



THE REAL DEAL PRESS

VOLUME 4/ISSUE 8 • DECEMBER 16, 2018

Civic leaders convene to plot economic development, inclusivity



Don Graves, KeyCorp senior director of corporate community initiatives and relations, reports out for his group on Friday afternoon.

By Taru Taylor
Special to The Real Deal Press

The public conversation about what are perhaps Greater Cleveland's two most vexing questions — how to modernize a stalled economy and how to create a more equitable community — entered a new stage this past Thursday with one and a half day work session to plan for a community wide summit that will take place sometime next year to find solutions to these questions.

The meeting was convened by a working group assembled following a much-discussed speech at the City Club June 8 on Cleveland's subpar performance in relation to its metropolitan peers across the region and around the country.

The 15 member working group formed in the wake of Jon Pinney's talk proclaims its

initial mission as "Designing a Greater Cleveland Economic and Collective Well-Being Summit That Includes All Voices, Unites Our Strengths, and Propels Collective Action for the Flourishing Future We Want to Create."

The plan is to use a strategic planning and change process — Appreciative Inquiry — pioneered and developed by two professors, David Cooperrider and Ron Fry, at Case Western Reserve University's Weatherhead School of Management.

An Appreciative Inquiry [AI] is defined by its founders as "a science-backed and game-changing large group strategic planning, designing or implementation meeting that brings a whole system of 300 to 2,000 or more internal and external stakeholders into the room in a concentrated way to work on the task of strategic, and especially

whole system, value."

The process is designed to work in three phases, beginning with yesterday's design planning for a not-yet scheduled community Summit. The actual Summit normally follows the design meeting in 3-6 months.

Financier and former Huntington Bank regional president Dan Walsh moderated a pre-meeting press conference before the mostly closed-door planning session began after a lunch for the 85 or so session participants. Both the presser and the session were held at the Plain Dealer building on Superior Ave. Walsh introduced the professors, describing the panel as a "group of stewards" of the "AI approach that our community needs." He emphasized, "Everybody should be able to say, 'I see myself represented at the table.'"

Cooperrider's introductory remarks described the AI concept

in contrast to the static blueprint model of change. He suggested that the Greater Cleveland community could bring about "change at the scale of the whole" by amplifying strengths instead of fixing weaknesses. Cooperrider said he learned this lesson from management guru Peter Drucker, who wrote: "The task of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths in ways that make a system's weaknesses irrelevant."

Cooperrider cited several AI success stories: improving Apple's supply chains after factory workers participated alongside management in

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- The Bill Ransom Quartet will be in concert this afternoon at The East Cleveland Public Library, 14101 Euclid Ave. The free concert will begin at 4p.
- The Opportunity Corridor Inclusion Advisory Committee will meet Wednesday, December 19 at 1:30p at Woodhill Homes Community Center, 2491 Baldwin Rd. [44104].
- The Men of the Divine Nine will host a panel discussion on domestic violence Thursday, December 20 from 6-8p at Tri-C Metropolitan Campus Theatre, 2900 Community College Ave. [44115]. Woodmere mayor Ben Holbert & Betty Halliburton will moderate.
- The annual Famicos annual Young Professionals party will be Friday, December 21 from 6-10p at Third Space, 1464 East 105 [44106].

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HOLIDAY PARTY



The mood was convivial at the annual Joint Minority Bar Association holiday party which took place outside the courtroom of US Chief District Court Judge Solomon Oliver this past Friday. Pictured here are, clockwise from bottom left Judge Oliver and his law clerks; Norman S. Minor Bar Association president Valissa Turner Howard and James W. Oliver Jr., president of the National Association of Black Accountants; and Cleveland Municipal Court Judge Charles Patton and his son, attorney Cyrus Patton.

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Opening Up

The process that began to unfold this week on the civic stage with the planning meeting looking towards a People's Convention next year has so many layers that any judgment would be premature. There are, however, some clearly hopeful signs, along with a few red flags.

In the spirit of the appreciative inquiry approach being utilized in this community self-examination, we congratulate the steering committee for its elevation of the question of inclusion and equity to primacy in the effort to envision a new future for Greater Cleveland.

