

SPECIAL
VIDEO TRIBUTE TO



HARRY BELAFONTE

Singer, actor, and activist

For his leadership of the
civil rights movement for 50 years,
and service as boardmember
for 15 years



21st Century Civil Rights: **PARTNERING FOR CHANGE**

Harold George "Harry" Belafonte, Jr. (born March 1, 1927) is an American singer, songwriter, actor and social activist. One of the most successful African-American pop stars in history, he was dubbed the "King of Calypso" for popularizing the Caribbean musical style with an international audience in the 1950s. His breakthrough album *Calypso* (1956) is the first million selling album by a single artist. Belafonte is perhaps best known for singing "The Banana Boat Song", with its signature lyric "Day-O". He has recorded in many genres, including blues, folk, gospel, show tunes, and American standards. He has also starred in several films, most notably in Otto Preminger's hit musical *Carmen Jones* (1954), 1957's *Island in the Sun*, and Robert Wise's *Odds Against Tomorrow* (1959).

Belafonte supported the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and was one of Martin Luther King Jr.'s confidants. He provided for King's family, since King made only \$8,000 a year as a preacher. Like many other civil rights activists, Belafonte was blacklisted during the McCarthy era. He bailed King out of Birmingham City Jail and raised thousands of dollars to release other civil rights protesters. He financed the Freedom Rides, supported voter registration drives, and helped to organize the March on Washington in 1963.

During "Freedom Summer" in 1964 Belafonte bankrolled the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, flying to Mississippi that August with Sidney Poitier and \$60,000 in cash and entertaining crowds in Greenwood. In 1968 Belafonte appeared on a Petula Clark primetime television special on NBC. In the middle of a song, Clark smiled and briefly touched Belafonte's arm, which made the show's sponsor, Plymouth Motors, nervous. Plymouth wanted to cut the segment, but Clark, who had ownership of the special, told NBC that the performance would be shown intact or she would not allow the special to be aired at all. Newspapers reported the controversy, and when the special aired, it attracted high ratings.

Throughout his career he has been an advocate for humanitarian causes, such as the anti-apartheid movement and USA for Africa. Since 1987 he has been a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador. In recent years he has been a vocal critic of the policies of both the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations.

Belafonte has won three Grammy Awards, including a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, an Emmy Award, and a Tony Award. In 1989 he received the Kennedy Center Honors. He was awarded the National Medal of Arts in 1994.

Learn more about the documentary of his life, "Sing Your Song"[here](#).