DOCUMENTING A CENTURY OF CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISM

THE NAACP PAPERS COLLECTION

ProQuest and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) have teamed up to digitize the association’s archives, bringing one of the most famous records of the civil rights movement to the online world. The collection is nearly two million pages of internal memos, legal briefings, and direct action summaries from national, legal, and branch offices throughout the country. It charts the NAACP’s work and delivers a first-hand view into crucial issues. The collection holds the distinction of being the most heavily used collection in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. And, it is fully searchable and accessible electronically as part of ProQuest® History Vault, an initiative to digitize historically rich primary sources, opening their discovery to broader audiences.

With a timeline that runs from 1909 to 1972, users can examine the realities of segregation in the early 20th century to the triumphs of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and beyond.
ProQuest’s digitization of the NAACP Papers begins with the central organizational records of the Association. Foremost among these records are thousands of pages of minutes of directors’ meetings, monthly reports from officers to the board of directors, proceedings of the annual business meetings, and significant records of the association’s annual conferences. This module also collects voluminous special reports written by the association’s officers and committees on a wide range of issues including the Ku Klux Klan, discrimination in public employment, the depiction of Blacks in motion pictures, economic equality, the church and civil rights, the changing attitudes of Black youth, and more.

The records from the 1950s chronicle the increasingly violent reaction within southern states against the determination of the NAACP and other civil rights groups to force compliance with the Brown v. Board of Education ruling. Month after month, executive officers’ reports and board of directors’ meetings were devoted to mapping out strategies to make the Supreme Court ruling a reality. Reports poured into the national office on acts of intimidation, economic reprisal, brutality, and terror against advocates of all forms of integration in the South. This collection also reveals the organization’s encouragement of voter registration in the face of determined southern white resistance, its support of Black students seeking admission to universities and professional schools, its work with labor unions, the appeals to state fair employment practices commissions, and the push for comprehensive federal civil rights legislation.

Records from the 1960s reveal the triumphs of this period in the form of the March on Washington, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. NAACP initiatives against housing discrimination culminated in the inclusion of an open housing provision in the Civil Rights Act of 1968. The 1960s was also a period of change for the NAACP as it dealt with other civil rights organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Congress of Racial Equality, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In addition to its traditional concerns, between 1966 and 1970 the NAACP faced new challenges. The association struggled to respond to the growing anti–Vietnam War movement, Black Power Movement, problems facing African Americans living in urban ghettos, and Nixon administration policies on civil rights and school desegregation.

COLLECTION LIST

NAACP Papers: Board of Directors, Annual Conferences, Major Speeches, and National Staff Files

- Papers of the NAACP, Part 02: Personal Correspondence of Selected NAACP Officials 1919–1939
- Papers of the NAACP, Part 14: Race Relations in the International Arena, 1940–1955
- Papers of the NAACP, Part 16: Board of Directors Correspondence and Committee Materials, Supplement 1 1956–1965; Supplement 2 1966–1970
- Papers of the NAACP, Part 17: National Staff Files, 1940–1955; Supplement to Part 17 1956–1965
- Papers of the NAACP, Part 21: NAACP Relations with the Modern Civil Rights Movement
The Education files in this second module document the NAACP’s systematic assault on segregated education that culminated in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. Files from 1955 to 1965 focus on the NAACP’s efforts to implement the Brown decision as well as to combat de facto segregation outside of the South.

Fighting for voting rights was one of the NAACP’s earliest major campaigns. The 1916–1950 files in this module document in extensive detail the NAACP’s campaign against the “white primary,” discriminatory registration practices, and the “grandfather clause.” Files from 1956–1965 chronicle the NAACP’s efforts to capitalize on the 1957 Civil Rights Act and the much stronger Voting Rights Act of 1965. NAACP’s voter registration efforts during this period are also well documented.

Racial discrimination in the workplace has long been one of the most difficult problems confronted by the civil rights movement. In its determination to provide African Americans with entry to the economic mainstream, the NAACP exposed and confronted every aspect of employment discrimination. This module documents the NAACP’s wide-ranging campaign and highlights the effectiveness (and more often limitations) of state fair employment practices laws, nondiscrimination clauses in collective bargaining contracts, private NAACP negotiations with major corporations, boycotts of major corporations, and presidential orders requiring equal opportunity in federal contracts.

The armed forces portion is an exceptionally rich documentary source on African Americans in the armed forces between 1918 and the early 1950s. It includes the complete extant files of the NAACP’s Department of Veterans Affairs, established to handle the increasingly heavy load of inquiries made upon the NAACP by Black servicemen and veterans and also to advance the NAACP objective of eliminating discrimination in the armed services based on race or color. The bulk of these files pertain to work handling complaints that were forwarded to the Washington office by local NAACP veterans committees and individuals and their families.
The focus of this module is on the NAACP’s efforts to combat lynching, mob violence, discrimination in the criminal justice system, and white resistance to civil rights efforts. These files are supplemented by materials on segregation and discrimination complaints regarding public accommodations and recreational facilities sent to and investigated by the NAACP, and records on discrimination in employment.

