
THE COALITION OF UNITED PROGRESSIVES CHARMECK CHRONICLE

Coalition of United Progressives CharMeck



Greetings!

We truly appreciate everyone's involvement.

**This War on Oppression will only be won as one
mass movement.**

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Our Mission Statement

The continual unification of as many organizations as possible starting at the local level and branching out to both the state of North Carolina and then the entire nation.

Spotlight

The United States vs Billie Holiday



Billie Holiday

(April 7, 1915 – July 17, 1959)

By

DonnaMarie Woodson

When I first learned about the film “The United States vs. Billie Holiday” I was intrigued and wondered if it would be just another “Lady Sings the Blues.” But, being captivated by Andra Days’ Golden Globe Award winning performance, I realized that *Lady Day* did not come off as what I had come to know about Billie Holiday (real name *Eleanora Fagan*).

Her biography usually goes something like this. Ms. Holiday was an American jazz and swing music singer who endured a very troubled life. Nicknamed “*Lady Day*” by her friend and music partner Lester Young, Holiday had an innovative influence on jazz music and pop singing. Her vocal style, strongly inspired by jazz instrumentalists, pioneered a new way of manipulating phrasing and tempo. She was also known for her vocal delivery and improvisational skills.

Director Lee Daniels’ new film, [The United States vs Billie Holiday](#)

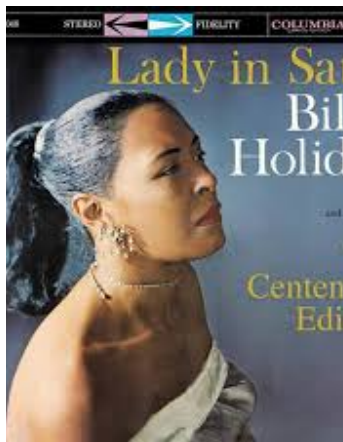


Billie Holiday (L) Andra Day in “The U.S vs Billie Holiday”

shines a different light on the “Lady Day”. The 2021 American biographical film is based on the book *Chasing the Scream: The First and Last Days of the War on Drugs* by Johann Hari.

Oscar nominated for her performance, singer Andra Day's characterization of the iconic song "Strange Fruit" as the first civil rights anthem combined with Ms. Holiday's personal struggle in the war on drugs and racism in America is powerful and resonates as a continuous modern day theme.

I first heard Andra Day's take on the film watching Oprah's "Super Soul Sunday." Ms. Day shares that, "She's [Billie Holiday] more than just a musical icon, and people are just starting to discover that. They really made her into just a tragic drug addict who sang jazz".



Billie Holiday singing
"Strange Fruit"

Ms. Day also spoke about how Ms. Holiday has been an influence in her life since she was 12 years old. Even Andra's "stage" name is a combination of her first name, Sandra (Andra) and Billie Holiday's (Day). Ms. Day refers to Billie Holiday as the Godmother of the civil rights movement and a strong, and driven champion of black lives matter.

Andra knew that as a young teenager, Holiday started singing in nightclubs in Harlem taking her professional pseudonym from Billie Dove, an actress she admired, and Clarence Halliday, her probable father. At the outset of her career, Billie Holiday spelled her last name "Halliday," her father's birth surname, but eventually changed to "Holiday," his performing name.

In 2017, Andra Day covered Billie Holiday's iconic "Strange Fruit" the anti-lynching song that landed Ms. Holiday in jail. The United States used "*Lady Day's*" drug addiction as an excuse to lock her up instead of the truth that the Government recoiled against her singing about their hate and legacy of racism.

Holiday was in the middle of recording for Columbia in the late 1930s when she was introduced to "Strange Fruit," a song based on a poem about lynching written by Abel Meeropol, a Jewish schoolteacher from the Bronx. Meeropol used the pseudonym "Lewis Allan" for the poem, which was set to music and performed with his wife, singer Laura Duncan, performing it as a protest song in New York City venues in the late 1930s, including Madison Square Garden. The song has been called "a declaration" and the beginning of the civil rights movement.



Strange Fruit, Billie Holiday
Single 1939

"Strange Fruit" was eventually heard by Barney Josephson, the proprietor of Café Society, an integrated nightclub in Greenwich Village, who introduced it to Holiday. She performed it at the club in 1939, with some trepidation, fearing possible retaliation. She later said that the imagery of the song reminded her of her father who died at age 39 from a fatal lung disorder, after being turned away from a hospital because he was a Black man.

