

# Top Journalist, SCLC Board Member Bankole Thompson Reflects on Kamala Harris and MLK's Civil Rights Group's Convention

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[/EINPresswire.com/](https://EINPresswire.com/) -- Bankole Thompson, one of the nation's preeminent journalists and a standard-bearer for economic justice, will be among conscientious leaders participating in the 65th Annual Convention of the historic Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) Aug. 9-10 in Atlanta, the home of the signature civil rights organization founded by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who served as its first president.

Thompson, a leading public opinion shaper who serves on the National Board of SCLC, is the dean of The PuLSE Institute, an independent and non-partisan anti-poverty think tank headquartered in Detroit, which was founded several years ago based on his influential work on race, democracy and poverty. The institute has a National Advisory Board, made up of national and international luminaries who collectively bring more than a century of anti-poverty work to an organization that is championing equitable policies.

He is a twice-a-week opinion columnist at The Detroit News, where his column on the presidency, public leadership, social and economic issues appears on Mondays and Thursdays in the newspaper. He is considered the premier Black opinion journalist in the battleground state of Michigan and is known for pushing the envelope and holding the powerful accountable.

Thompson, the former longtime editor and intellectual voice of the Michigan Chronicle, the state's African American newspaper, was one of the first Black journalists in the nation to conduct a series of exclusive sit-down interviews with former President Barack Obama during the groundbreaking 2008 presidential campaign. He wrote a pair of books on the Obama



Bankole Thompson, a nationally acclaimed journalist and standard-bearer for economic justice, will be joining conscientious leaders this week in Atlanta for the 65th Annual Convention of the historic Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).

presidency.

He also served as a special correspondent and analyst for Inter Press Service (IPS) North America Bureau at the United Nations in New York, doing analyses on cutting-edge global issues affecting marginalized communities as well as contributed columns for The Guardian the noted British newspaper.

In 2020, he led a public advocacy for a racially diverse national ticket during the Democratic presidential campaign, and was invited by CNN anchor and chief national correspondent John King to respond to the historic selection of Vice President Kamala Harris as then candidate Joe Biden's running mate. Thompson wrote a searing column taking Biden to task and insisting that a Black person must be on the ticket as the Democratic flagbearer was nearing the VP selection, a piece which King described as a harsh take on Biden's need to choose a Black woman.

In a monumental 2024 presidential race that could likely make Harris the first African American female president, the SCLC Convention offers immense opportunity to discuss and reflect on the modern day challenges facing Black America and the way forward to preserve American democracy.

"SCLC was born out of the fierce urgency of now to redeem the soul of America and the time we are in calls for nothing less," Thompson said. "This is an opportunity for us to not only look back at the gallant victories that were registered under Dr. King's leadership, but also to immediately break new ground for pragmatic leadership that meets the demands and expectations of Black America in the modern era."

For Thompson, Harris' candidacy for president should be a reset for Black opportunity and wellbeing.

"The problem of high unemployment, inflation, student debt, unspeakable police violence on Black bodies, and a host of other issues suffocating life in Black communities across our nation, calls on us and the entire people of conscience to respond with vision and vigor," Thompson said. "The Harris candidacy should speak directly to these issues. My hope is that the meeting in Atlanta will produce actionable decisions that will not only take this organization forward, but also inspire and engender growth and progress in the Black community."

SCLC is historically positioned to lead that discussion given the massive role it played during the Civil Rights Movement under Dr. King.

Now under the chairmanship of top King lieutenant, Reverend Dr. Bernard LaFayette Jr., who led the 1968 Poor People's Campaign, SCLC has an opportunity to be a vanguard for the soundboard for the Black community.

Thompson accepted the invitation of LaFayette, one of his mentors to join the SCLC National

Board in August of 2023. LaFayette, who initiated the historic civil rights campaigns in Selma, the cradle of the Civil Rights Movement, and was a co-founder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, has long admired Thompson's courage, intellect, and the depth of his work. He once described the journalist as a "remarkable person with many talents and powerful passion."

"We have an obligation to not look the other way on the issues confronting the Black community. It is imperative that we not only speak out about the multitude of challenges facing us, but also strongly advocate for policies that will bring about reparatory justice across the spectrum of the Black world," Thompson said. "That is why the candidacy of Vice President Kamala Harris is not only central in raising the Socratic questions of this moment, but also in demanding a redemptive need for healing in American democracy as it relates to Black lives."

Thompson's latest book, *Fiery Conscience*, which documents his years of speaking truth to power was launched last October at Dillard University in New Orleans, where he serves on the Executive Board of the Center for Racial Justice at one of the nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

The book which received a definitive review in *Forbes* magazine on April 2 underscoring how his work resonates around the nation, was also recently listed in the Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York. At the Schomburg, the world's leading repository on the global Black experience, Thompson's book is a reference for future scholars, students and individuals looking to engage issues dealing with Black existence in the modern era and for posterity.

Janis F. Kearney, who served as the first presidential diarist in the history of the White House under President Bill Clinton, and a former fellow at Harvard University's W.E.B. DuBois Institute, wrote the book's epilogue.

"It is gratifying for a native of the Arkansas Delta region and child of cotton sharecroppers to know that we still have a social commentator and leader who remains an unapologetic advocate for the poor and downtrodden. While American politics is oftentimes a murky, messy undertaking; the practical, realistic, yet hopeful Bankole Thompson knows that good politics can mean social and economic change for the masses. And, that good politics can result in policies, laws and civil actions that make life better for the least of us and addresses the dignity of all—including America's poorest," Kearney wrote. "But, good politics doesn't just happen. It needs advocacy and fiery voices like Bankole Thompson's. Voices that worry the lawmakers at night, that remain, like 'earworms' in their subconscious as they make and act on decisions that are crucial and life-changing for everyday Americans."

