



Fudge brings voting rights subcommittee to town

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THE REAL DEAL PRESS

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New Cleveland NAACP leadership team is installed Local chapter looks to regain effectiveness, relevance

By R. T. Andrews
EDITOR

The first fifty years of the history of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People — “The NAACP” — is so illustrious and justly revered that recently a Congressman from Illinois, seeking to curry favor with an audience focused on civil rights, proudly claimed that a share of the organization’s birthright belonged to his home state of Illinois.

The basis of his claim? More than 5000 white people rioted in Springfield, Illinois in August 1908 after a white woman falsely claimed she had been raped by a black man. The resulting violence led to the lynching of two black men and the burning and destruction of dozens of businesses and homes owned by black people.

The NAACP was born the following year, [partly in reaction to the “Springfield riots”](#).

The ceremonial installation of new leadership in the Cleveland NAACP this past week offers a measure of hope that the local chapter might



Danielle Sydnor

be on the road to regaining some of the credibility and authority a recitation of its initials once conveyed.

Cleveland never deserved its mid-century 20th reputation as a relatively progressive Northern metropolis on matters of race. Our penchant for pie in the sky sloganeering — see [J. Mark Souther’s *Believing in Cleveland*](#) for an account of our hollow boosterism — helped mask problems of racial discrimination that city fathers have been unable to resolve since black people began to arrive here in substantial numbers around the same time as the Springfield riots.

Cleveland eventually grew a robust local NAACP branch in the 1950s with a dues-paying roster that likely exceeded 10,000. But as eyes strayed from the prize of equity and



inclusion, the local chapter lost members, focus, efficacy, and credibility, with only its legal redress committee, operating with seeming autonomy, managing to carry the NAACP banner with any modicum of effectiveness.

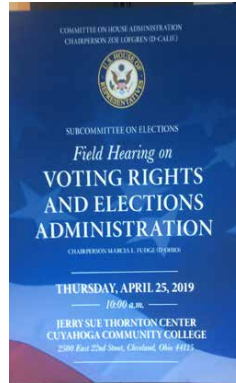
Efforts to revive the chapter or to create a robust alternative have been undertaken sporadically by a number of community members over the past few decades. [Disclosure: I have participated in several of those efforts.] These were all to no avail.

A palpable sense could be discerned this past Thursday

when a new slate of officers, led by lifelong Clevelander and finance professional [Danielle Sydnor](#), was installed. The ceremony itself, held at historic Mt. Zion Congregational Church UCC in University Circle, was unprecedented for the chapter. Serious without being somber, confident but neither corny or cocksure, it offered hope that a venerated old soldier might be restored and rearmed for a return to the continuing struggle for civil rights and equity.

In addition to Sydnor, the
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Fudge brings voting rights subcommittee to town



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EDITOR

Clevelanders got a chance to see their government in action on Thursday when Congresswoman Marcia Fudge brought the Subcommittee on Elections of the Committee on House Administration to town for a field hearing on voting rights and election administration in Ohio.

Fudge was joined at the hearing by Cleveland's three other area Congressional representatives — Marcy Kaptur, D-Toledo, Dave Joyce, R-Bainbridge, and Anthony Gonzalez, R-Rocky River, along with subcommittee members G. K. Butterfield, D-N.C. and Rodney Davis, R-Ill.

U.S. Representatives Jamie Raskin of Maryland and Terri Sewell of Alabama also participated as panel members.

The representatives heard prepared statements from a half-dozen witnesses who then were questioned in turn in five-minute intervals by each Congressperson.

Offering testimony were Daniel Ortiz, Outreach Director, Policy Matters Ohio; Elaine Tso, Interim Co-Chief Executive Officer, Asian Services In Action, Inc. (ASIA); Tom Roberts, President, Ohio Conference of the NAACP; Naila Awan, Senior Counsel, Demos; Mike Brickner, Ohio State Director, All Voting is Local (AVL); and Inajo Davis Chappell, a partner with Ulmer Berne and a member of the

Cuyahoga County Board of Elections

While the hearing, which lasted about two hours at Cuyahoga Community College's Jerry Sue Thornton Center, appeared to break no new ground, it did provide food for thought about how best to conduct elections that are fundamentally fair. For example, Kaptur highlighted the difficulty many voters have in getting to polling precincts that are regularly changed in a city like Lorain, which she said has no public transit.

Rep. Sewell was by far the most passionate panel member, befitting her representation of a district that includes such hallowed civil rights battlefields as Selma, Birmingham and Montgomery. She noted that higher turnout in a given election “doesn't mean we don't have voter suppression” and said that Alabama, where hunting licenses are accepted as proof of citizenship but student identification cards are not, the state privileges hunters over students.

Panel members and witnesses also discussed the way Ohio regularly purges its voter rolls, in effect restricting the constitutional right to vote of citizens who don't vote with sufficient frequency.

Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose came in for some mild praise from several witnesses and Congressmen, if only in comparison to his immediate predecessor and fellow Republican, Jon Husted, who is now

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PRESS

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QUOTE of the Week

If the “highly educated” Negro ... could see through the propaganda which has been instilled into his mind under the pretext of education, if he would fall in love with his own people and begin to sacrifice for their uplift — if the “highly educated Negro would do these things, he could solve some of the problems now confronting the race.

