

The legendary Lena Horne dead at 92

Written by Pharaoh Martin - NNPA National Correspondent
Wednesday, 12 May 2010 12:26



Statement by the President on the passing of Lena Horne

Michelle and I were deeply saddened to hear about the passing of Lena Horne – one of our nation’s most cherished entertainers. Over the years, she warmed the hearts of countless Americans with her beautiful voice and dramatic performances on screen. From the time her grandmother signed her up for an NAACP membership as a child, she worked tirelessly to further the cause of justice and equality. In 1940, she became the first African American performer to tour with an all white band. And while entertaining soldiers during World War II, she refused to perform for segregated audiences – a principled struggle she continued well after the troops returned home. Michelle and I offer our condolences to all those who knew and loved Lena, and we join all Americans in appreciating the joy she brought to our lives and the progress she forged for our country.

(NNPA) - Legendary singer, actress and dancer Lena Horne died on Sunday night at the New York-Presbyterian/Weill Cornell Medical Center at the age of 92. The Brooklyn-born entertainer was the first Black performer to be signed to a long-term contract by a major Hollywood studio and who went on to achieve international fame as a singer. The cause of her death has not been reported.

Horne was a mantle of African American beauty, who as a versatile and iconic performer made her name from a variety of entertainment platforms including the big screen, where she was the first African American actor to sign to a long-term contract by a major Hollywood studio; in music, where she won four Grammy awards, and in night clubs, where she extensively toured despite the racism that plagued her era.

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As an entertainer, Horne's light skin completion allowed her to traverse through doors that many other Black entertainers had a hard time walking through. Still, she was loved and highly respected because she refused to let herself become "an imitation of a White woman," as she would later say.



Horne got her start in entertainment as a 16-year-old dancer at Harlem's famed Cotton Club and worked the jazz club circuit before jumping into movies with her major studio debut in 1942 with *Panama Hattie*. Horne's success in movies helped pave the way for actresses such as Halle Berry and Dorothy Dandridge to become silver screen starlets and for crossover

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entertainers such as Diahann Carroll and Diana Ross to exist. But, more importantly, her pioneering roles helped open doors for African American actors to rise above subservient roles in Hollywood.

Although born in a Black upper middle-class family, Horne spent her life cutting through the red tape of racism. Although she has 22 film credits to her name, her outspoken criticism of the unequal treatment of Black soldiers during World War II and her left-leaning political views and associations got her blacklisted from Hollywood for much of the 1950s.

Despite her absence away from the big screen, Horne went on become one of the most revered night club performers in the post-war period. During the movement for civil rights, Horne was an active participator in marches and protests, including the 1963 March on Washington where she spoke and performed.

Horne spent the last years of her life focused on her musical career. She released her last studio album, "Being Myself" in 1998 on Blue Note records. She was 81 at that time. She received a Tony Award in 1981 for her one-woman Broadway show, "*Lena Horne: The Lady and Her Music.*"

She is being mourned in both the entertainment and social justice worlds.

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"Ms. Horne was a pivotal figure in the entertainment world. She was a consummate entertainer whose dignified stage presence destroyed many of the stereotypes in which other Black entertainers of her era were cast. She was a cross-over success before the term was widely used. Although many have failed to fully acknowledge her civil rights efforts, Ms. Horne used the power of her celebrity to change the shape of racial discrimination in the United States," said Dr. E. Faye Williams, national chair of the National Congress of Black Women in a statement. "Her life was genuinely iconic. The beauty and enjoyment that she brought to the masses with her entertainment will last far longer than many of the entertainers who followed her. She was a unique personality who will truly be missed."