

The NAACP's Fight Against Lynching and State Violence in the Black Freedom Movement

SVSU Faculty-led Undergraduate Research Grant Proposal

Submitted by

Kenneth Jolly, Ph.D.

Narrative

1. **Goals and Objectives:** *Describe the learning goals, methods for the students as you mentor them in effective research strategies. Describe the research ethics particular to your discipline that you will include as you work with the student requested.*

In his report to George W. Wickersham, chair of President Hoover's Law Observance and Enforcement Commission, NAACP head James Weldon Johnson concluded, "lynching, in its social, political, and economic overtones, served as a mechanism of terror that maintained the subjugation of black men and women. Furthermore, since the plight of black people symbolized that of other minority groups, it posed a test of the democratic system itself."¹ By the interwar years a national movement, led by the NAACP, was built in defense of civil and human rights and this movement surrounded the fight against lynching and state violence.² From its national office in New York, the NAACP worked with local NAACP branches, state NAACP Conferences and other civil rights organizations to "pierce the localism that shielded lynchers from outside scrutiny,"³ defend the lives of African Americans, and save America's "democratic system itself." These local battles against lynching and state violence built the groundwork for a national freedom rights movement.

This grant will support the hiring of a student research assistant to examine the recently digitized Papers of the NAACP which detail this movement. According to ProQuest, the NAACP Papers are "the most heavily used collection in the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress" and contain almost two million documents. This newly digitized collection is also searchable and the student assistant will examine documents related to the NAACP's battle against lynching and state violence. It should be noted, the large expense of the collection will only allow for the purchase of 13 months of access.

Yet because of the depth and enormity of the collection, the student will also have the important opportunity to use this rich collection as the foundation to learn the deep history of the NAACP and Black Freedom Movement and pursue a project related to their own personal interests. The student will encounter the detailed history of the fight for civil and human rights on a local and national level and learn about civil rights litigation, legal processes, lobbying, and community organizing. This student will discover details of the NAACP's work never before discussed in formal classes or even in published scholarship. Examination of these documents will also reveal larger questions about equality, justice, opportunity, and freedom rights.

Assisting with this project the student will learn more about the use of primary documents. In particular, the student will learn how to construct an historical narrative; the importance of corroborating and contextualizing events with additional primary and secondary sources; and learn to identify and analyze perspective and bias within sources. For instance, the student will consider myriad perspectives of the NAACP and other activists, police, lawyers and judges, and elected officials. Finally, the student will learn about the research ethics of history. Historians are guided by our sources and draw conclusions based on the interpretation and analysis of those

sources. Historians do not use sources to confirm or refute a hypothesis. Rather, historians read sources and listen to what they have to tell us.

The faculty mentor will immediately provide the student with a copy of Mary Lynn Rampolla's *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*.⁴ This book is specifically designed as a handbook and reference guide for teaching undergraduate research in history. Within the first weeks the student and mentor will meet to discuss the project and introduce the NAACP digital collection but also to discuss Rampolla's lessons on developing historical thinking skills, identifying and evaluating relevant and appropriate historical sources, and constructing a bibliography. From these initial discussions of skill development the student and I will consider the choice of keywords, dates, names, and events to search the digital collection and the student will draw upon their knowledge of the history of the Black Freedom Movement and new understanding of historical thinking skills and sources to contribute to the search list. Using Rampolla's guide, the student will learn active reading in history, analysis of primary and secondary sources, taking effective research notes, and developing research questions and a thesis. Examples of these skills will also be provided during these conversations. During these first few weeks of funding the student and mentor will also work together to identify secondary sources and ask questions about narrative and argument, sources, interpretation and bias, historiography, and relevance. With these conversations the mentor and student will initially begin searching the NAACP Papers together to become familiar and comfortable with the collection and as the student demonstrates effective research and note taking skills the student will begin searching the collection independently. Additional discussions of citations and paraphrasing, quoting and documentation along with larger consideration of plagiarism will also instruct the student in the research ethics in the discipline of history.

