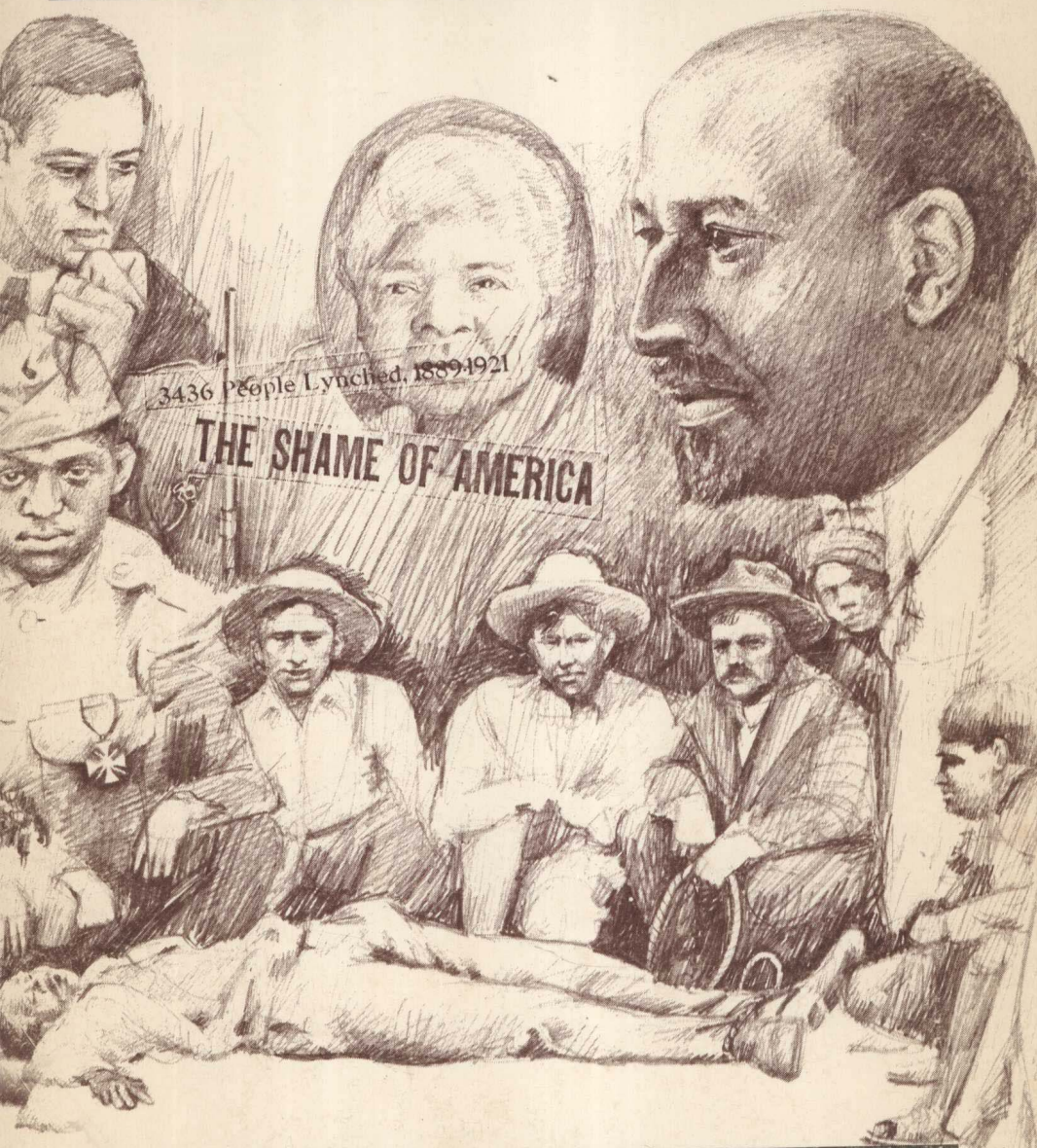


# NAACP



History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

Volume I (1909-1920)

by Charles Flint Kellogg

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# NAACP

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A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

Volume I 1909-1920

by Charles Flint Kellogg

The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London

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## Preface

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The organization of the NAACP and the names of its founders have been familiar to me since boyhood. I heard my father speak frequently of William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, probably the most distinguished citizen Great Barrington, Massachusetts, has ever produced. Both men spent their boyhood near the Green River, less than a quarter of a mile from each other.

