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### Founding of NAACP in San Antonio 1918: A Call to Activism

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Eric Nolden

HIST 4301

Dr. Barragan

### Founding of NAACP in San Antonio 1918: A Call to Activism

Enter the Progressive era a time of social activism and political reform, an era aimed at finding a cure for industrialization and urbanization nationally. There were also societal issues that needed to be resolved, issues of governmental corruption, government machines and their overseers, women's suffrage, child labor laws, the practice of Eugenics, and safer food and medicine for all citizens. Although the reformers of the era were trying to create a "Great America," the Progressive era encouraged discriminatory rules; rules which aided in the re-emergence of the KKK and lay the foundation for the Immigration Act of 1917. Policies that allowed strong segregation and racial persecution. There was an overwhelming need for a voice of equality, citizenship, and protection for African Americans. Organized in 1918, the San Antonio Branch of the NAACP has extensively been a spearhead of the fight for justice, and a forerunner in the call to activism. As I discuss the importance of the founding of the branch in San Antonio, I will also discuss the impact on the people it served, and the effects of a child born under its umbrella.

In 1905, a civil rights organization was founded by black scholars, and marshalled by W.E.B. DuBois called the Niagara Movement, these civil rights activists wanted African Americans to have the same full rights as whites, these black scholars would join a group of white liberal reformers to establish the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of

Colored People) in 1909, in New York City<sup>1</sup>. This organization would champion for African Americans using litigation and their work took them to the South a hotbed of racism, inequality, and segregation. The only thing the organization would need is men and women willing to answer the call and open branches in a state known for its mistreatment of African Americans. To understand the task that was at hand we must first give some insight to the climate of Texas and the sentiment of many of the people.

Texas was a segregationist before Jim Crow, and a place with heavy violence towards African Americans, especially when it pertained to affairs of official proceedings, including rights and privileges. Alwyn Barr an American historian who specializes in African American studies, the American South, The American Civil War, and Reconstruction states that, “Texas ranked third in the nation in lynching’s with over a hundred between 1900 and 1910.”<sup>2</sup> Majority of these lynching’s were done as a means of fear and intimidation towards African Americans. It was a way to halt black voting, establish Jim Crow, and continue white sovereignty. Kenneth Mason who specializes in African American history and culture says, “[I]n several communities throughout Texas the threat of violence and whipping, known as “whitecapping,” was used to intimidate blacks who insisted on exercising their civil rights.”<sup>3</sup> Racial violence, mob justice in the form of lynching, and voting rights issues were things that needed to be addressed. “As racial violence broke across the state of Texas white civic leaders grew concerned and between 1889

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<sup>1</sup> The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica. “Niagara Movement.” Encyclopedia Britannica. Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., May 9, 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Niagara-Movement>.

<sup>2</sup> “Chapter 5: Outsiders.” *Black Texans: A History of African Americans in Texas, 1528-1995*, by Alwyn Barr, University of Oklahoma Press, 1996, pp. 136–140.

<sup>3</sup> “Chapter 7: Black Reformers.” *Kenneth Mason African Americans and Race Relations in San Antonio, Texas, 1867-1937*, 211–11, n.d.

and 1917, the number of hangings, burnings and mob violence had moved the racial hysteria closer to Bexar County,” says Kenneth Mason.<sup>4</sup>



The first branch in Texas was founded in El Paso 1915. The spark for San Antonio would come in the form of a riot that occurred in Houston in 1917.<sup>5</sup> The violence and racial discrimination towards African Americans was not just perpetrated by locals, there were many occasions where it was police or other high ranking city officials. In the Houston Riot of 1917,

<sup>4</sup> “Chapter 7: Black Reformers.” *Kenneth Mason African Americans and Race Relations in San Antonio, Texas, 1867-1937*, 211–11, n.d.

<sup>5</sup> *Austin American-Statesman*, March 20, 1989. *Houston Chronicle*, July 15, 25, 1917. *Houston Press*, August 24, 25, 1917. Robert V. Haynes, *A Night of Violence: The Houston Riot of 1917* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976). Edgar A. Schuler.

also called The Camp Logan Mutiny, two black soldiers were beaten by police officers and one of the two was thought to have been killed. This led to soldiers arming themselves and marching into the fourth ward where the riot took place. After the riot was over the soldiers who were involved were arrested and transported to Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Tx to receive their punishment.<sup>6</sup> In a kangaroo court preceding 118 black soldiers were indicted, twenty-nine soldiers were hung, sixty-three received life sentences. The NAACP El Paso branch stepped in and the remaining soldiers received lesser sentences and some of the sixty-three were commuted to lesser time. No whites involved in the riot were arrested or brought to trial.