This project examines the national reach of lynching and the national climate of terror created by racial oppression and reveals the coordinated grassroots efforts of a growing national movement to protect and defend civil and human rights. This work employs the term Black Freedom Movement as informed by scholar-activist Charles E. Cobb Jr. who explains "The 'Freedom Movement' is a larger idea whose goal is the achievement of civil rights, civil liberties, and the liberated consciousness of self and community." Cobb notes, the Freedom Movement "recognizes that law alone cannot uproot white supremacy, ever creative and insidious in its forms and practices, and that civil rights law alone cannot create a new liberated sense of self and human capacity."⁵ Emphasizing this "long" Freedom Movement and the organized fight to defend civil and human rights reveals long-standing traditions of resistance and community organizing beyond the U.S. South and beyond the "heroic" years of the post-war Civil Rights Movement. While raising important questions about the legal and legislative struggle for civil rights, this study offers an historical examination of the local and national dynamics of this Freedom Movement which identified lynching and state violence as the central issue to mobilize local communities and to construct a national movement.

Since its founding in 1909, the NAACP built a national movement to combat lynching and state violence. Lynching, vigilantism, and police brutality were the ultimate mechanisms of racial subjugation and similar in their glaring violation of civil and human rights and reliance on public compliance and government sanctioning. Often referred to as "legal lynching" in the North, police brutality was an equivalently egregious violation of civil and human rights and the NAACP protested lynching in the South, fought strenuously for anti-lynching legislation, and equated police brutality and lynching as twin evils of the same abominable system of oppression condoned and perpetrated by the state. Attacking lynching and vigilantism alongside police

violence, the NAACP helped raise the consciousness of local people to recognize racist violence and legal injustice in all of its forms as a national phenomenon and policy which encouraged local people to identify more directly with one another despite regional differences. This movement mobilized and galvanized challenges to local political power which condoned, encouraged, protected, and perpetrated racist violence and built the foundations for the post-war Movement.

2. **Student Tasks:** *Describe the activities the student(s) will be completing during the course of the project. Explain the value of these activities for completing the research and accomplishing the learning outcomes, and building the student understanding of effective research strategies.*

Because of the size of the collection and the limited access time, the student will help examine the digitized Papers of the NAACP. Utilizing the search feature of the database, the student will explore documents specifically related to the NAACP's fight against lynching and state violence, and supporting context. While searching sources related to this particular research topic the student will also be supported and encouraged to utilize the collection to take the first steps in discovering their own project that may ultimately be used as a conference paper or proposal for a Student-led Research grant or Faculty Association Endowed Scholarship for Research grant.

Electronic access to the collection will allow the student to examine the documents from their own residence or on-campus in a computer lab or perhaps the research lab on third floor Brown Hall. As explained above, the research assistant will perform searches using keywords, dates, and names and will take detailed notes summarizing the individual documents. The student will meet weekly with the faculty mentor to provide these written and verbal summaries and to discuss the development of the larger project. The student will also be asked to identify and review secondary sources related to this research project and their own interests.

The student tasks will directly help the mentor complete two conference paper proposals and the papers, and make progress towards the completion of an article. By the end of the fall 2015 semester the mentor and student will complete a paper proposal for the National Council for Black Studies conference (submission deadline is December 31, 2015 and conference is March 2016); and a second paper proposal for the Association for the Study of African American Life and History conference (submission deadline is April 15, 2016 and conference is September 2016). Proposals will be completed and submitted by the deadlines with papers completed before the conferences. The student tasks will also directly help the mentor make progress towards the completion of an article, "The NAACP's Fight Against Lynching and State Violence in the Black Freedom Movement During the Interwar Years" through the winter 2016 semester. As outlined above, this article examines the NAACP's fight against lynching and state violence and the coordinated grassroots efforts of a growing national movement to protect and defend civil and human rights.

