

The NAACP and the Energy Crises: A Historical Development Towards Social Welfare

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1.1 Introduction

“The quality of life for those owning, managing or governing energy, surpassed anything ever experienced in human history. But beneath this energy-powered economic, industrial and military might lay an inequitable and pyramidal social structure.”¹ – Lenneal J. Henderson, 1980

This is an alarming quotation from Lenneal J. Henderson, member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, who wrote about his concerns for the economic situation of the lower classes in United States society in the civil rights organization’s official magazine *The Crisis*. Henderson found the motivation to write his article in the consequences of the National Energy Act of 1978 initiated by the Carter Administration (1977-1981). This act did, according to him, not sufficiently support the financial conditions of colored people in the United States.² The National Energy Act of 1978 was created to cope with the consequences of the energy crises that plagued the international consumption during the 1970s. These energy crises were the result of many historical developments and events. After the prosperous and promising years for oil production and oil consumption in the United States during the 1960s, the seemingly continuous flow of the black liquid started to falter during the 1970s.

In the United States this crisis was felt among all social groups of its population, and it managed to instill fear in the minds of the civilians. The idea that the continuously modernizing concept of the American Dream would no longer be provided with the necessary fossil fuels, caused a nationwide frenzy. The oil shortage caused an enormous inflation on all sorts of energy. On fossil fuels, but also on other forms of energy that were meant to replace the black gold. The energy crisis of 1973 especially hurt the financial means of low-income households. While it fostered support for neoliberalism and self-sustainability among the upper-middle class layer of American society, the lower classes feared for an even greater poverty. As African Americans make up a big part of the lower classes, it is not a surprise that the energy crisis of 1973 hit them especially hard. Their social-economic status was a result of the institutionalized racism in the American society.³ They had to start from scratch when and *if* they could overcome the prejudices of their second-class citizenship.

¹ Lenneal J. Henderson, “Managing an Uncertain Future,” *The Crisis* (March, 1980): 83.

² Henderson, “Managing an Uncertain Future,” 84.

³ *Ibid.*, 84.

Civil rights organizations denounced the unfairness of the energy-crises-infused neoliberalism for the citizens that never really got a chance in the past or the present.⁴ The NAACP, being one of them. The Energy Act of 1978 was not the first economic legislation that caused the NAACP to undertake action. Although, many other civil rights organizations and radical civil rights activists accused the NAACP of being too moderate, too much focused on the problems of the African American middle-class, and therefore too indifferent to the problems of the masses, that were often of an economic kind.⁵ Their intellectual and traditional focus on civil rights in the past did gain them indeed a lot of middle-class members, but the NAACP's founders always planned to help out the black working class.⁶ The NAACP really went through a lot of historical and sociocultural developments that caused them to change their tactics and strategies. But in the end, they always stayed true to their principles. How did the NAACP interpret the energy crises of the 1970s? And did it represent a new turn for this civil rights organization, demonstrating more interest in economic issues?

This thesis is structured along the lines of several sub questions. The first question that is posed is: What were the grounds for the intellectual and middle-class approach by the NAACP and why were they accused by fellow civil rights movements? Throughout the history of civil rights, the NAACP has proven to be the largest and most influential civil rights organization. They managed to have an impact on policy or legislation because they were always looking for cooperation and negotiation with the American authorities, rather than conflict.⁷ During their existence they have set up programs to help African Americans, often with the help and approval of American authorities. The question serves to provide the historical context necessary to examine the NAACP's efforts for the African Americans during the later energy crises. This section will also research the developments of the organization in the field of social welfare, and will discuss and explain the concept of the

⁴ Ebony, "Top Civil Rights Organizations say Impact of Crisis on Blacks is Devastating," *Ebony* (October, 1979): 42.

⁵ Robert Franklin Williams, *Negroes with Guns* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998); Manfred Berg, *The Ticket to Freedom: The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2007); Dan S. Green, and Earl Smith, "W.E.B. DuBois and the Concepts of Race and Class," *Phylon* 44, no. 4 (1983): 262-272.

⁶ Bernard Eisenberg, "Only for the Bourgeois? James Weldon Johnson and the NAACP, 1916-1930," *Phylon* 43, no. 2 (1982): 113.

⁷ George B. Hutchinson, *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 171.

“dual agenda” that started to impact civil rights organizations during the changes in the socioeconomic climate.

The second chapter will look at the NAACP’s developments during the 1970s. Just after the Black Power era, the NAACP managed to survive the competition from more radical civil rights organizations. This development also had its impact on the NAACP’s message, their outlook and their future goals. Did they, for example, take over the concerns of the slowly declining radical civil rights movements? And what did the period of 1970s mean for their “dual agenda”? During the 1970s the Nixon and Carter Administrations started to implement their economic policies. What did this mean for the African American lower classes? The question that is posed in chapter two is: How did the NAACP and other civil rights organizations fare in a period of rising conservatism?

And finally, in third chapter, the research will look at what kind of actions were undertaken to ease the financial situation of African Americans during the energy crises? How did the NAACP interpret the energy crises? As a civil rights organization with a lot of middle-class members and an intellectual approach, the NAACP had a hard time losing their ‘elitist’ imago over the years. The chapter explores whether the dual agenda helped the NAACP during the energy crises to formulate a plan that would fit the likes of the black masses. It will try to discover what the NAACP did to ease the burden of the energy crises for consumers or for minority businesses, and what arguments they used to justify these actions. Why did the NAACP support the deregulation of oil prices if it meant that the consumer would have to pay more for energy instead of less? And how does this outlook on the crisis fit with their historical character?

1.2 Historiography

With the new energy policies that emerged during the 1970s, the lower classes in American society feared for the financial consequences that this new political policy would entail for their small households. NAACP-member Lenneal J. Henderson expressed his concerns for the colored people in America that historically never made up a big part of the societal upper-class.⁸ As a population group that was denied the same privileges that the white Americans enjoyed due to the institutionalized racism that they had to endure, the NAACP would argue that their financial disadvantages during the energy crises of the 1970s were rooted in their second-class citizenship, and therefore unfair.⁹ But the NAACP was said to be originally an organization that did not do much for the social welfare of African Americans in US society. The organization had been subject to a lot of sociocultural developments that caused them to receive praise and criticism from other civil rights movements.

The NAACP and other civil rights movements

“He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.”¹⁰ – W.E.B. Du Bois

The African American academic and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois laid the foundations for the NAACP with this quotation being one of the principles the organization would be founded upon. In his book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois spoke about a kind of black capitalism that would only be possible in an idealistic society. But the ‘Doors of Opportunity’ were indeed always closed in the faces of the African Americans in United States society. They were second-class citizens, and they would never play a part in the American Dream that so many American citizens wanted to pursue. Du Bois acknowledged that this pursue was a distant utopia. *The Souls of Black Folk* was an important work in the research of civil rights, and it has been referenced by many academics.¹¹ Many historians see this work as a proof that the criticism of other civil rights organizations - that the NAACP was

⁸ Henderson, “Managing an Uncertain Future,” 83.

⁹ Ibid., 84.

¹⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm>.

¹¹ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm>.

an elitist organization - was ill found.¹² They were originally a civil rights organization that focused on the black working class, but somehow, over the years, they received the stamp 'elitist' and were accused of favoring the black middle-class. The historical character of the NAACP is researched by many historians.

The American historian Bernhard Eisenberg, for example, who writes in his article "Only for the Bourgeois? James Weldon Johnson and the NAACP, 1916" about the struggle of socialists like Du Bois and other founders of the NAACP to maintain the organization's original message about the economic and legislative disadvantages of the African American people in the United States. After the 1920s the organization was said to have received a lot of interest from the black middle-classes that were attracted to the NAACP's intellectual approach to civil rights.¹³ Eisenberg emphasizes this by looking at the discussion of the socialist founders, who were concerned about the consequences this would have for the organization's message to the working class. These founders were Mary White Ovington, Oswald Garrison Villard, William English Walling, Dr. Henry Moscowitz, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Mary Church Terrell. Most of these founders were socialist, anti-imperialist and racial egalitarian. Their concern for a lack of equal opportunity, made that they believed that a class-based society would never be in the favor of the African American community. According to its website, "the NAACP's mission was and is to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality of minority group citizens of United States and eliminate race prejudice."¹⁴ By issuing the problems of the minority, the NAACP wished for a better distribution of economic possibilities. The main difference is that the NAACP focuses on racial inequality instead of class inequality.

The German-American historian Manfred Berg mentions in his book *The Ticket to Freedom: The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration* (2007) that it was especially in the early years of the NAACP's existence that the organization was trying to find out in what areas they could be successful without antagonizing the white authorities, but they only received the 'moderate' label during the Black Power era. During that period, they were accused for their willingness to negotiate and cooperate with the dominantly white American authorities.¹⁵ The NAACP was never looking for a fight, and many radical civil rights

¹² Eisenberg, "Only for the Bourgeois?" 113.

¹³ Ibid., 113.

¹⁴ "Nation's Premier Civil Rights Organization," NAACP, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.naacp.org/nations-premier-civil-rights-organization/>.

¹⁵ Berg, *The Ticket to Freedom*, 11.

activists believed that they had the right to do so, but that the NAACP never made use of this right because they were indifferent to the idea of overthrowing the discriminatory regime.

The American historians Dan S. Green and Earl Smith argue in their work “W.E.B. DuBois and the Concepts of Race and Class” that the implication that Du Bois was pointing at the concept ‘racial uplift’ with his elaborate focus on education did also not help to change the character of the NAACP. Maybe it was interpreted the wrong way? It was a term that was used by, for example, the conservatist civil rights activist Dean Kelly Miller, who was, by the way, also a member of the NAACP, and who thought that “black capitalism” was a way for African Americans to come out of their miserable socioeconomic situation.¹⁶ Du Bois only used the concept to indicate that change was needed from both sides in order to come to terms with the white people. Green and Smith point to the fact that Du Bois’ ‘racial uplift’ was a term used for blacks to educate themselves with the help of organizations like the NAACP, and that he denied the possibility for successful black capitalism.¹⁷ ‘Racial uplift’ was therefore a means for African Americans to improve themselves for their own sake and not to please the white authorities.

The American historian Raymond Arsenault writes in his book *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* about the direct action and the supposed radicalism from the new civil rights organizations that were founded during and after the Second World War. He argues how the NAACP was very wary of these new developments. They feared that antagonizing the American authorities would eventually prompt a backlash, and harm the efforts in the negotiation with the authorities for more equal rights.¹⁸ It suggests that the NAACP stayed true to their original approach, as peacemaker and negotiator between the African Americans and the American authorities during the 1960s. They were, according to former NAACP-member Robert F. Williams, “indifferent to the problems of the masses.”¹⁹ This is an interesting historic viewpoint when one considers the fact that 1) the NAACP has created a lot of social welfare programs after the 1960s, and 2) the NAACP took a special interest in the problems of low-income black households that suffered from the consequences of the energy crises in the 1970s. The American historian Catherine M. Paden favors a

¹⁶ Dan S. Green, and Earl Smith, “W.E.B. DuBois and the Concepts of Race and Class,” *Phylon* 44, no. 4 (1983): 262.

¹⁷ Green and Smith, “W.E.B. DuBois and the Concepts of Race and Class,” 266.

¹⁸ Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 6.

