

**Middlesex County Branch NAACP – 2018-B**  
**Annual Report**  
**2024**

2024 was a banner year for partnerships with the Middlesex County Branch of the NAACP. I'm particularly pleased with a continuing relationship with Liberty Bank. A grant from the bank for reading was converted to address the critical need of young Black middle school students for mentorship.

Three Black male counselors at Beman conceived of and implemented a 12-week program for 10-12 young Black students. These sessions focused on specific areas of personal growth and social development, which are crucial for the holistic development of young men. The mentors encouraged participants to reflect deeply on their personal value and behaviors. The success was transformational based on testimonials from the students, mentors and teachers in the school who saw immediate changes in behavior from these students. We hope to continue the mentor program in 2025.

### **Financial**

We have worked hard to rectify issues with the National Office regarding online memberships. National office has refunded money to the branch for memberships.

We have a great deal of restricted funds, mostly assigned to our Health Committee.

Our Freedom Fund Dinner, which is the branch's major fundraiser, has helped increase our operational budget so we can do more for the community in all areas. The branch is in a health position financially.

We have met financial obligations for the Annual Financial Report (AFR) from National for the Adult and Youth Units. Thanks go out to Michael Alleyne, Treasurer and Melissa McCaw, Assistant Treasurer, with assistance from Secretary, Barbara Wade Holloman.

### **Membership**

Membership has grown due to the diligence of our co-chairs Ann Percival and Vanessa Cockrell.

Our members have demonstrated a willingness to go beyond checking a membership box but have immersed themselves in new initiatives and fundraising opportunities. The result has increased in the breadth of participation of people and partnerships within the county. I would be remiss if I excluded my own leadership development. With more visibility, come more responsibilities and opportunities to speak out. Leadership in our branch has been proactive in ironing out issues of online memberships and retrieving funds from National that were due from online memberships.

It is also important that organizations discuss succession planning. I've continued to try to identify and engage new members who can be tapped for leadership positions

We are working to adapt STRIPE and Cognito, two programs that help facilitate and streamline member fees and information.

### **Advocacy and Action**

Involvement in social justice issues ranged from speaking out at suburban board of education meetings regarding "herd mentality racial harassment" that have affected individual local school administrators, teachers, and students.

Formal complaints from Black and brown residents of the county have increased. The information below details an egregious situation that began to heighten our awareness.

Political Action Chair and former Branch President, David Roane and I spoke at a Board of Education meeting of East Haddam regarding white students who harassed a young Black student to the point that the family pulled the student from the district and the family moved out of the town. The white students called themselves the “KKK.” This very public display of racial hatred was the tip of the iceberg. Scores of residents contacted me about their experiences dating back, sometimes 20 years. Since that time of the middle school incident, the Department of Justice (DOJ) Community Relations Service (CRS) has been involved with the Middlesex County Branch as the lead to resolve issues. Here are some articles that will give you context to the story as it unfolded.

- [Some in East Haddam community say issues run deeper after alleged racist bullying of middle school student](#)
- [Family speaks about brutal alleged harassment of Black teen in white CT town.](#)
- [An Epidemic of Racism is Infecting Connecticut’s Schools, Officials Say.](#)

## Updates

We have held four meetings with East Haddam community members and the DOJ - CRS. That has resulted in a commitment from the town to hold four community conversations in the town about the school system, the town with concerned community members who want to see a change. These will be facilitated by the DOJ – CRS. I continue to be involved in the planning meetings for these conversations. The First Selectwoman of East Haddam is taking the lead at this stage.

We are aware of the new national administration's plans to decimate the Department of Justice, yet our contact assures me that we will be able to move forward with the community conversations.

On October 30<sup>th</sup>, our branch with partners, CT State Community College Middlesex, United Way of Middlesex County, and the Community Foundation of Middlesex County will host United Against Hate, a Hate Crime Forum. The forum was facilitated by a member of the Department of Justice (DOJ) and included the FBI, local police. Chief Erik Costa, Middletown Chief of Police sat on the panel as well. 50 attended and we shared resources with even more people.

