
THE COALITION OF UNITED PROGRESSIVES CHARMECK CHRONICLE



Greetings!

We truly appreciate everyone's involvement.
This War on Oppression will only be won as one mass
movement.

Sections

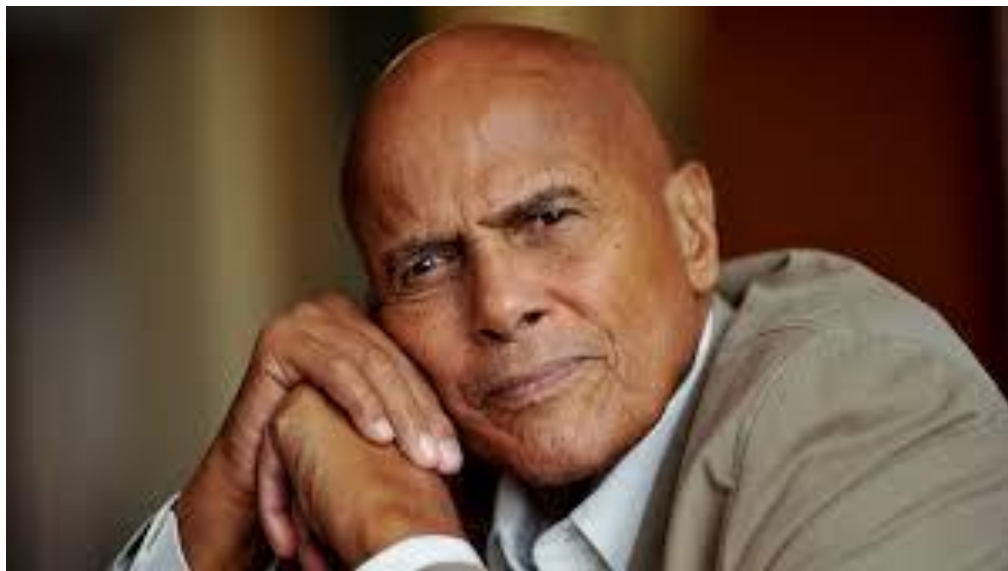
- **Spotlight - by DonnaMarie Woodson**
- **Editorial - by Tarik Kiley**
- **Announcements**
- **Happenings Gallery!**

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

Harry Belafonte



(March 1, 1927 – April 25, 2023)

**By
DonnaMarie Woodson**

For one week in February 1968, it was Harry Belafonte's interview skills, not his singing or acting, that grabbed headlines. At the height of the Vietnam War's Tet offensive, as riots were wracking major American cities and the Democratic Party was coming apart, Johnny Carson handed *The Tonight Show* over to the legendary Harry Belafonte, who proceeded to use the platform to introduce white America to his world of art and activism.



We lost Mr. B. as he was lovingly referred to by friends on April 25, 2023, a true American legend. I grew up listening to his distinctive calypso groove. Oh, and did I mention he was super fine!!!

In 1968 the airwaves were still very segregated and talk shows were definitely all hosted by white men," Yoruba Richen, director of a 2020 documentary about that week called *The Sit In*, told Matt Galloway on *The Current*.

Guest host Harry Belafonte, right, sits in for Johnny Carson on "The Tonight Show" with, from left, Ed McMahon and guests Nipsey Russell, Leon Bibb, Paul Newman and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in a February 1968 episode. (Peacock)



[Click Pic for RFK Interview](#)



[Click Pic for Dr. King Interview](#)



The week featured Belafonte’s searing, in-depth interviews with Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., just months before both were assassinated. Even before their deaths, America had begun to unravel. Big, bold changes like the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts still left Black Americans behind economically.

But the show wasn’t all politics. The well-connected entertainer gave his audience an amazing high-low pop-culture-and-politics mix. The night Kennedy appeared, so did Lena Horne. A few days later, Dr. King joked around with comedian Nipsey Russell, the blacklisted African American singer Leon Bibb, and actor Paul Newman, who played his trombone.

Fifteen of the 25 guests that week were African American. Only Belafonte could have pulled that off, says TV producer Norman Lear almost 50 years later. “He was an ambassador in both directions—to his own people and to the Caucasian community. There wasn’t anyone else like him. It is rare to this day.”

Belafonte's *Tonight Show* stint certainly thrilled black viewers everywhere. The scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. recalls being a high-school junior in Piedmont, West Virginia, transfixed by seeing the entertainer on Carson's throne. "Night after night, my father and I stayed up late to watch a black man host the highest-rated show in its time slot—history in the making," Gates wrote in a 1996 *New Yorker* profile of Belafonte.

But for many Americans, that breakthrough week is lost history.

I only found out about it myself a few years ago. The week almost didn't happen since Belafonte turned down Carson's first offer to sub for him. Despite his many successes, Belafonte had had some bad TV experiences in the years leading up to the invitation.