A particularly rich set of records in this module is the NAACP file on one of the most celebrated criminal trials of the 20th century—the case of the Scottsboro Boys. In 1931, nine young black men were accused of raping two white women on a train in northern Alabama. Sixteen days after their arrest, eight of the nine teenagers were sentenced to death in the electric chair. All eight escaped execution when the Supreme Court, in the landmark case of Powell v. Alabama, ruled that the defendants had been inadequately represented by counsel. The files document the publicity that this case generated, as well as the competition between the NAACP and the Communist Party in representing the Scottsboro Boys.

Closely related to the Scottsboro records are the key NAACP national office files on the campaign against lynching and mob violence, and NAACP efforts to fight discrimination in the criminal justice system.

The NAACP’s campaign against lynching and mob violence was ideally suited to accomplish the NAACP’s early goals of breaching the wall of silence regarding racial discrimination and racial violence, and bringing African Americans into full civic participation. The records pertaining to this campaign shed light on the Great Migration of the early 20th century and the movement of African Americans to urban areas, and NAACP’s efforts to respond to urban mob violence, especially during the violence of 1919 as well as later riots. The NAACP’s efforts to win passage of a federal law against lynching are also well-documented in this module. The records reveal the grief and appeals for help, the details of impending lynchings, and the personal sacrifices of NAACP officers.

The NAACP files on discrimination in the criminal justice system are also presented in this module. These records primarily consist of correspondence among NAACP attorneys at the local and national levels of the organization. The files also include legal documents, briefs, some trial transcripts, and correspondence with prisoners and their relatives, and with local NAACP officers and government officials. The major topics covered in the criminal justice files include death penalty cases, criminal cases pertaining to rape and murder, police brutality, conditions in prisons, and discrimination by juries and in jury service. The extradition cases involved persons who escaped from the South and sought refuge in northern or western states. The NAACP attempted to prevent these fugitives from being returned to southern states. One of the most significant cases in this series of records is the case of Pink Franklin, whose defense was the very first legal redress case taken up by the newly established NAACP in 1910.

The relentless resistance to the civil rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s is also documented. The hundreds of private communications in these files reveal the courage and resolve of individual civil rights leaders, as well as some of the movement’s most dramatic episodes.

The last two sets of records in this module cover NAACP efforts to combat employment discrimination from 1913–1939, and NAACP legal department files regarding complaints about segregation and discrimination in places of public accommodation, recreational facilities, and within private organizations.

COLLECTION LIST

NAACP Papers: The NAACP’s Major Campaigns—Scottsboro, Anti-Lynching, Criminal Justice, Peonage, Labor, and Segregation and Discrimination Complaints and Responses

- Papers of the NAACP, Part 06: The Scottsboro Case, 1931–1950
- Papers of the NAACP, Part 10: Peonage, Labor, and the New Deal, 1913–1939
- Papers of the NAACP, Part 15: Segregation and Discrimination: Complaints and Responses, 1940–55, Series A: Legal Department Files; and Series B: Administrative Files
This module covers the key issues the NAACP confronted during the peak years of the modern civil rights movement.

During this period, the NAACP Legal Department operated separately from the Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. NAACP Chief Counsel Robert L. Carter headed the former while Special Counsel Thurgood Marshall (succeeded in 1961 by Jack Greenberg) headed the nonprofit "Inc. Fund."

The Legal Department’s chief responsibilities during the 1950s and 1960s included defending the NAACP against attacks, mediating internal questions about the NAACP constitution and bylaws, and adjudicating disputes within the NAACP local branches. Many local branches turned to the Legal Department for guidance on a wide range of matters. The administrative files are a mix of correspondence with local civil rights attorneys on cutting-edge legal strategies and a collection of reference materials on every aspect of civil rights law.

The largest portion of this module consists of the working case files of the NAACP’s general counsel and his Legal Department staff for the period from 1956 to 1972. The files document the NAACP’s aggressive campaign to bring about desegregation throughout the United States, particularly in the South. Some of the 20th century’s most influential judicial rulings were one result. The case files presented in this module reproduce the documentary record of this litigation. Among the contested issues were school desegregation, abuses of police procedure, employment discrimination, freedom of speech, privacy, freedom of association, and housing discrimination.

The case files include the background correspondence of NAACP attorneys discussing strategic decisions in the litigation process. The numerous complaints, briefs, transcripts, depositions, and exhibits provide important documentation on the civil rights movement and the segregationist opposition.