As a result of the painful memories it conjured, Holiday didn't enjoy performing the song but she knew she had to. "I have to keep singing it, not only because people ask for it, but because 20 years after Pop died, the things that killed him are still happening in the South."

"The government was trying to eradicate her legacy," says Ms. Day. "She was one of the first people to say out loud and really understand that these drugs were dropped in our community during the first war



on drugs, in the Thirties and Forties. But she was way too famous, so [the government was] trying to get rid of her."

On May 16, 1947, Holiday was arrested for possession of narcotics in her New York apartment. On May 27 she was

in court. "It was called 'The United States of America versus Billie Holiday'. And that's just the way it felt," she recalled.

During the trial, she heard that her lawyer would not come to the trial to represent her. "In plain English that meant no one in the world was interested in looking out for me," she said.



Dehydrated and unable to hold down food, she pleaded guilty and asked to be sent to the hospital. The district attorney spoke in her defense, saying, "If your honor please, this is a case of a drug addict, but more serious,

however, than most of our cases, Miss Holiday is a professional entertainer and among the higher rank as far as income was concerned."

She was sentenced to Alderson Federal Prison Camp in West Virginia. The drug possession conviction caused her to lose her New York City Cabaret Card, preventing her working anywhere that sold alcohol; thereafter, she performed in concert venues and theaters.

*Holiday was released early (on March 16, 1948)
Because of good behavior.*

“She symbolizes freedom,” says Day. “She symbolizes equality. She represents not just civil rights, not just the Black community, but the LGBTQ community. She represents almost every marginalized group of people. She was the original ‘F**k the police.’”



Director Lee Daniels was in the midst of wrapping up the film when he noticed an unsettling parallel. He suddenly got a firsthand look at just how timely his new film project was. “We were in the middle of editing and that [\[George Floyd’s death\]](#) happened,” he recalls. “People were sending me [protest] videos of people singing ‘Strange Fruit’ in the middle of the street. It was crazy.”

Even as she was dogged by personal issues and career setbacks, Billie Holiday kept singing “Strange Fruit” until her death in a hospital room, — at [Metropolitan Hospital](#) in New York. As she lay dying, her hospital room was raided, and she was placed under police guard, police still taking her mug shot before she passed.

“She’s often painted as a poor black woman who did drugs, but that’s the picture the powers that be want us to believe,” says Pulitzer-winning playwright Suzan-Lori Parks, who wrote the script.

The wrong kind of guy. Drugs. But people are complicated, and one side fuels the other. Maybe her recklessness in choosing men fed into her thinking, I will say what I want to say. She was a really strong woman who would not be denied.



In the Lee Daniels bio-pic, Billie Holiday is not a victim. As he explains, "Standing up to injustice and power comes on really strong in our film. Billie did what she wanted to do right up to the end."

Among the many songs that Holiday is celebrated for, "Strange Fruit" will always be one of her defining works. It allowed her to take what was originally an expression of political protest and transform it into a work of art for millions to hear.

In 1999 *Time* designated "Strange Fruit" the "song of the century."

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abel_Meeropol

Editorial

Voter Suppression Hasn't Ended

By

Tarik Kiley

March 27, 2021



President Biden is expressing disapproval for a recent elections bill signed into law in Georgia according to Cnn.com. He is calling it “Jim Crow in the 21st

century.” He also has the Justice Department “taking a look” into this bill. Now, we know that voter suppression is not a new phenomenon, but it is expressly poignant given the fact that President Biden won the state of Georgia as the first Democratic candidate to do so in nearly three decades. Now the Republican leaders in Georgia are attempting to enact voter suppression measures with a bill, which Republican Gov. Brian Kemp signed into law, recently.

This bill targets African Americans more specifically, and is voter suppression, as African Americans mainly vote Democratic. According to Cnn.com, “Georgia's new law imposes new voter identification requirements for absentee ballots, limits the use of ballot drop boxes,

makes it a crime to approach voters in line to give them food and water and gives state officials more power over local elections.” Of



course, this sound truly absurd— not being able to give people food and water while waiting in line to vote?

How does this bill target African American voters? African American voters are more likely to vote absentee and less likely to have the identification

documents needed according to the new law to vote absentee. Also, African Americans face longer wait times while in line to vote, and not being able to have food and water while waiting in line could disproportionately affect African Americans.



What makes this whole thing stink of voter suppression, though is that [“Georgia State Rep. Park Cannon was arrested and removed from the Georgia Capitol on Thursday after passage of the](#)

bill,” according to Cnn.com. She simply knocked on the door where this bill was being signed into law. Why was she being arrested? Well, the obvious answer seems to be because she is African American.