The soldiers being brought to San Antonio was very important and because of this the organization that J. A. Grumbles had read about, he could now see in action. J.A. Grumbles was

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<sup>6</sup> V., Robert. "HOUSTON RIOT OF 1917." The Handbook of Texas Online | Texas State Historical Association (TSHA), June 15, 2010. <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/jch04>.

so impressed that he quickly held a meeting to discuss opening a San Antonio branch of the NAACP.<sup>7</sup>

“John A. Grumbles, a former head railroad postal clerk, was known to be ‘energetic, fearless and forceful, and generally accomplishes whatever he goes after.’ He was highly regarded by white civic leaders, well connected to the political machine, and one of the wealthiest black property owners in the city.”<sup>8</sup>

The San Antonio branch was founded in March of 1918, by a group of local politicians, educators, and clergymen. Totalling 503 people they would unanimously elect J. A. Grumbles as president of the newly formed branch. Under the leadership of J.A. Grumbles the San Antonio branch thrived.

His first action as president would be to take on an issue of segregation and “separate but equal” mandates by bringing a case against Indianola and Great Northern Railroad companies. The San Antonio branch sent a letter to the Superintendent and Director General of the Railroads. The San Antonio branch NAACP held the rail lines responsible for not adhering to mandatory state regulations that recommended separate and equal provisions for its customers. The plan was not to attack the Jim Crow laws, but to use the white’s mentality of maintaining the racial hierarchy to win the case. Grumbles next opponent would be a local magazine, *The Loyal Spirit*, stating that the author, J. S. Bonner, was undermining African American patriotism. Local and Army administrators agreed, and the magazine was no longer printed in the city. At the

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<sup>7</sup> Hudspeth, Gregory. Personal Interview. 26 Feb 2020

<sup>8</sup> “Chapter 7: Black Reformers,” 212–13, n.d.

same time Grumbles leveraged this opportunity to help gain employment for African American women by tying it into the war effort.<sup>9</sup>

By the 1920s the San Antonio branch would be one of the seven largest in the United States. This was because Grumbles would speak at Churches around the city to recruit new members and tie in job possibilities. This was a testament of the NAACP power, and what it represented for African Americans. The way that the NAACP united and rallied the African American communities on such a large scale is what made the San Antonio branch so large and active. The sudden passing of J. A. Grumbles in 1922 did have a crippling effect on the branch, and for a period there was more in-fighting than there was fighting for the people. The organization was changed into a political machine more concerned with securing votes than issues of violence and segregation.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Mason, Kenneth. "Chapter 7 Black Reformers: The Call for Civil Rights." In *African Americans and Race Relations in San Antonio, Texas, 1867-1937*, 1st ed., 214–14. Routledge, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Mason, Kenneth. "Chapter 7 Black Reformers: The Call for Civil Rights." In *African Americans and Race Relations in San Antonio, Texas, 1867-1937*, 1st ed., 216–16. Routledge, 1998.



**PRESIDENTS OF SEVEN OF THE LARGEST N. A. A. C. P. BRANCHES**  
**A. H. GRIMKE**  
Washington, D. C.

**J. A. GRUMBLES**  
San Antonio, Texas  
**W. H. STEWARD**  
Louisville, Ky.  
**REV. F. A. CULLEN**  
New York City

**W. A. BUTLER**  
North California

**F. E. YOUNG**  
Cleveland, Ohio

**JUDGE E. O. BROWN**  
Chicago, Ill.



In June 1937, all African American activist leaders in Texas would be brought together to create the “Texas State Conference.”<sup>11</sup> It would be at this conference in Dallas that the five branches would meet to organize a strategy for public education and voting issues. The NAACP state conference in Texas had a major impact on integrating communal establishments and provisions all over Texas.<sup>12</sup> The work that was done led to the abolishing of the all-white Democratic primary. In this same conference the Texas NAACP branches provided the initial blueprint they would use to combat racial discrimination and segregation. The principle plan of action was to use litigation to dispute the “separate but equal” law in court. The conference was a success and galvanized all branches in Texas.<sup>13</sup> Their mission was to change the face of racial segregation in transportation, public funded facilities, recreation, and education. After the “Texas State Conference” they began to use litigation to seek change in San Antonio. This would shift the focus of the San Antonio branch into being more about desegregation and civil rights. Heading into the 1950s the San Antonio branch would continue to be a paragon. The branch would win “Outstanding Texas Group” and receive a one-hundred-dollar check from the main branch in New York for outstanding work.

