the late twentieth century hosted African American cultural centers, archives, and local museums in almost every state.

²¹⁶ bell hooks, “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness.” 1989: *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, no. 36 (January): 15.

²¹⁷ Lonnie G. Bunch, “IN BLACK&WHITE: Interpreting African American Culture in Contemporary Museums.” 1995: *History News* 50 (4): 6

Conclusion: A New Century and the work of race advocacy in the African American Museum

By 2000 the NAACP resolved to support the creation of a national African American history and culture museum. The NAACP resolution for a National African American Museum:

WHEREAS, African Americans were the only population that came to America's shores as slaves; and

WHEREAS, despite persistent, massive legalized/institutionalized racism and discrimination well into the 20th Century, African Americans have played a major role in the building of America, the defending of America and in the shaping and contributing to America in the fields of science, medicine, literature, arts, dance, music, religion and entertainment; and

WHEREAS, other ethnic groups which played a role in the building of America have a national history museum on the mall of the nation's Capitol, the seat of government.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the NAACP encourages every unit of the NAACP across the country to work in coalition with other like-minded groups and organizations to develop a lobbying campaign to petition the U.S. Congress to provide a site, funding, and support to erect a full-scale, interactive, high-tech historical museum and research center on the mall of the nation's Capitol for the purpose of documenting, educating and telling the story of the African American experience in the United States from its early beginnings in the 17th Century.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ <https://naacp.org/resources/us-african-american-history-museum-washington-dc>

The cover of the July 2020 issue of the NAACP's *The Crisis Magazine* articulated the frustration of the centuries-long attack on the Black body with the statement: *We Are Done Dying*. Like the first editor of *The Crisis Magazine*, the editor and chief, Lottie L. Joiner, outlined the violence that Black people continue to face. In the editor's note titled "Our Underlying Condition," Joiner wrote:

George Floyd was murdered. Lynched. By police on May 25th, Floyd, 46, was arrested after a convenience store owner claimed he tried to buy cigarettes with a fake 20 dollar bill. Minneapolis police officer David Chauvin put his knee on Floyd's neck- keeping it there 8 minutes and 46 seconds while Floyd begged for his life. "I can't breathe," Floyd pleaded- 28 times. Just two months earlier, on March 13th, Breonna Taylor, a 26-year-old African American emergency medical technician, was asleep in her apartment when she was fatally shot by three Louisville, KY., police officers who had a no-knock warrant. And in February, Ahmaud Arbery, 25, was jogging in Brunswick, GA., when he was hunted down by three white men who shot him dead.

This brief statement has many examples of the degradation. Black people have withstood for centuries. The accounting of the violence, social and economic bias faced by African Americans is exhausting, and the statement "we are done dying" hangs heavy in our hearts. While there must be a judicial reckoning for these crimes against humanity, the NAACP created solidarity through the written word. In the past, it was a sign that hung outside their New York office, "A Man Was Lynched" today, it is the exasperated statement "We Are Done Dying."

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