The student and mentor will have weekly meetings to discuss research and writing as informed by Rampolla's *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*. In addition these weekly meetings will allow for further discussion of the digital collection, secondary sources, and larger history of the Black Freedom Movement. This will further the student's understanding of the relationship between primary and secondary sources to build context, recognize multiple perspectives and interpretations, taking effective research notes, identify and ascertain the

historiography or development of this area of inquiry through published scholarship, and teach the student how to use secondary literature to identify additional sources.

3. **Timeline:** *Include a timeline for the proposed project with the milestones by semester that the student must complete.*

Thirteen month access to the digitized collection will be purchased approximately July 1, 2015. The student research assistant and mentor will begin weekly meetings at the start of the 2015/2016 academic year to discuss the development of research skills as detailed above and to introduce the digitized collection. The student and mentor will examine the collection together during these initial weeks and as the student demonstrates effective research note taking and source analysis the student will begin to examine the digitized collection independently. As outlined above, the faculty mentor and student will meet weekly throughout the academic year. At the first meeting the faculty mentor will provide the student with a copy of Mary Lynn Rampolla's *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, a copy of the finding aid of the NAACP Papers, and instructions for accessing and searching the digital collection. These materials will assist with initial conversations about learning goals, methods, and ethics as previously detailed. These conversations will be focused in the first three weeks of the fall 2015 term but will continue over the course of the academic year.

According to projections by the Office of Sponsored Programs and Director of Undergraduate Research, the student will work approximately 103 hours/semester which equates to approximately 8 hours a week. This time will be allocated to weekly meetings (approximately two hours/week) with the faculty mentor, examination of digital collection (approximately three hours/week), and review of additional secondary and primary sources (approximately three hours/week).

As noted above, during the first semester the student and mentor will initially focus on research skills and familiarizing with the NAACP collection and surveying secondary sources. As the student becomes proficient in research skills and familiar with the larger collection the student will begin examination of the collection independently. By the end of the fall 2015 semester the mentor and student will complete a paper proposal for the National Council for Black Studies conference (submission deadline is December 31, 2015 and conference is March 2016); and a second paper proposal for the Association for the Study of African American Life and History conference (submission deadline is April 15, 2016 and conference is September 2016). Proposals will be completed and submitted by the deadlines with the papers completed before the conferences. The student will also directly help the mentor make progress towards the completion of an article, "The NAACP's Fight Against Lynching and State Violence in the Black Freedom Movement During the Interwar Years" through the winter 2016 semester.

From the initial discussions of research and writing and examination of the digital collection through the fall 2015 semester, the student will take the first steps in discovering their own project and by March 31 (deadline for proposals) will complete a proposal for a Student-led Research grant or Faculty Association Endowed Scholarship for Research grant to support their ongoing research in this field. By the end of the winter 2016 term the student will also be prepared to present their work at the Undergraduate Research Program Symposium and Research/Creativity/Engaged Learning Day of the College of Arts and Behavioral Science.

As previously mentioned, the large expense of the collection will only allow the purchase of 13 months of access (ending approximately July 31, 2016). Access will be purchased with the

last remaining funds in my current Braun Fellowship. Hopefully additional funding can be secured in the future to purchase sustained access to the collection but for now current funding only allows for this one time limited purchase.

4. **Evaluation:** *Describe how you will assess student work to demonstrate that progress is being made in meeting the goals.*

Progress will be assessed with weekly meetings to discuss material reviewed and identify specific sources relevant to the project, and by the student's growing confidence and independence. Each week the student will meet with the faculty mentor to report the findings and provide written and verbal summaries from the documents reviewed. During these meetings the student and mentor will also reflect and evaluate development of the larger work and the student's own project. As previously noted, by the end of the fall 2015 semester the mentor and student will complete a paper proposal for the National Council for Black Studies conference (submission deadline is December 31, 2015 and conference is March 2016); and a second paper proposal for the Association for the Study of African American Life and History conference (submission deadline is April 15, 2016 and conference is September 2016). Proposals will be completed and submitted by the deadlines with the papers completed before the conferences. The student will also directly help the mentor make progress towards the completion of an article, "The NAACP's Fight Against Lynching and State Violence in the Black Freedom Movement During the Interwar Years" through the winter 2016 semester.