The Planning Committee for the East Haddam Community Conversations has planned four “Dialogues on Race” in the town. The meetings begin at 6:00 pm with a light dinner and networking. The Dialogue begins at 6:30 and conversation starts at 6:30 pm. All sessions will take place at the East Haddam Municipal Complex, 1 Plains Road, Moodus, CT.

January 23; January 30 February 27; March 27
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Other incidents include high school students from Cromwell, teachers in Cromwell, staff and administrators from the Middletown School System, and the City of Middletown. I am not fully satisfied with the response I have received from many of the leaders. Suffice to say, there is still more “good trouble” for this branch to get into.

Middlesex County Branch of the NAACP had a visible role in supporting Debby Irving’s presentation at Cross Street AME Church. Debby Irving is the author of “*Waking Up White*,” an authenticity arrow for white America that defines how racial injustices can be changed. The responsibility lies within white America.

## Youth Council

During my first year, we struggled with organizing the Youth Council. There were countless paperwork and portal issues. We were able to enter youth names in the adult portal until recently. I thank Rev. Alan Marshall who took on the role of Youth Works Chair last year. Most recently Vanessa Cockrell has taken on the post of Youth Works Chair and still maintains the co-chair position in membership. Our Youth Council installed their officers earlier this year.



The Youth Council continues to persevere and overcome challenges not of their own doing. The resolve and faithfulness of the new Youth Chairperson and a full Youth Council executive committee has brought action to a formerly inactive council. Through all that, they are in compliance with national standards.

## Health

In 2019, focus groups were conducted with the African American community as part of a combination of health grants from The Community Foundation of Middlesex County. The results were not surprising revealing the Black community locally still suffers from chronic illnesses like diabetes, cardiovascular disease, mental health and high blood pressure. Fast forward past COVID with the inception of focus groups in the Latine community. This process was more arduous because the Latine population of Middletown is small compared to that of the Black population. The results of the focus groups were not startling but still serious enough that our Health Committee is partnering with Community Health Center, Middlesex Health, the Community Foundation of Middlesex County, and the YMCA to bring solutions to that community. The Latine Focus Groups Report, [detailed](#) and [summary](#) are linked. The report presents opportunities to address the negative health outcomes and help brown and Black people live a healthy life, no matter what age.

Addressing these issues and in partnership with Middlesex Health, we presented a diabetes program at Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church. The 95% of the participants were Black and brown men and women 55 and older and the program stressed the importance of checking your numbers, nutrition and exercise. We also gave away blood pressure cuffs so members could keep track of their own BP numbers, empowering them to be proactive about their health. As a result of these combined efforts, more than half of the participants had a follow-up visit with their provider to discuss more ways to better care for their health.

## Communications

Our newsletter “For Members Only” is published on a regular basis and has been well-received. We launched the Facebook page yet have not generated the significant traction that we need. Chair Briajh Harrell will work with our web host from Hylton Multimedia Design to establish a strategy that would result in more visibility and engagement.

## Freedom Fund

Our signature fundraiser successfully reached a financial and outreach goal. We engaged new sponsors and my personal goal of reaching beyond Middletown into the county helped us expand our vision and reach.

We had sponsorships six sponsors spanning all levels from Platinum to Bronze. Essex Savings Bank was a first-time advertiser and has approached us about a partnership. Our program book contained 26 ads of varying sizes, and we continue to fulfill our early goals of reaching beyond Middletown for support.



## Armed Services & Veterans Affairs

This was done in November of 2023. In November of last year, we honored Veterans in our community. This year I appointed Gary Wallace as the Chairperson of the Armed Services & Veteran's Affairs committee. Gary, a veteran himself, has made inroads with the Middletown Military Museum to be sure there is full representation in the museum. Gary is continuing to build relationships with the veterans in the county as well as advancing our efforts to assist in improving the quality of life, especially minority veterans (in accordance with the NAACP National Initiative).

