

Bankole Thompson to Deliver Juneteenth Opening Keynote at 15th Annual National Civil Rights Conference in Detroit

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[/EINPresswire.com/](https://EINPresswire.com/) -- Nationally acclaimed Detroit journalist, author, and standard-bearer for economic justice issues Bankole Thompson will deliver the opening keynote address on Friday, June 19, 2026, at the 15th Annual National Civil Rights Conference, organized by the Florida-based National Education and Empowerment Coalition in Detroit.

Thompson's keynote, titled "The Battle for America's Story: Media, Power and Economic Justice," will examine the role of journalism, public narrative, and democratic accountability in shaping the nation's pursuit of economic justice and inclusive opportunity. His address comes at a pivotal moment in American life, as questions of representation, truth, power, and economic equity increasingly define the national conversation.

The 2026 National Civil Rights Conference will be held June 18-20, 2026, at the Curtis L. Ivery Downtown Campus of Wayne County Community College District, bringing together civil rights leaders, college professors, policymakers, faith leaders, scholars, and advocates from across the nation. The 2025 conference was held at Fisk University, continuing the conference's tradition of convening national voices around the most pressing issues facing American democracy and civil society.

A major highlight of this year's conference will be the presentation of the 2026 Civil Rights and Social Justice Award to Dr. Curtis L. Ivery, Chancellor of Wayne County Community College District. Dr. Ivery is being recognized for his distinguished leadership in higher education and his longstanding commitment to expanding educational opportunity, advancing racial equity, and championing economic justice for underserved communities. Under his leadership, Wayne



Bankole Thompson is one of the nation's most trusted interpreters of the complex forces shaping democracy and economic justice.

County Community College District has emerged as a national model for educational access, workforce development, and community empowerment.

"Dr. Curtis L. Ivery represents the very best of what educational leadership should be in America. His life's work has been rooted in the belief that education is not merely a pathway to individual advancement, but a powerful instrument for expanding opportunity, advancing racial equity, and strengthening the democratic promise of our nation," Thompson said. "At a time when economic inequality continues to define the life chances of far too many Americans, Dr. Ivery has demonstrated that community colleges can serve as engines of economic mobility, human dignity, and social transformation. Through his visionary leadership of Wayne County Community College District, he has championed access for students often overlooked by traditional systems and helped create pathways to prosperity for countless families and communities."

Thompson noted that Ivery's work is directly connected to the larger goals of the Civil Rights Movement.

"The Civil Rights Movement has always been about more than legal rights. It has been about opening doors of opportunity and ensuring that every person has a fair chance to realize their potential. Dr. Ivery's leadership embodies that tradition. His commitment to educational excellence, economic justice, and inclusive opportunity reflects the highest ideals of the civil rights legacy," Thompson said. "I can think of few leaders more deserving of the 2026 Civil Rights and Social Justice Award. His impact extends far beyond the college. It can be measured in transformed lives, strengthened communities, and renewed hope for future generations. His work reminds us that education remains one of the most powerful forces for justice in a democratic society."

Thompson's keynote arrives just three weeks after the release of his sixth book, *HOPE: On The Mountain Of Fear*, a work that explores hope, democracy, economic justice, and moral courage in an era of uncertainty and division. The significance of the occasion extends beyond the conference itself. Thompson's address will be delivered on Juneteenth, the national observance commemorating freedom and the ongoing struggle to realize the full promise of American democracy. The keynote also coincides with the opening of the Obama Presidential Center, a landmark institution dedicated to leadership, civic engagement, and democratic participation.

"At a time when the nation is debating who gets to tell America's story, and whose voices are



Bankole Thompson's latest sixth book, *HOPE: On The Mountain Of Fear*.

represented in that story, the questions of media power and economic justice have become central to the future of democracy," Thompson said. "Juneteenth reminds us that freedom is not simply a historical achievement. It is an ongoing moral responsibility. Hope, therefore, is not passive optimism. It is democratic action."

