

Black Radio and the Civil Rights Movement

Est. Time: 90-180 minutes
Subjects: History, Social Studies
Age Range: High School
See the full lesson [here!](#)

★ *TEACHROCK* ★

How did Black radio empower Black Americans, aid the Civil Rights Movement, and influence U.S. society?

In this lesson you will:

- Investigate the connection between Black radio stations and the Civil Rights Movement
- Examine the pioneering role of Black radio stations in Memphis, Atlanta, and the southern United States
- Identify important people, groups, and events in the history of Black radio and the Civil Rights Movement

Consider or ask a partner:

- Do you listen to streaming radio (*satellite and internet -based*) and/or terrestrial radio (*land-based, AM/FM radio*)?
- Yes or no, do you think it is possible for a radio station to have a social and political impact on U.S. society?



Read the *WDIA radio station in Memphis, Tennessee* section of [Handout - Black Radio](#) and summarize “WDIA” in your own words on [Handout - Radio and the Civil Rights Movement Graphic Organizer](#). You will use the graphic organizer throughout the lesson.

Watch the [YouTube video “Hidden History: WDIA Radio – The ‘Heart And Soul Of Memphis’”](#) and summarize “Nat D. Williams” and “Tan Town Jubilee” on the graphic organizer.



Read the *WERD radio station in Atlanta, Georgia* section of the handout and summarize “WERD” and “Jesse B. Blayton, Sr.” on the graphic organizer.

Consider or ask a partner:

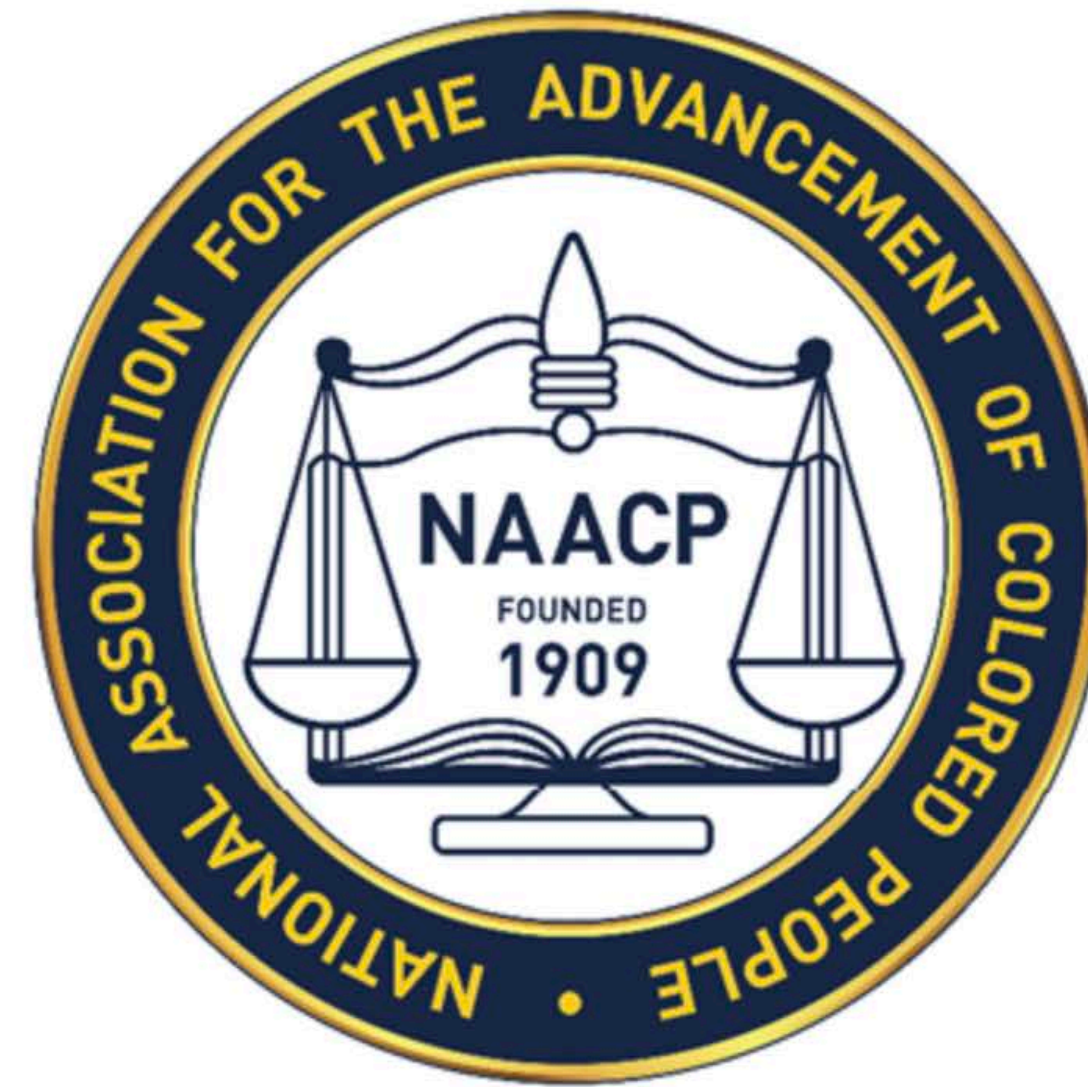
- What campaign was Jesse B. Blayton “following in the footsteps” of when he purchased WERD in 1949?
- Have you heard of the NAACP? If so, what is it?