¹⁹ Robert Franklin Williams, *Negroes with Guns* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998); Manfred Berg, *The Ticket to Freedom: The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration* (Gainesville, Florida: University Press of Florida, 2007); Dan S. Green, and Earl Smith, “W.E.B. DuBois and the Concepts of Race and Class,” *Phylon* 44, no. 4 (1983): 262-272.

different approach, compared to Arsenault. In her book *Civil Rights Advocacy on Behalf of the Poor*, she argues that the Black Power era *did* have an impact and an influence on the NAACP's traditional, non-radical and supposed elitist approach. She argues that the NAACP placed itself during the Black Power Movement era in the midst of new competition. Thus, the NAACP started to focus on the problems that were issued mostly by the black masses. Paden calls these problems the 'popular issues', and they were in fact social welfare issues.²⁰ After the Black Power era the NAACP could return to their traditional approach, and could finally forget about the internal debate inside the organization. But did this mean that they abandoned the dual agenda?

To understand better the changes in tactics and strategies of civil rights organizations, the American historians Dona Cooper Hamilton and Charles V. Hamilton introduced in their article "The Dual Agenda of African American Organizations since the New Deal: Social Welfare Policies and Civil Rights" the concepts: the Consensual Stage, the Complementary Stage and the Conflictual Stage. All these concepts refer to a change in the socioeconomic climate that led civil rights organizations to introduce, change, and advocate their reasons for a dual civil rights agenda, that focused on both civil rights and social welfare.²¹ Hamilton and Hamilton claim that this concept can be applied to most civil rights organizations. This thesis will use this article and the concept of the dual agenda to analyze the development of the NAACP, and this article will therefore play a major role in this research. Did this dual agenda, for example, change the approach and the outlook of the NAACP completely, or did it play a minor role? If the NAACP changed its tactics at all, was it due to the introduction of the dual agenda that Hamilton and Hamilton describe? The period of the energy crises will serve as a case to analyze this concept.

The energy crises of the 1970s and energy conservation

When one takes a quick look at the academic literature available on the energy crises and the oil shocks of the 1970s, one will learn that most works focus on macroeconomic policy, and on the energy security that was debated internationally. Especially the literature dating from just after the decade of the 1970s, focuses on the energy crises with an outward looking perspective, as the oil shocks were indeed a worldwide problem. The Austrian historians Karl-

²⁰ Catherine M. Paden, *Civil Rights Advocacy on Behalf of the Poor* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 126.

²¹ Dona Cooper Hamilton and Charles V. Hamilton, "The Dual Agenda of African American Organizations since the New Deal: Social Welfare Policies and Civil Rights," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 107, No. 3 (1992): 435-452.

Michael Brunner, Anja Christanell and Markus Spitzer write as such in their chapter “Energy Consumption Practices and Social Inequality The Case of Low-Income Households”. They argue that the academic literature on energy policy in the 1970s and 1980s was dominated by an economic, and top-down political approach.²² It took scholars, according to Brunner, Christanell and Spitzer quite some time to study the societal impact of the energy crises, because only after the 1980s “It became increasingly evident that it is the people who consume energy, not their dwellings or devices.”²³ Still, a new focus on the society and the ordinary people was an idea that was still very minimally used by scholars when they researched the oil shocks of the 1970s.

Richard Nixon was the first American president who had to deal with the faltering oil production as a consequence of the first energy crisis of 1973. He was also the president that made an end to the Black Power era by introducing rules for tougher law enforcement, according to the American historian Alexander Michelle. In her book *The New Jim Crow*, she argues that a conservative revolution came with the presidency of Nixon.²⁴ This is also stressed by the NAACP in their official magazine *The Crisis*, wherein they fear that with the presidency of Nixon there would come an end to social welfare policies for African Americans.²⁵ Nixon was mainly focused on spurring the self-reliance of African Americans by investing in his Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE), but he neglected the fact that African Americans would need more than a fund to organize a successful enterprise. The American historian Dean Kotlowski reaffirms this by stating that “by viewing poverty in terms of dependence versus independence Greenspan [Nixon’s economic advisor] overlooked white racism and blamed its black victims.”²⁶ With his energy policy, Nixon also focused on independency, and although his policy to control oil prices would be in the favor of the consumers, he did not pay special attention to African Americans who might have been hurt more by the energy crisis due to their socioeconomic history. Nixon’s policy was solely focused on the consumers in the United States in general.

The other presidents that also had to deal with the energy crises, Ford and Carter, continued Nixon’s policy to control oil prices and invest in domestic energy production. None

²² Karl-Michael Brunner, Anja Christanell, and Markus Spitzer, “Energy Consumption Practices and Social Inequality: The Case of Low-Income Households,” in *Past and Present Energy Societies: How Energy Connects Politics, Technologies and Cultures*, ed. Nina Möllers and Karin Zachmann, 199.

²³ Brunner, Christanell, and Spitzer, “Energy Consumption Practices and Social Inequality,” 199.

²⁴ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: An Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 47.

²⁵ Roy Wilkins, “NAACP Annual Meeting,” *The Crisis* (March, 1974): 88.

²⁶ Dean Kotlowski, “Black Power-Nixon Style: The Nixon Administration and Minority Business Enterprise,” *The Business History Review* 72, no. 3 (1998): 411.

of these presidents paid special attention to the consequences of the energy crises for African Americans. The price controls were initiated to alleviate the economic consequences for consumers, but the prices were still relatively high in this crisis period, and the weakest socioeconomic groups of the US society were still very vulnerable. The ‘consumers’ in the presidents’ rhetoric were, more or less, an all-encompassing group, and an absolute opposite of the producing sector. Also, very few academic sources pay special attention to the consequences of the energy crises for African Americans. An example of this is the book *Jimmy Carter's Economy: Policy in an Age of Limits*. In this publication the economic historian W. Carl Biven writes about the economic policy of President Carter and how his policy was influenced by all the oil shocks he had to cope with during his term of office. Biven pays special attention to foreign policy, and to how Carter’s energy security policy was a constant failure, unable to succeed because of all the roadblocks and the lack of public trust. The decision to view the energy crises as an international and macroeconomic problem would have an impact on the domestic policy in the US, that Biven only focuses on from the perspective of the people in power.

It is a returning subject in the works on the energy crises that academics focus mainly on international and macroeconomic consequences and solutions. Most academic literature is either written from a top-down perspective, or focus on the economic, sociological and political sides of the energy crises. This approach often studies the impact of the energy crises along a formula originating from social science, and it is yet again an example of how there is a lack of interest from the field of historical science in this subject. Especially the African American community in the United States, is a social group that could be better understood with an extensive historical background. The works on the presidential policies during the energy crisis do never look into the responses from this population group, and this thesis relies for a big part on primary sources that give more information on this perspective. This will be discussed further in the sections ‘Innovative aspects’ and ‘Methodology and primary sources’.

1.3 Innovative aspects

The energy crises of the 1970s are a subject of inquiry that have been dominated by scholars active in economics, political science and social science. All of these fields of science take on a policy-orientated approach, and try to create models to understand the actions that were undertaken by politicians and institutions during the energy crises. Their goal is to explain rather than describe, and in doing so, they do not always take into account the historical developments. Many civil rights activists would stress that some populations groups' social economic status is a product of their history. From first glance, very few academic sources have paid attention to the impact and the consequences of the energy crises on African Americans in the United States, whose history cannot be more marred by the injustices done to them in the past.

This research also further explores the development of civil rights organizations and the 'dual agenda' that many historians link with the various civil rights organizations' approaches. The dual agenda, is an agenda that takes into account both civil rights and social welfare. The social welfare agenda is not necessarily focused on race-related problems, although many activists would link the poor socioeconomic situation of many African Americans with race. In the past, there had been many time periods that led to developments that concerned this dual agenda. There were periods in time wherein one part of the agenda would gain the priority over the other. How would this dual agenda fit in within the NAACP during the energy crises?

This topic also holds a certain importance for current and future developments in international energy conservation. This current and future energy conservation policy will not so much be about a fear for a future shortage in fossil fuels, as much as it is about a fear for climate change. In this case, authorities also want to implement alternative energy policies to diminish the harmful emissions of fossil fuels. These new energy policies also require drastic financial changes for a nations' economies as well as for the many households that are located in these particular nations. The topic is also interesting because it concerns an ongoing problem and an organization that tries to find ongoing solutions for this problem. The old energy support programs of the 1970s could be extended and improved for future energy issues.

1.4 Methodology and primary sources

As the historiography has already clarified, there is a lack of sources on the impact of the energy crises and the energy conservation policies on the lower classes in United States society. Most of the authors who have written on the energy crises were primarily looking into the political and economic dimensions of the historical event. So, in order to research the unique historical responses from certain social groups, one has to address and analyze mainly primary sources originating from these population groups to get a clear historic overview.

This thesis looks into the interpretation and the responses of the NAACP, since this is the largest and most influential civil rights organization in the United States, especially after the Black Power era. The NAACP is also one of the oldest civil rights organizations that is still active today, and their history is therefore a very long and interesting one. In the past the NAACP has been accused of being moderate, elitist and solely focused on the improvement of civil rights, and not so much on welfare. It suggests an interesting historical development that needs to be addressed before this research delves into the actual subject. Therefore, the first part of this research is a historical analysis of the NAACP's economic standpoints, the influences from other civil rights organizations on the organization, and the NAACP's dual agenda. The article by Hamilton and Hamilton, as mentioned before, will play an important role in this research. This thesis essentially wants to find out if the dual agenda did have an impact on the NAACP as much as Hamilton and Hamilton suggest in their article. Did the NAACP remain, for example, the organization that it was at its founding, or was even the character of the NAACP affected by this dual agenda?

The second part is a more specific analysis on the NAACP's approach to 1970s politics and to the problems caused by the energy crises. For this part, this research looks into *The Crisis* magazine, the official information outlet of the NAACP. This particular source represents the voices of the members of the NAACP, but does by no means represent the voices of *all* African Americans in the United States, since there are big differences in the approaches of the different civil rights organizations. The content of the source can be very insightful, as well as, the people who were invited to write on certain issues. Who, for example, were invited to write about the consequences of the energy crises, and what does this say about the NAACP? Other civil rights organizations will also be addressed in order to research their responses to the NAACP's stance on US energy policy, but most of them do not play a large role in this thesis, since a lot of the organizations that criticized the NAACP during the Black Power era disappeared after this period. An organization that *is* active during

the 1970s is the Black Panther Party. They are a Marxist civil rights organization that still adhered some of the standpoints of the Black Power era, while also linking their criticism to the capitalistic world. They are very outspoken about the energy crises, and they directly confront the NAACP about their stance on the deregulation of oil prices.

Not many civil rights organizations confronted the NAACP directly with their own information outlets, but the NAACP felt that they needed to defend themselves. To learn more about the energy policy of the NAACP (and whether it was controversial or not) this thesis researches other information outlets that are not directly or necessarily linked with a specific civil rights organization. The first magazine is *Ebony*, and this magazine will only be mentioned when it mentions 'energy policy' or 'energy crisis' in its articles. They were originally a lifestyle magazine that reported about the lifestyles of successful African Americans. The publisher, John H. Johnson, was a businessman that only briefly went along with the frenzy of the Black Power era. During the 1970s, this magazine, again, engaged in politics by representing the perspectives of African American politicians. So it seems that the minority elite after the Black Power era received a podium in *Ebony* magazine. By publishing interviews with civil rights organizations they seem to try to objectively report about their standpoints on the energy crises.