The NAACP also took up cases involving the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, including indictments against Martin Luther King Jr. In addition, the collection includes background reference files on several landmark cases that the Legal Department did not participate in but still collected documentation on, such as Parks v. City of Montgomery. In total, this module contains over 600 cases from 34 states and the District of Columbia.
NAACP was involved in several subjects that did not rise to the level of major campaigns. This module contains records on those subjects, and in so doing, reveals the wide scope of NAACP activism and interest.

The files cover subjects and episodes that are crucial to the NAACP’s early history. In them, researchers will discover important material on civil rights complaints and legislation, segregation and discrimination, the Klan, Birth of a Nation, Blacks and American politics, the Walter White-W.E.B. Du Bois controversy of 1933-1934, and records of important conferences where strategies for Black advancement were debated.

The files for 1940-1955, like the 1912-1939 files, reveal the wide scope of NAACP activities as well as the wide-ranging aspects of race relations in America during the period 1940-1955. The 1940-1955 files are divided into three groupings. Highlighting Series A: Legal Department Files are files on the Ku Klux Klan in the 1940s, communism and anticommunism during the years of the “red scare,” the congressional prosecution of Hollywood personalities, the prosecution of conscientious objectors during World War II, the persecution of the pro-Japanese network of African Americans known as the Pacific Movement, efforts of the Farm Security Administration to establish Black sharecropper communities in the cotton South, prison conditions throughout the United States, plus a large series on Thurgood Marshall.

Series B and Series C for 1940-1955 are General Office Files including files on the American Civil Liberties Union, Mary McLeod Bethune, Theodore Bilbo, Thomas E. Dewey, the Dies Committee, W.E.B. Du Bois, James Eastland, the FBI, William Hastie, Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Loyalty Boards, Joseph McCarthy, Politics, Poll Tax, Adam Clayton Powell, The President’s Committee on Civil Rights, Paul Robeson, and papers covering vigilante and economic retaliations against Blacks in Mississippi in the 1950s.

The files for 1956-1965 cover topics such as the NAACP’s relations with African colonial liberation movements and with the Nation of Islam, the organizing of support among Christian churches for the civil rights cause, the fending off of charges of communist influence in the NAACP, racial injustice in the criminal justice system, presidential campaigns, relations with Jews, and NAACP fundraising and membership recruitment.

The files for 1966-1972 provide an in-depth look at some of the most important developments in the civil rights struggle during those years. These include the emergence of the Black Power movement, the enactment of open housing legislation, the fight against discrimination by employers and labor unions, new obstacles in the field of school desegregation, the War on Poverty, urban riots, the Vietnam War, confrontations with President Richard M. Nixon, plus excellent documentation on the NAACP’s interest in colonial liberation movements, African nationalism, and opposition to the South African policy of apartheid.
NAACP PAPERS: BRANCH DEPARTMENT, BRANCH FILES
AND YOUTH DEPARTMENT FILES

The files in this module chronicle the local heroes of the civil rights revolution via NAACP branches throughout the United States, from 1913-1972. The contributions of scores of local leaders—attorneys, community organizers, financial benefactors, students, mothers, school teachers, and other participants—are revealed in these records. Some of the most widely acclaimed recent scholarship in American history has focused on the local leaders and activists who transformed race relations in the United States during the 20th century and especially after the Second World War. The Branch Department, Branch Files, and Youth Department Files in this module will allow researchers at all levels new opportunities to explore the contributions of NAACP local leaders. The files also indicate how effectively the NAACP national office used the branch network to advance its national program. The Youth Department Files document how the NAACP tapped the energy and talent of college students and other young people at the state and local levels.

The Branch Files contain the correspondence between the national office and the most important and interesting local branches. The pre-1940 branch files reveal the wide-ranging nature of NAACP activism before 1940, efforts to build permanent community-based protest organizations, to secure the cooperation of white liberals, and to fend off white reaction. They shed light on relations with other organizations inside the Black community and with competing factions within the local branches. Branch Files frequently contain biographical material on numerous local civil rights leaders whose efforts have been largely unchronicled by historians.

Virtually every major topic in the history of the NAACP is touched on here: investigations of lynchings; campaigns for voting rights and against employment discrimination, police brutality, and the abusive use of federal slum clearance projects; and the fight against Jim Crow laws. Documents typically consist of correspondence between branch and national offices, with reports to the secretary of branches, requests for legal assistance, minutes of branch meetings, and financial reports.

The Branch Department files for 1941-1965 include in-depth reports and correspondence from NAACP regional field secretaries and the comprehensive annual activities reports of hundred of local branches. These documents provide a panoramic view of local civil rights activism throughout the United States, revealing a national surge in grassroots activism in the wake of U.S. mobilization for World War II and the U.S. Supreme Court decision in Brown v. Board of Education.

