



Universiteit
Leiden

The Netherlands

Leading from the back : Roy Wilkins and his leadership of the NAACP, 1955-1968

Ryan, Y.

Citation

Ryan, Y. (2009, November 25). *Leading from the back : Roy Wilkins and his leadership of the NAACP, 1955-1968*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/14434>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/14434>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Stellingen bij het proefschrift van Yvonne Ryan, *Leading from the Back: The Leadership of Roy Wilkins, 1955-1968*

Five propositions on the subject of this thesis

1. Roy Wilkins' upbringing among European immigrants in a predominantly white neighborhood in St Paul, Minnesota, had a profound effect on his views on segregation. This environment shaped his awareness of the position of African-Americans as a minority group and in turn informed his frequently dispassionate approach to the battle for equal rights, and his scepticism about the use of direct action tactics such as boycotts to effect social change.
2. The decentralized structure of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR) was a more sympathetic environment in which Wilkins, as the organization's chairman, could practice his political skills than the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The level of autonomy at the LCCR, which was unavailable to him at the NAACP, encouraged him to operate with a decisiveness that was rarely evident in his work at the Association.
3. Wilkins' prodigious political talents and a shared belief in the potential of legislation to effect social change were the foundation for his highly effective partnership with Lyndon Johnson despite the President's ambiguous civil rights credentials.
4. Wilkins can be viewed as the quintessential embodiment of William Whyte's "Organization Man", the sociological construct that described an employee who not only worked for an organization but 'belonged' to it spiritually as well as physically.
5. The increasingly important role of television in American households proved to be both a burden and a blessing for Wilkins. A fleeting image of white intransigence at Little Rock, for example, highlighted more effectively than a dozen congressional testimonies about the plight of black Americans. Unfortunately, Wilkins' reticence and air of detachment made him a less than compelling television spokesman for the movement, particularly in comparison with Martin Luther King.

Six propositions concerning the discipline of the subject of the thesis

6. Scholars have often cited the 1954 Supreme Court ruling that acknowledged the inequality inherent in segregation, *Brown v Board of Education*, as the trigger for the wave of direct action that became known as the civil rights movement. However increasing levels of black activism following the Second World War suggests that the decision can be seen as a stage in an historical trajectory rather than as a starting point for an historical narrative.
7. Dramatic episodes such as the Freedom Rides and the demonstrations in Selma and Birmingham, and the charismatic leaders of other groups dominate the cultural memory about the civil rights movement. This overshadows the

NAACP's contribution to such an extent that even President Obama, in his address to NAACP convention delegates celebrating the Association's centenary in 2009, paid homage to people and actions that were not directly associated with the NAACP.

8. Despite the NAACP's protestations that legal action secured the successful outcome of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the success of the direct action sit-down protests across the south in 1960 challenged the efficacy of legalism and the reliance of law to redress inequalities. The success of these protests almost discredited the NAACP's entire strategy to eliminate segregation, which relied primarily on lobbying and litigation.
9. The NAACP's extensive branch structure gave the organization a presence across the United States, and should have placed the Association in a position of strength as direct action protest mobilized black communities. However, many of those branches were moribund and therefore the NAACP often found itself reacting to the actions of competing groups rather than instigating action itself.
10. As the NAACP looks toward its next hundred years, an increasingly prevalent opinion has begun to take hold, particularly among younger Americans, that the election of Barack Obama to the presidency demonstrates that racial politics is now an irrelevant issue. The notion of this post-racial construct has, in turn, has led to questions about what the role of NAACP might be when racial discrimination has been if not eradicated then rendered impotent despite compelling evidence that, on the contrary, not only has discrimination not been eliminated its more subversive character is as damaging as ever.
11. The disproportionate number of African-Americans adversely affected by the sub-prime mortgage crisis can be attributed in large part to the fact that home equity plays a significantly larger part in the net worth of black families than in white families.

Three statements on the topics of your choice

12. While technology has allowed greater access to primary source material than ever before, the abandonment of more traditional forms of communications in the face of recent technological developments, by which documents are not easily accessible after a length of time, poses a problem for historians in the future.
13. Global corporations have as much capacity to influence and transform social development in emerging economies as governments. However, there is a dilemma that remains to be resolved about whether societal improvement is the role of a private company or should a company's focus be entirely on producing shareholder value and therefore leaving social responsibility to government.
14. The completion of a doctoral dissertation relies as much on a determined tenacity as it does on intellectual ability.