

National association  
for the advancement  
of coloured people  
essay sample



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Segregation is explained as the “ policy of separating racial groups in all aspects of their lives to ensure that whites maintained supremacy over African Americans”. With segregation being a large issue in the lives of African Americans in the 1900’s, organisations such as the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People) were created in order to assist the African Americans in fighting this issue. In this report, I will be assessing the NAACP’s contribution to the fight against segregation in the 1900’s, with reference to many key events along the way, judging its success in this fight. The NAACP was a civil rights organisation, whose mission was “ To ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate racial hatred and racial discrimination”. It used many different forms of resistance, mainly the use of test cases, but also including boycotts, marches and sit-ins to achieve this mission. The most famous of the NAACP’s efforts include the “ Little Rock Nine”, the Montgomery Bus Boycott and participation in the March on Washington. The “ Little Rock Nine” is the name for a group of nine African American students who attempted to integrate into Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.

The first attempt of these students entering the school was on the 4th of September 1957. The students were recruited by Daisy Bates, the president of the Arkansas branch of the NAACP. On the day of the first attempt, a white mob gathered in front of the school, and General Orval Faubus deployed the Arkansas National Guard to stop the students from entering. In response, the NAACP sent a team of lawyers, including Thurgood Marshall, to fight for the student’s rights. The NAACP team won a federal district court injunction to

prevent the government from blocking the student's entry and rights to education. With the assistance of police escorts, the students successfully entered the school from a side entrance on 23rd September 1957. Although the students were in the school, fears of the escalating mob outside meant they were rushed home soon afterward. Seeing the standoff between General Faubus and the federal court, Martin Luther King Jr, a member of the NAACP, sent a telegram to President Eisenhower urging him to "take a strong forthright stand in the Little Rock situation."

Becoming aware that the Little Rock incident was turning into an international embarrassment, Eisenhower reluctantly ordered troops to protect the students, who were shielded by these federal troops and the Arkansas National Guard for the remainder of the school year. King praised the president's actions in another telegram later that month: "I wish to express my sincere support for the stand you have taken to restore law and order in Little Rock, Arkansas. . . . You should know that the overwhelming majority of southerners, Negro and white, stand firmly behind your resolute action". At the end of the school year, Ernest Green became the first African American to graduate from Central High School. King attended his graduation ceremony. In honour of their momentous contributions to history and the integration of the Arkansas public school system, in 1958 the Little Rock Nine were honoured with the NAACP's highest award, the Spingarn Medal. Another major case that the NAACP was involved in was the case of Rosa Parks and consequently, the Montgomery bus boycott. The NAACP was searching for an appropriate case to test the court system.

Before Rosa Parks was chosen, there were two other women who were also arrested for not giving up their seats. The NAACP tried to use the women's cases, although neither of the women proved to be suitable for their test case to end segregation. On the first of December, 1955, Rosa Parks, a member of the NAACP was arrested and fined for refusing to give up her seat on a segregated bus in Montgomery, Alabama. The day Rosa Parks was arrested, the NAACP knew she would be the right candidate and so, chose to use her case as a test case to end segregation in yet another area of the African American's daily life. This event was the initial spark for the famous Montgomery bus boycott, which eventually led to all the major civil rights groups combining their efforts to fight segregation. This protest was organised by Martin Luther King, another member of the NAACP. The loss of income from the 17, 000 African Americans in Montgomery who refused to use the buses and chose to walk everywhere instead, left the Montgomery Bus Company with no other option than to withdraw its segregation policies. For the entirety of this movement, the African-American community did not use violence to protest, they simply denied the bus company income for their denial of freedom and the unfair treatment they received.

Every week the community would meet at the First Baptist Church in Montgomery, with speakers, many from the NAACP, and have a meeting about the boycott. With the assistance of the NAACP and some other organisations, the boycott lasted for 11 months, ending when the Supreme Court ruled that the separation of people based on race was unconstitutional. A technique the NAACP chose to use, other than test cases, was sit-ins. Sit-ins are organised desegregation protests which consist of students, usually

from colleges, sitting in white-only sections of cafeterias or restaurants and refusing to move on the basis that the segregation of public places is unjust. These sit-ins occurred all through the 1960's with a great final result. Most of these sit-ins were carefully planned, with many students gaining information from different branches of the NAACP. The participants in the sit-ins were also trained in the tactics of non-violent resistance, a strong belief of the NAACP, as the organisation opposed the use of violence in resistance and the fight for integration.

In 1960-61, over 70, 000 people took part in these sit-ins in many cities and towns, which succeeded in integrating public eating areas and also in desegregating other public facilities. The final involvement of the NAACP I wish to address is the part it played in the March on Washington in 1963. This march was seen as the " high tide of that phase of the Civil Rights Movement". The NAACP was one of the major players (known as the " big six"), along with members of other organisations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The NAACP had many members involved in this march, although the most easily recognised are Martin Luther King Jr and Roy Wilkins. Both of these members believed strongly in the use of peaceful protest and non-violent resistance. The march began at around 11 o'clock on the 28th of August, 1963, finishing at 4: 20pm. During the march there were many speakers, including Mr King. The day's culmination was when King took the podium and recited what has been come to be known as his " I Have a Dream" speech. In this speech, King commented that " as television beamed the image of this extraordinary gathering across the border oceans,

everyone who believed in man's capacity to better himself had a moment of inspiration and confidence in the future of the human race," and labelled the march as an " appropriate climax" to the events of the summer and years before.

This speech and the NAACP's involvement in the March on Washington meant even more progress in fighting segregation in the United States. Through all these efforts of the NAACP, it can be seen that this organisation played a huge part in the fight against segregation. It can be concluded that the NAACP was highly successful in its efforts and without its contribution, segregation may not have ended for many more years, continuing to impact on the lives of the African American People. It can also be said that the NAACP was a major factor in the abolishment of segregation in the United States of America, with its efforts being of great importance to the African American people and their lives. It may be concluded that the NAACP, in a way, achieved its mission of eliminating racial hatred and racial discrimination. Even though the NAACP was not completely responsible for the abolishment of segregation, it was a large player in the fight and was successful in its efforts.

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