Harry Belafonte was the first African American to win an Emmy Award, for a 1959 CBS special, *Tonight With Belafonte*, which led to a contract for a multi-episode prime-time show. The first and only episode featured talented entertainers, black and white, singing and dancing together, but CBS quickly told the star to choose either an all-black or all-white cast, because the sponsor, Revlon, had gotten complaints about race-mixing. Belafonte refused, and though he was paid in full, the series was canceled.

Because of Belafonte's past experience with CBS, the then legendary Robert Sarnoff, head of NBC's parent company RCA, personally lobbied Belafonte to do the *Tonight Show*, promising him control of the guest list and pitching it as an important step for race relations. Belafonte accepted. He negotiated a good deal with NBC: He'd sing a song in place of Carson's droll monologue, and he wouldn't pitch products or do commercial lead-ins like Carson did; that would be the job of sidekick Ed McMahon. He would also have total control of the guest list, though he agreed to show it to NBC higher-ups.

“The Sit-In” Documentary produced in 2020 by the Peacock Channel unveils never-before-seen footage of this historic week, much of which was lost to history because the shows were taped over to save space in the vault. Director Yoruba Richen says this presented a challenge when making the film, but they were able to piece together as much as they could from other historical accounts of the week.

A Live Event Celebrating The Sit-In: Harry Belafonte Hosts the Tonight Show, hosted by Joy Reid

Click Pic for The Sit-In Celebration!

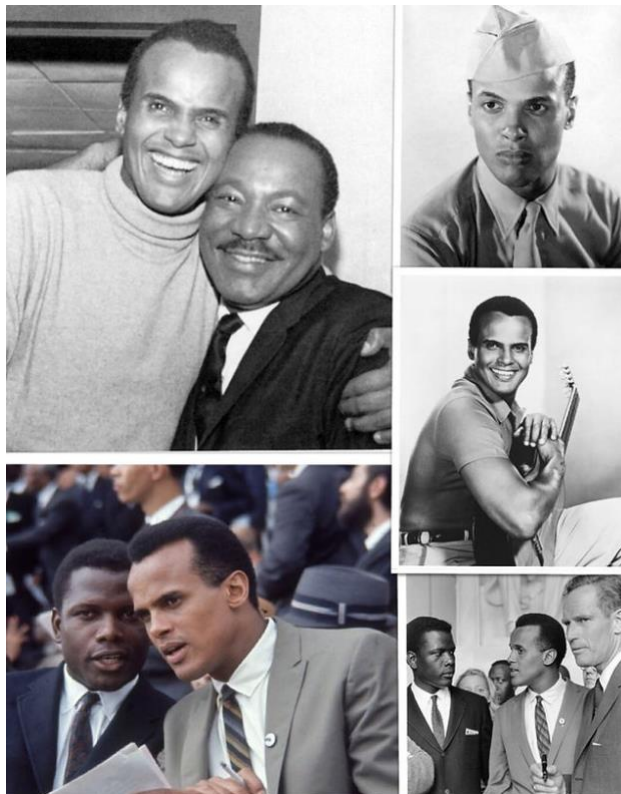


LEGACY



Harry Belafonte (born Harold George Bellanfanti Jr.; March 1, 1927 – April 25, 2023) was an American singer, actor and activist, who popularized calypso music with international audiences in the 1950s. Belafonte is one of the few performers to have received an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony (EGOT). He earned his career breakthrough with the album *Calypso* (1956), which was the first million-selling LP by a single artist.

Being a radical was essential to how Belafonte defined himself. He



never lost his movie-star looks or his hunger for radical change. In 2013, he was awarded the NAACP's highest honor, the Spingarn Medal. He said during his acceptance speech that what was missing from the contemporary struggle for freedom is "radical thought."

Blessed with looks, wealth and fame, he could have been content with being the King of Calypso. But he made another choice. He made his biggest contributions offstage.

Belafonte is survived by his wife Pamela, his children Adrienne Belafonte Biesemeyer, Shari, Gina, David Belafonte, two stepchildren Sarah Frank and Lindsey Frank and eight grandchildren.

Belafonte with wife Pamela



REST IN POWER ☹️

Works cited:

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

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/harry-belafonte-tonight-show-1.6823376#:~:text=For%20one%20week%20in%201968,includin%20Martin%20Luther%20King%20Jr.>

<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/49-years-ago-harry-belafonte-hosted-the-tonight-show-and-it-was-amazing/>

<https://www.nbclosangeles.com/entertainment/the-sit-in-details-the-historic-week-harry-belafonte-hosted-the-tonight-show/2426342/>

<https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/25/entertainment/harry-belafonte-death/index.html>

Editorial

Drew Kromer Infuses His Youth into the Process

By
Tarik Kiley

5/01/2023

The recent contest for Chair of the Mecklenburg County Democratic Party had me torn. Both Drew Kromer, and his

Drew Kromer MCDP Chair



opponent, Braxton Becoats, were both young, intelligent men, who were equally qualified for the position. Becoats is a Morehouse alumnus and proved to be a very compelling speaker. Becoats is also the President of the African American Caucus of the

Mecklenburg County Democratic Party. But Kromer had the golden ticket—fundraising experience.