It was on the same stream in the adjoining village of Alford that Mary White Ovington converted an old barn into a delightful summer home—"Riverbank"—in 1920. She spent a portion of her summers there for the next twenty years. "Riverbank" also provided a refuge from the city heat for the young Negro students Miss Ovington assisted financially through Smith College, as well as for the office workers and staff members of the NAACP. Among those who visited her were the Walter Whites, the Herbert Seligmans, the Robert Bagnalls, the James Weldon Johnsons, and Richetta Randolph. The Spingarns and Du Bois were also frequent visitors. (Du Bois later began restoration of his birthplace there but the work was never completed.) Far from being ostracized by the old New England families because of her activities, Miss Ovington was welcomed into the life of the community, and for a time served as president of the Alford Garden Club.

In 1926 the James Weldon Johnsons purchased and developed an old property in the township of Great Barrington and called it "Five Acres." Johnson did most of his writing there in his study with a magnificent view of Mt. Washington in the Berkshires. Mrs. Johnson's brother, John E. Nail, who was an officer of the New York branch of the NAACP, developed the adjoining property as a summer home. The Johnsons and the Nails were lionized as the result of Johnson's reputation as an author and poet, and Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Nail were invited to attend the Thursday Morning Club, the most select group of women in Great Barrington.

I was born the year the NAACP was founded. It was during this period that the status of the Negro deteriorated into a "new slavery." Negroes were disfranchised, their educational opportunities were restricted, and their freedom of association, work, travel, and recreation were circumscribed by law and by custom. They were the victims of savage lynchings and race riots in the South. But it was the outbreak of mob violence against Negroes in the North which led to the founding of the NAACP. The aim of the "new abolitionists" was to fight the "new slavery" by means which were then considered radical—non-violent agitation, well-publicized protest, propaganda, and legal action. It is the object of this study to trace the history of the NAACP during its formative years until a Negro became Executive Secretary, and the Association was accepted by Negro intellectuals as the most effective organization dedicated to their struggle to achieve full equality and first-class citizenship.

My greatest debt is to Professor C. Vann Woodward of Yale University, who read the manuscript and made many suggestions as to style, emphasis, and structure. I am also grateful to Professor Charles A. Barker of The Johns Hopkins University who read the manuscript and recommended improvements. Professor John Hope Franklin of the University of Chicago made valuable suggestions as to sources, and did much to clarify various aspects of Negro history. I am also indebted to Professor Elliot M. Rudwick of Southern Illinois University and Professor August Meier of Roosevelt University for direction in the use of the massive Booker T. Washington collection in the Library of Congress. I am under obligation to the late Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois for giving me access to his personal papers. Dr. Herbert Aptheker, Dr. Hugh H. Smythe, and especially Dr. Francis L. Broderick of Lawrence University provided guidance in the use of the Du Bois papers. Roy Wilkins and the late Walter White permitted me to use the files and Board Minutes of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. I am particularly indebted to James W. Ivy, Madison S. Jones, Gloster B. Current, Henry Lee Moon, Herbert Hill, and John A. Morsell, staff members at the national office of the NAACP, who provided me with valuable insights into the functioning of the Association. Miss Bobbie Branche, office manager of the NAACP, took unlimited pains to make me comfortable and to provide me with office space and with access to the files of the Association. Arthur B. Spingarn, who was president of the NAACP at that time, placed his office and personal papers at my disposal. He also introduced me to Mrs. Joel E. Spingarn, who permitted me to use her husband's papers at "Troutbeck," Amenia, New York. Charles Storey of Boston made his father's correspondence available to me. Mrs. James Weldon Johnson and Mrs. Poppy Cannon White consented to my use of the personal papers of their husbands. I am grateful for the help and consideration of the custodians of the James Weldon Johnson Collection at the Sterling Memorial Library at Yale University, the Schomburg Collection at