But of course, voter suppression is not new at all. There is simply a new wave of voter suppression coming into being. According to the [National Low Income Housing Coalition](#),

“VOTER SUPPRESSION IS AN UNFORTUNATE BUT CONSISTENT FEATURE OF THE U.S. POLITICAL SYSTEM. LIMITATIONS ON THE RIGHT TO VOTE WERE CODIFIED IN THE JUNE 2013 CASE OF SHELBY COUNTY V. HOLDER, IN WHICH THE U.S. SUPREME COURT GUTTED THE 1965 VOTING RIGHTS ACT. THIS DECISION NO LONGER REQUIRED STATES AND LOCALITIES WITH A HISTORY OF SUPPRESSING VOTING RIGHTS TO SUBMIT CHANGES IN THEIR ELECTION LAWS TO THE U.S. JUSTICE DEPARTMENT FOR REVIEW. SINCE THIS RULING, 25 STATES CREATED NEW OBSTACLES TO VOTE”.

I suppose this was presented in all capital letters, because of the seriousness of this issue. It should be noted that voter suppression has



been a part of this country since its inception. Despite talk about equality of all men, at the founding of this country, only White men who owned land were eligible to vote. Even when the

vote was extended to White men who did not own land, for much of American history, non-White people, had been systematically excluded from voting.

While some inroads were made with the 15th Amendment where no one could be denied the right to vote because of their race, color or



previous condition of servitude, backlash began in southern states when they began to see African Americans elected to office.

Also, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, “Many

[states] implemented such tactics as poll taxes, literacy tests, and English-language requirements to deliberately reduce voting among African Americans, immigrants, and low-income populations. These tactics became known as [Jim Crow Laws](#). Efforts like the one in Mississippi and other southern states lasted for almost a century.”

Why is this relevant to what is happening in Georgia today?

Well, think about the fact that President Joe Biden won the state of Georgia with a person of color as his vice-presidential running mate. Think of the power that [Stacey Abrams](#) was leveraging with her community organizing efforts in Georgia. The Republican party which has significantly shifted right since the election of Donald Trump is probably terrified to see non-Whites gaining power in their state.

Just like it took the [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#) to significantly impact Jim Crow, it will take a significant federal response to counter the new voter repression efforts of Republicans at the state level in various states across this country, most notably in Georgia.

There was a whole Civil Rights movement about this. African Americans were beaten and jailed for wanting to vote. Peaceful protesters were attacked for wanting freedom to vote and for wanting other freedoms as well.

Now, the far right leaning Republican party wants to turn back the hands of time to a place where African American people and potentially other non-Whites were prohibited from voting.



A strong Federal response is really needed to stop this from happening. Also, African Americans need to be organized on the state and local level. Voter registration drives, souls to the polls, and other

measures need to be taken to make sure that everyone's vote is counted. State governments that try to suppress the non-White vote should be sued, and some of these lawsuits should be pursued to the Supreme Court. And of course, the US Department of Justice should investigate. At every turn, the American people should fight against voter suppression. The far-right wing of the Republican party needs to know that they are not the only voice in the room.

Works Cited

<https://www.cnn.com/2021/03/26/politics/joe-biden-georgia-voting-rights-bill/index.html>

<https://nlihc.org/resource/history-voter-suppression>

Announcements



North Carolina Democratic Party's New Chair Reception

Thursday, April 1st at 6:00 PM

Please join the NC Democratic Party to celebrate the election of our new State Party Chair, Dr. Bobbie Richardson
(Anyone on or off Facebook)

North Meck Dems Monthly Meeting

Thursday, April 1st at 7:00 PM

ZOOM

Democratic Women of Mecklenburg County

Wednesday, April 14th at 6:30 PM

ZOOM

Announcements



North Charlotte “Dem Good Time”

Wednesday, April 14th at 5:30 PM

ZOOM LINK: Register in advance for this meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwpcOGurDsjEtdUtavPVhwr8jJoseRwcWrg>

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

Monthly Chapter Meeting: County Commission Updates

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 21, 2021 AT 6:30 PM EDT

Online: us02web.zoom.us

Public · Anyone on or off Facebook - FREE



Please submit your group events to donnamarie93@gmail.com by the 15th of the month for inclusion in the Announcements

Happenings Gallery!



The Executive Corner:

Executive Director - Jade X. Jackson

Rev Rodney Sadler, Joel Segal, DonnaMarie Woodson

Coalition of United Progressives-CharMeck Chronicle

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