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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) | [Next entry](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_national_baptist_convention_nbc) | |
| |  | | --- | | http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/resources/uploads/NAACP.gif |   At the time of Martin Luther King, Jr.,’s birth in 1929, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was already the largest and most influential civil rights organization in the United States. King’s father, [**Martin Luther King, Sr.**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_king_martin_luther_michael_sr_1897_1984/), headed Atlanta’s NAACP branch; and in 1944, King, Jr., chaired the youth membership committee of the Atlanta NAACP Youth Council. Although King believed in the power of nonviolent direct action, he understood that it worked best when paired with the litigation and lobbying efforts of the NAACP.  The NAACP was formed in 1909 when progressive whites joined forces with W. E. B. DuBois and other young blacks from the Niagara Movement, a group dedicated to full political and civil rights for African Americans. The NAACP initially focused on ending the practice of lynching, and although lobbying efforts did not persuade Congress to pass anti-lynching laws, the 1919 publication of the NAACP report entitled, *Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States*, convinced President Woodrow Wilson and other politicians to condemn mob violence.  In 1940 the NAACP established its nonprofit legal arm, the Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF). Under the direction of [**Thurgood Marshall**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_marshall_thurgood_1908_1993/), the LDF went on to win the landmark 1954 case [**Brown v. Board of Education**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_brown_v_board_of_education_of_topeka_kansas_347_us_483_1954_349_us_294_1955/), which ruled that segregated education was unconstitutional. NAACP activists worked at the local level, as well. In 1955 NAACP member [**Rosa Parks**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_parks_rosa_1913_2005/) refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery bus, helping launch the [**Montgomery bus boycott**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_montgomery_bus_boycott_1955_1956/) that brought King into the national spotlight.  The NAACP supported the boycott throughout 1956, providing NAACP lawyers and paying legal costs. NAACP Executive Secretary [**Roy Wilkins**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_wilkins_roy_ottaway_1901_1981/) personally encouraged branches to fundraise for the [**Montgomery Improvement Association**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_montgomery_improvement_association/). In a 1 May 1956 letter, King thanked Wilkins, saying, ‘‘this deep spirit of cooperation from the NAACP will give us renewed courage and vigor to carry on’’ (*Papers* 3:244). King recognized the benefits of this partnership and encouraged Montgomery churches to become lifetime members of the NAACP. In the summer of 1956, King gave the first of many featured addresses at an NAACP national convention. The following year the NAACP gave King its highest award, the Spingarn Medal. In his appreciation letter, King wrote Wilkins, ‘‘I am wholeheartedly with the program of the NAACP. You will have my moral and financial support at all times’’ (King, 10 July 1957).  In 1957 the NAACP and King’s new organization, the [**Southern Christian Leadership Conference**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_southern_christian_leadership_conference_sclc/) (SCLC), began collaborating on civil rights campaigns, beginning with the [**Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_prayer_pilgrimage_for_freedom_1957/) in Washington, D.C. The next year King and Wilkins met with President [**Dwight Eisenhower**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_eisenhower_dwight_david_1890_1969/) to advocate for civil rights legislation. Although tensions surfaced between SCLC and NAACP, both King and Wilkins were quick to publicly deny any discord between the two organizations.  In 1962 NAACP partnered with SCLC, the [**Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_student_nonviolent_coordinating_committee_sncc/) (SNCC), the [**National Urban League**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_national_urban_league/), and the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) to launch the [**Voter Education Project**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_voter_education_project/), a grassroots voter registration and mobilization campaign. The organizations joined with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters the following year to organize the [**March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_march_on_washington_for_jobs_and_freedom/). Throughout the mid-1960s, while King continued to partner with the youthful activists of SNCC and CORE, the NAACP sought to distance itself from the more radical, action-oriented organizations. However, by 1966, the NAACP and SCLC were both at odds with CORE and SNCC because these groups began advocating ‘‘[**Black Power**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_black_power/)’’ and excluding white members.  Despite the NAACP’s opposition to King’s 1967 public statement against the [**Vietnam War**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_the_vietnam_war_1961_1975/), Wilkins and King continued to work closely on civil rights issues. Both pressed for immediate action to address the needs of urban blacks and blamed the summer race riots of 1967 on a lack of jobs. SCLC and the NAACP were both accused of being too moderate during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The NAACP steadily lost membership during this more radical period, and the political climate under Presidents [**Richard Nixon**](http://mlk-kpp01.stanford.edu/index.php/encyclopedia/encyclopedia/enc_nixon_richard_milhous_1913_1994/) and Gerald Ford continued to hurt the organization. In 1986 the NAACP moved its headquarters from New York to Baltimore, where it began a slow recovery. Nearly a century old, the NAACP continues to be the strongest national multiracial voice for political, educational, social, and economic equality.  **Sources**  Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts*, 1994.  King, ‘‘Call to a Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom,’’ in *Papers* 4:151–153.  King, ‘‘The Montgomery Story,’’ Address Delivered at the Forty-seventh Annual NAACP Convention, in *Papers* 3:299–310.  King to Wilkins, 1 May 1956, in *Papers* 3:243–244.  King to Wilkins, 10 July 1957, NAACPP-DLC. |