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# NAACP

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A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People



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## Introduction

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In the first decade of the twentieth century few voices were raised in defense of the Negro and his rights as a citizen of the United States. In 1877 the North had abandoned Reconstruction, acquiescing in Southern assurances that the constitutional rights of Negroes would be protected. Reactionary attitudes toward race had been strengthened with the triumph of imperialism in the war of 1898. By 1909, the civil rights the Negro had gained during Reconstruction had been severely limited. The prevailing attitudes toward the Negro were reflected in the sensational press, in the hate literature, in the periodicals of the middle class and the intellectuals, in court decisions reinterpreting the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, and in legislation providing for Negro disfranchisement and segregation in the South. Anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and political theorists had put their stamp of approval on the popular belief in the Negro's inferiority, which had been used to justify racist policies on national and local levels.

Voices that had once been raised in defense of the Negro and his rights now uttered words of reaction. After a trip to Africa, Charles Francis Adams, Jr., repudiated what he termed the self-sufficient ignorance of the philanthropists and theorists of New England, those successors of the abolitionists and humanitarians of the antebellum period who still claimed that the Negro had never been given an opportunity—a conception which had been one of the foundation stones of Reconstruction but which Adams now called the sheerest of delusions.<sup>1</sup> Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the abolitionist who had commanded the first Negro regiment during the Civil War and had later founded a school for Negroes at

<sup>1</sup> Charles Francis Adams, "Reflex Light from Africa," *Century Magazine*, LXXII (May, 1906), 101-111.

Calhoun, Alabama, now believed that giving the suffrage to all Negroes as a class was a mistake and that no white community would ever consent to the political supremacy of any of the colored races.<sup>2</sup> President Charles W. Eliot of Harvard openly deplored miscegenation, denounced any admixture of racial stocks, and endorsed the absolute separation of races on which the South insisted.<sup>3</sup>

Public opinion in the North, lulled by the success of the new economic order evolving out of the Civil War and Reconstruction, was apathetic and indifferent to the problems of the Negro. The North was willing to leave the solution of these problems to the South, and the South had entrenched itself behind legislation that assured the dominance of the Anglo-Saxon in Southern society, with the Negro firmly fixed "in his place"—at the bottom.

When Booker T. Washington, head of the industrial school for Negroes at Tuskegee, Alabama, gave his celebrated address at Atlanta in 1895, rejecting social equality and (at least temporarily) renouncing civil rights and political aspirations for Negroes, the acquiescence of the Negro to this state of affairs seemed assured. In return for the friendship and cooperation of Southern whites, Booker T. Washington, by emphasizing practical education that would fit the Negro to earn a living, virtually promised a docile labor force to the new industrial South. His speech won national acclaim, and Washington himself was hailed as the leader of his race.

In spite of Booker T. Washington's compromise with the white South, race relations continued to deteriorate. One answer to any challenge the Negro might raise against white supremacy in the South was lynching. Fear and tension, exaggerated by demagogues like Hoke Smith and fanned into flames by the sensational press, broke out in mob violence, culminating in the Atlanta riots of 1906 and in racial disturbances in the North as well.

The response of Northern philanthropy was based on the belief that education was the cure for all Southern problems. Northern money poured into the South in the endeavor to raise the literacy levels of whites and blacks, but always the Negro slipped into the lowest rank, the vocational training that had been approved by Booker T. Washington. Few funds were provided for the higher education of intelligent Negroes.

This trend did not go unnoticed by a young Negro scholar, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, a professor at Atlanta University. Within half a dozen years of Booker T. Washington's Atlanta speech, Du Bois was pointing out the weaknesses of Washington's philosophy. According to Du Bois, a large and impor-

<sup>2</sup> *New York Sun*, May 30, 1909. See also *Boston Evening Transcript*, June 1, 1909.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Jackson Garrison to Oswald Garrison Villard, March 9, 1909; March 12, 1909, in Oswald Garrison Villard Papers (Houghton Library, Harvard University). See also *Boston Evening Transcript*, editorial, "The Anglo-Saxon Solvent," March 9, 1909; *Boston Globe*, cartoon, March 10, 1909.

