



# NAACP®

## *Manchester Branch*

**Freedom Fund Dinner 2025**

**Saturday, December 13, 2025, 5:30 pm to 9 pm**

**Doors open at 5 pm. Virtual event starts at 5:30 pm.**

**Location: Hybrid, at the Afro Fusion Lounge and Restaurant, 201 Hanover Street,  
Manchester, New Hampshire 03104**

**Theme: *The Fierce Urgency of Now!***

*"We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of Now. This is no time to engage in the luxury of cooling off or to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism. Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. Now is the time to lift our nation from the quicksands of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood. Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children." – Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered August 28, 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.*

**Keynote speaker: Bithiah Carter,**

**President/CEO, GiveBlack Alliance**

**The Freedom Fund Gala is our way of lifting up those who exemplify the values and philosophy of the NAACP. It is a time to come together to celebrate community and recognize heroes for social justice.**

**[naacpmanchesternh.com](http://naacpmanchesternh.com)**

# **PROGRAM SCHEDULE**

**Welcome: Masters of Ceremonies, Tracy Strombom and  
Mackenzie Verdiner**

**Invocation: Rev. Emilia Halstead,  
First Congregational Church, Concord NH**

**Lift Every Voice (lyrics on PPT)**

**President's Remarks: Arnold Mikolo**

**. . . . . BREAK . . . . .**

**Keynote Speaker: Bithiah Carter,  
President and CEO, GiveBlack Alliance**

**Award Presentations: Arnold Mikolo**

**Closing Remarks: Tracy Strombom**

**"We Shall Overcome," led by John Luhanga  
(lyrics on PPT). Guests are invited to hold hands.**

**Benediction, Pastor Renee Rouse**

**"Wade in the Water," sung by Martin Toe  
DJ and fellowship, with or without dancing.**

## WELCOME TO THE 2025 FREEDOM FUND GALA!

It's wonderful to see you all here! We appreciate your support of the 2025 Freedom Fund Gala, our largest fundraising effort for each year providing key sustenance for the branch as we continue in our work for equity and as we launch new initiatives, in response to emerging needs community needs and as we gain new members, with new visions and energies.

This event comes just a month before the one-year anniversary of the beginning of a presidential term that has divided the and exposed many to new threats and vulnerabilities. My own ability to continue to hope comes in large part from my knowledge that I am one of many—one of all of you!—who are standing up, walking the walk every day for equity, dignity, civil rights, and community.

The theme of this year's gala is *The Fierce Urgency of Now!* – a phrase from Martin Luther King, Jr's 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech. Facing the Capitol building on the National Mall, he said: "We have also come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now."

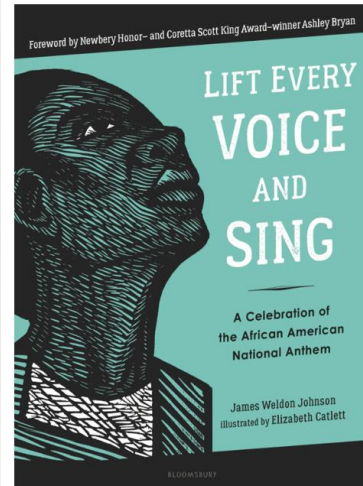
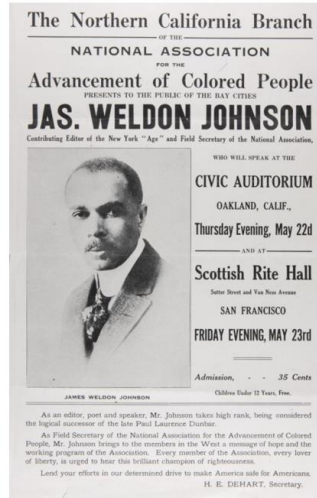
He spoke of the struggle "to make real the promises of America," and we carry on this struggle today, in this branch—and in the work that so many of you here are doing—as committed people across the nation push to recover what progress had been made since the March on Washington in 1963. Together, we are strong.