As a result, the newly formed Armed Forces and Veterans Committee is engaged and has plans to aid Post 206 in Middletown. It's key that we help with access to resources for our veterans.

**WIN** – Our Girls Reading Program, now in its fifth year, expanded into the county including (towns and girls) – what we learned about the difficulty of finding books that continue to challenge these young ladies. The young readers had great discussion with great women leaders (mentors) for 4 weeks and ended with a completing a stem project with our youth leadership award recipient (UConn student studying engineering). We started with 10 girls and throughout the year we expanded to 17 girls. We held our first Women & Girls Summit with 17 girls and 12 women. The young girls participated in activities about advocating for a cause and for self while the women attended a session on human trafficking and another session on self-care. Both women and girls attended a session on nutrition and wellness while the girls made their own smoothie.

## The WIN Luncheon this year.....

...had over 180 people in attendance. The crowd included men, women, girls, and boys from Middlesex County, Hartford County, New Haven County, and Waterbury. We networked, recognized extraordinary women in our community, and highlighted our young girls.

## Other activities included.

- Health Care Heroes program from Black and brown children continues to grow. During Black History Month and Black Children's Book Week, we donated and delivered over 250 books to local elementary schools and read to over 100 children ages 8 and under.
- We are working together with Middlesex Health, Community Health Center, Inc., and Pregnant with Possibilities to put together an action plan to help reduce factors that contribute to Black Maternal Mortality.
- Hosted the CT State Conference WIN Committee statewide webinar: A Time for Change! commemorating the one-month anniversary of Sonya Massey, murdered by a police officer in her home.

## Partnerships

**Partnerships are an important part of our work.** The number of partnerships may have grown yet what is more important is the depth of the relationships. Some are new and others are sustained by relations built from the ground up.

- New Freedom Fund sponsor relationships with Wesleyan University, McClam Funeral Home, Community Health Center, and Essex Savings Bank
- Increase in scholarship donation from donor to \$15,000 from Mark Masselli
- The Middletown Ministerial Alliance held an informational meeting regarding the defunding of the public charter school, Capital Prep Middletown. I was able to give context to the group as they work toward an action plan.
- The Branch supported the efforts of the Middletown High School HBCU Tour. We participated in their “sendoff” with prayer.
- Members of the Branch participated in the unveiling of the Constance Baker Motley Forever stamp. Judge Motley made her home in Chester CT for 42 years. The event was sponsored by Chester Historical Society and the Community Foundation of Middlesex County.
- I spoke at a BOE meeting detailing state statues regarding hate crimes after two students from Cromwell High School used social media to detail racial harassment in the high school.
- As a result of a presentation, I delivered on branch activities for Middletown Rotary, the Executive Director of Heritage Commons Retirement Community offered to donate gloves, hats, mittens, and socks to the branch. There were over 100 items, mostly handmade. They will be used for the WIN gift donation projects and for youngsters in our other programs.

### Program Partnerships

City of Middletown Black Grant	Liberty Bank
Community Foundation of Middlesex County	Middlesex Health
Community Health Center	Midstate Medical
The Dorna Fund	Middlesex Women’s Wellness Fund
Judy Omphroy	Ministerial Health Fellowship

It’s important to carry out the business of the NAACP, but I like to have speakers at our meetings to educate members on what’s going on in the community. Here are just a few that have shared municipal progress and resources.

- Former Common Councilman Ed McKeon to discuss impact of plans to re-route Routh 9
- Developer J.R. Hargreaves and expanding plans for North End of Middletown
- YMCA of Middletown – nutrition and wellness presentation and education on properly disposing of unused prescription medication (Deterra Kit distributed to the membership present)
- National Conference of Community Justice (NCCJ) gave insight to the work they do mediation and resolution of intolerance.
- Community Health Center – Colon Cancer Awareness
- State Conference President and National Board Member Scot X. Esdaile and First Vice President Virginia Monteiro visited the branch and spoke to members.