Ours is a city where the town fathers have for generations privileged publicly subsidized brick-and-mortar projects over investment in human development. The results speak for themselves: a large, impoverished, functionally illiterate portion of the population that not only is unable to contribute significantly to the local economy, but severely taxes resources of virtually every sector from the courts to social services to health care.

Reports of the closed-door sessions this week affirm the public reports from participants of their understanding that Cleveland cannot advance until it finds ways to create equity of opportunity for

all its citizens.

The Appreciative Inquiry approach is designed to build trust among all stakeholder groups. This essential goal was perhaps made more difficult by the insider means of recruiting community members. While raw racial numbers may suggest a diverse mix of citizens, the reality is far different if one considers the economic, social, residential, or educational standing of those who were invited to participate in the initial phase of this process.

Those who gathered outside the Plain Dealer building on Thursday were right to feel excluded. Their networks are disconnected from those

of the movers and shakers who have initiated this process. But here again, conversations with participants indicate that the process will expand quickly to include representation of those who are traditionally marginalized.

One final observation seems in order at this point. Cleveland's business and political leadership in many ways has been as stagnant as the local economy. However this current exercise plays out — we hope it turns into a roaring success — there will likely be a changing of the guard in both the civic and political spaces, certainly by the next Cleveland mayoral election, if not before.



THE EXACT MOMENT RADICAL BLACK ACTIVIST THOMAS X REALIZED THAT, YES INDEED, HE WAS AN UNCLE TOM...

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Advertising Sales: 216.282.5111

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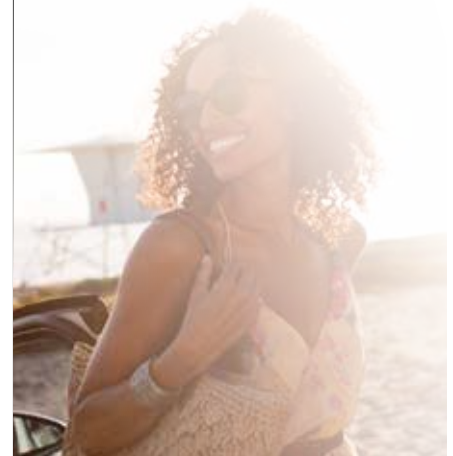
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Ohio Supreme Court Panel Got It Right on Lance Mason: Why Didn't Anyone Listen?

By C. Ellen Connally

Social workers, mental health professionals and criminologist have, for decades, engaged in the inexact science of attempting to predict criminal behavior. Sentencing judges ask themselves: Is the sentence imposed commensurate with the crime? Will this defendant be a repeat offender?

If it were possible to predict acts of violence thousands of victims of domestic violence would be alive. If the courts or society could look into a person's mind, Anthony Sowell would have been arrested long before he killed his 11th victim. Ariel Castro would have been in jail after he abducted his first victim. To the world Sowell and Castro were the quiet guys who lived next door. For much of his life, Lance Mason was the same. The only difference was that he went to top-notch schools, became a lawyer and held elective office. He also had a series of guardian angels and lucky breaks.

When the tragic saga of the former judge is complete, the names of Peggy J. Schmitz, Robert B. Fitzgerald and Patricia A. Wise will not be remembered. They were the hearing examiners who in March of 2017 conducted a hearing on behalf of the Ohio Supreme Court Board of Professional Conduct to

determine whether Mason should keep his license to practice law. Mason's disbarment proceedings were automatically prompted after he plead guilty to and was convicted of attempted felonious assault and a misdemeanor domestic violence in connection with the August 2014 attack on his wife, Aisha Fraser.

In June of 2017 the panel rendered its decision. After carefully reviewing the evidence regarding Mason's conduct, they recommended a permanent disbarment of Mason — the harshest finding that they could impose. In making its decision the panel voiced serious misgivings about Mason's "dubious explanation for the behavior (the attack on his wife), failure to provide assurances that the behavior will not occur again, and less than heartfelt engagement in the redemptive process."

They found that Mason's promises to keep in contact with his daughters went unfulfilled and that "he managed only a few letters to each daughter — and could not say with certainty that the letters that he did write were delivered to his daughters." His contacts with his psychiatrist were "short lived." His sessions with his counselors were minimum at best. Mason never "walked the walk or talked the talk" of a man who was truly sorry for his actions.

