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National Museum of African American History and Culture

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[[image - NAACP logo]]
 [[image - photograph of Benjamin L. Hooks]]
 Benjamin L. Hooks, Executive Director

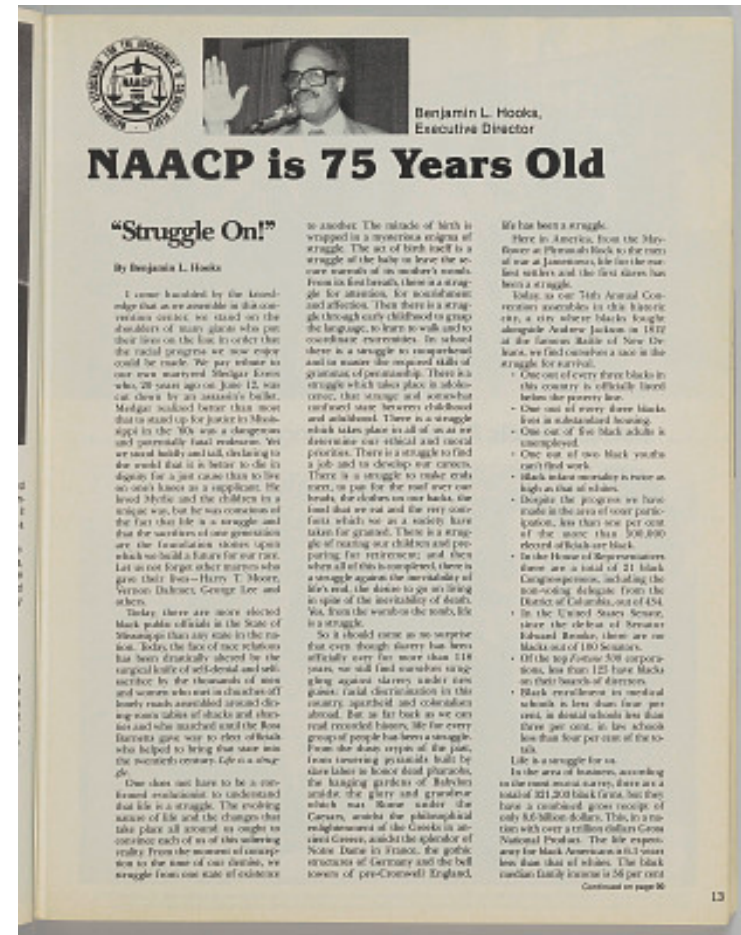
NAACP Is 75 Years Old
 "Struggle On!"
 By Benjamin L. Hooks

I come humbled by the knowledge that as we assemble in this convention center, we stand on the shoulders of many giants who put their lives on the line in order that the racial progress we now enjoy could be made. We pay tribute to our own martyred Medgar Evers who, 20 years ago on June 12, was cut down by an assassin's bullet. Medgar realized better than most that to stand up for justice in Mississippi in the '60s was a dangerous and potential fatal endeavour. Yet we boldly and tall, declaring to the world that it is better to die in dignity for a just cause than to live on one's knees as a supplicant. He loved Myrlie and the children in a unique way, but he was conscious of the fact that life is a struggle and that the sacrifices of one generation are the foundation stones upon which we build a future for our race. Let us not forget other martyrs who gave their lives—Harry T. Moore, Vernon Dahmer, George Lee and others.

Today, there are more elected black public officials in the State of Mississippi than any state in the nation. Today, the face of race relations has been drastically altered by the surgical knife of self-denial and self-sacrifice by the thousands of men and women who met in churches off lonely roads assembled around dining-room tables of shacks and shanties and who marched until the Ross Barnetts gave way to elect officials who helped to bring that state into the twentieth century. Life is a struggle.

One does not have to be a confirmed evolutionist to understand that life is a struggle. The evolving nature of life and the changes that take place all around us ought to convince each of us of this sobering reality. From the moment of conception to the time of our demise, we struggle from one state of existence to another. The miracle of birth is wrapped in a mysterious enigma of struggle. The act of birth itself is a struggle of the baby to leave the secure warmth of its mother's womb. From its first breathe, there is a struggle for attention, for nourishment and affection. Then there is a struggle through early childhood to grasp the language, to learn to walk and to coordinate extremities. IN school there is a struggle to comprehend and to master the required skills of grammar, of penmanship. There is a struggle which takes place is adolescence, that strange and somewhat confused state between childhood and adulthood. There is a struggle which takes place in all of us as we determine our ethical and moral priorities. There is a struggle to find a job and to develop our careers. There is a struggle to make ends meet, to pay for the roof over our heads, the clothes on our backs, the food that we eat and the very comforts which we as a society have taken for granted. There is a struggle of rearing our children and preparing for retirement; and then when all of this completed, there is a struggle against the inevitability of life's end, the desire to go on living in spite of the inevitability of death. Yes, from the womb to the tomb, life is a struggle.

So it should come as no surprise that even though slavery has been officially over for more than 118 years, we still find ourselves struggling against slavery under new guises: racial discrimination in this country, apartheid and colonialism abroad. But as far back as we can read



recorded history, life for every group of people has been a struggle. From the dusty crypts of the past, from towering pyramids built by slave labor to honor dead pharaohs, the hanging gardens of Babylon amidst the glory and grandeur which was Rome under the Caesars, amidst the philosophical enlightenment of the Greeks in ancient Greece, amidst the splendour of Notre Dame in France, the gothic structures of Germany and the bell towers of pre-Cromwell England, life has been a struggle. Here in America, from the Mayflower at Plymouth Rock to the men of war at Jamestown, life for the earliest settlers and the first slaves has been a struggle.

Today, as our 74th Annual Convention assembles in this historic city, a city where blacks fought alongside Andrew Jackson in 181 at the famous Battle of New Orleans, we find ourselves a race in the struggle for survival.

- One out of every three blacks in this country is officially listed below the poverty line.
- One out of every three blacks lives in substandard housing.
- One out of five black adults is unemployed.
- One out of two black youths can't find work.
- Black infant mortality is twice as high as that of whites.
- Despite the progress we have made in the area of voter participation, less than one per cent of the more than 500,000 elected officials are black.
- In the House of Representatives there are a total of 21 black Congresspersons, including the non-voting delegate from the District of Columbia, out of 434.
- In the United States Senate, since the defeat of Senator Edward Brooke, there are no blacks out of 100 Senators.
- Of the top Fortune 500 corporations, less than 125 have blacks on their board of directors.
- Black enrollment in medical schools is less than four per cent, in dental schools less than three per cent, in law schools less than four per cent of the totals.

Life is a struggle for us.

In the area of business, according to the most recent survey, there are a total of 321,203 black firms, but they have a combined gross receipt of only 8.6 billion dollars. This, in a nation with over a trillion dollars Gross National Product. The life expectancy for black Americans is 6.1 years less than that of whites. The black median family income is 56 per cent

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