

This Day in History... February 12, 1909

Founding of the NAACP

On February 12, 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in New York City. It's America's oldest and largest civil rights group.

Prior to this, the Niagara Movement was formed in 1905 by a group of 32 prominent African American leaders. They were concerned over several southern states' passage of laws that excluded many black and poor white voters. In some cases, people who had voted for 30 years were told they no longer qualified to register. Though they were separate groups, several members of the Niagara Movement also joined the NAACP. The Niagara Movement disbanded in 1910.



Wells was one of only two women to sign the call to form the NAACP.

For decades to come." At their second conference the following year, they established a new, permanent group, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).



Martin Luther King Jr. organized boycotts, rallies, and marches for the NAACP.

Charles Hamilton Houston and Thurgood Marshall, spent decades fighting the "separate but equal" decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. A major victory came in 1954 with the Supreme Court decision on *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregation in elementary schools was unconstitutional.

In the years to come, the NAACP helped organize the Montgomery bus boycott, led the campaign to integrate public schools in Little Rock, Arkansas, and staged the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Their efforts eventually led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. These bills were aimed at ending racial discrimination in employment, education, and voting.

The NAACP continues its advocacy today, with a focus on economics, education, health, public safety, criminal justice, and voting rights.

The main catalyst for the founding of the NAACP was the 1908 race riot in Springfield, Illinois. When a mob seeking to lynch two black men accused of rape and murder discovered that the sheriff had transferred the pair out of the city, they began attacking black neighborhoods. The riot left 9 African Americans dead and more than 60 buildings destroyed. Later that year, Mary White Ovington answered William Walling's call to form a group of citizens to aid African Americans. They sent out invitations to 60 people encouraging them to join.

Ovington and Walling organized a national conference to be held on Abraham Lincoln's 100th birthday, February 12, 1909. The first large meeting was held on May 30, but February 12 is considered the organization's founding date. The organization's original name was the National Negro Committee. Among its earliest members were W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, and Oswald Garrison Villard.

According to one historian, "The events at the conference set the tone for future race relations within the [NAACP] movement

Incorporated in 1911, the NAACP's charter stated its mission: "To promote equality of rights and eradicate caste or race prejudice among citizens of the United States; to advance the interest of colored citizens; to secure for them impartial suffrage; and to increase their opportunities for securing justice in the courts, education for their children, employment according to their ability, and complete equality before the law."

Beginning in 1910, the NAACP produced its own magazine, *The Crisis*, with Du Bois as its editor. The magazine shared news as well as African American poetry and literature. The early years of the NAACP were spent attempting to overturn Jim Crow laws that legalized segregation. They scored a major victory during World War I in getting African Americans the right to serve as military officers.

The NAACP also began taking on lawsuits all the way up to the Supreme Court, earning significant wins in their fight against segregation and other issues. By the 1940s the NAACP became the face of the Civil Rights Movement. Their leading lawyers,



Du Bois was a founding member of the NAACP and edited its magazine, The Crisis.



Marshall was the legal director for the NAACP from 1940 to 1961.



Wilkins was a leader of the NAACP for 22 years.

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