This is very different compared to the magazine *Black Enterprise* that not only defended the NAACP's 'controversial' policy, but also proposed policy advices to the organization, since a lot of its writers were invited to write in the NAACP's information outlet, *The Crisis*. The publisher of *Black Enterprise*, Earl G. Graves, was an oil entrepreneur himself, and he was invited to publish his articles in *The Crisis*. This is very informative to find out more about the NAACP's policy. Were they entirely following the advices of the oil executives, or did they also pay attention to the perspectives of the consumers and low-income households? And what does this say about, on the one hand the 'dual agenda' they were supposed to be running according to Hamilton and Hamilton, and on the other hand, the historical character of the organization? With these primary sources, this thesis researches the responses of the NAACP to the energy crises, and tries to find out in what way these responses were characteristic for the NAACP as an organization with a lot of historical baggage.

2.1 The NAACP and the economic situation of African Americans

“He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.”²⁷ – W.E.B. Du Bois

This citation from the book *The Souls of Black Folk* written by the later NAACP founder, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois in 1903, portrays the situation of the African American population group around the first years of the twentieth century. Estranged from their previous lives, still not accepted by society as American citizens, and bereft from the privileges that the white Americans did enjoy. The black American was segregated from the fortunate in American society, struggled to make for a living, and was denied the rights to pick the fruits of - and pursue the American Dream. They had to deal with the institutionalized racism that would continue to plague their socioeconomic development throughout history. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) has often been described as an elitist organization that did not sufficiently help the African Americans at the bottom tray of society. They never really participated in anti-poverty programs, and were entirely focused on their civil rights agenda. What were the grounds for this approach by the NAACP and why were they accused of conservatism by fellow civil rights movements?

The NAACP was founded in February 1909 by a group of sociologists, journalists and lawyers who pledged for an improvement of civil rights. Of this group of six ‘founding fathers’ W.E.B Du Bois was the only African American. Du Bois, however, saw the interracial board of the NAACP not as a disadvantage. In his works he often pointed at the scientific advantages of two different races complementing one another.²⁸ He strongly supported integration, and saw education as the key to ‘racial uplift’:

“For some time men doubted as to whether the Negro could develop such leaders; but to-day no one seriously disputes the capability of individual Negroes to assimilate the culture and common sense of modern civilization, and to pass it on, to some extent at least, to their

²⁷ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm>.

²⁸ Joel Olson, “W.E.B. Du Bois and the Race Concept,” in *Souls. A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*, ed. Manning Marable (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1999): 119.

fellows. If this is true, then here is the path out of the economic situation, and here is the imperative demand for trained Negro leaders of character and intelligence,—men of skill, men of light and leading, college-bred men, black captains of industry, and missionaries of culture; men who thoroughly comprehend and know modern civilization, and can take hold of Negro communities and raise and train them by force of precept and example, deep sympathy, and the inspiration of common blood and ideals.”²⁹

One thing that really stands out in this quotation, is that Du Bois praised the modern civilization and argued that the black American should be trained and educated along this way in order to improve their situation in society, and according to him, there would, idealistically, even be a “path out of the economic situation” if only the African Americans did have better access to equal education and equal opportunity. So in an idealistic society a form of capitalism could according to Du Bois be possible if there was no color-line dividing the black race from the prosper of ‘white’ opportunity.³⁰ From this quotation it almost seems like Du Bois was a capitalist at heart, but in reality Du Bois was quite the opposite of that. The American historians Dan S. Green and Earl Smith state that there were many contradictions in the early and later works of Du Bois. Green and Smith argue that in his earlier works, such as *The Souls of Black Folk*, mentioned here, Du Bois talked indirectly about “black capitalism,”³¹ since he mentioned the virtues of education and the existence of black upper and middle-classes:

“But the increasing civilization of the Negro since then has naturally meant the development of higher classes: there are increasing numbers of ministers, teachers, physicians, merchants, mechanics, and independent farmers, who by nature and training are the aristocracy and leaders of the blacks.”³²

In the same work, however, Green and Eisenberg stress that Du Bois also denounced capitalism in *The Souls of Black Folk*. He could not see a future with capitalism, as long as the African Americans were exploited by their white fellows: “They [freed slaves] exhibit, therefore, all the advantages and defects of such training; they are willing and good-natured, but not self-reliant, provident, or careful. If now the economic development of the South is to

²⁹ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Green, and Smith, “W.E.B. DuBois and the Concepts of Race and Class,” 266.

³² Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm>.

be pushed to the verge of exploitation, as seems probable, then we have a mass of workingmen thrown into relentless competition with the workingmen of the world, but handicapped by a training the very opposite to that of the modern self-reliant democratic laborer.”³³ The exploited African American could not overcome his situation in a capitalist society, if he was subject to discrimination in education and in labor. Du Bois never really proposed an actual economic policy himself, but he was a socialist supporting inclusive labor unions.

Du Bois’ concern for the lack of equal opportunity was shared by the NAACP, but the organization never actively created programs for economic support and educational support. This becomes clear from a document in the collection of the *Mary Church Terrell Papers* from 1910, one year after the foundation of the organization. In the document, the NAACP argued that legal rights were the only foundation that would lead to educational and industrial opportunity: “There is a widespread believe that race feeling is so heated in some parts of the country that public discussion of the legal and political situation of the colored people is likely to do more harm than good. Industrial and educational opportunity is almost universally admitted as desirable; yet many fail to recognize that it can be insured only by legal rights.”³⁴ The NAACP did thus not create active programs to levitate the economic situation of African Americans in the United States in first decades of the twentieth century. And this is probably why they were accused for a lack of support towards the black masses by later more radical civil rights organizations. In *The Call* that was written after the Springfield Race Riots of 1908, and that was seen as the manifesto of the NAACP, the American journalist and abolitionist Oswald Garrison Villard wrote about the importance of equal opportunity, but also stressed that legal rights and a halt to the disfranchisement of black voters needed to be pursued first, before equal opportunity could even become a possibility.³⁵ It was therefore that the NAACP’s agenda initially focused primarily on legal rights in the first decades of their founding and not on social welfare programs that they would later fund.

What did this mean for the supposed elitist character of the NAACP? It was true that the true intentions of the NAACP - that of equal opportunity in education in labor – were overshadowed by their approach, and by the educated middle-class members it attracted with this approach. The American historian Bernhard Eisenberg opens his article “Only for the

³³ Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/408/408-h/408-h.htm>.

³⁴ Mary Church, Terrell, *Mary Church Terrell Papers: Subject File, -1962; National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1910 to 1952. - 1952, 1910. Manuscript/Mixed Material.* <https://www.loc.gov/item/mss425490289/>.

³⁵ “The Call,” Library of Congress, accessed March 12, 2020, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/naacp/founding-and-early-years.html#obj2>.

Bourgeois? James Weldon Johnson and the NAACP, 1916” with the following line: “The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has often been labeled a conservative organization, concerned mainly with courtroom victories for its middle-class membership.”³⁶ Eisenberg writes that the NAACP was supported and founded by many socialists like William E. Walling and W.E.B. Du Bois, but their approach seemed to attract middle-class members. Their focus on justice and civil rights instead of housing and anti-poverty action gained them a lot of support from the middle-class. Eisenberg states that during the first years of its existence, the NAACP adhered indeed the socialist notions and was initially more focused on the African American laborer.³⁷ Eisenberg pinpoints the shift towards a more elitist, middle-class approach during the 1920s. Before the 1920s, there was a lot of internal debate and discussion among the more socialist and radical members about the middle-class members who adhered more conservative and liberal notions, and whom, the socialist members were afraid, muddled the message the NAACP wanted to bring about as an organization. Eisenberg mentions an example of criticism posed by the socialist and Executive Secretary John R. Shillady in 1917: “Secretary John R. Shillady wrote that many liberal friends of the organization were anti-union and laissez-faire adherents. The socialist Walling more than once complained about such men. He described the ‘bad’ element in the NAACP’ to fellow trade unionist John R. Frey, and warned Johnson to beware of such ‘pseudo-liberals’.”³⁸

It was indeed true that socialists and conservative liberals coexisted in the hierarchy of the NAACP. Dean Kelly Miller was seen as a conservative NAACP member who often came into conflict with W.E.B. Du Bois. Like Du Bois, Miller advocated the benefits of education and ‘race uplift,’ and Du Bois initially agreed with Miller on such stances, but Miller took these stances, according to Du Bois, much too far. In his speech the “Atlanta Exposition”, Miller insisted that African Americans could improve their situation in society through education and entrepreneurship.³⁹ He denied that challenging the Jim Crow laws and the disenfranchisement of black voters was a necessity for overall improvement.⁴⁰ He adhered conservatism and capitalism, and quite contrary to Du Bois, he did not make the connection between race and class, and thought that African Americans could also pursue a higher socioeconomic status in a capitalistic society. The middle-class members of the NAACP, the

³⁶ Eisenberg, “Only for the Bourgeois?” 110.

³⁷ Ibid., 113.

³⁸ Eisenberg, “Only for the Bourgeois?” 113-114.

³⁹ August Meier, “The Racial and Educational Philosophy of Kelly Miller, 1895-1915,” *The Journal of Negro Education* 29, no. 2 (1960): 121.

⁴⁰ Meier, “The Racial and Educational Philosophy of Kelly Miller, 122.

liberal leaders of the NAACP, and the focus of the NAACP on justice and education gave them the elitist, conservative stamp that they are still criticized for by radical civil rights activists. In the end the liberals and socialists co-existed in the hierarchy of the organization. The liberals were not very insistent on an economic approach, but when the more radical civil rights organizations emerged, they used the group of middle-class NAACP-members as an excuse to criticize the NAACP for their supposed moderate and conservative approach.

2.2 The NAACP's increased focus on social welfare issues

The NAACP continued to strive for better civil rights and continued to fight this fight within the courtroom. With the help of their educated lawyers they challenged discriminatory laws, and supported African Americans against the institutionalized racism that they felt victim too. During the 1920s they won many pivotal cases like *Moore et al. v. Dempsey* in 1923, where NAACP lawyers managed to shorten the sentences of African American convicts after a race riot in Arkansas. The overall goal of the NAACP was an agenda that was entirely focused on civil rights and not on active social welfare support, and they continued to follow this one-dimensional agenda until the 1930s. During the 1930s, with the Great Depression dominating the news, more emphasis was put on socioeconomic issues.⁴¹ It was what many historians refer to as the start of the 'dual agenda' for the NAACP, where the civil rights agenda had to share its importance with the current socioeconomic situations at stake. It was during the time of the New Deal that the NAACP started to push for acts that, according to them, should be added to the proposed economic alleviating acts of the Roosevelt Administration (1933-1945).

In their work "The Dual Agenda of African American Organizations since the New Deal: Social Welfare Policies and Civil Rights" the American historians Dona Cooper Hamilton and Charles V. Hamilton argue that the history of civil rights organizations can be divided in the three different stages that were all connected to the political, sociological and economic circumstances of their time. The Consensual Stage in the 1930s and 1940s, The Conflictual Stage in the 1950s and 1960s, and The Complementary Stage starting from the mid-1960s onwards. Once again, this article is going to play an important role in thesis, as it is used to research if the dual agenda impacted the historical character of the NAACP at all. According to Hamilton and Hamilton the Consensual Stage was the period in which civil

⁴¹ Hamilton and Hamilton, "The Dual Agenda of African American Organizations since the New Deal," 439.

rights organizations started to put more focus on their social welfare agenda.⁴² The term means essentially that there was an agreement in the increased focus on social welfare among the leaders and members of the organization. The civil rights agenda and the social welfare agenda would coexist simultaneously, and sometimes the first would in some cases even subordinate the latter.⁴³ In this period, civil rights organizations started to realize the importance as well as the popularity of this new agenda among African Americans in need of financial support.