Reverend Leonard L. Hamlin Sr., the Canon Missioner and Minister of Equity and Inclusion at the Washington National Cathedral is among those praising the book.

“The problems of our past are not resolved by turning a blind-eye, or by commitment to silence. Bankole Thompson’s needed witness displayed a courage and faith that inspires us to move beyond complacency and into prophetic action. His ‘Impactful Journalism’ has raised the uncomfortable questions and exposed circumstances that were in need of transformation,” Hamlin wrote in his endorsement of the book. “It is a must read for those who have a concern for where we have been but more importantly for where we are headed as a community. By reading this work I was inspired to remember the words of Maya Angelou that stated, ‘You can’t really know where you are going until you know where you have been.’”

Ron Fournier, who served as White House correspondent, and Washington bureau chief for the Associated Press, during which he covered three presidential administrations including Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama praised *Fiery Conscience* as a “timely tome,” while calling Thompson, “the soul of Detroit” who is “prodding his readers to heed the fierce urgency of now.”

Sister Simone Campbell, the leading anti-poverty and racial justice champion in the modern American Catholic Church, who received the 2022 Presidential Medal of Freedom, has followed Thompson’s work over the years.

“In the midst of these turbulent times in our nation, we need *Fiery Conscience* more than ever. We are all called to speak out for the sake of truth and struggle together across divides to realize a justice that includes all. Bankole Thompson does just that and his witness can nourish our spirits,” Sister Campbell wrote in her endorsement of the book.

Civil rights leader the Rev. Jesse Jackson Sr., and the Rainbow PUSH Coalition honored Thompson with the Let Freedom Ring Journalism Award in January of 2018 during a ceremony to mark the 50th anniversary death of Dr. King. He was recognized as a force for economic justice in vein of Dr. King and for being a preeminent voice of conscience and courage.

The National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women’s Clubs, Inc founded in 1935, in May of 2014, presented Thompson with its coveted Frederick Douglass Award during the group’s Founder’s Day Luncheon in Detroit. The group hailed him for using his voice and pen in the tradition of the 19th century abolitionist Frederick Douglass to speak to the modern-day challenges and issues involving the Black freedom movement and supporting the advancement of African American women.

A sought-after speaker, Bankole Thompson, over the years continues to keynote and address many diverse and prominent organizations around the country including major corporations, cultural and academic institutions as well as civil rights organizations.

In February of 2022, he delivered the keynote lecture for the Ivy League school Brown University’s Black History Month Forum under the theme: Race and Democracy in the Era of Black Lives Matter: Why Major Institutions Must Address the Fierce Urgency of Racial Justice with

opening and closing remarks given by Brown President Christina Paxson.

In May of 2024, he gave the closing keynote address at a National Urban Summit organized and hosted by Wayne County Community College District Chancellor Dr. Curtis Ivery under the theme: New Visions of Integration and Civil Rights in American Democracy, joining other speakers such as Harvard University dean Tomiko Brown-Nagin, Georgetown University Law Professor Sheryll D. Cashin, University of California-Berkeley Professor John A. Powell and others.

In October of 2021, The Daily Princetonian, Princeton University's daily independent student newspaper invited him to join its Forum on Opinion Journalism to discuss the franchise of opinion journalism and democracy before aspiring journalists at the Ivy League school.

In February of 2020, he gave the keynote address at Michigan State University's 20th Annual Dr. William G. Anderson Slavery to Freedom: An American Odyssey Lecture Series titled: Black Lamentations: The Redemptive Need for Healing in American Democracy. Previous speakers of the series include late civil rights heroes Congressman John Lewis and humanitarian Harry Belafonte.

In 2017, during the height of the historic Flint water crisis, he gave the keynote for the Flint NAACP 36th Annual Freedom Fund Dinner themed: Boldness in the Face of Adversity.

In 2015, the Detroit Regional Office of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission named him speaker for the EEOC's 50th Anniversary Celebration and presented him with an award for his "valuable contributions of using journalism as a tool to break down stereotypes, help educate, present truth and influence the public."

In 2011, he was named the keynote speaker for the Providence NAACP 98th Freedom Fund Dinner in Providence, Rhode Island under the banner theme: Affirming America's Promise. That same year, he spoke at the Federal Bench and Bar Conference for the Eastern District of Michigan on the topic, "Media and the Law."

In 2012, he accepted the invitation of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the first Jewish organization in the nation to seek contact with Germany after the Holocaust, to deliver the keynote address for the AJC's Annual Distinguished Leadership Dinner at the Townsend Hotel in Birmingham, Michigan.

In 2012, Nancy Schlichting, the former CEO of Henry Ford Health System invited him to serve as the keynote speaker for the 13th Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day Celebration at Henry Ford Health System, where he challenged doctors and healthcare administrators to push for health equity in one of the nation's largest healthcare organizations with 27,000 employees.

In recognition of his work as a journalistic thought leader, the University of Michigan Bentley

Historical Library, which houses the papers of every Michigan governor, wrote a letter to Thompson in 2015 to formally request to establish the Bankole Thompson Papers, a comprehensive physical and digital collection to document and preserve his work for scholars, students and for posterity.

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