They would need help with the litigation and would receive the help from Thurgood Marshall, who was national counsel for the NAACP, and had won more civil rights cases than any attorney, he won six U.S. Supreme Court decisions that dealt with segregation in housing,

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<sup>11</sup> “The NAACP State Conference in Texas: Intermediary and Catalyst for Change, 1937-1957.” *The Journal of African American History* 94 (4): 509–28.

<sup>12</sup> “The NAACP State Conference in Texas: Intermediary and Catalyst for Change, 1937-1957.” *The Journal of African American History* 94 (4): 509–28.

<sup>13</sup> Gillette, Michael L. “The Rise of the NAACP in Texas.” *The Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (1978): 393-416.

education, and transportation. Thurgood Marshall would visit the San Antonio branch and go to worship services at different churches to help with litigation and membership enrollment for the NAACP.<sup>14</sup> They would continue to combat segregation, in 1955 the San Antonio branch sought to eradicate segregation at all city recreation facilities, and to put an end to a 1934 city ordinance that barred African Americans from all but two of the cities eleven swimming pools in San Antonio.<sup>15</sup> There were old city ordinances in place that represented segregation of the highest form and the San Antonio branch wanted these ordinances removed.

The branch was so successful in its efforts of litigation that the Texas Attorney General John Ben Sheppard tried to run the NAACP out of Texas during the years of 1955-56.<sup>16</sup>

In 1960 the San Antonio youth council staged a sit-in and picket demonstration at Joske's restaurant services counter.<sup>17</sup> This was due to non-service of African Americans at the food counter, a clear sign of discrimination. Another sit-in would take place at the F. W. Woolworth building, and as a result San Antonio would be the first southern city to have lunch counters desegregated.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "NAACP Lawyer to Speak Here." *San Antonio Express*, 29 Oct. 1952, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> "Segregation End Decision Delayed." *San Antonio Express*, 28 Jan. 1955.

<sup>16</sup> E., George. "SHEPPERD, JOHN BEN." *The Handbook of Texas Online* | Texas State Historical Association (TSHA), June 15, 2010. <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fsh65>.

<sup>17</sup> "Negroes 'Quit' Store in Protest." *San Antonio Express*, 25 Apr. 1960, pp. 2-A-2-A.

<sup>18</sup> Mendoza, Madalyn. "58 Years Ago, San Antonio Was the First Southern City to Integrate Lunch Counters." *MySanAntonio.com*, 19 Mar. 2018, [www.mysanantonio.com/150years/major-stories/article/Fifty-eight-years-ago-San-Antonio-was-the-first-6145959.php#photo-7434599](http://www.mysanantonio.com/150years/major-stories/article/Fifty-eight-years-ago-San-Antonio-was-the-first-6145959.php#photo-7434599)  
<https://www.saconservation.org/san-antonio-woolworth-building-news/>



The San Antonio branch would also host its' 26<sup>th</sup> annual meeting starting at 10 a.m. in the form of a four day conventions that would bring together clergymen of different denominations, community leaders, and representatives from the state and national level of the NAACP, to host sessions. Barbara Jordan was invited to host her own session. The convention had a list of topics the NAACP wanted to discuss, such as, combating bias, Texas school desegregation, expanding the NAACP program in Texas, and expansion of job opportunities for Texas minority groups. The convention would culminate with a speech from then national director Gloster Current.<sup>19</sup> The convention and the topics that they would be discussing were very vital to the black population going forward. With more blacks moving into the city there would indeed be problems with discrimination and segregation.

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<sup>19</sup> "4-Day NAACP Convention to Open with Array of Top Texas Leaders." *San Antonio Express*, November 8, 1962, sec. G.

The signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 meant there was now an opportunity for the upward mobility for African Americans. Using the Civil Rights Act of 1964 the San Antonio branch could now demand full implementation of the removing of all racial barriers in the city.<sup>20</sup> The following year the President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Both Acts gave blacks the right to exercise their citizenship, in a world seemingly free of discrimination, and segregation, a turning point in history. The signing of the Civil rights Act and the Voting Rights Act signified successful legislation passed for African Americans. Non-discrimination in all facets of life, something the San Antonio branch NAACP fought for since its' inception.

The San Antonio branch helped to develop a committee that pledged a war on poverty. The plan was to help unemployed blacks find jobs or receive training that would make them job eligible.<sup>21</sup> Similar to Lyndon B. Johnsons "war on poverty" the goal was to specifically help unemployed blacks in Texas. The branch believed that by finding a way to keep people informed could help in eliminating these issues of unemployment and it would promote moral and economic progress. The branch would also sit in on city council meetings to push the issues of desegregation in the city. The San Antonio branch would be essential at campaigning for the rights of blacks in San Antonio, they pursued equal rights in all aspects of life. Not only racial discrimination, the branch wanted equality in job selection, school desegregation, voter registration, and homeownership for poor families. The San Antonio branch stood up to the city council when it decided to end a program that was vital to low-income families.<sup>22</sup>

In the 1970s the NAACP used its recognition to aid in a voter registration drive for African Americans. This was a way to communicate to the people the power of the black vote.

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<sup>20</sup>"New NAACP Chief Asks Use of Act." *San Antonio Express*, January 1, 1965, sec. C.

<sup>21</sup>"S.A. Poverty War Development Plan Group Is Formed." *San Antonio Express*, 2 Sept. 1965, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup>"NAACP Criticizes Turnkey Decision." *San Antonio Express*, 7 Nov. 1969, p. 10.

Stations were set up everywhere on the east side of town and places that were limited to African Americans. One of the deputies at serving at one of the seventeen stations was Mrs. Louis Hudspeth, Gregory Hudspeth's mother.<sup>23</sup> The San Antonio branch also held meetings where they would allow the potential candidates for State Senate and State Representative to do question and answer with the community they potentially represented.<sup>24</sup>

There were still battles to be fought in the 70s the San Antonio branch filed a suit against the San Antonio Independent School District Board of Trustees, and the Federal department of Health, Education, and Welfare over the building of a new school. The suit was filed because the next school built should have been located on the eastside and named Phyllis Wheatley. Once the suit was filed the school district continued to purchase land to make it appear as if they bought land on the eastside to build the school as promised to avoid a court injunction. The school district wanted to build the school by Brackenridge which was on the westside of town. The problem was there was never a school built after Wheatley was closed.<sup>25</sup>

One of the highlights for the San Antonio branch was that in 1973 it hosted its annual Freedom Fund Dinner. The Freedom Fund Dinner was a time to call attention to the achievements of the NAACP on a national and local level, and to celebrate the deeds of members and liberal residents who were overseers in the struggle for civil integrity. At this dinner, the featured speaker would be C. Delores Tucker, a woman who marched with Dr. Martin Luther King, and was also the secretary of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Tucker stated, "[T]he NAACP must lead the way in the Black Freedom struggle, It's the only thing we got left."

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<sup>23</sup> "1970 Voter Registration Under Way." *San Antonio Express*, 22 Jan. 1970, p. 4

<sup>24</sup> "S.A. NAACP Meeting Set." *San Antonio Express*, September 24, 1970, sec. D.

<sup>25</sup> "Wheatley Hearing Set." *San Antonio Express*, 29 Oct. 1971, p. 11.

Tucker also stated, “We’ve got to get ourselves together now.”<sup>26</sup> As she spoke about once prominent African American Institutions who are less powerful because they are in disarray, Institutions like the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, the Congress of Racial Equality, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference who lost their prominence.

These are just some of the focal points that show the importance of the founding of the San Antonio branch. The impact was a more diverse San Antonio with less violence, and a better education for African American kids, more African Americans registering to vote and voting, and desegregated public facilities that could be used by all.

