

Written by Kathy

Wednesday, 18 January 2012 10:49 - Last Updated Monday, 06 February 2012 19:53

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(News Video Of Aspects Of The Debate By The PlayaT Show ( [www.playatshow.com](http://www.playatshow.com) )

CLEVELAND, Ohio-Hundreds of people packed the Lil' Africa Party Center in Cleveland Thurs. evening to hear Cuyahoga County prosecutor hopefuls Subodh Chandra, Stephanie Hall, James J. McDonnell and Robert Triozzi debate and listen to concerns from the Black and grassroots communities about the county's most powerful political office, one with the authority to recommend grand jury indictments on felony criminal charges, among other powers.

Situated at 68th St and Superior Ave. in the heart of Cleveland's inner city, Lil Africa is where Blacks often go for cabarets, celebrations like Kwanzaa, and political events for prominent politicians like Cleveland Mayor Frank Jackson.

But Thursday's gathering drew a racially diverse crowd, and a cross section of people, young and old, Black and White, middle class and poor.

Debate issues ranged from capital punishment, to illegal prosecutions of innocent Blacks by the city of Cleveland and state of Ohio.

Also discussed, among a host of other community issues, was the alleged theft of Black new born babies by The Cuyahoga County Department of Family and Children Services to give to affluent White couples, and complaints about juveniles too often tried as adults.

Hosted by Cleveland Urban News.Com, The Imperial Women Coalition, The Cleveland African-American Museum and The Audacity of Hope Foundation, in cooperation with several other sponsors such as The Carl Stokes Brigade, The Family Connection Center, Occupy Cleveland, Black on Black Crime Inc., Peace in the Hood, The Oppressed People's Nation and The Cleveland Chapter of The New Black Panther Party, the three hour event drew judges like Cleveland Municipal Court Judge Emanuella Groves, and elected officials like state Reps. John Barnes Jr. (D-12) and Bill Patmon (D-10).

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Kathy Wray Coleman, a community activist and editor of Cleveland Urban News.Com and The Kathy Wray Coleman Online News Blog. Com, served as the mistress of ceremony.

Moderated by Cleveland Ward 7 Councilman T.J. Dow, the debate forum opened with prayer from Community Activist Khalid Samad, followed by an overview by Community Activists Marva and David Patterson of the court system and the cases fought by the Imperial Women Coalition such as The Imperial Avenue Murders, the Joaquin Hicks case, and the cases of two Collinwood High School sisters maliciously prosecuted by Cleveland prosecutors for a peaceful student protest at the school in May 2010.

Abdul Quahhar and Sharon Danaan, representing the Cleveland Chapter of The New Black Panther Party and The Lucasville Uprising Freedom Network, talked about Black male prisoners illegally convicted and put on death roll around the 1993 riots at the Lucasville Prison in Oh., and Carl Stokes Brigade President Genevive Mitchell spoke on the need for the Black community to vote in next year's presidential election, and for the March 6 Democratic primary for Cuyahoga County prosecutor, judges, Congress, and other offices.

On behalf of The Imperial Women Coalition, Community Activist Judy Martin presented the coalition's courage award to Denise Hunter, the sister of slain Imperial Ave. murder victim Amelda Hunter, whose cousin Crystal Dozier was also a casualty of Cleveland Serial Killer Anthony Sowell, now on death roll for the murders of 11 Black women.

Audience members gave Hunter two standing ovations.

The Oppressed Peoples Nation, led by Community Activist Ernest Smith, called out the names of the 11 Black women that fell victim to Sowell's escapades.

After Cleveland African-American Executive Director Frances Caldwell recognized the dignitaries and candidates for office, District 7 Cuyahoga County Council Member Yvonne Conwell introduced the debate candidates [Subodh Chandra, Stephanie Hall, James J. McDonnell and Robert Triozzi]. And the debate was on with a six-member panel posing questions, followed by a 30 minute forum for questions from the community.

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Panelists were Cleveland Ward 8 Councilman Jeff Johnson, East Cleveland Councilman Nate Martin, Cleveland Jobs With Justice Executive Director Debbie Kline, Criminal Defense Attorney Michael Nelson Sr. and Community Activists Art McKoy and Ada Averyhart.

"I am for a moratorium on the death penalty," said Hall in responding to a question from Nelson about Ohio's death penalty.

Hall is the only Black and woman in the race.

She is a Case Western Reserve University police officer, former assistant Cuyahoga County prosecutor, and former common pleas court foreclosure magistrate.

Chandra agreed with Hall and told the audience that Blacks are sometimes over indicted and unfairly charged because grand juries listen to the police and prosecutors when deciding whether to bring felony criminal charges. And he said that his record as a former federal prosecutor, prior Cleveland law director and current attorney provided an opportunity to fight on issues impacting the Black community.