These fundamental values of the NAACP and the branch are reflected in the awards given annually at the gala, recognizing people of heart, mind, and will who work hard and well to fulfill the NAACP mission to secure the political, education, social, and economic equality of rights; to eliminate race-based discrimination; and to ensure the health and well-being of all persons. Congratulations and thanks to the winners of this year's social justice awards!, which will be given later in the program.

Bithiah Carter, our keynote speaker, is the president and CEO of the GiveBlack Alliance, which works to leverage community assets to improve education, workforce, and economic opportunities for Black- and Brown-led organizations. Her passionate dedication to driving forward 21<sup>st</sup>-century community development also underlies her service on many local and national nonprofit boards.

Many thanks to the Freedom Fund Gala committee, which has worked hard to make this event happen. My thanks also to our sponsors, and to you for your attendance in the 2025 Freedom Fund gala.

Finally, we encourage you to get food and drink as needed and to mingle and network—your name tags are meant to encourage such conversation. Enjoy the evening!



## “LIFT EVERY VOICE AND SING”

**NAACP LEADER JAMES WELDON JOHNSON** was born in 1871 in Jacksonville, Florida, to Bahamian parents. In 1897, he became the first African American admitted to the Florida Bar Association. Two years later, in a contest to write a national anthem, he wrote the lyrics to “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” and his brother J. Rosamund Johnson, a singer and composer, set it to music. “Lift Every Voice and Sing” got the second prize—behind “The Star Spangled Banner.” It has come to be known as the Negro National Anthem and grew in popularity during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, when it was steadily sung in marches and protests.

**Weldon’s wife-to-be, Grace Nail Johnson**, was born into the African American elite of New York City in 1855. She grew to be a civil rights advocate and supporter of the NAACP. Her father, John Bennett Nail, real estate developer, was the first Lifetime Member of the NAACP.

# KEYNOTE SPEAKER



**Bithiah Carter has a passion for philanthropy and fueling the 21st Century mindset by shining a light on the assets of our communities and how they can be leveraged to improve education, workforce, and economic resources in our communities. Her experience is rooted in both Wall Street finance and community nonprofit and foundation leadership.**

**Bithiah is currently the President and CEO of Give Black Alliance. She previously served as Executive Director of Grand Circle Foundation, Senior Director in the Community Impact Division of United Way, and Program Director at the Girls' Coalition of Greater Boston. Bithiah also worked for nearly ten years in the financial services industry in New York City and Boston. In addition, she serves as a member of the board of directors of several local and national non-profit organizations.**

## Awards

The NAACP Freedom Fund awards given within local branches across the nation raise crucial funds for scholarships and for branch initiatives supporting civil rights, while also honoring individuals and groups who exemplify the NAACP's mission of equality, justice, and community service. Freedom Fund awards recognize award-winners' dedication to Black empowerment and human rights, as the Freedom Fund galas celebrate achievement and inspire continued activism.

After the Adult and Youth Social Justice Champion awards,  
the awards are given in alphabetical order.

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### Adult Social Justice Champion: Ali Sekou



Originally from a small rural village in Niger, West Africa, Ali Sekou immigrated to the United States in 2012 after working with the U.S. Embassy in Niamey. His upbringing instilled a deep belief in the power of community, collective effort, and shared responsibility.

Ali currently serves as the Manager of Community Engagement and Outreach at New Hampshire Housing. In November 2023, he was elected to the Concord City Council, becoming the youngest council member elected and the city's first Muslim and first Black council member in its 245-year history. He was re-elected on November 4, 2026, and also serves as Mayor Pro Tem (Vice Mayor).

A dedicated civic leader, Ali serves on boards including the New Hampshire Community Loan Fund, NHTI Advisory Board, Islamic Society of Greater Concord, Organization for Refugee and Immigrant Success (ORIS), World Affairs Council of New Hampshire, Home for All Seacoast, and Rain for the Sahel and Sahara.