**On behalf of the Branch, I've had the opportunity to speak at several functions.**

- Members of the branch participated in the 2024 Juneteenth Parade and held an information booth presence.
- We extended our Black authors program to include Prof. William Foster, Barbara McClane and Shanay Fulton with the goal of exposing “those who might not know” to local authors of color.
- Testified at the Middletown Common Council against the appointment of a candidate for Middletown BOE who made racially insensitive comments on a cable access program.
- I met with State Representative Brandon Chafee (33<sup>rd</sup> District) and Sen. Jan Hochadel, (13<sup>th</sup> district), to discuss inequities in education here in Middletown
- The Branch President, the President and the Vice President of the Youth Council represented the branch at the Beman School Back to School event.
- The Branch was provided an opportunity to speak at the Cross Street Church Back to School Event with a strong message about voting. “Your Only Black Job is to Vote.” We also had a table with voter registration and membership information.
- Representing the NAACP I was able to speak on behalf of marginalized students at the March 27<sup>th</sup> Rally Stand Up for Educational Justice at the Capitol.
- I represented the branch in participating in a focus group initiated by the Middletown Public School System surveying expectations for our school system and education in general. The results of the focus groups are pending.
- I was able to testify virtually to the Education Appropriation Committee of the CT Legislature regarding the refunding of the public charter school.
- Met with Chief Costa, Chief of Police for Middletown, regarding proposed changes in Route 9. For context, the Chief of Police and the Mayor are the last word on the acceptance of the DOT plan to reroute Route 9. This decision could negatively affect Black and brown communities.
- NAACP had a visible role is supporting Debby Irving’s presentation at Cross Street AME Church. Debby Irving is the author of “*Waking Up White*,” an authenticity arrow for white America that defines how racial injustices can be changed.
- The branch will serve as a resource for the elections. Chair of the Democratic Town Committee, Mike Fallon and I met to discuss how the branch could help and to clarify national and local NAACP’s commitment and mandate to not endorse candidates.
- I serve on a committee to find a permanent location for Black History material in Middletown.
- The branch, represented by Treasurer Michael Alleyne, attended conversations with Rep. Rosa DeLauro on two occasions. Intersectionality of education and job development and the opportunity to have a conversation with House Democratic Leader, Hon. Hakeem Jeffries.
- I joined Greater Hartford NAACP Branch President, Corrie Betts as panelists discussing the movie “Origin.” Origin is based on Isabelle Wilkerson’s book, “Castes: The Origins of our Discontent.” The movie was directed by Ava Duvernay and challenge the concepts of race on an international level. The event was sponsored by the YWCA of Greater Hartford and took place at Real Art Ways in Hartford.
- Members of the Branch participated in the unveiling of the Constance Baker Motley Forever Stamp hosted by the Chester Historical Society and the Community Foundation of Middlesex County. Although she was from New Haven, she and her family made Chester CT their home for over three decades.



### **Working with CT Branches**

- I was invited to speak, along with Kim Fisher, President of the Meriden/Wallingford NAACP, to the City of Meriden Human Rights, Racial Equity and Social Justice Advisory Board about issues of importance and the work our branch is doing in Middlesex County.
- President of Greater Hartford Branch Corrie Betts and I shared space on a panel discussion after the screening of *Origins*, a biographical drama directed by Av Duvernay based on the book *Caste* written by Isabella Wilkerson.

As this year ends, I am thankful for a membership that is supportive and engaged. Our Executive Committee, Committee Chairs and co-chairs, and committee members are superb examples of commitment and integrity. Thank you for your support at every level. You all are amazing leaders and set an example for our members and the community at large.

As we induct new members of our executive committee, I am encouraged for the New Year. Please remember that membership is the key to engagement and support for our programs that benefit youth and the social justice work that needs our full attention, daily. We are in this together and “we are not going back.”

Thank you for your support.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anita Ford Saunders".

Anita Ford Saunders, President  
Middlesex County NAACP