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December 2, 2019

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Historian and Journalist

Rev. Lawrence T. Foster

Liberation Theologian

Reverend Wendell Anthony
President
Detroit Branch NAACP
8220 2nd Ave
Detroit, MI 48202

Dear Reverend Anthony,

Six years ago, when the Detroit NAACP presented me with its 2013 Great Expectations Award at the 58th Annual Fight for Freedom Fund Dinner, I saw it as a tribute to the grand legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois, one of the founders of the NAACP, whose commitment and dedication to black humanity was unwavering. I accepted the award as a demonstration of the need to continue using my pen and voice like Du Bois to bear witness to the existential suffering of blacks in Detroit and to call attention to both the challenges and the solutions for racial and economic injustice.

In your April 2, 2013 Award nomination letter to me, you stated that, "It is because of your commitment to journalistic integrity and the ability to speak truth to power, that we seek to honor you. Through your work as a journalist and a community advocate for positive change, you have demonstrated to this community and others that we can all use our professional vocation to lift up and to inspire the quality of life for all people. You have set a prime example, not only in our local media, but for a national model as well."

The recent Kid Rock/Detroit NAACP fiasco has left me thinking deeply about a salient critique the preeminent race scholar Derrick Bell, the first black tenured professor at Harvard University Law School, raised in his book, "Faces at the Bottom of the Well." "Freed of the stifling rigidity of relying unthinkingly on the slogan 'we shall overcome,' we are impelled both to live each day more fully and to examine critically the actual effectiveness of traditional civil rights remedies," Bell wrote.

Now, given your refusal to acquiesce to community outcry to rescind the 2011 Great Expectations Award you gave to Kid Rock who recently engaged in a vile and sexual insult of Oprah Winfrey, a towering black woman, my conscience leaves me no other choice but to return my award to the Detroit NAACP. An attack on Winfrey is an attack on all black women because she exemplifies black culture and pride. Given what black women meant and had to endure throughout the great pipelines of history, I simply cannot accept the demeaning insult by Rock, who built his fan base out of waving the Confederate Flag, a symbol of the cruel institution of slavery.

I believe that returning my Award will affirm an important statement that we must not accept the cultural and sexual degradation of all black women including Winfrey. Upholding the dignity of blacks was a cornerstone of Du Bois' pilgrimage as an important purveyor of black culture, and something that I believe the NAACP should honor and hold dear in 2019.

Sincerely,



Bankole Thompson

Editor-in-Chief