The findings of the Su-

preme Court panel were accurate predictors of Mason's future conduct, but nobody listened. Even the esteemed Justices of the Ohio Supreme Court gave Mason some slack. They reduced the findings of the panel and gave Mason an indefinite suspension — a step up from permanent disbarment. With an indefinite suspension, Mason could have at some point asked to get his license to practice law back rather than being prohibited from ever practicing law in Ohio again. Mason got a break.

Back in August of 2014, Mason initially stood accused of eight felony charges in connection with the brutal beating of his wife, in the presence of his children — crimes that had been committed almost a year to the day that he finally got to court for a final disposition. The attack included twenty punches, hair pulling, bites to the victims face and a broken orbital bone — the bone around her eye.

Admittedly, Congresswoman Marcia Fudge did not have the benefit of the findings made by the Supreme Court Panel, but she had to have known severity of the attack on Aisha Fraser. She should have been aware of a fact that Mason later admitted at the Supreme Court Hearing. After the initial attack on his wife Mason went to his sister's house with a gun and threatened suicide. The gun

"What Administrator Would Have Hired Such A Controversial Person Without Going Up The Chain Of Command?"

was easy to come by — he had an arsenal of weapons in his home including smoke bombs, a huge stash of ammunition and multiple weapons. Fudge had to have known that Aisha Fraser required several surgeries to help correct the injuries inflicted on her.

But Fudge used her bully pulpit — admittedly not written on Congressional stationery — to recommend to the then County Prosecutor Tim McGinty that Mason receive leniency. In her August 9, 2015 letter she said his conduct was a "bad mistake" and that "Lance accepts full responsibility for his actions and has assured me that something like this will never happen again." The full impact of her letter cannot be fully determined but ultimately, six felony charges were dropped and a plea to an attempted felonious assault and a misdemeanor domestic violence was accepted

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Looking Around America

Growing up Colored

By Marilyn Dyson

I checked. Google Earth doesn't show the street or even a building's footprint. There's just a parking lot. The memories are fading too. I lived in the house in the early 1950s; it's unrealistic to think it might still be there. Fortunately, unlike the house, the memories are not destroyed.

It was a red brick three-bedroom row house with a spiked

wrought iron fence around the front yard and facing a jagged brick sidewalk. The front yard had rose bushes and a few unspecified plants. A tall wooden fence lined the sides of the backyard. There was no grass. This gave Gran, my grandmother, reason to try growing vegetables; at least tomatoes and peppers. There were only two floors; no basement.

The house was old by the time I was born. My family converted the original gas light fixtures

to electricity and used the gas sconces to hold the lightbulbs. A huge black coal furnace heated water for the steam to warm the metal radiators. In winter Gran constantly watched the fire through the furnace grates. When the coals burned low, she ordered, "Get more coal from the shed and feed the furnace before it burns out."

The warm house was part of a good life at 1110 6th Street SE. To me the entire neighborhood was ideal. Everything was

nearby: a corner grocery store, a drugstore, the church and the library. Relatives and my elementary school were within blocks. There my classmates and teachers looked like me. I learned about Negro heroes: Frederick Douglass, Phillis Wheatley and Ida B Wells. I had little knowledge of the world outside my neighborhood, yet I knew there was more to life and the city than my small world. I knew almost

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Ohio Supreme Court Panel Got It Right on Lance Mason

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by the court. Mason was sentenced to twenty-four months. He only served nine. His lawyers, longtime friends worked for free. The judge suspended the court costs. Mason got a major break.

Just over a year after Mason's brief stint in jail and just over three years since the original acts of violence, the administration of Mayor Frank Jackson hired Mason. Mason got a major break obtaining a job that paid \$45,000 a year.

The findings of the Supreme Court Panel were a public record at that point, open for any prospective employer to see on the Ohio Supreme Court website. In a TV interview, immediately following the murder of Aisha Fraser, Mayor Jackson told reporters that Mason was the best qualified for the position. Washing his hands of the decision to hire Mason, Jackson said he had nothing to do with Mason's employment at City Hall.