One of the nation's most respected interpreters of race, democracy, economic mobility, and public life, Thompson has earned widespread recognition for journalism that combines rigorous reporting with moral reflection. He is one of the first Black editors in the nation to conduct exclusive sit-down interviews with former President Barack Obama, producing conversations that explored leadership, race, democracy, and the future of the American experiment.

Thompson, a visiting scholar at Wayne County Community College District, is the founder of The PuLSE Institute, a national anti-poverty and economic justice think tank. He is a twice-a-week opinion columnist for The Detroit News and host of the podcast, Bankole's Nation.

His previous book, *Fiery Conscience*, published in 2023, received national acclaim, including a review by Forbes, and was subsequently listed as a reference resource in the Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York, one of the nation's foremost repositories of global Black history, scholarship, and intellectual life.

In 2018, civil rights leader the Rev. Jesse L. Jackson personally presented Thompson with the Rainbow PUSH Coalition's Let Freedom Ring Journalism Award during a ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the death of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The award recognized Thompson's distinguished contributions to journalism and his commitment to advancing public understanding of civil rights, economic justice, and democratic accountability.

In an honor rarely bestowed upon a living journalist, the University of Michigan's Bentley Historical Library, one of the nation's most prestigious and significant depositories of history wrote to Thompson officially requesting to establish the Bankole Thompson Papers in 2015. The Bentley preserves the papers of every Michigan governor. The Bankole Thompson Papers, a comprehensive physical and digital collection preserves Thompson's journalism, speeches, commentaries, interviews, manuscripts, and public writings, documenting a career devoted to examining the intersections of race, power, democracy, and economic opportunity for posterity.

An example of Thompson's influence as a national thought leader was in 2022 when he delivered a major keynote address for the Brown University Forum on Race and Democracy, a prominent gathering of scholars, civic leaders, and public intellectuals focused on the future of democratic participation and racial equity in America. Brown University President Christina Paxson delivered both the welcome and closing remarks, underscoring the significance of the forum and Thompson's contribution to the national conversation on race and democracy.

His distinguished career also includes becoming the first journalist in American history appointed to the National Board of Directors of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the civil rights organization founded and led by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He was appointed to the role by his late mentor and civil rights icon Rev. Dr. Bernard Lafayette Jr., the former Chairman of SCLC National Board. Lafayette was one of the chief strategists of the Civil Rights Movement, architect of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and a close associate of Dr. King Jr.

Thompson's keynote is expected to provide a powerful opening to a gathering focused on civil rights, educational equity, economic empowerment, leadership, and democratic renewal.

As the nation marks Juneteenth and reflects on the opening of the Obama Presidential Center, Thompson's address will challenge attendees to consider a defining question of this era: who has the power to shape America's story, and what role must journalism, democracy, and economic justice play in ensuring that story belongs to everyone.

Thompson also applauded Dr. Keith D. Parker, the 2026 National Civil Rights Conference chair, founder and executive director of the National Education and Empowerment Coalition for meeting in Detroit.

"Dr. Keith D. Parker's decision to bring the 2026 National Civil Rights Conference to Detroit is both timely and profoundly symbolic. Detroit is more than a city. It is one of America's great proving grounds for democracy, economic justice, labor rights, civil rights, and the enduring struggle for opportunity. Few places in the nation better embody the intersection of history, resilience, innovation, and hope," Thompson said. "Dr. Parker understands that where we gather matters. By bringing this national conference to Detroit, he is affirming the city's continuing relevance to the American story and recognizing its unique role in shaping conversations about equity, inclusion, education, and economic empowerment. Detroit has long been a place where ordinary people have challenged systems of exclusion and expanded the boundaries of opportunity. It remains a powerful symbol of reinvention and collective possibility."

Thompson added, "Dr. Keith D. Parker understands a truth that has defined every great movement for justice in America: meaningful change requires institutions that can convene people, cultivate leadership, and transform ideas into action. Through his visionary leadership, the National Education and Empowerment Coalition has become one of the nation's important platforms for advancing civil rights, educational equity, economic empowerment, and democratic participation."

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The PuLSE Institute

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