His leadership and impact have been widely recognized. He was named to the 2025 New

Hampshire 200 Most Influential Business Leaders and his work has been featured in 603 Diversity and regional and local newspapers. Passionate about social justice, fair housing, economic opportunity, immigrant and refugee success, and cultural exchange, Ali remains committed to building strong, inclusive, and connected communities.



## Youth Social Justice Champion: Amara Phelps



Amara Phelps, of Manchester, is a 25-year-old community organizer, arts and cultural outreach coordinator, musician, and artist currently working at the Nashua-based nonprofit Positive Street Art (PSA), the Granite State's only urban arts/ fully representative BIPOC organization. PSA champions urban arts and culture-keeping, rooted in hip-hop, graffiti, music, and dance, through large-scale mural and public beautification projects across the region.

Amara works as a Lead Outreach Coordinator at PSA, a role that includes giving graduate-level art courses to underprivileged populations in settings that have included a four-year residency at the Waypoint Youth Shelter, the annual six-week summer mural internship program sponsored by MYTURN, and the adult-disability program Opportunity Networks. She is also the lead singer of the band Cozy Throne. You can keep up with Amara's activities, work, and music by following PSA, Amara, and Cozy Throne on social media at: @positivestreetart @theamaraofficial @cozythrone

## Economic Justice Champion: Joede Brown



Joede Brown is a community advocate and Chair of the Manchester Housing Commission whose work is shaped by lived experience and a strong commitment to housing justice. Having once faced homelessness, she brings both compassion and insight to her advocacy. At 20, she authored a white paper on homelessness, sparking her lifelong dedication to systems change, transparency, and fair housing policy.

Joede believes that every person is entitled to dignity, regardless of their housing status, and she lives out that principle through direct community outreach—providing food and essential resources to unhoused community members. She is a former member of the Manchester Housing Alliance and the Manchester Housing Alliance Land Trust. She serves as the Chair of the Resolutions Committee for the NEAC

region, advancing policy proposals that shape the NAACP's official positions on civil rights, housing, equity, and community protection. As Housing Commission Chair, Joede champions ethical governance, data-driven planning, and policies that reflect the needs of all residents. She is also the owner of Brown & Associates, providing financial services to mission-driven small businesses.

## Education Justice Champion: Amadou Hamady Sy



Amadou Hamady Sy is a dedicated education and community leader with more than fifteen years of experience advancing equity, student engagement, and newcomer support across NH. He currently serves as the Executive Director of Student Engagement, Outcomes, and Success for the Manchester School District. Previously, he served as the district's Executive Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice and spent seven years as an ELL District Social Worker supporting multilingual and immigrant students. From 2012 to 2016, he served as the Executive Director of the International Institute of New Hampshire, the state's leading refugee resettlement agency, where he oversaw refugee resettlement operations, community integration programs, and statewide partnerships supporting successful transitions for new arrivals.

## Environmental/Climate Justice Champion: Chris Kelly

Chris Kelly is a lifetime member of the NAACP. He has been a member of the Manchester branch since he moved to New Hampshire in 2018. Chris had the privilege of serving as the chair of the branch's Environmental & Climate Justice committee from 2020 until earlier this year, in which role he was key in setting up the branch's project installing air quality monitors in Manchester, in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy. Professionally, he is one of 400+ employee-owners of ReVision Energy, a clean energy & electrification company serving Maine, New Hampshire & Massachusetts.



Chris lives in Manchester with his best friend and wife Jillian, and their two boys, Calvin (2) and Charlie (3 months), and the world's best dog, Grizzly.



## Legal Redress Justice Champion: Lois Numbi



My name is Lois Numbi. I was born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and I've lived in New Hampshire for the past ten years. I have always been deeply interested in people, their stories, their experiences, and the communities that shape them, a perspective that has shaped my path and taught me that true leadership begins at home. Meaningful change does not only happen in government buildings or decision-making rooms. It also happens in neighborhoods, in conversations, and in small acts of care. Even if we are not the ones writing laws, the work we do with those around us can be just as transformative. This belief guides the work I do for the Manchester NAACP as chair of the Legal Redress/Criminal Justice Committee and shapes my responses to those who leave messages on the branch triage line about their mistreatment in schools, jobs, and schools, and on the streets, as well as my work for community and equity in other capacities.