One of the signs of anything great is its legacy, Gregory Hudspeth is part of the legacy of the San Antonio branch NAACP. His mother and father were both members of the San Antonio branch. His father Charles A. Hudspeth Jr. was a president of the San Antonio Branch NAACP in the 1970s and 1980s. Charles Hudspeth spent the fifties and sixties in the trenches battling for equality and desegregation for African Americans. In following the plan of the “Texas State Conference”. The San Antonio branch was committed to developing the youth to later become leaders in the NAACP.<sup>27</sup> Dr. Gregory Hudspeth was one of those youth. To say the NAACP is in Gregory Hudspeth’s DNA is an understatement. His mother Louise served as chair with his father at the Freedom Fund Dinner. His mother also helped with voter registration in the 70s.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> “NAACP Lead Urged for Black Freedom.” *San Antonio Express*, 21 Sept. 1973, p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> “The NAACP State Conference in Texas: Intermediary and Catalyst for Change, 1937-1957.” *The Journal of African American History* 94 (4): 509–28.

<sup>28</sup> “1970 Voter Registration Under Way.” *San Antonio Express*, 22 Jan. 1970, p. 4



Dr. Hudspeth recalls being in middle school and walking in a picket line at the Majestic Theatre, because African Americans could not go through the main entrance. He also picketed at Joske's. Dr. Hudspeth then goes on to speak of another instance at Handy Andy, where he and his father picketed together. Handy Andy hired people to harass the picketers, and one of them approached young Gregory and his father. Gregory says, "[T]he guy pulled out a gun, pointed it at my dad, and said I've always wanted to shoot a Nigger!" The police were called, the gun was not found, but it made the news. Dr. Hudspeth smiles and then says where is Handy Andy today?<sup>29</sup>

When I ask about his childhood, he speaks of the founders like they are household names. Edna Carter, his first-grade teacher, Myra Hemmings one of the founders of Delta Sigma Theta

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<sup>29</sup>Hudspeth, Gregory. Personal Interview. 26 Feb 2020

Sorority, and Co-founder with her husband, an actor, of the Phyllis Wheatley Dramatic Guild Players. I sat in amazement as he told me about Barbara Jordan, coming to his house for lunch, and spoke at his church. Reverend Claude Black, one of Dr. Hudspeth's close friends, is remembered from all of Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners that he attended until his death. Dr. Hudspeth recalls when the Reverend became ill and he was asked to be his power of attorney, he says that's when he understood the depth of their friendship. He says he met Thurgood Marshall after he argued *Brown vs. Board* and won. Dr. Hudspeth was around of prominent African Americans as he came of age. He says that while he was in college, he thought of being a civil rights attorney, or political scientist. Political Science eventually won, but civil rights still has his heart because of the things that he was exposed to.<sup>30</sup>

Dr. Gregory Hudspeth academia is prestigious as well, he was an Associate Professor of Political Science at St. Philip's College here in San Antonio, Texas. He attended Huston-Tillotson College in Austin, Texas where he achieved his BA, he also went to St. Mary's University, also here in San Antonio, TX where he earned his MA in Political Science continuing his educational pursuits he then attended Our Lady of the Lake University earning his Ph.D. in Leadership Studies. He is a Life Member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and a Gold Life Member of the NAACP.<sup>31</sup> He is also a Piper Professor Award recipient. Dr. Hudspeth attributes his academic tenacity from things he was exposed to growing up, and the drive that was instilled by his parents.

In closing I would say that the San Antonio Branch NAACP did more than answer the call to activism, they kept the lines open. For more than a century, the San Antonio Branch of the

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<sup>30</sup> Hudspeth, Gregory. Personal Interview. 26 Feb 2020

<sup>31</sup> "President's Biography: NAACP San Antonio Branch." San Antonio Branch NAACP. Accessed April 17, 2020. <https://www.naacpsanantoniobranch.org/president-s-biography.html>.



NAACP has extensively been a spearhead of the fight for justice, and a forerunner in the call to activism. The signs of segregation are not as blatant as they used to be, the fear of racism is not as strong. In parting Dr. Hudspeth says to me, “We are not passing the torch, we’re lighting the torch.”<sup>32</sup> My understanding of that lead me to believe that the San Antonio Branch NAACP would be here long after I’m gone.

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<sup>32</sup> Hudspeth, Gregory. Personal Interview. 26 Feb 2020

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