2.3 The Conflictual Stage and the Black Power era

A same tendency is seen in the Conflictual Stage, where the popularity of the social welfare agenda among African Americans is once again a driving force for civil rights organizations to change their approach. This time, however, the dual agenda was not pushed for the necessity of it per se, it instead became a tool to gain new members in a time where the competition between civil rights organizations was at its peak.⁴⁴ It is therefore that the term ‘conflictual’ refers to tension between the two aspects of the dual agenda. The social welfare agenda was not pushed by consensus on the importance of it, but it was pushed after internal debate over the loss of members during the Black Power era.⁴⁵ In this period, civil rights organizations criticizing each other in the scramble for paying members. Especially the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Black Panther Movement accused the NAACP of being too moderate, and for being the lap dogs of the predominantly white American authorities. Especially, when the NAACP took a stance against the Black Power slogan, and against the formation of armed black vigilantes.⁴⁶ This notion is also supported by the American historian Catherine M. Paden. She argues that the Black Power era did have an impact and an influence on the NAACP’s traditional non-radical and supposed elitist approach. During the Black Power Movement era the NAACP was faced with the emergence of new more radical civil rights organizations that were very much inspired by the anti-imperialist tendencies in the colonies of Western powers.⁴⁷ So, Paden argues that the NAACP had to change their approach in order to not lose the scramble for paying members and

⁴² Ibid., 439-440.

⁴³ Ibid., 439-440.

⁴⁴ Hamilton and Hamilton, “The Dual Agenda of African American Organizations since the New Deal,” 444-445.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 444-445.

⁴⁶ Williams, *Negroes with Guns*, 28.

⁴⁷ Paden, *Civil Rights Advocacy on Behalf of the Poor*, 126.

support among the African American community in the United States. The NAACP started to focus more on the ‘popular’ issues at hand. They started creating programs to benefit the social welfare in society. Traditionally not one of their main areas of expertise.⁴⁸ The Conflictual Stage is very complicated and has a large historical baggage to take into account. This period was by many historians seen as the start of the Civil Rights era. Although, there is a lot of discussion about the start and end date of this concept.⁴⁹

The new civil rights movements like Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) that were founded during the Second World War were largely inspired by anti-imperialism. They saw the resistance in Western colonies as the beginning of the end to apathetically and meekly watching the white men pull the strings. It was exactly what they accused the NAACP of: negotiating with the ‘devil’ instead of fighting him. In their speeches they advocated quicker change through direct action.⁵⁰ The sit-ins – a way of protesting by occupying a space or an establishment that employs discriminatory rules, the Freedom Rides – the protest against segregation in public transport by forcefully occupying the seats in public transport that were meant for white people, and the call for armed vigilantes protecting the black people against the aggression of the white people, all increasingly deterred the white authorities. The NAACP was afraid that these actions would lead to a deterioration of the progress that had already been made.⁵¹

During the Conflictual Stage the boldness of the new civil rights organizations grew, and the concept of Black Power was mentioned for the first time. It was an African American student who coined the concept in a speech to members of the SNCC in 1966, Mississippi. Stokely Carmichael emphasized especially the discrimination in the United States law enforcement. He told the group of listeners how many times he had been arrested by the police, and argued that this was only a small example of the widespread oppression of black people that was visible in United States society. He stated that this would not improve as long as the white men held sway.⁵² According to the *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World* Black Power “embodied the more radical approach of young activists who sought to

⁴⁸ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁹ Eric Arnesen, “Reconsidering the “Long Civil Rights Movement,” *Historically Speaking*, Volume 10, Number 2, April 2009: 31.

⁵⁰ Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 334.

⁵¹ Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 6.

⁵² Simon Hall, “The NAACP, Black Power, and the African American Freedom Struggle, 1966–1969,” *The Historian* 69, no. 1 (2007): 49.

encourage self-determination and autonomy for African Americans in order to alleviate the psychological vestiges of racism not addressed through the legal victories won by their predecessors in the civil rights movement.”⁵³ The last part of this definition especially shows the disdain towards older civil rights organizations. The new organizations were not willing to plead for a change in the laws of a legislation set up by the white race. Of course, their ultimate endgame would be an overthrow of the current establishment.

The approach of the NAACP during the 1960s was to continue to denounce the concept of Black Power. They kept their original principles and hoped to convince African Americans that improving integration was better than rebelling against it. In addition to that, the NAACP started to listen to the immediate needs of their target audience. This is, for example, visible in the issue of *The Crisis* magazine of June and July 1960. In the table of contents of this issue, the editors mention the support of “Students For Integration” and they focus on “the housing market in Queens”. The first article written by Joan Hedlund refers to the NAACP’s call for integration: “Colored students in Nashville are waging a non-violent fight, not just against segregated lunch counters, but against malice and unreason.” The NAACP spoke proudly of this Students For Integration (SFI) that challenged both the segregation imposed by white people as well as the segregation advocated by the civil rights organizations that emerged around the 1950s.⁵⁴ Another article in the same issue written by Olivia Frost addressed the housing market in Queens. In a small note on the first page of the article the reader is informed that Olivia Frost is a resident of Queens, New York, and that she is active in the NAACP housing activities. In the article Frost explains firstly that the NAACP acknowledged the economic problems of the African Americans and their inability to pay for a mortgage in most cases. She stressed that “during this time the policies of banks in granting mortgages were patently discriminatory.”⁵⁵ Frost went on to write about the NAACP’s support for the Neighborhood Relations Committee that had set up a program to assist African Americans in their housing aspirations.⁵⁶ This suggests that the NAACP’s focus is more and more on ‘popular’ issues in society.

In another issue of *The Crisis*, published in November 1960, the editors devoted a big article to clarify the NAACP’s role in economic progress. In the article “The NAACP stand on Economic Issues” Alfred Baker Lewis, national treasurer of the NAACP, opened with the following sentence: “The NAACP national convention, besides taking a stand on the various

⁵³ Peter N. Stearns, *Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵⁴ Joan Hedlund, “Students For Integration,” *The Crisis* (July, 1960): 345.

⁵⁵ Olivia Frost, “The housing market in Queens,” *The Crisis* (July, 1960): 351.

⁵⁶ Frost, “The housing market in Queens,” 351.

aspects of civil rights, takes a strong position on economic issues too.”⁵⁷ In the article, the support for labor unions is mentioned again. “Many hundreds of thousands of Negroes are in unions, and we would not be true to ourselves if we did not support a type of organized labor which is clearly to their interests.”⁵⁸ Lewis also wrote about the NAACP’s contribution to better social security by referring to their demand for the widening of the coverage of old age benefits “to include domestic and farm workers, and employees of non-profit organizations”.⁵⁹ In the article, Lewis also refers to the NAACP’s stand on unemployment compensation and medical and hospital care.

In the 1960s it is almost as if the NAACP tried to, firstly, redefine itself as a pro-unionist and socialist organization, and, secondly, tried to defend itself against the ‘elitist’ accuses of the new civil rights organizations, while also staying true to their principles about integration through negotiation. It was shift that was visible in the articles of their official magazine, *The Crisis*. The issues before the Conflictual Stage focus mainly on civil rights, while in the later issues the ‘dual agenda’ is visible.

2.4 The Complementary Stage

The Complementary Stage was according to Hamilton and Hamilton a moment in time wherein civil rights organizations were of the opinion that against the background of the many victories over segregation and discrimination – the Civil Rights Act was signed in 1964 – they, again, needed to focus on socioeconomic issues.⁶⁰ The term ‘complementary’ refers to the way the remaining civil rights organizations had matured and had realized that both the civil rights agenda and the social welfare agenda could benefit the goals and ambitions of the organizations, as the organizations realized that civil rights issues could not be solved purely by political rights. During this period, the socioeconomic situation of especially African Americans and Latinos had worsened a lot.⁶¹ The period that is described as the Complementary Stage is also the period that followed after a long time of economic progress after the end of the Second World War. The period of the Complementary Stage is the period in which income gaps had become wider and in which new financial burdens would not only

⁵⁷ Alfred Baker Lewis, “The NAACP stand on Economic Issues,” *The Crisis* (November, 1960): 565.

⁵⁸ Lewis, “The NAACP stand on Economic Issues,” 565.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 567.

⁶⁰ Hamilton and Hamilton, “The Dual Agenda of African American Organizations since the New Deal,” 447.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 439.

plague the economically fortunate, but even more the economically less fortunate in United States society. The oil shocks of the 1970s would begin to play a role in drastic economic changes. This period will be discussed more comprehensively in the next chapter.

This chapter has tried to give a comprehensive historical framework of the NAACP and their involvement in economic issues in United States society. It has explained how the NAACP came by their 'elitist' character, and why this accuse is not necessarily fair. The NAACP started as an organization that would fight for economic opportunity alongside their fight for better civil rights. Their founder, W.E.B. Du Bois, was a unionist with a clear economic vision in mind. But the message of the NAACP would later be muddled by members of various socioeconomic backgrounds that *did* support conservative liberalism and self-sustainability through self-development. The approach of the NAACP was increasingly based on civil rights and on their fight in the courtroom, which gave them the character of a law-abiding, intellectual and moderate civil rights organization. Especially after the emergence of more radical civil rights organizations around the 1940s and 1950s. The American historians Hamilton and Hamilton have grasped the history of socioeconomic awareness among civil rights organizations in three different stages. The Consensual Stage in the 1930s and 1940s, The Conflictual Stage in the 1950s and 1960s, and The Complementary Stage starting from the mid-1960s onwards. And for an organization that was already active way before the start of the first stage, this model seems, at first glance, especially applicable on the NAACP. It portrays their developments as, first, an organization with more awareness of socioeconomic issues against the background of the Great Depression, then more awareness of socioeconomic issues because of the rise of competition and the popularity of it, and then the awareness of socioeconomic issues for the sake of socioeconomic issues in society? Did all the stages mentioned by Hamilton and Hamilton correlate with the NAACP's development? The last stage, the Complementary Stage, will be researched further in the next chapter.

3.1 The NAACP during the 1970s and the Nixon Administration

With the Complementary Stage that Hamilton and Hamilton describe in their work, they do not mean the harmonization between the various civil rights organizations after the turbulent years of the 1950s and 1960s. The civil rights organizations did not shake hands and did not bury old hatchets. Instead Hamilton and Hamilton refer to the harmonization of the “dual agenda”. There was no longer a battle between the civil rights agenda and the social welfare agenda on which one should be the prime concern. Civil rights organizations started to ‘read’ the socioeconomic climate better, and decided that it would be better to have the two opposites complement one another according to the main issues in society. This, at least, seems to be the case with the NAACP. This chapter researches the development of the NAACP during the 1970s and explores the ways the NAACP coped with changes in the socioeconomic environment. This chapter will give answer to the question: How did the NAACP and other civil rights organizations fare in a period of rising conservatism?

3.2 Professionalization and the decline of competition

The main reason the NAACP changed their tactics and goals during the Black Power era was to compete against the growing influence and the growing popularity of radical civil rights organizations. The social welfare agenda was introduced to cope with the new developments, and there was often disagreement on which of the two agendas was more important. But the importance of the social welfare agenda did not decline after the competition of other civil rights organizations started to diminish, and it really looked like the NAACP had matured over the years and had accepted that the social welfare agenda was not a necessary evil, but a very welcome development that could complement the overall goals and strategies of the NAACP.

