

# CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

## *Critical For Political Empowerment*

The Civic Engagement Committee of the Brooklyn Branch strives to increase awareness and participation of African-Americans and communities of color in the electoral process. The committee's activities are guided by the national NAACP Civic Engagement Department, which is committed to eliminating barriers that impede individuals from full involvement in the democratic process.

The NAACP's Civil Engagement Department works to:

- increase the number of registered African-American and other minority voters;
- train African-American and other minority groups on the voting process, and improve voter awareness of civil rights issues;
- hold elected and appointed officials accountable on civil rights issues;
- encourage African-Americans, other minority groups, and individuals who share its vision to seek elected offices;
- evaluate the accuracy of census data; and
- promote election reform and enforcement of laws that promote and protect voter participation and voting rights.

Activities of the Civic Engagement Committee of the Brooklyn Branch reflect the overall policies of the national NAACP's Civic Engagement Department. The Civic Engagement Committee is extremely active in local communities. Among its many responsibilities, the committee:

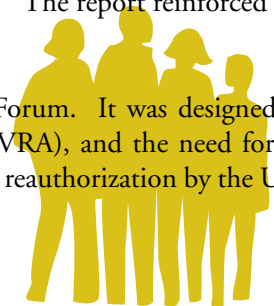
- advocates for enactment of municipal, state and federal legislations that improve the educational, political and economic status of minority groups;
- campaigns for repeal of racially discriminatory legislation, and for improvement in the administration of justice;
- promotes and works to attain equal enforcement of the law; and
- monitors all proposed legislations that affect minority groups.

With the theme *Voting Our Values, Valuing Our Votes*, the NAACP 97th national convention, held in July 2006, emphasized the continuing need to fight for, promote, and help ensure engagement of all Americans in the democratic process. There is strong evidence of the need for intensified action in this area.

Statistics indicate that substantial numbers of African-Americans and other individuals of color are not using their voting power. In 2004, less than 64.5 percent of Blacks were registered to vote, compared to almost 70 percent of Whites. In addition, in both the 2000 and 2004 elections, the percentage of uncounted votes was higher in low-income, minority communities.

According to reports, federal enforcement of civil rights laws has dropped sharply since 1999. The number of complaints received by the U.S. Justice Department, however, remained constant, at approximately 12,000 each year. A study conducted by the Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse and Syracuse University in 2004 found that the number of times the Federal Bureau of Investigation or other federal investigative agencies recommended civil rights cases fell from 3,000 in 1999 to less than 2,000 in 2003. Additionally, the report stated, the government has sought fewer civil sanctions against civil rights violators. The report reinforced the continuing need for civil rights vigilance and advocacy.

In February 2006, the Civic Engagement Committee held a Voting Rights Act Forum. It was designed to educate individuals about the history and importance of the Voting Rights Act (VRA), and the need for its renewal. The hard work of the NAACP and supporters of the VRA paid off with its reauthorization by the U.S. Congress in July 2006 for another 25 years.



The Voting Rights Act has a painful history. Following voter intimidation and attacks by Jim Crow states, the VRA was originally enacted in 1965. Provisions in the VRA provide for “extraordinary remedies” to combat blatant discrimination that existed before the law was passed. The “extraordinary remedies” were intended to address problems faced by many African-Americans and other minority groups in their attempts to register to vote. These provisions, which were extended in 1970, 1975 and 1982, were due to expire in 2007. Arguing that the VRA was just as necessary today as it was in 1965 to protect the right of all Americans to vote, the NAACP helped lead a national campaign to ensure its extension. Extension of the Voting Rights Act was an important victory, and safeguards the right of all Americans to vote.

*Arrive with Five Campaign*

The NAACP *Arrive with Five* campaign was a national voter empowerment initiative to increase voter registration and participation in the 2006 mid-term elections. The NAACP, partnering with “People for the American Way,” asked participants to identify five individuals committed to registering others to vote. In addition, individuals were asked to arrive with five people at the polls for the November 7, 2006, elections. The Brooklyn Branch will continue to educate every voter about the importance of their participation in the electoral process, and the obligation to encourage others to become involved, by valuing their votes and voting their values.

*Working with Underrepresented Groups*

A priority of the Civic Engagement Committee is working with groups whose voting turnout can be significantly increased through accelerated committee activities that spur civic engagement. These groups include young voters, former inmates, senior citizens, the homeless, and the disabled.

*Voter Education: Key to Enfranchisement and Empowerment*

It is a Brooklyn Branch priority to educate individuals about how they can use their constitutional right to vote as a powerful weapon to advance justice and equality in our great nation. Building on a year of activities that heralded in a new wave of civic awareness and education in communities of color, the Civic Engagement Committee is strengthening partnerships with civic organizations that share its vision.

The committee has placed emphasis on training members to increase their knowledge and skills in addressing civic engagement and social justice issues. This is essential so the committee is well-equipped to do critical monitoring and advocacy work. The Civic Engagement Committee believes that *Voter Education Is Key to Enfranchisement and Empowerment*.

*Join the Civic Engagement Committee*

The Civic Engagement Committee is nonpartisan and does not endorse candidates for public office. The committee, however, works to spur participation by African-Americans and people of color in the electoral process by heightening awareness about the importance of voting, and the sacrifices made to guarantee this right.

The Civic Engagement Committee welcomes partners, friends and others who know that the work of freedom, justice and equality of opportunity is a continuing journey, and that true democracy is free from barriers that limit full engagement in the democratic process. The committee calls on all Brooklynites to join its efforts to educate individuals, eliminate voting disparities, and increase participation in political processes that profoundly impact the lives of all Americans.



**MEMBERSHIP IS OUR LIFEBLOOD!  
JOIN ... GIVE ... DO MORE!**

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