## Lifetime Social Justice Champion: Gloria Timmons



Gloria J. Timmons passed away on October 29, 2025 after a life of heart, soul, labor, wisdom, and leadership that touched and impacted thousands. Born in Hartford, Connecticut, she worked after high school and then joined the U.S. Army, serving there for 22 years. After military service came college (a degree in sociology) and work with New Hampshire Employment Security. In 2007, she founded the Greater Nashua chapter of the NAACP, serving as its first president. A lifelong public servant, she was elected to the Nashua Board of Education (2017), then elected as Alderwoman-at- Large for the City of Nashua (2021). Her fierce advocacy for the underserved, for public education, and for all obstacles to equity,

opened doors, inspired community engagement and action, and led all the many community groups that she was part of pull together to affect change and sustain community with compassion and determination. Rare and exemplary as were her leadership skills and their power, still more rare and exemplary was her humanity and integrity. She will not be forgotten, and the lights she lit and tended in others will burn on.



The founders of the NAACP: Mary White Ovington, Henry Moskowitz, William English Walling, Oswald Garrison Villard, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ida Wells-Barnett, Archibald Grimke and Mary Church Terrell.

## History of the NAACP

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was founded in 1909 by a multiracial group of activists and interested citizens.

The principle objective of the NAACP is to ensure the political, education, social, and economic equality of minority group citizens of the United States. The NAACP is committed to non-violence and relies on the press, the petition, the ballot, and the courts, even in the face of overt and violent racial hostility.

Manchester NH Branch #2069 was established in 1964, at a time in the history of New Hampshire when the non-white population was very small. In its 55-year history, the leadership and membership of the organization has been a testament to the diversity of Manchester, NH. Branch activities have included housing and employment discrimination programs; community health programs, including community education on intergenerational racial trauma and community training in Mental Health First Aid; environmental and climate justice projects including the installation of 13 air quality monitors in Manchester to gather data to shape economic and health advocacy; workshops in home buying; collaborative work for educational equity in Manchester city schools, including attendance of in Aldermen hearings; connecting those in need with resources to pursue legal redress in relation to housing, schools, and the criminal justice system; and support for the passage of legislation that established Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday as an NH state holiday in 1999.

***Monthly meetings of both branch and community members are held in Manchester City Library every fourth Thursday, 6-7:30 pm. Email [2069secretary@naacp.org](mailto:2069secretary@naacp.org) to be put on the mailing list or for membership information.***

## The Manchester NAACP is honored to have artwork by local artist Jozimano Matimano hung in the gala space.



Jozimar Matimano grew up in Uganda. Nine years ago, he immigrated to Manchester as a refugee. Six years ago, he began painting in his free time as a way to express himself. He then realized he has a voice. Since then, his work has gained recognition throughout New Hampshire, leading to exhibitions in New York City as well as New Hampshire. Locally, he has contributed to exhibits such as “Finding Home: Portraits, Memories, and Art of Immigrants” at Kimball Jenkins (2022) and “Being Black: The Immigrant Experience” at Portsmouth Historical Society (2024). Jozimar is known for being community-oriented. He has volunteered his time to the Manchester Arts Commission and Creative Guts Podcast, assisting with organizing events and exhibits that support local artists.

Artist statement: “I see art as a powerful tool that could spark something in one’s lifetime which could change the course of history. I use my art as a way of expressing the reality, beauty, struggle, and strength of humanity by painting and drawing. I feel like it’s a message that somebody out there can learn from or be inspired by.”



The painting on the left is titled "Love it or Leave it."

# SHAPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF ACTIVISTS

Our young people have picked up the civil rights and social justice torch. They're running with it, advocating for a future free of race-based discrimination. We invest in them with training, fellowship, and scholarships.