The American historian Martin N. Marger describes in his article “Social Movement Organizations and Response to Environmental Change: The NAACP, 1960- 1973” how the NAACP went on to thrive during the 1970s, and why the influence of other civil rights organizations started to diminish. With this article he really complements the article of Hamilton and Hamilton as he notes that more developments are at play during the Complementary Stage. However, it should be said that he does not mention the Complementary Stage in his work. Marger states that by the early 1970s, the relatively young and radical civil rights organizations that were very influential just after the Second World

War started to lose members, funds and support from important institutions as their stance on Black Power and their radical approaches deterred influential organizations. “By 1968, CORE had become a small and ineffective group. SNCC disappeared entirely by 1970. After the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968, SCLC fell into a state of financial and organizational disarray from which it never fully recovered.”⁶² The NAACP, however, continued to thrive after they ‘survived’ the turbulent peak years of the civil rights era. With their change in tactics it is quite surprising that they did so well in maintaining their traditional members. In addition to that, new members that embraced these strategic changes, and members from the declining organizations joined the NAACP.⁶³

The American historian Yancey explains that the NAACP’s organizational structure and bureaucratic foundation was very strong. The NAACP also had a lot of ‘sleeping’ members that were only really tied to the organization by filling in a membership agreement. It meant that these inactive members were not so much aware of leadership changes or strategy changes. Organizations like SNCC and CORE, with exclusive membership, were more prone to lose members after a drastic change in leadership or strategy.⁶⁴ The bureaucratic foundation thus really gave the NAACP a solid organizational structure that was blessed with the trust of their members *and* their allies. So, in contrast to the young and radical civil rights organizations, the NAACP could hold on to the ties they had established with influential institutions during its history, because they were less unpredictable due to their clear message and organizational structure. Yancey describes this as follows: “Professionalization allows the organization to cultivate ties to dominant institutions, thereby enabling it to increase its revenues despite a lack of growth in membership.”⁶⁵ So the NAACP established itself as an organization that was more and more taken seriously by governing institutions, even if they did not reflect the needs and thoughts of all African Americans.

In an article named “The Washington March: a ten year perspective” published in *The Crisis*, in the issue of Augustus and September 1973, the NAACP itself reflected back on their change in approach and the shortcomings of civil rights organizations in general. In the article that celebrates the ten years anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the author Bayard Rustin described how far they had come with civil rights in a single decade. Five months after the March the government had ratified the 24th Amendment and outlawed

⁶² Martin N. Marger, “Social Movement Organizations and Response to Environmental Change: The NAACP, 1960-1973,” *Social Problems* 32, no. 1 (1984): 24.

⁶³ Marger, “Social Movement Organizations and Response to Environmental Change,” 23.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

the poll tax. The poll tax had for a long time been a means to exclude African Americans from voting, since they were often unable to pay for it.⁶⁶ A few months later the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was signed. It seems that Rustin wanted to point at the improvement of civil rights, but at the same time he stressed that the economic problems were not gone and needed their attention with the following sentence: “To examine the black progress in area of employment is to understand not simply the success of civil rights movements, but its shortcomings as well. For while black people are getting *better* jobs, they are not getting *more* jobs.”⁶⁷ This is in line with Hamilton and Hamilton’s Complementary Stage. Rustin also pointed at the exact reason for the reconciliation of the two sides of the dual agenda. He stated that “In the area of civil rights, again we see that far-fetching economic change does not necessarily accompany legislation dealing with moral issues. For, in fact, the destruction of the legal foundations of segregation did not substantially alter the economic structure.”⁶⁸ Reflecting back on the 1960s, Rustin also argues that the lack of unity between African Americans is strange and unnecessary since they all agree on the improvement of civil rights and economic advancement. The development of the mid-1960s that led to more African Americans actually participating in politics, caused them to become increasingly liberal. Separatist Black Power candidates were rejected, and lost their influence.⁶⁹

Rustin also reported on the loss of focus on economic advancement, and claimed the moral high ground for the NAACP that, according to him, did not lose their focus on economic issues at stake. He said that: “This general agreement over basic needs no longer exists. Some have dropped to from the struggle, embraced marginal, non-economic issues, or advocated programs which, although they may touch on economic change, are too narrow to reach the mass of black working people.”⁷⁰ After this statement he continued to add that “only a few of the groups which provided the March’s nucleus have retained an unambiguous commitment to integration and basic economic change, most notably the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the National Urban League.”⁷¹

3.2 The Nixon Administration and Conservatism

⁶⁶ Bayard Rustin, “The Washington March: a ten year perspective,” *The Crisis* (September, 1973): 224.

⁶⁷ Rustin, “The Washington March: a ten year perspective,” 225.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 226.

The 1970s were also seen as the period of the conservative revolution in the United States after the turbulent 1960s. After President Richard Nixon took office on January 20 1969 he was determined to focus on tougher law enforcement. Part of his tougher legislation on law enforcement was to take firm steps against the bolder civil rights activists, black crime and the use of narcotics.⁷² During his campaign, Nixon's team produced an ad on national television that "explicitly called on voters to reject the lawlessness of civil rights activists and embrace 'order' in the United States."⁷³ What the NAACP had feared during the Black Power era became truth. The bold and radicalized civil rights movements' actions in the 1960s made, according to them, for a backlash in the struggle for civil rights. Executive Director of the NAACP, Roy Wilkins, said as much at the annual meeting for members of the NAACP. He stated that despite the large protests in the years prior to Nixon's election, he and his administration "continued its siege against civil rights throughout 1973".⁷⁴ Most African Americans perceived the president as a threat to the progress that had already been made. Wilkins' speech was described in an article of *The Crisis* in the issue of March 1974. Wilkins spoke about the Nixon Administration as "calculated and deliberate evil, launched against poor and black people because of strong feelings against these elements of the population, coupled with the belief that we should be trampled upon and kept down."⁷⁵

In an article in the same issue of *The Crisis*, called "Hope that breeds outrage" Barbara D. Lyles, assistant professor of education at Howard University, wrote about the years of progress and the years of decline for civil rights. She argued how just after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, African Americans made progress in the field of politics, and voters started to denounce racism with as a consequence that during the second half of the 1960s blacks were in some cases elected over whites, and Republican moderates were elected over segregationists or racist Democrats. She, however, noticed with sadness that with the election of Richard Nixon this progress had come to a halt. Because "the pro-Nixon vote clearly indicated that there would be no more massive social welfare or economic assistance to blacks."⁷⁶ It is true that Nixon is very skeptical about the existing social welfare programs. One of his administration's economic policies was to fight poverty with tools to increase the self-sustainability of the poor. He once said during an interview in 1969:

⁷² Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: An Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 46.

⁷³ Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: An Age of Colorblindness*, 46

⁷⁴ Roy Wilkins, "NAACP Annual Meeting," *The Crisis* (March, 1974): 88.

⁷⁵ Wilkins, "NAACP Annual Meeting," 88.

⁷⁶ Barbara D. Lyles, "Hope that breeds outrage," *The Crisis* (March, 1974): 94.

“I intend to begin this administration by telling black Americans and the rest of Americans the truth. ... I am going to propose new programs the purpose of which will be to get people off welfare rolls and onto payrolls. For the past five years we have been deluged by Government programs for the unemployed, programs for the cities, programs for the poor, and we have reaped from these programs an ugly harvest of frustrations, violence and failure across the land . . . Black Americans - no more than white Americans - do not want more Government programs which perpetuate dependency.”⁷⁷

This fear for an end to social welfare or economic assistance to African Americans is not described in the article mentioned above, but Nixon’s economic policy towards African Americans is very interesting and is indeed against the founding principles of the NAACP stance on economic policy. In 1966, three years before Richard Nixon was elected, he reintroduced the term “black capitalism”.⁷⁸ He wanted to stimulate black entrepreneurship by funding minority startups with his program Office of Minority Business Enterprise (OMBE). With this plan Nixon seemed to be willing to help out the poor African Americans in a capitalist society, but a journalist of the *New York Times* remarked that Nixon did it just to counter the criticism that he did not care about the improvement of civil rights.⁷⁹ But with his call for “black capitalism” Nixon also wanted African Americans to be self-reliant in the future. The American historian Dean Kotlowksi remarks, however, that “by viewing poverty in terms of dependence versus independence Greenspan overlooked white racism and blamed its black victims.”⁸⁰ Greenspan was an economic advisor to Nixon. Of course this stance on economic policy is closely linked with the debate between Dean Kelly Miller and W.E.B. Du Bois mentioned earlier in this research. Contrary to Du Bois, Miller believed that African Americans would be accepted by whites if they managed to flourish with their own enterprises. But Du Bois believed that African Americans would never flourish in United States economy, let alone be accepted by whites as equals, because they would never have the means to start an enterprise, and they would never be able to compete with white enterprises. This last remark explains why the NAACP was so concerned about Nixon’s economic policy.

⁷⁷ Scott J. Spitzer, “Nixon's New Deal: Welfare Reform for the Silent Majority,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (September 2012), 460.

⁷⁸ Dean Kotlowksi, “Black Power-Nixon Style: The Nixon Administration and Minority Business Enterprise,” *The Business History Review* 72, no. 3 (1998): 411.

⁷⁹ Kotlowksi, “Black Power-Nixon Style,” 412.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 414.

3.3 Nixon and the first Energy Crisis: The NAACP slow in the uptake

When the Seven Sisters Consortium in Iran was demolished and lost its influence to OPEC in 1960, no one was aware of what could happen in the early 1970s. But when Nixon took office in 1969, his administration was faced with an impending energy crisis. Nixon's Presidential Administration and his foreign policy advisor Henry Kissinger acknowledged that the citizens of the United States consumed far more fossil fuels than the United States produced. This gap in domestic oil production was always filled with relatively cheap oil imports from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, but Nixon realized how unhealthy this misbalance was for the economy of the United States. It was why he introduced his Energy Independent policy, a policy in which Nixon put restrictions on the amount of oil that was allowed to be imported.⁸¹ With this policy he wished to stimulate domestic oil production in order to be completely independent in case of trouble in geopolitics. Quite detrimental to his wish for increasing domestic oil production, was his policy to control oil prices. He announced this policy in 1971 as part of his anti-inflation program, but it was only beneficial to consumers that could enjoy artificial lower prices while it discouraged domestic production. The impending crisis was thus not felt by the American population. This, however, changed in 1973 when the gasoline shortage became too big for domestic oil companies to supply the consumers with the energy they needed.⁸² Nixon abolished the oil import restrictions and advocated the decontrol of the prices of 'new' oil, passing on the problem to the consumers. "In order to stimulate the seriously lagging natural gas production, the president called on the Congress to enact legislation which would end Federal Power Commission regulation of wellhead natural gas prices."⁸³ Although Nixon, tried to fix this deregulation with controlled prices on oil that was already found, the increasing oil prices still hurt the consuming population.

In a pamphlet in *The Black Panther: Intercommunal News Service* of December 8, 1973, the Black Panther Party, that was known for being Marxist, wrote to their audience: "You're #1 on Nixon's Energy Enemy List."⁸⁴ With this quotation, they denounced Nixon's

⁸¹ Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2009): 617.

⁸² Yergin, *The Prize*, 590.

⁸³ Rogers C. B. Morton, "The Nixon Administration Energy Policy," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 410 (1973): 68.