## INTRODUCTION

tant group of Negro intellectuals, who refused to accept Washington as a popular leader, was seeking "that self-development and self-realization in all lines of human endeavor which they believe will eventually place the Negro beside other races."<sup>4</sup>

Among those who sympathized with Booker T. Washington and his work, but were nevertheless becoming increasingly aware of Du Bois's writings, were the Garrison family of Boston. They objected to the spirit of reaction in the North and were shocked and pessimistic at the retreat from New England enlightenment. Fanny Garrison Villard, daughter of the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, was stunned by the "wave of passion and hatred towards the race to whom opportunity has been denied." She was moved to remark after reading Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1903, that there were no champions like those of antislavery days.<sup>5</sup> Her brother, the second William Lloyd Garrison, was sure that there had never been an affirmative majority for the abolition of slavery in the North except for a brief period at the Emancipation climax. He saw no marked change of feeling in the North regarding the Negro. The North as well as the South intended to keep Negroes in the lowest industrial levels, he observed, but the Northern intention was expressed "more by subtle action, and less by war cries."<sup>6</sup>

The third generation of the Garrison family continued to fight for fair treatment of the dark race. Oswald Garrison Villard, grandson of the abolitionist, son of Fanny Garrison Villard, and nephew of William Lloyd Garrison, Jr., prided himself on his abolitionist ancestry. His first opportunity to say a word in public in behalf of the colored man came in 1903, although he had dared to remark in an earlier address to an educational conference at the governor's mansion in Richmond that changed conditions made it possible for him "to speak where [his] grandfather would so cheerfully and happily have been hanged."<sup>7</sup>

Villard was also opposed to the prevailing spirit of imperialism. He had been "utterly miserable mentally" when the United States declared war in 1898 and he had cried out against the injustice of what he called the iniquitous war with Spain. He was thankful that the *New York Evening Post*, which was eventually to come under his management, had steered so straight a course during the war, and he looked forward to the day when he would have complete control of the paper and could make it a worthy successor to his grandfather's *The Liberator*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> William E. B. Du Bois, "The Evolution of Negro Leadership," *Dial*, XXXI (July 16, 1901), 53-55.

<sup>5</sup> Fanny Garrison Villard to Oswald Garrison Villard [March 10, 1903]; May 18, 1904, Villard Papers; Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago, 1903).

<sup>6</sup> William Lloyd Garrison to Oswald Garrison Villard, July 30, 1907, Villard Papers.

<sup>7</sup> Oswald Garrison Villard to Fanny G. Villard, July 31, 1903, Villard Papers; Oswald Garrison Villard, *Fighting Years: Memoirs of a Liberal Editor* (New York, 1939), p. 173.

<sup>8</sup> Oswald Garrison Villard to Francis J. Garrison, April 28, 1898, Villard Papers.

The *Evening Post* was one of the few papers that reported the activities of Negroes sympathetically. In 1926 Mary White Ovington was to write: "Long before there was a N.A.A.C.P., there was a Garrison in New York setting forth in his larger *Liberator* the wrongs of the Negro Race." Miss Ovington was a social worker who was associated with Villard in the turbulent early years of the NAACP. She knew from experience how seldom the Negro was given fair play in the press. Even the muckraking *McClure's Magazine* had turned down an article of hers in which the Negro was shown in a self-respecting light.<sup>9</sup>

Another Bostonian, Moorfield Storey, whose views on race had been influenced by his early association with the abolitionist Charles Sumner, was convinced that the condition of the colored race could be improved only if the solid South could be broken up and the Fifteenth Amendment enforced. Rather than leave the solution of the race problem to the South, he insisted that the rights of the colored people should be protected by public opinion from other parts of the country.<sup>10</sup> Storey was president of the Anti-Imperialist League. When W. E. B. Du Bois congratulated Storey on his illuminating pamphlet on United States policy in the Philippines and the atrocities perpetrated by American soldiers, he learned that Storey was familiar with his own writings and anxious to meet him because of their mutual concern over imperialism and the race question.<sup>11</sup>

Du Bois had attended the first Pan-African Congress in London in 1900, where he had been chosen vice-president of what was intended to be a permanent organization protesting imperialism and working for the granting of self-government to subject peoples.<sup>12</sup> The theme that ran through all his writings was that "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line; the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Mary White Ovington, "Beginnings of the N.A.A.C.P.," *Crisis*, XXXII (June, 1926), 76.

