

NAACP

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Walter White's Leadership

ONE of Walter White's greatest strengths was his ability to select strong staffers. Thus, in addition to choosing Houston as his first special counsel and Marshall as Houston's successor, he also brought onto the staff people like Wilkins, who became his second in command; Gloster Current, who became director of branches and field administration; and Clarence Mitchell, Jr., who was initially labor secretary and, subsequently, director of the NAACP Washington Bureau that White himself created.

the 1960 Civil Rights Act, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act and the 1968 Fair Housing Act.

There were numerous other social and civil rights measures for which the NAACP struggled in Washington.

A Debt Owed Wilkins

WITHOUT a strong organization, however, it is unlikely that the Association could have been as successful as it was on the legislative front. For his leadership in strengthening the NAACP, Americans owe a debt to Wilkins. Working with him in building

Pictured below on the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court Building is the battery of attorneys for the NAACP who argued the school segregation cases, *Brown v. Board of Education*, which resulted in the famous decision of May 17, 1954 banning segregation in public education. (Left to right) Howard Jenkins, James M. Nabrit, Spottswood W. Robinson III, Frank Reeves, Jack Greenberg, Special Counsel Thurgood Marshall, Louis Redding, U. Simpson Tate and George E.C. Hayes. Missing from the photograph is Robert L. Carter who argued the *Topeka, Kansas* case.



(Above): Glouster B. Current, former Director of Branches and Field Administration and currently, Deputy Executive Director.

University in Washington, D.C. He received his J.D. degree from DePaul University College of Law in 1948. He is also an ordained Baptist minister.

In 1965, Hooks was appointed to the Memphis Criminal Court as the first Black judge in the South since Reconstruction. The following year, he was elected to an eight-year term. He was co-founder and vice president of the Mutual Federal Savings and Loan Association of Memphis. In 1972, President Nixon appointed Hooks a member of the Federal Communications Commission. He served in that capacity until taking the leadership position of the NAACP in 1977.

Reflecting the profound changes in the nation's social fabric that the NAACP has achieved over this 75-year history, Hooks today is providing the leadership required to ensure that Black Americans reap the gains of earlier progress. Primary thrusts involve implementation of civil rights laws and the prevention of roll backs of those hard-won gains. In this regard, the NAACP in 1982 led the successful fight for the extension of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The NAACP fought off attempts to weaken the law, thus ensuring that Black political strength will continue to increase.

The NAACP also led in challenging the Reagan Administration's attempt to reverse a 12-year policy of denying tax exemption to schools that practice racial discrimination. Thanks to the NAACP's work, the United States Supreme Court appointed William Coleman, a veteran Washington lawyer, to present arguments opposing the administration's effort. Other efforts that seemed hostile to Black progress also were challenged vigorously by Hooks. As in past years, rather than being discouraged by these challenges, the NAACP at 75 is as firm in its commitment to equality for all Americans as its founders were on February 12, 1909.



(Below): Roy Wilkins, Executive Director, 1955-1977.



for equality was one that would ensure them full participation as equal citizens in every aspect of American life.

Hooks Takes Leadership Position

THIS, therefore, was the heritage that Wilkins handed over to Benjamin Lawson Hooks in 1977. A veteran of World War II, Hooks was born in Memphis, Tennessee and was educated in the city's schools. He attended LeMoyné College in Memphis and Howard

From the NAACP's creation in 1909, an effective publicity campaign was deemed important for the success of the Association's work. To take command of this job, White chose Henry Lee Moon in 1948, a veteran newspaperman. Moon quickly rose to become a top administrator as well. In the final years of White's tenure, Moon became one of the "Big Four," along with White, Wilkins and Marshall, who ran the organization and masterminded overall civil rights strategy.

These were principal strategists in the modern phase of the civil rights struggle that the NAACP led. Among Wilkins' historic contributions was his creation of a formal civil rights coalition, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights. This group was composed of civil rights and civic groups as well as labor and religious organizations. This formalized broad-based support group was crucial to the Association's drive to win passage of civil rights legislation in Congress. The first concrete result was the 1957 Civil Rights Act. Subsequently, the NAACP led the struggle for passage of

the national structure was Current, who was responsible for the administration of the branches.

In 1977, Roy Wilkins retired, leaving behind an America that was radically different from the one that was present when he took a front position in the civil rights struggle. In the courts, from the time he first joined the staff through his departure, the NAACP had also won decisions outlawing segregation in interstate and intrastate transportation, in recreational facilities, such as parks, swimming pools and golf courses, and in ever other important area of life. The passage of civil rights laws ensured governmental protection for most of these victories.

In the social turmoil of the 60's, when a multitude of Black nationalism ideologies were being advocated, Wilkins provided another invaluable service by keeping the NAACP on a steady course of activism and agitation based on the philosophy of integration. Wilkins never wavered in his belief that the only realistic course for Blacks in the struggle