

# *U.S. actor and activist Harry Belafonte dies at 96*

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**Trailblazing Black actor and singer known as ‘King of Calypso’ was involved in US civil rights movement in the 1960s.**

New York, April 25 (RHC)-- Harry Belafonte, a singer, songwriter and groundbreaking actor who started his entertainment career belting, Day O, in his 1950s hit song “Banana Boat” before turning to political activism, has died at the age of 96, the New York Times reported. The cause of Belafonte’s death was congestive heart failure, his longtime spokesperson Ken Sunshine told the Times on Tuesday.

As a Black leading man who explored racial themes in 1950s movies, Belafonte would later move on to working with his friend Martin Luther King Jr during the United States civil rights movement in the early 1960s. He became the driving force behind the celebrity-studded, famine-fighting hit song, *We Are the World*, in the 1980s.

Belafonte once said he was in a constant state of rebellion that was driven by anger. "I've got to be a part of whatever the rebellion is that tries to change all this," he told the *New York Times* in 2001. "The anger is a necessary fuel. Rebellion is healthy."

Belafonte was born in New York City's borough of Manhattan but spent his early childhood in his family's native Jamaica. Handsome and suave, he came to be known as the "King of Calypso" early in his career.

He was the first Black person allowed to perform in many plush nightspots and also had racial breakthroughs in movies at a time when segregation prevailed in much of the United States.

In the 1960s, he campaigned with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and in the 1980s, he worked to end apartheid in South Africa and coordinated Nelson Mandela's first visit to the United States.

Harry Belafonte travelled the world as a goodwill ambassador for UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, in 1987 and later started an AIDS foundation. In 2014, he received an Academy Award for his humanitarian work.

Belafonte provided the impetus for *We Are the World*, the 1985 all-star musical collaboration that raised money for famine relief in Ethiopia. After seeing a grim news report on the famine, he wanted to do something similar to the fund-raising song, *Do They Know It's Christmas?*, by the British supergroup Band Aid a year earlier.

*We Are the World* featured superstars such as Michael Jackson, Stevie Wonder, Bruce Springsteen, Bob Dylan, Ray Charles and Diana Ross and raised millions of dollars.

"A lot of people say to me, 'When as an artist did you decide to become an activist?'" Belafonte said in a National Public Radio interview in 2011. "I say to them, 'I was long an activist before I became an artist.'"

Even in his late 80s, Belafonte was still speaking out on race and income equality and urging President Barack Obama to do more to help the poor. He was a co-chair of the Women's March on Washington held the day after Donald Trump was inaugurated as president in January 2017.

Belafonte's politics made headlines in January 2006 during a trip to Venezuela when he called President George W Bush "the greatest terrorist in the world". That same month, he compared the U.S. Homeland Security Department with the Gestapo of Nazi Germany.

An anthology of his music was released to mark Belafonte's 90th birthday on March 1, 2017. A few weeks before the launch, Belafonte told *Rolling Stone* magazine that singing was a way for him to express injustices in the world. "It gave me a chance to make political commentary, to make social statements, to talk about things that I found that were unpleasant – and things that I found that were inspiring," he said.

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