COLLECTION LIST

NAACP Papers: Branch Department, Branch Files and Youth Department Files

- Papers of the NAACP, Part 12: Selected Branch Files, 1913-1939
  - Series A: The South
  - Series B: The Northeast
  - Series C: The Midwest
  - Series D: The West
- Papers of the NAACP, Part 19: Youth File
  - Series A: 1919-1939
  - Series B: 1940-55, American Jewish Congress through Motion Picture Project
  - Series C: 1940-1955, NAACP through Youth Builders
  - Series D: 1956-1965, Youth Department Files
- Papers of the NAACP, Part 25: Branch Department Files
  - Series A: Regional Files and Special Reports, 1941-1955
  - Series B: Regional Files and Special Reports, 1956-1965
  - Series C: Branch Newsletters and Printed Matter, 1956-1965
  - Series D: Branch Department General Subject Files, 1956-1965
- Papers of the NAACP, Part 26: Selected Branch Files, 1940-1955
  - Series A: The South
  - Series B: The North
  - Series C: The Midwest
  - Series D: The West
- Papers of the NAACP, Part 27: Selected Branch Files, 1956-1965
  - Series A: The South
  - Series B: The Northeast
  - Series C: The Midwest
  - Series D: The West
- Papers of the NAACP, Part 29: Branch Department Files
  - Series A: Field Staff Files, 1965-1972
  - Series B: Branch Newsletters, Annual Branch Activities Reports, and Selected Branch Department Subject Files, 1966-1972
  - Series C: Branch Newsletters and Printed Matter, 1966-1971
  - Series D: Branch Department General Subject Files, 1966-70
The Regional Files and Special Reports show how national branch director Gloster Current set up regional offices to provide a full-time professional staff to link the local branch structure to the national office. Regional officers were on the front lines contesting housing segregation throughout the country, especially in the North. In the Midwest and West, files reflect substantial efforts to fight against discrimination and for enactment of state fair housing legislation. Southern files detail the emergence of a civil rights network during World War II (before the Brown decision) and the work of many talented and notable southern leaders such as Roscoe Dunjee of Oklahoma and Harry T. Moore of Florida. Western files reveal particular concern for keeping local organizations free of communist influence. Concern with the media is seen in the establishment of an NAACP Hollywood Bureau.

The Branch Files for 1956–1965 place NAACP local branches in the midst of 1960s political activism. The records cover:

- Hundreds of local civil rights cases inspired by the Brown v. Board of Education ruling
- Voter registration and voter turnout drives
- Campaigns for local fair housing and fair employment statutes
- Efforts to influence policies of local boards of education and local housing authorities
- Pressuring local congressmen to support federal civil rights legislation
- Pickets, boycotts, and direct-action demonstrations

Even after the passage of major civil rights legislation in 1964 and 1965, the files for the period from 1966–1972 reveal that the NAACP branch network continued to work vigorously for the association’s long-standing goal of ending racial discrimination in all aspects of American life. The Field Staff files, for example, contain regular reports on NAACP efforts between 1965 and 1972 to achieve school desegregation and quality education for African Americans. Local NAACP efforts to expand employment opportunities for African Americans are also covered in detail. The one major civil rights issue not covered by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was housing. As a result, in the period after 1964, the NAACP remained very active on the state and local level in pressing for expanded and improved housing opportunities for African Americans. Other topics covered in the 1966–1972 branch files include voter registration, the War on Poverty, urban riots, and the civil rights policies of the Nixon administration. Finally, the diverse reaction of NAACP branches to the concept of Black Power is a particularly interesting theme in the 1966–1972 NAACP Branch files.

In the 1930s the NAACP began to develop an extensive network of local youth councils and college chapters. With talented leadership by Juanita Jackson, Madison S. Jones, and Ruby Hurley, the organization attracted growing numbers of young people in the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s. The Youth files in this module document how the NAACP tapped the energy and talent of college students and other young people through effective organizing at state and local levels. Series A: 1919–1939 covers the Youth Department’s formative years, when the NAACP’s focus was on antilynching legislation.

Series B: 1940–1955, American Jewish Congress through Motion Picture Project and Series C: 1940–1955, NAACP through Youth Builders document the NAACP’s dramatic expansion of its civil rights program and its increasing success as a major force in American politics.

Series D: 1956–1965 Youth Department Files details the infusion of energy from hundreds of young men and women into the NAACP in the decade following the U.S. Supreme Court’s decision Brown v. Board of Education. The records show how the roots of youthful militancy in the 1960s ran deep into the preceding decade. They document an outpouring among both African American and white youths of energy and political action dedicated to basic change and improvement of race relations in the United States.

EXPLORE MORE AND SAVE MORE with mix and match discounts on an array of ProQuest History Vault modules and complementary resources.

FOR A FREE TRIAL OR MORE INFORMATION, visit www.proquest.com/pdpq/historyvault, call 800.521.0600, or email pqsales@proquest.com or marketing@proquest.co.uk outside of North America.