⁸⁴ The Black Panther, "You're #1 on Nixon's Energy Enemy List," *The Black Panther: Intercommunal News Service* (December 8, 1973).

deregulating policy and made a reference to Nixon's Enemy List: a list of Nixon's political opponents that were said to be ripped off by the Nixon Administration's tax audits.⁸⁵

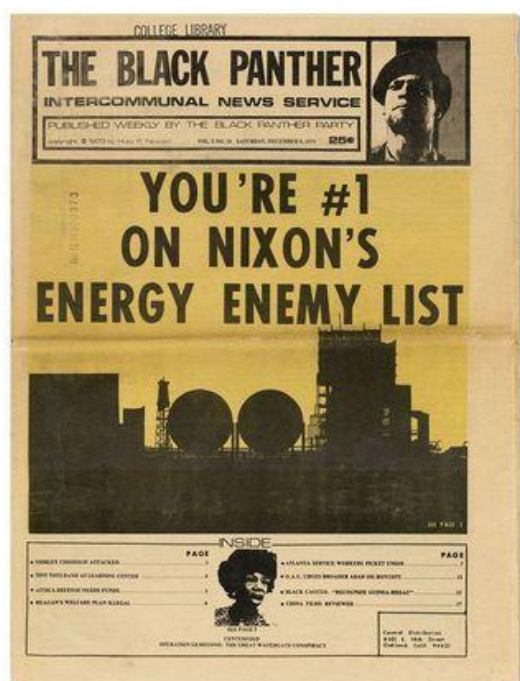


Figure 1.1 - “You’re #1 on Nixon’s Energy Enemy List”⁸⁶

The Black Panther Party was on this list as well. In his book *The Prize* the American journalist and energy specialist Daniel Yergin wrote that the oil industry and the Nixon Administration were held accountable for the oil shortages and the OPEC embargo.⁸⁷ Nixon actually wanted to keep the energy prices low, but his advisors told him that it was simply impossible: “The only chance to bring oil prices down immediately would be massive political warfare against countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran to make them risk their political stability and maybe their security if they did not cooperate,” said Kissinger in 1975.⁸⁸ So the oil prices kept on rising for the consumers, and the low-income households were relatively the worst off in society. The Black Panthers were quick to link this unequal financial burden with race, and the fact that Nixon was ‘very indifferent’ to the poverty of many African Americans. As mentioned before, Nixon’s welfare policies were focused on the future self-sustainability of the poor, and if one did not make it out of his poor situation, he had a problem.

⁸⁵ “Nixon’s Enemies List,” Wikipedia, accessed March 21, 2020, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nixon%27s_Enemies_List.

⁸⁶ The Black Panther, “You’re #1 on Nixon’s Energy Enemy List.”

⁸⁷ Yergin, *The Prize*, 618.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 642.

Despite the rising criticism on Nixon's energy policy by consumers and organizations that supported low-income households, the NAACP was suspiciously quiet about the whole issue. Maybe it was because the effects of the deregulation were not immediately seen as a problem for African Americans. Or maybe they first wanted to wait and see how the energy policies would pan out, since the government was also experimenting with regulation and deregulation. The first time the NAACP started mentioning the 'energy crisis' in their magazine, was in April 1975 when Nixon had already resigned from his position and Gerald Ford had taken over as President of the United States. This is very late for an organization that is supposed to be running a dual agenda. Does this mean that the dual agenda did not change the approach of the NAACP, but that the organization only started to focus on the economic issues of the energy crises after they saw other organizations like, in this case, the Black Panthers address the problems?

How did the NAACP and other civil rights organizations fare in a period of rising conservatism? This chapter has tried to explain why the competition of the NAACP diminished around the mid-1960s, and why the NAACP did so well in surviving the end of the Black Power era. Thanks to their timeless principles and strategies and their solid bureaucratic foundations, the NAACP managed to keep the amount of members quite balanced. Unlike the organizations that gained in popularity and influence *because* of the Black Power era, the NAACP was an organization that existed way prior to this period. So when the Black Power era came to an end, the influence of the NAACP did not. For this civil rights organization, the Black Power era was a phase more than a peak their popularity rested upon. So the end of it led to less drastic results for the NAACP. The conservative period that came with the Nixon presidency caused radical civil rights organizations that were not densely rooted in United Society to disappear. This was why professionalization and the bureaucratic organizational structure of the NAACP were so important. They had inclusive membership and branches all across the nation.

The Complementary Stage of the 'dual' civil rights agenda seems to correlate with Nixon's presidential policy of self-sustainability. Hamilton and Hamilton have pointed out the increasing poverty for ethnic minorities in United States society after the mid-1960s. Nixon focused on social welfare that was meant to give the poor a push in the back toward entrepreneurship in the capitalistic society. Nixon wanted them "off the welfare rolls and onto the payrolls". It was the moment one can see an increase in the concern for social welfare in the NAACP's official magazine *The Crisis*. Economic issues, unemployment issues and

housing problems appeared more frequently in the articles of the magazine's monthly issues. It was therefore very interesting that the problems of the energy crisis did not immediately catch the attention of the NAACP. It were the Black Panthers who initially started to blame the Nixon Administration for the increasing social welfare problems as a result of the first energy crisis. For the NAACP, this must have been a very novel issue that they not immediately saw as a race problem. Was it a civil rights problem? Did it fit within their dual agenda? The next will research these questions in more depth.

4.1 The NAACP takes notice: the oil fluctuations in the mid-1970s

“WHEREAS, the NAACP has a long history of involvement and concern for the welfare of racial minorities of low income, and recognizes that inequities exist for this class of citizens to compete in the nation’s marketplace for goods and services affected by the energy crisis.”⁸⁹

The energy crises of the 1970s were a burden for the wallet of every American citizen, but the oil prices that kept on rising in absolute numbers, especially hurt the low-income households. As mentioned before, the NAACP only started to show their concern for the consequences of the first energy crisis in April 1975, one year after Nixon had resigned from office, and two years after the start of the first energy crisis. The question, why the NAACP was relatively late in acknowledging the economic problems of the crisis, and why the Black Panther Party was relatively early, is very interesting. Especially when one acknowledges that the NAACP’s leader at the time, Roy Wilkins, was a socialist. Maybe the crisis was first merely seen as an international problem, and maybe the Black Panther Party was so early in rejecting Nixon’s policy because they were Marxist, and therefore internationally orientated and opposed to any major conflict in the capitalistic world. *Or maybe* the dual agenda did not play that much of a role as Hamilton and Hamilton would like to argue? This chapter researches how the NAACP reacted to the first and second energy crisis, and how other civil rights organizations viewed the NAACP’s approach. It tries to answer the following questions: How did the NAACP interpret the energy crises of the 1970s? And how did they respond to the challenges of these crises for the people they represented during the 1970s and 1980s?

4.2 Nixon, Ford and the oil price problems

In August 1974 Richard Nixon resigned from the presidential office after the Watergate Scandal. He left his successor and former vice-president, President Gerald Ford, to deal with the big economic problems of the energy crisis and an unfinished business: a chess game between governmental regulation and deregulation in order to overcome the energy crisis. Carter picked up on Nixon’s Energy Independence policy, and proposed a plan to subsidize alternative energy projects and synthetic fuel projects in order to give these types of energy a

⁸⁹ NAACP, “NAACP 65th Annual Convention Resolutions,” *The Crisis* (April, 1975): 127.

place in the commercial markets.⁹⁰ This, of course, was a very expensive project, and the United States Congress kept on advocating deregulation, while Nixon and Ford continued to support governmental control of oil prices. Because of this large discussion between the United States Congress and the Ford Administration, the government settled with a “minimum safeguard price”. They were afraid that the oil exporting countries would also artificially drop the prices of oil, with as a result that domestic, alternative and sustainable energy projects would falter due to the new competition with the price fighting exporters. The “minimum safeguard price” or “floor” price would entail that no oil from exporting nations would be sold under that fixed minimum price. It meant that the Ford Administration could drop the price of the regulated ‘new’ oil to help consumers during a shortage, but they could not drop it below the “minimum safeguard price” in order to protect their domestic market and minimize international price fighting.⁹¹ It also meant that the prices were still relatively high in comparison to the pre-energy crisis situation.

It was actually in *Ebony Magazine*, the most influential magazine on African American culture in the United States, in which the economic problems for African Americans as a consequence of the energy crisis appeared first. *Ebony* was published by the African-American businessman John H. Johnson, and originally a magazine that did not cover news about the race question. Instead, the publishers said that they wanted to cover the “happier side of Negro-life.”⁹² During the mid-1960s they briefly went along with the Black Power frenzy, but they later continued to cover the stories of successful African Americans. It was essentially a life-style magazine, but during the 1970s, due to competition from other magazines covering the same subject matter, they started, again, to report more on politics.⁹³ Especially on the perspective of politicians as the professionalization of civil rights (mentioned before) seemed to have impacted *Ebony* as well. In February 1974, the redaction of the magazine reported about the plans of three African American Mayors on their city management: Mayor Tom Bradley of Los Angeles, Mayor Coleman A. Young of Detroit, and Mayor Maynard H. Jackson of Atlanta.⁹⁴ In each of their policies, energy management played a large role. Tom Bradley argued that especially minority groups will face problems with unemployment due to the energy crisis.⁹⁵ His plans, however, and the plans of the other Mayors were quite general and focused on the cities’ inhabitants as a whole. Bradley

⁹⁰ Yergin, *The Prize*, 660.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 643.

⁹² “Ebony (magazine),” Wikipedia, accessed April 21, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebony_\(magazine\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ebony_(magazine)).

⁹³ Wikipedia, “Ebony (magazine).”

⁹⁴ *Ebony*, “Three Mayors Speak of their Cities,” *Ebony*, (March, 1980): 35.

⁹⁵ *Ebony*, “Three Mayors Speak of their Cities,” 36.

mentioned conservation, voluntary cutbacks in energy use, and mandatory cutbacks in energy use,⁹⁶ but did, interestingly enough, not mention plans that were focused on the help of minority groups. It is, therefore, clear that this article in *Ebony* is focused on the African American roots of these Mayors, and not on the problems caused by the energy crisis. Maybe this article explains why some civil rights organizations were late in realizing the impact of the energy crisis on minorities. Because it was, even by African American Mayors, first essentially seen as a problem that would plague the entire population of the United States, making it a macroeconomic problem on the first place and a microeconomic problem on the second place.

At their sixty-fifth annual convention in 1975, the NAACP took notice of the economic burden that the energy crisis caused for the low-income consumers. During the convention, they spoke about different focal areas: political action, youth work, labor and industry, education and economic development. And in the economic development area they included a part that discussed the energy crisis for the first time. They introduced the topic almost as if they were filing a motion:

“WHEREAS, the nations of this planet have recently experienced an energy crisis of major proportion (...) and unwarranted increases in the cost of fuels for home heating, automobile use and public transportation, and WHEREAS, black and poor people are disproportionately affected by this crisis due to discrimination in housing, employment and economic opportunities, and WHEREAS, the NAACP has a long history of involvement and concern for the welfare of racial minorities of low income, and recognizes that inequities exist for this class of citizens to compete in the nation’s marketplace for goods and services affected by the energy crisis, BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED, that the NAACP (...)”⁹⁷

A long list of actions that should be taken by the NAACP concerning the energy crisis followed this statement. They called for solutions by the government for the people that were rendered unemployed because of the crisis, and they called for the regulation of energy prices so that the low-income households could still afford the costs of energy in and around their houses. It was also very clear that the NAACP’s focus on the energy crisis was still in its infancy, because they ended their statement with a call to all the nationwide branches of their

⁹⁶ Ibid., 35.

⁹⁷ NAACP, “NAACP 65th Annual Convention Resolutions,” 127.

organization to 1) initiate emergency programs for low-income households, and 2) organize discussion among members to think about solutions for the long term.⁹⁸

The rhetoric the NAACP used in the quotation mentioned above seems to suggest that the organization saw this economic problem as both a welfare problem and a civil rights problem. They mentioned the economic burden and the shortcomings of equal opportunity in one breath. It was almost as if their “dual agenda” had merged into one complementary agenda. So it seems that this was what Hamilton and Hamilton were ultimately referring to with their Complementary Stage. The two were not separate issues anymore, but strengthened one another in terms of rhetoric and immediate action with long term aspirations. It meant that the NAACP underlined that the roots of the current economic problems lay in the historical fight for equal opportunity. They pointed to the fact that the African American community in the United States had the right to more social welfare programs and levitating economic solutions because of their unfair chance in education and labor. The NAACP thus hoped to fill in the gaps in the governmental policies that neglected the economic consequences for the low-income households and the less fortunate minorities in United States society.