Even if, for the sake of argument, Mason was the best qualified to be the Director of Minority Business Affairs,

what administrator would have hired such a controversial person without going up the chain of command? Jackson really wants us to believe that he had no idea that a former elected official, convicted of felony charges that received extensive media coverage just happened to get a job at City Hall? And all this occurring at the heights of the Me-Too Movement. Mason's guardian angels stepped in again.

Every year thousands of persons return from terms of incarceration. Cuyahoga County leads the state in the number of persons returning from prison. Having done their time in jail, formerly incarcerated persons are entitled to every opportunity to become viable parts of the workforce. But they must earn that chance by demonstrating a commitment to changing their previous behavior. They must compete in the employment market place like every other person seeking a job. And they must also realize that their

success or failure will reflect on the thousands of other deserving persons participating in re-entry programs. Mason and the people that hired him did no breaks for future participants of re-entry programs.

If Marcia Fudge and Frank Jackson were so sympathetic to Mason and wanted to get him a job, I'm sure they had enough clout to get Mason a job in the private sector. Mason had forfeited his right to work in the public sector.

Mason went from a judge to jail to City Hall, where he could continue his white-collar image. He didn't hit rock bottom like many formerly incarcerated persons. The doors that had been opened for him throughout his career — from working in the County Prosecutors office for the late Stephanie Tubbs-Jones; to running her Cleveland Congressional office; to a seat in the state legislature; to a seat on the Common Pleas Court — all secured with the help of Tubbs-Jones — came very easy for Mason.

He always got a break.

The fact that Mason was hired by the City of Cleveland did not cause the death Aisha Fraser. A failure to make her ex-husband fully accountable for his prior conduct and adequately assess the predictors of his future conduct and a lot of lucky breaks contributed to her death.

Sadly, pundits like me and the many others who have written about Aisha Fraser's death are merely Monday morning quarterbacks. We can say what could-a, would-a, should-a happened in determining future acts of violence by Lance Mason. The Ohio Supreme Court Board of Examiners' report did a pretty good job of identifying those predictors and determining that Mason was a likely repeat offender. Why didn't anyone listen?

C. Ellen Connally is a retired judge and former President of Cuyahoga County Council. This piece was written for CoolCleveland.com and is reproduced here with their permission and in the public interest.

Growing Up Colored

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nothing about race.

Each weekday morning, my parents left home for their jobs. Mom went to the Navy Department's mail-room and Dad to the Post Office. Gran and I stayed home and watched the white men park their cars and walk to their jobs in the Navy Yard. Gran told me, "White men dress differently from us. They don't have to wear hats and heavy coats to stay warm. You do."

My closer contact with white people was shopping downtown with Mom and her twin sister, Lil. We dressed up in skirts and blouses and added hats and white gloves for accessories. We only went to two department stores, Hecht's and Lansburg's. Mom said, "These stores have colored people working for them."

Our next-door neighbor, Ruby Proctor, was an elevator operator in Woodies', the other department store. Mom reminded me, "If you see Ruby, don't speak to her. She's passing. If a white person finds out she knows you, she'll lose her job."

At that point, I thought colored people could not be department store elevator operators. But, I didn't think it mattered. I knew we could be teachers and ministers as well as doctors and lawyers. Plus, there were the successful colored people in Ebony magazine: models, actors, business owners and athletes. I didn't see limits for what I could do; I only saw places where I could

not go. I hoped that I would never go downtown and make the mistake of speaking to Ruby.

Then, in 1953 we needed to move because the government declared our neighborhood "unlivable". My parents looked for a house near a segregated school. That's when I learned I could only go to certain schools. But a year later, after the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*, Washington's schools were desegregated.

We moved to a house in the northwest, across town from our 6th Street. This house had gas heat controlled by a thermostat, front and back lawns, and a garage. A short brick wall separated the front yard from the concrete sidewalk. The neighborhood had the same conveniences with nearby grocery and drug stores. Best of all, two blocks away, there was a movie theater with a High's Ice Cream shop down the street.

Along with the gains there were losses. The elementary school we could see from our front door was all white. I was the sole colored child in my class and all of the teachers were white. My classmates' mothers stayed home and their dads went to offices. All of the people in the school's books were white. I lost my heroes. I no longer had Harriet Tubman, Langston Hughes or So-

journer Truth. Worse, the other kids were something I'd never heard of: Jewish. Even my "all knowing" parents were perplexed with how to explain them to me. Then and there, I knew that being colored was about how we lived, what we believed and what we learned in school.

