



*Statement of Rev. Dr. Wendell Anthony*

**GREETINGS FOR NAACP DETROIT BRANCH FREEDOM FUND LAUNCH!**  
**February 12, 2026**

**DETROIT** – Good evening to everyone. Thank you so much for being here on this historic occasion. It is historic because it is on this day 117 years ago that the NAACP was founded. It was founded by men and women like many of you who were committed and dedicated to the cause of freedom, democracy, peace, and justice. That cause has never changed. As a matter of fact, 117 years later, it has been escalated. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., called it the *“fierce urgency of now.”* Fannie Lou Hamer said she was, *“Sick and tired of being sick and tired.”* John Lewis said, *“We all should be engaged in some good trouble.”* Abraham Joshua Heschel made it very clear that, *“...indifference to evil is worse than evil itself, that in a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible.”* We are here as responsible people who believe in the cause for freedom and justice.

Let me thank our chairpersons, Ms. Brittany Lavis of DMC, Mr. Dennis Archer, Jr., of Sixteen42 Ventures, and of course the longest serving Senior Corporate Chair, Mr. Gary Torgow, Executive Chairman of Huntington Bank. As we gather here tonight, we are all called to do more. Now is not the time for any of us to sit on accomplishments of the past. We must in fact stand upon the critical possibilities for our future. Ida B. Wells Barnett, one of the founders of the NAACP said, *“If this work can contribute in any way towards proving this, and at the same time arouse the conscious of the American people to a demand for justice to every citizen, and punishment by law for the lawless, I shall feel I have done my race a service.”* Beloved we are here because we choose to do service.

In this so called month of Black History, celebrating the centennial year since Carter G. Woodson created Negro History Week, then Negro History Month, and now the observed African History Month, even though we know our history is not on a one month a year basis, but it is every day, every week, and every month during the year. Ivan Van Sertima told us that we were here before Columbus. African Mariners sailed the oceans from Africa to the Caribbean, to Europe, to the Americas, around the world and back home for hundreds of years before the Mayflower ever set sail. But tonight, I'm not here to give you a history lesson, but to encourage us all to go forward in a positive direction. That direction leaves us with but one choice. It is rooted in the theme that we have selected for this year's dinner. The theme for the 71<sup>st</sup> Fight For Freedom Fund Dinner is **LIBERTY OR OPPRESSION, THE CHOICE IS OURS.** At a time when ICE leaves us cold in cities throughout America, when terrorists who used to wear hoods have now traded them in to wear masks, when threats are being made to nationalize elections against the constitution of the United States, when dictators are lifted up as heroes and private citizens exercising their constitutional rights to engage in nonviolent protests are counted out as zeros, the time is now. Even now we are being taken back 250 years. On the eve of the supposed celebration of 250 years of American democracy, as the first African American President and first African American First Lady have been portrayed as gorillas, it is symptomatic of the disease of racism and discrimination that has infected the political bloodline of America. Therefore, at a time when racial discrimination, antisemitism, anti-women, anti-diversity,

anti-history, just anti-freedom is at an all-time high, our most critical advocacy must not be at an all-time low. The NAACP needs you. Our nation needs you. The world needs you.

Our Fight For Freedom Fund Dinner as you know is more than a dinner. It is a historic assembly that serves the nation as a call to action – a call to action to get engaged in community, a call to action to get engaged in our country, and a call to action to get engaged with our neighbor. The NAACP Detroit Branch is committed to this cause. We are prepared for this work. We will not surrender our claim to all the benefits of this nation to those who would separate us from this promise, its obligation, and its responsibility to be a place of the people, for the people, and by the people. We have come too far as a people to be turned back now. So we will continue to,

*“Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,  
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us.*

*Facing the rising sun, of our new day begun,  
Let us march on till victory is won.”*

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