<sup>10</sup> Moorfield Storey to William Monroe Trotter, March 11, 1909, Moorfield Storey Papers (in the possession of Mr. Charles Storey, Boston, Massachusetts).

<sup>11</sup> Du Bois to Storey, October 21, 1907; Storey to Du Bois, October 24, 1907, in W. E. B. Du Bois Papers (now in the possession of Mrs. W. E. B. Du Bois, New York City). These papers were made available to the writer during the summer of 1949. After this, Dr. Du Bois closed his papers to all persons engaged in research. Francis L. Broderick, author of *W. E. B. Du Bois: Negro Leader in a Time of Crisis* (Stanford, 1959), has deposited his notes on the Du Bois Papers in the Schomburg Collection (New York Public Library, New York).

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Walters, "The Pan-African Conference," *A. M. E. Zion Quarterly Review*, XI (1901), 164-65; Walters, *My Life and Work* (New York, 1917), pp. 253-62.

<sup>13</sup> Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Premier Americana ed. (Greenwich, Connecticut, 1961), p. 23; Du Bois, "The Reconstruction Period: The Freedmen's Bureau," *Atlantic Monthly*, LXXXVII (March, 1901), 354. In writing the "Address to the Nations of the World" of the Pan-African Congress of 1900, Du Bois had used much the same phraseology. *Crisis*, XXI (March, 1921), 198.

## INTRODUCTION

Before the first decade of the twentieth century was over, these three men—Oswald Garrison Villard, Moorfield Storey, and W. E. B. Du Bois—were to become united in an organization dedicated to securing for Negro Americans first-class citizenship in the United States and to the abolition of the “new slavery.” The train of events that was to bring them together was set off by two days of bloody rioting, not in the South, but in Abraham Lincoln’s own city, Springfield, Illinois.





## The Founding of the NAACP

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On the fourteenth of August, 1908, race riots broke out in Springfield, Illinois. White mobs raged through the Negro district, burning homes and interfering with the work of firemen. It was two days before 4,200 militiamen brought the riots under control. By that time two persons had been lynched, six had been killed, and over fifty wounded. More than 2,000 Negroes fled the city, and hundreds took shelter in the camps of the militia.<sup>1</sup>

Lynchings and anti-Negro riots in the city where Lincoln had lived and was buried were too much for Oswald Garrison Villard, who, as the grandson of William Lloyd Garrison, had been reared in the abolitionist tradition.<sup>2</sup> In the *New York Evening Post*, of which he was president, Villard spoke out indignantly against the outbreak in Springfield, calling it the climax of a wave of crime and lawlessness that was flooding the country.<sup>3</sup>

The liberal periodical *The Independent* was also shocked that such violence against Negroes could occur in the North. "Springfield," wrote the editor, "will have to carry a heavier burden of shame than does Atlanta, for Illinois was never a slave state." Horrified at the thought that rioting might break out in other cities, *The Independent* urged Negroes, when attacked, first to seek protection from the proper authorities; if that failed, they should defend themselves and resist to the utmost of human power so that invaders of the home would be

<sup>1</sup> *Independent*, XLV (August 20, 1908), 339-400. For a study of the Springfield riot, see James L. Crouthamel, "The Springfield Race Riot of 1908," *Journal of Negro History*, XLV (July, 1960), 164-81.

<sup>2</sup> Oswald Garrison Villard to Fanny Garrison Villard, August 17, 1908, Oswald Garrison Villard Papers in the Houghton Library, Harvard University. (Hereafter Villard refers to Oswald Garrison Villard unless otherwise indicated.)

<sup>3</sup> *New York Evening Post*, August 17, 1908.