

## The Freedom Medal

*On this, the tenth day of October 2017, the Franklin D. Roosevelt*

*Freedom Medal is awarded to:*

### Harry Belafonte

We gather this evening at a time of both fear and hope. Much of the progress we have made towards a more just society, one in which every person has a true chance to fulfill their potential, is in peril. And yet many people—young and old, of every racial and ethnic background—have also awakened to the necessity of politics, of making sure their voices are heard.

We have a great distance to go before truly achieving the principles for which you have fought. So tonight, we celebrate you. During your 90 years of life, whenever this country took one step closer to its ideals, you were there doing everything you could to push us, lead us, further.

You were born right here in New York City—Harlem, to be exact—a proud son of this city's vibrant West Indian community. You worked hard until your brilliance as a musician led to a breakthrough, and audiences from all walks of life recognized your talent and passion as a performer.

People from across America and all over the world came to hear you and your joyful calypso. You won critical acclaim and commercial success, becoming the first solo artist to sell 1 million LPs.

But even as you found fame and fortune, you never stopped thinking about the least fortunate and most marginalized among us. Your own success never led you to forget that millions of Americans remained trapped by the brutal legacies of slavery, Jim Crow, and racism—in some ways obvious and in others more hidden, but nonetheless insidious.

For daring to demand full legal equality for African-Americans, you were blacklisted by Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy in the 1950s. But still, you never stopped.

In August 1963, when hundreds of thousands descended on Washington for the March for Jobs and Freedom, you were there marching alongside them. You stood in the crowd demanding justice as your dear friend, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke of an America in which all of God's children could join hands, free at last.

In the decades since, you have been involved in campaigns to fight apartheid and bring relief to the world's poorest. You founded We Are the World, which brought together some of the greatest talents in music to draw attention to and take on the scourge of famine in Africa. You have always used your platform to call out injustice and violence and make sure we never stopped believing that a more just, beautiful world was possible. Your voice—your life—has been a beacon of hope, comfort, and inspiration to generations.

This is certainly not the first award you have received and it will not be the last. But we are humbled and honored to stand with you tonight and present to you the [2017 Freedom Medal](#).

**Citation read by Darren Walker, President, Ford Foundation.**