I stopped answering questions in class and at recess I only talked to the two other classmates who talked to me: Rosemary — who was overweight; and Lynn — who had a brace on her leg. Mom and Dad did their best to make up for my loss. On weekends, they took me back to the old neighborhood for church programs and to visit friends and family.

My isolation didn't last long. Over the next three years, white flight brought back some of my original life. Gradually, I had friends that looked like me. Most of our parents worked for the government or the school system. We played together and visited each other's homes. I regained my comfort level.

Although I want to believe I miss the southeast house, what I really missed were the friendships and the neighborhood support. I missed the people who gave me their concern and attention as well as those who encouraged and supported me. Fortunately, I still remember them and I know that the southeast neighborhood helped shape me into who I am today.



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Civic leaders gather to plot economic development, inclusivity

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decision-making; better morale in the U.S. Navy because E5 sailors sat at the table with 3-star admirals; and initiation of the Global Compact after then-Secretary General Kofi Annan brought AI into the U.N.'s world summit of CEOs.

Cooperrider described this past week's two-day session as the pre-summit design phase, to be followed by the Summit itself — a much larger gathering with a date yet to be determined; and the post-summit, or follow through.

Some members of the steering group also spoke at the press conference. Dr. Akram Boutros, CEO of MetroHealth Systems, said that while Cleveland now has a "cacophony of voices," the goal is a common community vision. Citing a need for "critical ideas and thoughts," Boutros expects the AI process to "democratize decision-making."

Justin Bibb, head of Gallup's Global Cities practice, spoke of reimagining how to build community trust based on a "broad spectrum of lived experiences," while David Gilbert, president & CEO of both Destination Cleveland and the Greater Cleveland Sports Commission, pointed to the 2016 Republican National Convention and Blockland Cleveland's recent convention as successes that Greater Cleveland should replicate through AI.

Asked how the invite list was developed, panelists said the



India Pierce Lee, Cleveland Foundation senior vice president, right, and Justin Bibb during a break in the Friday afternoon planning session. CWRU Professors Ron Fry and David Cooperrider can be seen seated in the background.

Summit's initial 15 members chose people that they knew, with an eye towards diversity.

Asked how AI can deal directly with basic conflicts such as racism, sexism, and class conflict, Cooperrider said that AI closes "empathy gaps" by collectively "co-creating" a future. Pressed for a concrete example, Cooperrider cited his experience in South Africa towards the end of apartheid, where Inkatha, Zulus, and white nationalists came together with the understanding that it wasn't about just ending apartheid, but rather "building the best multiracial democracy the world had ever seen."

Bibb cautioned that we should not expect too much, acknowledging that this summit would not solve the problem of racism in Cleveland.

After lunch, reporters got to hear Cooperrider repeat his presentation, this time in power point, to session attendees. He quipped about his generation not being the "greatest generation," as Tom Brokaw described a previous generation, but rather, the "privileged generation."

One of the professor's slides noted that \$350 billion is lost in the U.S. economy every year due to "disengaged people." It seemed to speak to the key community

issues the summit must address: economic stagnation and inclusion/equity.

Although Cooperrider didn't drive home the point, perhaps he had in mind this quote from his mentor Peter Drucker's 1968 book, *The Age of Discontinuity*:

"The American Negro is indeed the representative of the poor races within the richest nation. The American Negro problem is, therefore, the most important, the most acute, and perhaps the most dangerous instance of the worldwide problem. If the United States, the world's richest, technologically most advanced, and managerially most accomplished country, cannot bring about economic and social development of a nonwhite minority in its midst, then it will be taken as proved, by white and colored alike, that there is an unbridgeable race conflict. By the same token, however, our ability in this country to resolve the problem of Negro destitution and to bring about rapid Negro development may also be the greatest possible contribution to the world race problem. The American Negro represents the world's pre-industrial rural people in industrial society. He represents also the most acute problem of "colonialism," that is, of a growing inequality between the white and the colored peoples of the world."

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