



**Smithsonian Institution**

*National Museum of African American History and Culture*

## **Delegate Magazine 1979**

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Come to Louisville, Kentucky for the 70th Annual N.A.A.C.P. Convention  
June 25-29, 1979 - Galt House

On August 1, 1977, Benjamin L. Hooks became the ninth executive director of the NAACP. His selection had been confirmed seven months earlier when the Board of Directors unanimously approved the recommendation of the Search and Screening Committee at a special meeting in New York on November 6.

He was then a commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission, having been appointed in 1972 for a seven-year term.

Of his election, Mrs. Margaret Bush Wilson, chairman of the Board of Directors, said: "This is an historic occasion, for it has not been often that we in the NAACP had the responsibility of seeking a person to fill the position of Executive Director. Some will find historic significance too in the fact that we have chosen a man from the South to guide the NAACP just as the electorate has chosen a Southerner to lead the nation."

She noted the extent to which all Americans were indebted to Roy Wilkins, Mr. Hooks' predecessor, for his leadership in bringing revolutionary social change to the nation. But the task is unfinished. "No victim of racism and bigotry has any illusions about the dimensions of the mission ahead in the struggle for human dignity and justice and equality." Despite civil rights gains, black Americans and other minor minorities still face discrimination.

So the challenge "lies in helping to marshal the real strengths of this nation of varied people—to forge a partnership among equals committed to the full realization of the founding principles of this great country."

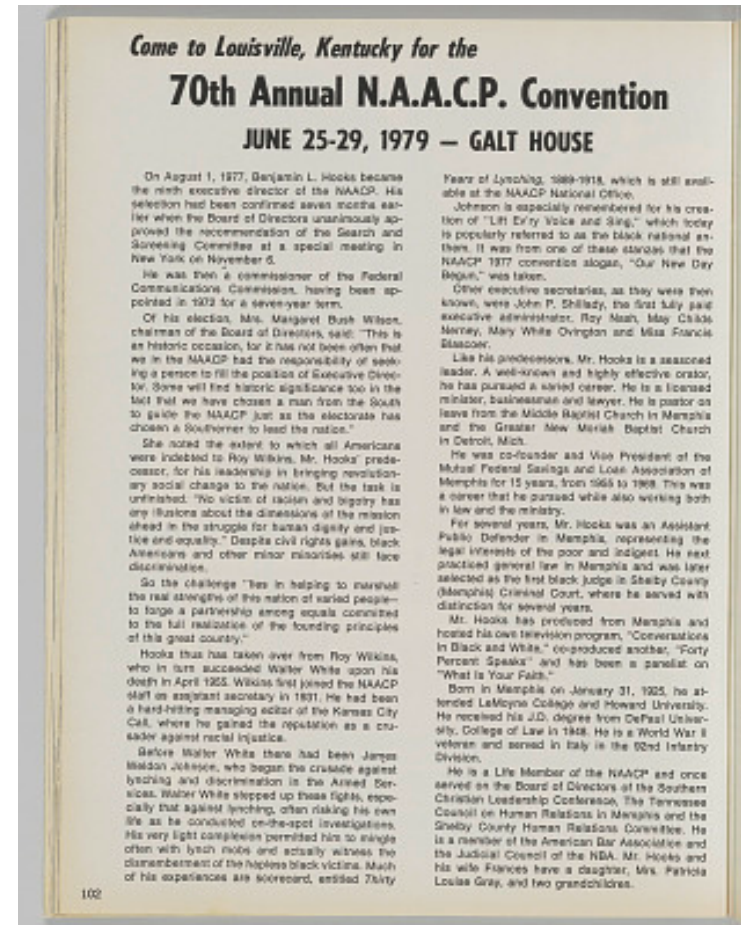
Hooks thus has taken over from Roy Wilkins who in turn succeeded Walter White upon his death in April 1955. Wilkins first joined the NAACP staff as assistant secretary in 1931. He had been a hard-hitting managing editor of the Kansas City Call, where he gained the reputation as a crusader against racial injustice.

Before Walter White there had been James Weldon Johnson, who began the crusade against lynching and discrimination in the Armed Services. Walter White stepped up these fights, especially that against lynching, often risking his own life as he conducted on-the-spot investigations. His very light complexion permitted him to mingle often with lynch mobs and actually witness the dismemberment of the hapless black victims. Much of his experiences are scorecard, entitled *Thirty Years of Lynching, 1889-1918*, which is still available at the NAACP National Office.

Johnson is especially remembered for his creation of "Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing," which today is popularly referred to as the black national anthem. It was from one of these stanzas that the NAACP 1977 convention slogan, "Our New Day Begun," was taken.

Other executive secretaries, as they were then known, was John P. Shillady, the first fully paid executive administrator, Roy Nash, May Childs Nerney, Mary White Ovington and Miss Francis Blascoer.

Like his predecessors, Mr. Hooks is a seasoned leader. A well-known



and highly effective orator, he has pursued a varied career. He is a licensed minister, businessman and lawyer. He is pastor on leave from the Middle Baptist Church in Memphis and the Greater New Moriah Baptist Church in Detroit, Mich.

He was co-founder and Vice President of the Mutual Federal Savings and Loan Association of Memphis for 15 years, from 1955 to 1969. This was a career that he pursued while also working both in law and the ministry.

For several years, Mr. Hooks was an Assistant Public Defender in Memphis, representing the legal interests of the poor and indigent. He next practiced general law in Memphis and was later selected as the first black judge in Shelby County (Memphis) Criminal Court, where he served with distinction for several years.

Mr. Hooks has produced from Memphis and hosted his own television program, "Conversations in Black and White," co-produced another, "Forty Percent Speaks" and has been a panelist on "What is Your Faith."

Born in Memphis on January 31, 1925, he attended Lemoyne College and Howard University. He received his J.D. degree from DePaul University, College of Law in 1948. He is a World War II veteran and served in Italy in the 92nd Infantry Division.

He is a Life Member of the NAACP and once served on the Board of Directors of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, The Tennessee Council on Human Relations in Memphis and the Shelby County Human Relations Committee. He is a member of the American Bar Association and the Judicial Court of the NBA. Mr. Hooks and his wife Frances have a daughter, Mrs. Patricia Louise Gray, and two grandchildren.

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