Through the first semester the student will take the first steps to identify a research area of interest and by March 31 (the deadline for proposals) will complete a proposal for a Student-led Research grant or Faculty Association Endowed Scholarship for Research grant to support their ongoing research in this field. By the end of the winter 2016 term the student will also be prepared to present their work at the Undergraduate Research Program Symposium and Research/Creativity/Engaged Learning Day of the College of Arts and Behavioral Science.

¹ Zangrando, Robert, *The NAACP Crusade Against Lynching, 1909-1950*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980) 93.

² State violence includes police brutality, vigilantism, "legal lynching," and additional acts of overt violence against African Americans condoned or encouraged by the state directly or indirectly. For example, states condone and encourage violence in their refusal or failure to prosecute mobs or individuals responsible for racist violence.

³ Waldrep, Christopher, *African American Confront Lynching: Strategies of Resistance from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Era*, (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009) 78.

⁴ Rampolla, Mary Lynn, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, (New York: Bedford/St. Martin, 2015)

⁵ Cobb Jr., Charles E, *This Nonviolent Stuff will Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible*, (New York: Basic Books, 2014) 2.

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BUDGET

➤ Total estimated budget (student salary and supplies): \$2274.39

- *Faculty Salary: If the project is carried out over Spring and Summer terms, include a \$1,000 supplemental pay for faculty.*
- *Student Salary: Include a request for funds for student salary up to \$1,000/semester during the academic year and/or \$2,500 if working Spring/Summer semesters.*

I am requesting funding for the salary of one student research assistant for the academic year (two semesters) for \$2,000.

- *Number of students: Indicate the number of students (up to 3) you are requesting. Important note: Present a project that is scalable as funds are limited.*

For this project I am looking to support one student.

- *Supplies: Submit a budget for up to \$500 per student for project supplies and explain how these supplies are necessary when including a student(s) to carry out your project. However, if you are submitting a proposal for more than one semester you can request up to an additional \$500 in supplies per student position with strong justification and rationale.*

This project aims to establish the student's long-term research agenda and funds will assist the student in building their own collection of secondary literature on the Black Freedom Movement and NAACP in particular. This funding will also pay for photocopies of primary and secondary documents.

- Photocopies: (500 copies @ 5 cents/ copy) approximately \$25.00 for academic year
- Rampolla, Mary Lynn, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, (New York: Bedford/St. Martin, 2015) \$25.99
- SVSU Graphics Center 36" x 48" laminated poster for Undergraduate Research Program Symposium and Arts & Behavioral Sciences Research/Creativity/Engaged Learning Day \$72.00

Secondary sources

- Douglass Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II*, (New York: Doubleday, 2008) \$29.00
- Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993) \$33.00
- Charles Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2007) \$34.95

"The NAACP's Fight Against Lynching and State Violence in the Black Freedom Movement," Faculty-led Undergraduate Research Grant Proposal, K. Jolly

- Patricia Sullivan, *Days of Hope: Race and Democracy in the New Deal Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) \$32.50
- Patricia Sullivan, *Lift Every Voice: The NAACP and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*, (New York, The New Press, 2009) \$21.95
- Total cost for books: \$177.39 (costs are based on publisher's websites but costs may be reduced when purchased through alternative online retailers such as Amazon).
- Total estimated supplies budget: \$274.39
- Total estimated budget (student salary and supplies): \$2274.39
- *Other Funding: Describe if and how other funds support this project.*

13 month access to the digitized collection of the Papers of the NAACP (approximately \$10,452) will be funded by the Ruth and Ted Braun Fellowship. Access will be purchased July 1, 2015 and will end approximately July 31, 2016.