"I fought against driving while Black," said Chandra, who held up a Cleveland Plain Dealer Newspaper article titled "Presumed Guilty," an article that ran last year that outlines scores of unfair prosecutions by the office of Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Bill Mason, who is not seeking a fourth term next year.

Neither Triozzi nor McDonnell took a pro or con stance on the death penalty, though McDonnell said that he doubts if The Imperial Women mind "the death penalty" as to Sowell.

A criminal defense attorney and former North Roalton city prosecutor who was an assistant county prosecutor under former Cuyahoga County Prosecutor John Corrigan, McDonnell said that both Subodh and Triozzi, Cleveland's former law director with the Jackson administration, had failed to prosecute some cases that needed prosecution.

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Subodh countered that Mason's office would sometimes ignore his requests for felony prosecutions.

Under state law city law directors and municipal prosecutors prosecute misdemeanors and assistant county prosecutors, under the leadership of the county prosecutor, prosecute felony cases, some with attached misdemeanor charges. City law directors and prosecutors, however, can recommend felony charges to the county prosecutor's office to take to the grand jury for possible indictments.

If the grand jury agrees with the criminal charges, an indictment is issued, and if it disagrees, a no bill, which means no prosecution, comes down.

Triozzi said "not enough" when asked by McKoy how many Blacks are among the more than 250 assistant prosecutors under Mason.

Mason has said that he has more Blacks than former Cuyahoga County prosecutor Stephanie Tubbs Jones had.

A congresswoman for the 11 Congressional District at the time, Tubbs Jones died of a brain aneurysm on Aug. 20, 2008, less than two weeks before President Barack Obama accepted the Democratic nomination for president.

McDonnell said that Black men, only two of whom are assistant Cuyahoga County prosecutors, have to be recruited in high school to seek careers in law, prompting Subodh to argue that he increased the number of Blacks in the law department when he was law director under former Cleveland Mayor Jane Campbell by utilizing effective recruitment strategies.

Hall said that if elected she would develop a steering committee to deal with the dearth of Black assistant county prosecutors. And she said that she would support less incarceration and more substance abuse programs for non-violent drug crimes, something Chandra said he supports too.

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Triozzi told the audience that he understands that the county prosecutor should be a friend to the Black community, and fair and just in such a powerful role.

Questions from the community were solid too as Angelique Cunningham asked how the county could allegedly steal her grandchildren to give to a young White couple when state law requires that qualified family members be considered first. And she said that Black children are being prosecuted for simple fights and things as little as "jay walking."

Members of the Occupy Cleveland 11, who were arrested in Oct. for protesting on Cleveland Public Square against corporate greed and malfeasance and charged with a string of misdemeanors including resisting arrest, were there too.

Community Activist Leatrice Tolls, one of the Occupy Cleveland 11, asked the candidates if they would maliciously prosecute community activists for the exercise of "free speech," if elected.

Laura Cowan, a CNN Hero for her courage in overcoming rape and other domestic violence, asked why some cases of domestic violence are overlooked by the city of Cleveland.

And Freddie Moore, a Cuyahoga County deputy sheriff, wanted to know why state law requires that innocent people exonerated on false criminal charges must seek an expungement to clear their records.

The program concluded about 8:30 pm with prayer by Community Activist Jean Whitte, who said that "God will put the best person in the position."

With no Republican filing petitions by the Dec. 30 deadline and any independent being a long shot, the winner of the March 6 Democratic primary among the five Democratic contenders will likely be Cuyahoga County's next prosecutor. (Editors note: Cleveland Ward 13 Councilman Kevin Kelley has dropped out of the race).

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Others at the event include U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown Rep. Meredith Turner, Elaine Stone, 8th District Court of Appeals Judicial Candidate Erin O'Toole, Common Pleas Court Judicial Candidate Judge Emanuella Groves, Priscilla Cooper, Larry Bresler, Don Bryant, Teralawanda Aaron, Willie Stokes, Denise Taylor, Common Pleas Court Judicial Candidate Edel Passalacqua, Charles E. Bibb Sr., Roz McCallister, Brett Jackson, Mansfield and Brenda Frazier, William Clarence Marshall, Lytle Davis, Ann Foster, Reketta Barringer, Ray Lautenschlager, Jeanie Joy, Donnie Pastard, Darnell Brewer, Obama Campaign Associate Andre Saint CYR, Ernest Smith and Patricia Rowell.

On Feb. 4 the East Cleveland Coalition will sponsor a county prosecutor candidates' debate from noon to 2:30 pm at the East Cleveland Library, 14101 Euclid Ave. For more information contact Charles E. Bibb Sr. at 216-659-4619 or cebibbsr@yahoo.com.

The Cleveland Heights Democrats will host the candidates in debate Jan 12 at 7 pm at the Heights Community Center, One Monticello Blvd.