— Carter G. Woodson,
The Mis-Education of the Negro

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HONORED

Cynthia Thompson, board chair of the Toledo Museum of Art, was recognized as Museum Advocate of the year by the Ohio Museums Association at its annual conference held recently in Akron.

The award recognizes individuals who have gone “above and beyond” the normal call of duty to support their institution, serve their public, and advance the cause of the museum community.

Thompson was recognized for her vision and leadership, which has been transformative for the Museum. She has been instrumental in the Museum’s strategic planning process, giving oversight to TMA’s 2020 vision and its community-focused Master Plan. Her focus on excellence, using brilliant coaching and mentoring, have improved the organization’s capacity to deliver successfully for its visitors and surrounding community.

Her efforts as part of the campaign committee helped TMA raise more than \$46 million for the Polishing the Gem fundraising campaign, which was designed to replenish the Museum’s endowment after the 2008 crash and allow it to remain a vital leader in art education. Leading by example, she and her husband, Ronald, are members of the Founder’s Circle and established a fund that will support Museum interns, with a focus on high school students from Toledo Public Schools (TPS).

Brian Kennedy, TMA’s director, said of Thompson that “her vision and leadership are remarkable, and her accomplishments have been transformative for the Toledo Museum of Art.”

New Cleveland NAACP leadership team is installed

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new slate of officers includes Rev. Jerome Hurst and Carl Ewing as vice presidents, LaRese Purnell as treasurer, Michelle Kenney as assistant treasurer; and Ronisha Jordan and Kayla Griffin as secretary and assistant secretary. Nicky Miller, Frances Holley Blount, Donna Kelso Nelson, Dr. Eugene Jordan and Dr. Fred Harris are also elected members of the executive committee.

Only a few years ago, the chapter’s top elected officers had an average age of 85 years. It is beyond the memory of most when the leadership was this young and fresh. Appropriately enough, following brief but spirited remarks from Sydnor that evoked the spirit of [Fannie Lou Hamer](#), attendees adjourned for a meet and greet

reception to the [Third Space Cafe](#), a new business founded by a pair of young Clevelanders motivated by a desire to create [liberated spaces](#).

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Ohio’s Lt. Governor. Husted was cited by several speakers for implementing practices that were restrictive and/or confusing for voters.

County elections board member Inajo Chappell captured the panel’s attention when she had the large projection screens display long voting lines to demonstrate that uniform voting hours are not necessarily equal or fair

when applied to dense urban areas and sparse rural ones. Ohio only allows one early, in-person voting site per county, which overly burdens voters in the most populous counties. Chappell suggested that Election Day be moved to weekends and/or made a national holiday.


The hearing was conducted as a continuing response to the 2013 Shelby County case in which the US Supreme Court gutted key portions of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, partly on grounds that Congress had failed to use current data in its regular reauthorization of the Act.

In closing the hearing, Fudge said, “we’re here to fix the Voting Rights Act and I’m confident we will.”



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This Week in Politics

Lorain Co. Urban League chief running for Elyria mayor

By R. T. Andrews
EDITOR

• **The local Democratic Party** avoided disaster this week when county officials committed to preserving the jobs of current employees once responsibility for the health care of county jail inmates is transferred to MetroHealth Hospital. The commitment satisfied the AFSCME and UAW unions that their members were not being tossed out with the bath water to the extent that they cancelled plans to picket today's annual dinner, the Party's main fundraiser. Neither U.S. Sen. Kamala Harris, D-CA, nor scores of elected party officials, would not have crossed the picket line.

• **Former Milwaukee sheriff David Clarke**, who secured 15 minutes of national fame during the 2016 presidential campaign for his outspoken support of Donald Trump, will be feted by Ohio Black

Republicans this Tuesday at a luncheon at Crop Bistro, 25xx Lorain Ave.

• **Former Cleveland Municipal Court judge Craig Cobb** was appointed to Cleveland Heights city council earlier this month. While it wasn't a condition of his appointment, Cobb has indicated his intent to change his party affiliation from Republican to Democrat.

REGIONAL



• **Lorain County Urban League president and CEO Frank Whitfield** is resigning effective May 15 to run for mayor of Elyria. PIC

STATE

• **State Representative**

Sarah LaTourette, R-78, was appointed by Gov. Mike DeWine this week to serve as the Executive Director of Ohio Family and Children First. LaTourette is currently in her third term. Her district includes most of Geauga and northern Portage Counties.

NATIONAL

• **Women of color demonstrated their growing national political clout** this past week by hosting the inaugural She the People Presidential Forum in Houston, Texas. An estimated audience of more than 1000 mostly black and Hispanic women heard from eight candidates vying to become the 2020 nominee of the Democratic Party.

U.S. Elizabeth Warren reportedly received the warmest response at the forum, due to the specificity of her policy positions, a clear sign of the respect she gave her audience.

Former Vice President Joe

Biden, who formally entered the race this week and is the current leader for the nomination in most early polls, was not among the candidates who appeared. In addition to Warren, other candidates who spoke at the forum included Senators Cory Booker, Kamala Harris, Amy Klobuchar and Bernie Sanders; Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, former Rep. Beto O'Rourke, and former housing secretary Julian Castro.

• While politicians wrestle with how to respond to the Mueller report, colloquial evidence from voters at local campaign events suggests that voters have other issues on their minds. Sen. Warren's team reported recently that of the 275 questions she's taken from voters at town halls, only three were about Russia, Mueller, or impeachment. O'Rourke's team has encountered similar responses.

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