25K

young people are leveraging their power to uproot systemic injustices in youth and college chapters across the country

## BECOME A MEMBER!

## AND/OR COME TO A MONTHLY MEETING!

*Monthly meetings of both branch and community members are held in Manchester City Library every fourth Thursday, 6-7:30 pm—hybrid and in person. Information, with Zoom link, here: <https://naacpmanchesternh.com/upcoming-events>*

All are welcome! Suggestions for topics are welcome!

### Topics of monthly general meetings in 2025:

January: The impact of recent Executive Orders on immigrants and refugees in NH, with Eva Castillo, NH Alliance for Immigrants and Refugees, and Enrique Mesa, Mesa Law PLLC.

February: Member discussion of the impact of recent Executive Orders on people of color.

March: Discrimination Reporting, with Christine Wellington, Legal Redress/Criminal Justice Committee, Manchester NAACP.

April: How to Combat Anti-DEI, with Antony Poore, NH Center for Justice and Equity, and James McKim, Manchester NAACP.

May: Joede Brown, Chair, Manchester Housing Commission, "Housing Equity in Manchester."

June: Discussion of Frederick Douglass's "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" as prep for branch participation in the state-wide reading of it on June 28 at Manchester City Library.

August: Report and discussion, National convention of the NAACP, with branch delegates Paulson Edum, James McKim, and Arnold Mikolo.

September: Lifting Up Youth Leaders, with Kristy Lauture and Judith Nsimire of Positive Street Art, and Lois Numbi and Favour Ben-Okafor, co-planners of the August program Nature's Palette (youth, climate change, and environmental equity).

October: Deborah Opramolla, Disability Rights Center, NH: "Disability Advocacy in NH Now: Insights from ABLE 2025"



## **MANCHESTER NAACP BRANCH OFFICERS**

### **Executive Committee:**

**President: Arnold Mikolo**

**First Vice President: James McKim**

**Second Vice President and chair of the Health Committee: Tracy Strombom**

**Treasurer: Paulson Edum**

**Secretary: Jennifer Thorn**

**Head of the Economic Justice Committee: Joede Brown**

### **Committees:**

**Freedom Fund Committee: Shaunte Whitted, chair; Carola Beasley-Topliffe; Jennifer Thorn**

**Environmental and Climate Justice Committee**

**Education**

**Legal Redress/Criminal Justice, chaired by Lois Numbi**



## **YOUNG LEADERS UP NEXT**

Next Generation (NEXTGEN) Young Professional Leadership Program serves as an incubator for current and future civil rights and social justice leaders. Participants network with peers, establish strong leadership skills, and deepen their understanding of issues impacting the Black community.



## NATURE IS FOR EVERYONE.

Access to nature should not be limited by your ability, zip code, race or net worth. At The Nature Conservancy, we're working together with local communities, leaders and partners in New Hampshire on projects that benefit people and protect nature, like our universally accessible All Persons Trail at the Manchester Cedar Swamp Preserve. Scan the QR Code to plan your visit today!



The Nature Conservancy

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**Thank you for your commitment to the people of New Hampshire and your leadership in the advancement of civil and human rights.**

The New Hampshire Community Loan Fund is proud to support the Manchester branch of the NAACP and its dedication to ensuring political, educational, social, and economic equality in the Greater Manchester area.

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# Thank you

**We are grateful to the NAACP Manchester for its continued dedication to helping New Hampshire communities with the urgency of now.**

*Proud to sponsor the Freedom Fund Dinner*



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*The SEE Science Center is planning an event to celebrate black history and recognize impacts on science, technology, engineering and math.*

*We are listening to voices from the entire community and want to hear yours to help guide our event. The event will take place on the evening of February 13 with free admission for kids and families.*



*The exhibit halls will be full of hands-on science, but we want your opinions on what else to include. Please take our 5-question survey and share your voice.*



200 Bedford Street  
Manchester, NH  
603-669-0400  
[see-sciencecenter.org](http://see-sciencecenter.org)





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