4.3 “Carter, Kiss My Gas” and the American Association of Blacks in Energy (AABE)

In 1976, Jimmy Carter succeed Gerald Ford as President of the United States. Just like his predecessors, he continued to strive for energy independence, but he took his policy quite a bit further. Carter put more emphasis on voluntary and, especially, on mandatory cutbacks in the use of energy. His vision was very much focused on the future of the country, and he insisted that the US citizens should not be selfish.⁹⁹ In 1978, he introduced the National Energy Act. This legislation consisted of the Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act, the Energy Tax Act, the National Energy Conservation Policy Act, the Power Plant and Industrial Fuel Use Act, and the Natural Gas Policy Act. With this legislative package, Carter wanted to 1) promote energy conservation and promote the use of domestically produced oil and sustainable energy, 2) levy taxes on imported energy, 3) put more emphasis on the production of alternative energies and create a commercial market for them.¹⁰⁰ Carter’s policy did thus not spare the consumer. It was an all-or-nothing strategy to help increase the domestic supply, because even

⁹⁸ Ibid., 127.

⁹⁹ Meg Jacobs, “America’s Never-Ending Oil Consumption,” *The Atlantic*, accessed March 27, 2020, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/05/american-oil-consumption/482532/>.

¹⁰⁰ Jacobs, “America’s Never-Ending Oil Consumption.”

the regulation policy of his predecessors was rejected by Carter. He advocated the deregulation of energy prices, with as a result the increasing costs for the consumers. It led to the creation of “Carter, Kiss My Gas” bumper stickers. The consumers were fed up with the taxes they had to pay for Carter’s “Pay More, Buy less” policy.¹⁰¹

The NAACP, that had formerly called for the regulation of oil prices at the time of the Ford Administration, was clearly not entirely sure about their own standpoints when it came to energy management and the governmental regulation of energy prices. In an article of *The Black Panther: Intercommunal News Service* of February 18, 1978 the Black Panther Party reported about the “controversial energy policy” of the NAACP. It seemed that they were widely criticized by other civil rights organizations. The Black Panther reported that “the NAACP is embroiled in a storm of controversy over its recent stand on energy policy that is strikingly similar to the position of the oil industry.”¹⁰² They stated that the NAACP, was opposed to Carter’s policy, and that it accepted the deregulation and the rising prices of oil as a necessary evil to create more job opportunities.¹⁰³ Even the NAACP itself acknowledged that it was criticized by other civil rights organizations. In an issue of *The Crisis* of October 1978, Margaret Bush Wilson, Chair of the NAACP’s National Board of Directors at the time defended the NAACP’s controversial energy policy, that was said to support deregulation.¹⁰⁴ She said:

“The thrust of this statement is that unless America is assured of ample and reasonably priced energy supplies in the future. The economy will not expand at the rate required to provide a job for every person willing and able to work. A no-growth economic policy is not and never will be in the interest of black Americans. A slow-growth economy will hardly be better. It will only continue to foredoom black Americans to the wastelands of idleness and poverty.”¹⁰⁵

It thus looks like the NAACP was making a consideration between backing the regulation of oil prices for the consumers or backing the deregulation of oil prices for the increase of job opportunities. Although, the Black Panthers were of the opinion that the NAACP changed its mind because their report was backed by “persons closely connected to

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² The Black Panther, “N.A.A.C.P. Under Attack: Controversial Energy Policy Widely Criticized,” *The Black Panther: Intercommunal News Service* (February 18, 1978): 130.

¹⁰³ The Black Panther, “N.A.A.C.P. Under Attack,” 130.

¹⁰⁴ Gloster B. Current, “The 69th – The Post-Bakke Convention,” *The Crisis* (October, 1978): 260

¹⁰⁵ Current, “The 69th – The Post-Bakke Convention,” 260.

the oil industry, and by Black oil executives, many of whom belong to the American Association of Blacks in Energy (AABE).¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, they state that they cannot believe how the deregulation of oil prices would ever be in the interest of black people.¹⁰⁷ Who are the AABE? And how did they influence the policy of the NAACP?

The AABE was founded in 1977 by Clarke A. Watson. He was a successful energy engineer, and his idea for the AABE was, what he called, a response to the United States' problems during the energy crisis. Watson was of the opinion that the consequences of the energy crisis on minorities were neglected, and that the expertise of colored energy engineers was necessary to address and discuss *all* the issues that the energy crisis caused.¹⁰⁸ "This group of African American professionals formed the American Association of Blacks in Energy to ensure that minorities who had knowledge and understanding of U.S. energy issues could bring their thinking to bear on the development of energy and environmental policy."¹⁰⁹ From a small biography of Watson on the website of the AABE it becomes clear that Watson had many contacts with leaders of the NAACP.¹¹⁰ There is thus reason to believe that what the Black Panthers wrote about the NAACP's support for the standpoints of the oil industry might be true, but one has to bear in mind that the Black Panther Party was a Marxist organization. They could have been prejudiced towards the AABE, because it was a collective of black energy entrepreneurs. However, the Black Panthers wrote that other civil rights organizations like the National Urban League (NUL) and the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) were also opposed to the NAACP's energy policy, and they substantiated the truth of this statement with quotations from the leaders of the respective civil rights organizations.¹¹¹

4.4 Is the criticism justified? The NAACP and the middle ground

Taking into account the NAACP's former stance on the energy crisis in 1975 and their change of heart in 1978 as reported by the Black Panthers, the NAACP seems to be quite divided on their standpoints cornering the energy crisis. This becomes especially clear in an interview

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 130.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 130.

¹⁰⁸ "About Us," *The American Association of Blacks in Energy*, archived March 21, 2017, <https://archive.is/Xs3NS>.

¹⁰⁹ "American Association of Blacks in Energy Biennial Report 2009/2010," *The American Association of Blacks in Energy*, archived March 20, 2017, https://web.archive.org/web/20170320215246/https://www.aabe.org/docs/annual_reports/docs/2-AABE-2009-2010-Annual-Report.pdf.

¹¹⁰ "AABE History," *The American Association of Blacks in Energy*, archived March 21, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170321182230/https://www.aabe.org/index.php?component=pages&id=14>.

¹¹¹ The Black Panther, "N.A.A.C.P. Under Attack," 130.

conducted by *Ebony* in October 1979. In the interview titled “Top civil rights organizations say impact of the energy crisis on blacks is devastating” *Ebony* asked the NAACP, the NUL and People United to Save Humanity (PUSH) about their viewpoints. On the question “what will be the impact of the energy crisis on black America in 1979-1980?” the NAACP replied that the consequences were indeed devastating, and predicted that by the 1990s low and moderate-income households would not be able to afford the costs of energy. The other civil rights organizations more or less agreed with the NAACP, although PUSH did not want to make predictions for the long term developments.¹¹² They argued that the long term developments depended on how involved and politically active blacks would become in energy policies. With the questions that follow after this introductory question (Do blacks have an energy policy? And what is your position on the energy crisis?), the NAACP firstly stated that the energy crisis is “neither a black, nor a white problem,” and that all social groups have to endure the same consequences of the energy crisis.¹¹³ However, for the NAACP it was not merely a general economic problem, because: “We note the historical direct correlation between the level of economic activity and energy availability and consumption. Energy supply development throughout our nation’s history has been critically important to economic growth. We find it very disturbing to contemplate a future in which energy supply would become a constraint upon our ability to solve these critically important social and economic problems which confront Black citizens.”¹¹⁴ This interview, again, shows how the civil rights agenda and the social welfare agenda are no separate parts anymore. The NAACP linked general economic problems with the history of African American citizens, and stated that due to their non-self-imposed backlog, they needed the financial support from the government and from organizations like the NAACP.

Also interesting, taking into account the article of the Black Panther Party, is the NAACP’s response to the question “what is your position on Presidents Carter’s announced energy program?” In the interview, they did not state whether they agreed on Carter’s policy or not explicitly, but they criticized his program for being too pessimistic. They argued that the energy program was an “over-emphasis on conservation and a reduction in the growth of total energy demand and consumption.”¹¹⁵ The NAACP’s proposition was to put more focus on the development of “new supply technologies so that energy itself will not become a long-

¹¹² *Ebony*, “Top Civil Rights Organizations say Impact of Crisis on Blacks is Devastating,” *Ebony*, (October, 1979): 42.

¹¹³ *Ebony*, “Top Civil Rights Organizations say Impact of Crisis on Blacks is Devastating,” 42.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

term constraint.”¹¹⁶ This of course speaks in favor of the oil industry, and thus in favor of the deregulation of oil prices, since this was the only way for domestic oil producers and alternative energy producers to overcome the competition from abroad. They needed the motivation of the higher prices in order to experiment with alternative energy production. The NUL, however, *did* voice their support for Carter’s energy program explicitly, stating that their organization was against deregulation.¹¹⁷

It gets, however, quite confusing when the NAACP is asked if President Carter’s announced program meets the needs of poor people and of black people. The NAACP replied that it was very skeptical about Carter’s decision on April 5, 1979 to gradually remove price controls on crude oil. They stated that this decision would have a large impact on minorities and low-income households, and argued that “measures must be taken to alleviate the disparate effects of rising costs upon minorities and the poor.”¹¹⁸ It seems that the NAACP was weighing the options for deregulation and poverty support. And unlike what the Black Panthers reported, they seem to have chosen for a middle ground that would benefit both the oil industry and the poor. In sum, they seem to propose deregulation and support the higher energy prices, but they insisted that for the poor minorities, financial support and alleviating measures should be initiated. So finally, the burden would be carried by the high-and-middle-income households. This two-fold opinion on the increasing costs of energy is enforced by the NAACP’s argumentation that using the profit of the Windfall Profit Tax to alleviate the energy costs for low-income households is insufficient, and by the NAACP’s argumentation that in order to provide employment, the United States economy must invest in and explore “all forms of energy.”¹¹⁹

On March 1980 the NAACP published an issue of *The Crisis* that was specially focused on the energy crisis. Lenneal J. Henderson opened the issue with an article on the consequences of the energy crisis on the poor by providing numbers. These numbers were generated by an econometric model named the Comprehensive Human Resources Data System. Henderson stressed that this has made clear that “black households were estimated to spend a larger proportion of their disposable income on energy in 1974 than white households, and that the average expenditures of these low-income households is already higher, and will be higher than for middle and upper-income households.”¹²⁰ Furthermore,

¹¹⁶ Ebony, “Top Civil Rights Organizations say Impact of Crisis on Blacks is Devastating,” 42.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 42.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 42.

¹¹⁹ Ebony, “Top Civil Rights Organizations say Impact of Crisis on Blacks is Devastating,” 42.

¹²⁰ Lenneal J. Henderson, “Managing an Uncertain Future,” *The Crisis* (March, 1980): 84.

another mentioned concern for the NAACP is in this article the increase of unemployment. So, once again the NAACP's focus on a middle ground policy shines through in this article that is researching both the financial assistance for black low-income households and solutions to support the oil industry and the job market. Beating around the bush about the fact that deregulation is not such a bad thing, and about the fact that the middle-classes would have to bear the burden of the largest economic consequences, Henderson seemed to prefer to write about the solutions rather than the sacrifices for some groups in the African American community. The NAACP proposed three solutions: 1) financial support for the poor when deregulation takes place, 2) favoring small energy businesses over major oil companies, and 3) "expanded minority input in energy policy-making."¹²¹ The last two points speak in favor of the AABE, and in this issue of *The Crisis* and the issue of April 1980, the NAACP invited African American energy entrepreneurs to write articles on the energy crisis.