NAACP

View the image and read the text. Then, summarize “NAACP” on the graphic organizer.

Consider or ask a partner:

- What does the NAACP work to *abolish*, *oppose*, and *ensure*?



National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is an American civil rights organization. It was founded in 1909 by an interracial group of individuals to “work for the abolition of segregation and discrimination in housing, education, employment, voting, and transportation; to oppose racism; and to ensure African Americans their constitutional rights.”

-Britannica.com

NAACP

Read the *Prince Hall Masonic Grand Lodge building in Atlanta, Georgia* section of the handout and summarize “Prince Hall Masonic Grand Lodge” on the graphic organizer.

Consider or ask a partner:

- What organization had offices in the Prince Hall Masonic Grand Lodge where the radio station WERD was located?

View the image and read the text. Then, summarize “SCLC” on the graphic organizer.

Consider or ask a partner:

- What does the SCLC work to “coordinate and assist”?
- Considering the *WERD* section of the handout, how might the SCLC’s announcements on *WERD* have taken place?

SCLC



Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) is an American advocacy organization “established by the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and other civil rights activists in 1957 to coordinate and assist local organizations working for the full equality of African Americans in all aspects of American life.”

-Britannica.com

SCLC

Load the webpage for the [Google Arts & Culture audio documentary, *Golden Age of Black Radio - Part 4: Gender Equality and Civil Rights*](#) and scroll down to the segment, “Jack Gibson describes the relationship between radio station WERD and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference” (*pause the audio*).

Consider or ask a partner:

- What signs do you see attached to the front of the building?
- From your reading, what building is this?



Play the segment, “Jack Gibson describes the relationship between radio station WERD and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference” (*Transcript of audio available here as [Handout - WERD and SCLC](#)*).

Consider or ask a partner:

- How might the SCLC announcements broadcast on the radio have aided the SCLC in achieving its mission of “the full equality of African Americans in all aspects of American life”?



Now, examine radio's role in voter registration with [Handout - Black Radio and Black Voter Registration Document Set](#) and complete [Handout - Guiding Questions for Document Set](#).

Consider or ask a partner:

- How might Black voter registration rates have had a social and political impact on U.S. society?
- Yes or no, do you think it is possible for a radio station to have a social and political impact on U.S. society? Did your answer change from earlier? If it did, how and why did it change?

Complete [Handout - Exit Ticket activity](#) and share your answers with a partner or your class.

SUMMARY

- Desegregating radio stations profoundly shaped the development of media broadcasting and American society
- WDIA was the first radio station in the U.S. to broadcast programming specifically for a Black audience
- WERD was the first Black American-owned and operated radio station in the U.S.
- Black radio stations played a crucial role in the Civil Rights Movement by broadcasting announcements that encouraged public engagement and voting
- The location of a Black radio station correlated to increased Black voter registration and Black voting in that area during the Civil Rights Movement

BE CREATIVE

Create a PSA to focus public attention on a current issue of your choice with [StoryboardThat](#).

Create an infographic about one of the pioneering Black Radio deejays:

- [Nat D. Williams - WDIA](#)
- [Jack Gibson - WERD](#)

Create an infographic about the [Prince Hall Grand Masonic Lodge in Atlanta, GA](#).

Read [“A Point of View by Nat D. Williams – ‘BlackMonday’”](#) and provide a brief summary of Williams’ point of view.

BE CURIOUS

Listen to the entirety of the [Google Arts & Culture audio documentary, “Golden Age of Black Radio - Part 4: Gender Equality and Civil Rights”](#) and discuss as a class.

Read [“A Point of View by Nat D. Williams – ‘BlackMonday’”](#) and provide a brief summary of Williams’ point of view.

Research the [National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters](#) and the [African American Public Radio Consortium](#) websites. Locate a member station close to your school, research the station’s history, and discover its role in advocating for social change both in the past and present.

CONNECT

Share it with us! Either you or an adult in your life can share your work with TeachRock on **Instagram** or **Facebook**, email to **info@teachrock.org**, tweet it to **@TeachRock**, or make an Instagram post and tag us **@teachrock.org**



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