During a debate between Kromer and Becoats, Becoats admitted that he didn't have fundraising experience. This put Kromer into a better light, because having an adequate source of funds is a big deal for the party in Mecklenburg County. According to NewsObserver.com, "During [Kromer's] time with the Precinct 206 Democrats, the group raised \$150,000, a news release said. So, Kromer, definitely has the fundraising experience that will be crucial for his success as a leader of the local party.



Kromer succeeds Jane Whitley who was a popular Chair of the Mecklenburg County Democratic Party, and as a result has a high bar set for him. According to QCNerve.com,

“The 26-year-old Kromer succeeded Jane Whitley, who announced she would not seek reelection after serving three terms (six years) as chair. Kromer beat opponent Braxton Becoats, 28, with 78% of the vote during Saturday’s vote, which consisted of nearly 350 voting delegates representing Mecklenburg County’s 195 precincts.” His win is a sign of the times, and affirms the need for change, and for the youth to step forward into engaging their communities.

Also, Kromer is aware of the lack of voter turnout in Mecklenburg County and wants to work to fire up the base. According to QCNerve.com, “Among Kromer’s top priorities is what appears to be a certain apathy among Democratic voters in Mecklenburg County, who saw only a 44% turnout in the 2022 elections, much lower than comparable areas such as Wake County.” Kromer realizes that there is apathy, and truly wants to do something about it. He points out that Democrats in Mecklenburg County can easily become complacent in areas where they know they will win the local races.



Anderson Clayton

It is really refreshing to have such young men run for a position with so much responsibility. It is important for young people to engage in the process, and it is really inspiring to have Drew Kromer in a position where he can bring such a youthful perspective. Kromer will also be joined by another youthful leader, Anderson Clayton, who is the newly elected Chair of the North Carolina Democratic Party. She is 25 years old.

What are Kromer’s plans more specifically for the party?

According to Charlotte.Axios.com, “Kromer, an employment law attorney, says Democrats need to engage underrepresented voters and increase attention to precincts in communities of color. Black turnout was 38% in Mecklenburg, according to an Axios analysis of North Carolina and Mecklenburg board of elections data.

Kromer also wants to hire an executive director and split the county’s 195 precincts into regional groups. Many precincts are led by a couple of people and clustering them together could build community and drive turnout. His goal is to raise at least \$100,000, as party fundraising lags in Mecklenburg compared to other urban counties, Axios previously found.” So, Kromer has some progressive ideas for the party.

It should also be noted that Kromer was very active in organizing his precinct while a student at Davidson University, and that he has recently graduated from UNC Chapel Hill, and works now as an employment law lawyer. According to NewsObserver.com, “He has served as the vice chair of the College Democrats of America, was a delegate to the 2020 Democratic National Convention and served on the N.C. Democratic Party State Executive Committee.”



Kromer won 78% of the vote at the Mecklenburg County Democratic Party’s 2023 Convention. According to QCityMetro.com, “The party convention, held virtually, drew more

than 400 participants, including 347 voting delegates from the county’s 195 precincts.” Hopefully, the youthful Kromer will continue to use his youth, vision, and drive to lead the Mecklenburg County Democratic Party into a more progressive future.

Works Cited

<https://qcnerve.com/nooze-hounds-mecklenburg-county-democratic-party-chair-drew-kromer/>

<https://charlotte.axios.com/322433/young-people-want-to-reenergize-mecklenburg-county-democrats/>

<https://qcitymetro.com/2023/04/25/drew-kromer-elected-chair-mecklenburg-democratic-party/>

https://www.newsobserver.com/news/politics-government/article274775161.html?utm_source=ground.news&utm_medium=referral

Announcements



Democrats of North Mecklenburg:

Monthly Meeting

Thursday, May 4th at 6:30 PM

(Email democrats@demsofnorthmeck.org for the Zoom Link)

Democratic Women of North Mecklenburg County

May Membership Meeting

Wednesday, May 10th

Caldwell Presbyterian Church

6:30 pm – Meet and Great

7:00pm Program

N. Meck Progressives

Monthly Meeting, Monday, May 8th

6:30 pm



**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:

**Rev Rodney Sadler, Joel Segal, DonnaMarie Woodson
Rev Glencie Rhedrick**

Coalition of United Progressives-CharMeck Chronicle

Editor: DonnaMarie Woodson

Contributor: Tarik Kiley