

“Black Americans are not defeated, the civil rights movement is not dead. If anyone thinks that we are going to stop agitating, they had better think again. If anyone thinks that we are going to stop litigating, they had better close the courts. If anyone thinks that we are not going to demonstrate and protest, they had better roll up the sidewalks.”

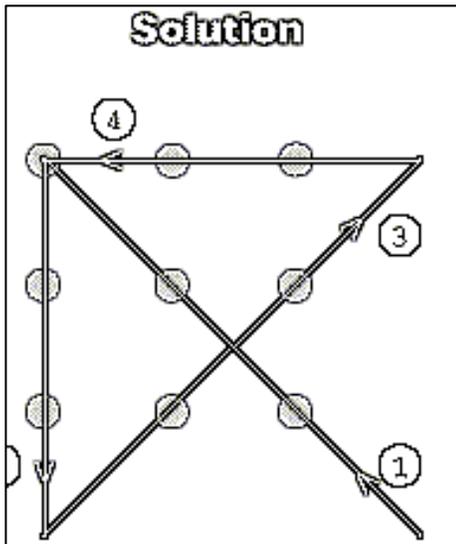
—Benjamin Hooks

The NAACP: Challenging Systemic Racism



In this lesson, students will explore the legacy of Benjamin Hooks, a forceful voice for fairness and opportunity, through his leadership of the NAACP, during the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Step 1: Hook—Thinking Outside of the Box (5 minutes)



Pass out a copy of the [DOTS](#) diagram. Ask students to complete the directions given at the bottom of the drawing. The challenge is to connect all the dots, without lifting the pen or retracing. Give students two minutes to work on the puzzle. At the end of the time period, ask if anyone has found the solution.

The point of the exercise is to demonstrate that, on occasion, our solutions to problems lie in thinking differently, changing our perspective and sometimes drawing lines “outside of the box.” Successful organizations, like the NAACP for its entire history, have had to think outside of the box in strategizing and pushing for racial justice. Consider:

- Why is it that most of us do not think about going out of the boundaries?

Step 2: Profile of Benjamin Hooks (20 minutes)

Benjamin Hooks earned his law degree in 1948 at DePaul University in Chicago. He returned home to Tennessee, where no law school had been willing to admit him. Hooks vowed to work to break down segregation. He was a pioneer in restaurant sit-ins and other boycotts sponsored by the NAACP. He later passed the Tennessee bar examination and opened his own law practice, facing prejudice at every turn.

Have students read the [tribute](#) to Benjamin Hooks in *The New York Times*.

Hooks was elected executive director of the NAACP in 1976, where he faced declining membership and organizational problems. “Black Americans are not defeated,” he told *Ebony* magazine. “The civil rights movement is not dead. If anyone thinks that we are going to stop agitating, they had better think again. If anyone thinks that we are going to stop litigating, they had better close the courts. If anyone thinks that we are not going to demonstrate and protest, they had better roll up the sidewalks.” Under his 15-year leadership, the organization rebounded, adding several hundred thousand members.

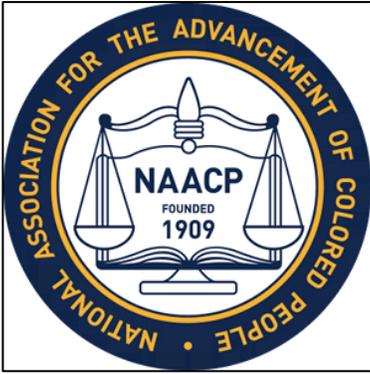
[Video \(one minute\)](#) Benjamin Hooks speaks of the history and goals of the NAACP.

Video (five minutes): [“Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing”](#)

Distribute the lyrics to your students. This song, written around the time the NAACP was formed, is considered the “Black National Anthem,” and is still widely sung today. Students can compare this song with [“We Shall Overcome,”](#) which is considered an anthem of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, as well as Kendrick Lamar’s [“Alright,”](#) which has become an anthem for the Black Lives Matter movement.

Video (four minutes): [How the NAACP Fights Racial Discrimination](#)

Step 3: Questions for Discussion (15 minutes)



- How has the NAACP been a force in working to combat racism?
- Are there other organizations that we can think of that have also been involved in fighting for social justice and racial equality?
- What does Benjamin Hook's life tell us about what is required to be a leader in the fight for racial equality?
- Have your students discuss what they know about people and organizations that have historically fought racism or are currently fighting racism. Ask students what they can do to fight racism.

Step 4: What Can Students Do?



Use this step to expand on the legacy of Benjamin Hooks and his fight for civil rights. Contacting and working with your local NAACP office will be key to this exercise. The office will help guide you in finding people whose lives have been connected to the drive for social justice and fairness in your community.

Divide the class into teams. Each team is assigned to conduct an interview with someone in the community who is an advocate for social justice and racial equality.

Students will use their interviews as information to create presentations about the community that could include drama, poetry, podcasts, poster displays, comic strips or music.

Here are two options for your students to join in with students from around the country working on similar projects:

[RFK Human Rights Video Contest](#)

[RFK Music Composition Contest](#)

Additional Resources and Materials



[History of the NAACP](#)

[Teaching About Race, Racism and Police Violence](#)
(Southern Poverty Law Center/Teaching Tolerance)

[Ten Ways to Fight Hate: A Community Response Guide](#)
(Southern Poverty Law Center/Teaching Tolerance)

[Talking About Race](#) (Resources from the National African American Museum of History and Culture)

The Southern Poverty Law Center's Teaching Tolerance Guide, "[Let's Talk: Discussing Race, Racism and other Difficult Topics With Students](#)"