4.5 "Recessions for the rest of the nation are depressions for Black America"

Carmel Carrington Marr, Commissioner of the New York State Public Service Commission, was among the specialists invited by the NAACP to write an article in *The Crisis*. He pointed to the importance of a policy that would bring the least damage to the least fortunate in society, and stressed therefore, as well, that the government and the private sector, with the inclusion of *all* enterprises, should negotiate on a most democratic policy.¹²² Marr took the opportunity to appeal the United States government by referring to a proud facet of US governing: "Whatever approaches other governments adopt in formulating their energy programs, ours is a democratic form of government, with, multifaceted concerns that determine the likelihood of success of any national undertaking."¹²³ As a member of the State Public Service Commission, Marr seems more representative for low-income households than the African American entrepreneurs who are also mentioned in the magazine. However, Marr wrote in his article mostly about the economic consequences of the energy crisis on a macroeconomic and international level by looking at both Gross Domestic Product and by comparing the energy policies of different nations. He did not mention the consequences for low-income households on domestic or state level. Although, he did strongly argue for an inclusive commission on energy that reflected all social groups of the US' democratic society.

¹²¹ Henderson, "Managing an Uncertain Future," 85.

¹²² Carmel Carrington Marr, "Energy Questions: Government Answers," *The Crisis* (March, 1980): 90.

¹²³ Marr, "Energy Questions: Government Answers," 90.

Earl G. Graves, chairman of Earl G. Graves Limited and publisher of *Black Enterprise Magazine* was also invited to write in the NAACP's magazine. It is very interesting and telling that the *Black Enterprise* is a magazine that focuses on a minority elite within the African American community in the United States. He argued that everyone in the United States society had to make financial sacrifices in order to overcome the energy crisis, but since "recessions for the rest of the nation are depressions for Black America,"¹²⁴ Graves stressed that low-income households and small minority businesses should be spared at the expense of major energy businesses and upper-middle-class households, because they would otherwise be hit the hardest. Graves also used this opportunity to call on the "social justice in energy," thereby linking the current crisis to civil rights.¹²⁵ He argued that small minority businesses were discriminated at by banks that withheld their venture capital, by stating that "access to capital remains the number one problem of black-owned businesses today."¹²⁶ In sum, Graves argued that the source of the multifaceted problems in United States societies caused by the energy crisis could not be fixed by an exclusive commission on energy that included only the white pioneers of major oil companies.

In an article of the magazine *Black Enterprise*, of which Earl G. Graves is the editor and publisher, George Davis, a New York based writer, reported on the energy crisis and spoke in favor of decontrol by the United States government. He argued that it was necessary in order to overcome the energy crisis with the least severe consequences to the minorities living in the US. Davis quoted Clarke Watson, chairman of AABE: "We recognize decontrol as an economic necessity separate from any social or political considerations. The poor will suffer from higher prices in the same way they suffer from the high prices of everything else. This problem will have to be dealt with in some other way."¹²⁷ A harsh statement which suggests that the oil industry is mainly focused on its own uncertain future. Davis also wrote on the unfair and severe competition from major oil companies like Texaco, Standard Oil, Mobil and Exxon. But most interesting is his report on the NAACP's approach towards the energy crisis:

"Last year the AABE helped the NAACP formulate a response to the government's energy policies. The response was heavily criticized in many quarters for being too much pro-oil industry. In a letter to the *Wall Street Journal*, Clarke Watson took note on the criticism

¹²⁴ Earl G. Graves, "Energy...with Justice for All," *The Crisis* (March, 1980): 93.

¹²⁵ Graves, "Energy...with Justice for All," 93.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹²⁷ George Davis, "The Energy Crisis," *Black Enterprise* (January, 1980): 29.

and defended the AABE and the NAACP. Stating that “federal schemes to assist minorities such as the War on Poverty, Model Cities and the like failed dismally. They failed because they perceived minorities as necessarily and perpetually poor.”¹²⁸

The authors of *Black Enterprise* were essentially in favor of black capitalism. This becomes clear when they state that decontrol would not work if the government would raise taxes like the Windfall Profit Tax, because it would undermine the purpose of decontrol itself.¹²⁹ It thus makes sense that when the NAACP is mentioned in one breath with the energy entrepreneurs with close links to the oil industry, it could count on criticism from other civil rights organizations. Also really interesting, is that the NAACP invited almost only black energy entrepreneurs and black oil executives to write articles in their special issue on energy. Graves and Marr are both closely linked to the oil industry, and so are Clarke R. Watson, President of Westland Companies and Chairman of the AABE, Matthew Holden, Commissioner of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Rufus W. McKinney, Vice President of the Southern California Gas Company, and Alan L. Smith, President of the National Energy Foundation.¹³⁰ It suggests that the NAACP put the focus on job opportunity to help both the unemployed African Americans and the minority oil industry, more than on programs and legislative action to help the poor bear the financial consequences of the energy crisis. The NAACP also seems to put emphasis on the knowledge of intellectual black leaders rather than on the experiences of actual low-income black citizens. So, to some civil rights organizations like, for example, the Marxist Black Panther Party, the NAACP may indeed have seemed like an elitist organization that was backing black entrepreneurs, and thus black capitalism.

But the NAACP was essentially in favor of the working class with their own characteristic approach: a middle ground policy drifting somewhere between socialism and capitalism. A policy that supported small business over big business, a policy that was essentially focused on the decline of unemployment, and a policy that also advocated a social safety net for the least fortunate in society, “because the profits of the Windfall Profit Tax were not enough to sufficiently support the poor.”¹³¹ This last point suggests that the NAACP did thus not completely fall in line with the AABE and minority energy entrepreneurs, because they held a clear hand above the heads of the poor.

¹²⁸ Davis, “The Energy Crisis,” 29.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 29.

¹³⁰ NAACP, *The Crisis* (The Crisis Publishing Company, Inc., 1980).

¹³¹ Ebony, “Top Civil Rights Organizations say Impact of Crisis on Blacks is Devastating,” 42.

5.1 Conclusion

The NAACP was originally a civil rights organization that was founded upon the beliefs of philanthropists and social workers. One of the founders, W.E.B. Du Bois, translated the lack of equal opportunity in education and employment to some sort of class society based on race rather than on the accumulation of wealth by some social groups in US society. The lack of opportunity was a race problem according to Du Bois, and the economic policy that came closest to his beliefs of a classless society, or in his case, a society free of prejudice, was socialism. Despite the fact that the NAACP had very outspoken socialist founders, the organization did not have a very outspoken stance on economic policy. Instead, they focused on the improvisation of equal opportunity in education and employment in order to achieve 'racial uplift'. This striving for equal opportunity did not only appeal to socialists but also to liberals. Due to the NAACP's emphasis on an intellectual approach and their continued fights in the courtroom, a lot of middle-class blacks, that were not opposed to conservative and liberal notions, joined the organization. Eisenberg wrote that the socialist members were afraid that the new accretion of elitist members would muddle the message of the NAACP. To cope with this imago and to cope with the Great Depression of the early 1930s, the NAACP started to put more focus on social welfare issues, thereby showing that they were not only looking to create opportunity, but also looking to help overcome the consequences of this lack of opportunity. Hamilton and Hamilton see a pattern in this approach and describe in their article a chronological development of the civil rights organization's "dual agenda". An agenda that focuses both on civil rights and on social welfare. The dual agenda is really influenced by external developments in society on a socioeconomic or cultural level.

During the Black Power era, the NAACP was criticized by new and more radical civil rights organizations for being too modest, too conservative, and too elitist. So it seemed that despite the NAACP's original socialist and unionist standpoints, as described by Eisenberg, the NAACP was still haunted by the assumption that they were elitist. It is however in the definition of 'black power,' as described by the *Oxford Companion*, that the new civil rights organizations liked to criticize their predecessors, and to oppose them as rebellious teens. This was also the moment that the NAACP put more emphasis on the social welfare part of their dual agenda. This moment is what Hamilton and Hamilton call the Conflictual Stage since the social welfare agenda, here, is backed to tackle popular issues in a time the NAACP found itself in the midst of heavy competition. It is visible in their magazine *The Crisis*, their information outlet, that they started focusing more on housing and other economic issues.

This does not change when the Black Power era comes to an end. The NAACP seemed to be the big survivor among the civil rights organization that declined or disappeared because of the new conservative climate and the lack of a stable bureaucracy. The NAACP did not let go of their dual agenda, but realized the complementary aspect of it while serving the civil rights agenda. The two merged agendas merged into one, and the NAACP realized that the both went hand in hand during the 1960s.

However, evidence for the existence of a ‘dual agenda’ that Hamilton and Hamilton describe becomes weaker in the 1970s. The NAACP was relatively late in the ‘picking up’ of the consequences of the energy crises compared to, for example, the Black Panther Party. The difference between the two, however, is that the Black Panther Party is outspoken Marxist and the whole crisis might for them have been a socio-economic problem, as well as an ideological problem. When the NAACP started to take notice they were very undecided about their approach. In 1975 when the energy crisis was mentioned for the first time in *The Crisis*, the NAACP objected the deregulation of oil prices because it would harm the low-income households. However, in 1978 the Black Panther Party reported on a “controversial energy policy” supported by the NAACP. The NAACP, they said, was influenced by energy entrepreneurs and black oil executives, and backed the deregulation of oil prices. The NAACP did indeed cooperate with African American oil officials from the AABE on an energy policy as becomes clear from the many entrepreneurs that were invited to write in the NAACP’s special issue on the energy crisis. They did, however, not completely fall in line with them. Where the entrepreneurs and oil executives mock the Windfall Profit Tax, as becomes clear in *Black Enterprise*, the NAACP argued that the Windfall Profit Tax was not enough to meet the economic problems of the poor. The NAACP wanted support for small businesses *and* for low-income households, and not only by creating job opportunities, but also by advocating the need for poverty support and alleviating acts on high energy prices for the poor.

In the end, the approach by the NAACP seems very characteristic of their historical development. As an civil rights organization that was originally unionist and socialist, but that had a large amount of middle-class members who might or might not have influenced the approach of the NAACP throughout its history. The organization seemed to have, once again, received the support of middle-class, successful African Americans in their approach towards the energy crises of the 1970s. Characteristic for the NAACP is their effort to harmonize both the things that are considered ‘liberal’ or ‘capitalist’ and the things that are considered ‘socialist’ and ‘solidary’. This all suggest that the ‘dual agenda’ did not change much about the character and goals and strategies of the NAACP, it was more of a natural flow that did

have an impact on the NAACP's approach around the civil rights era, but during the 1970s, the dual agenda played only a minor role. The NAACP was still very much the NAACP: an organization that gave the priority to equal opportunity in labor above anti-poverty action. They found self-sustainability through 'removing the barriers to equal opportunity in labor' more important, than self-sustainability through social safety programs. It shows that the NAACP returned to its roots as a socialist organizations that was influenced by liberal friends and allies. The period of the energy crises served as a case to study the historical development of the NAACP. In the present the NAACP has further developed its energy policy as one can read on its website. And in face of climate change and the increasing influence of environmentalists, this energy policy will be an ever-developing strategy, challenged to meet both the future aspirations and the economic possibilities of African Americans in the United States.

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