



Legislation Text

File #: Res 0242-2010, **Version:** *

Res. No. 242

Resolution commemorating the life and legacy of legendary entertainer and civil rights activist, Lena Horne.

By Council Members Comrie, Vann, Barron, Brewer, Chin, Dickens, Ferreras, Fidler, Gentile, Gonzalez, Koppell, Koslowitz, Lander, Mark-Viverito, Mendez, Nelson, Palma, Van Bramer, Williams and Rodriguez

Whereas, Lena Horne, renowned singer, actress, dancer and civil rights activist, was one of the most popular African-American entertainers of the twentieth century; and

Whereas, A woman of great beauty and commanding stage presence, she performed in nightclubs, concert halls and movies, on radio and television, and on Broadway; and

Whereas, Lena Horne was born in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York on June 30, 1917; and

Whereas, The Hornes were an established middle class, well-educated family, with distinguished positions in organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the National Urban League; and

Whereas, Lena Horne attended Girls' High School, an all-girls public high school in Brooklyn which has since become Boys and Girls High School; and

Whereas, At age 16, Ms. Horne joined the dance chorus at the famous Cotton Club in Harlem, New York; and

Whereas, A year after joining the Cotton Club, she made her Broadway debut in 1934; and

Whereas, Lena Horne's major film career began in 1942, shortly after being discovered by Hollywood talent scouts while singing at the Manhattan nightclub Café Society; and

Whereas, Ms. Horne was signed to a seven-year contract with the movie studio Metro Goldwyn Mayer

(MGM) and was the first black performer to be signed to a long-term contract by a major Hollywood studio; and

Whereas, She also became the highest-paid African-American entertainer in the United States at that time; and

Whereas, She appeared in a number of MGM musicals, but was never featured in a leading role because of her race and the fact that films featuring her had to be re-edited for viewing in states where theaters could not show films with black performers; and

Whereas, Despite the harsh limitations imposed on African-Americans in 1930s and 1940s Hollywood movies, Ms. Horne refused to take on any roles that were disrespectful to her as a woman of color, and she gained national and international appeal; and

Whereas, After her tenure with MGM ended in 1950, she was blacklisted for her political views and unable to appear in films or television for seven years, but still maintained a lucrative career off screen as a recording artist and nightclub performer; and

Whereas, From the late 1950s through the 1960s, Lena Horne became a staple of TV variety shows, appearing multiple times on Perry Como's Kraft Music Hall, The Ed Sullivan Show, and The Dean Martin Show; and

Whereas, After leaving Hollywood, Lena Horne established herself as one of the premiere nightclub performers; and

Whereas, She headlined at clubs and hotels throughout the U.S., Canada, and Europe, including the Waldorf-Astoria in New York; and

Whereas, The album "Lena Horne at the Waldorf-Astoria," was recorded during a well-received eight-week run in 1957, reached the Top 10 and became the best-selling album by a female artist in the history of the RCA Victor label; and

Whereas, She continued to perform and record songs into the 1990s, for RCA and other record labels,

notably United Artists and Blue Note; and

Whereas, In 1981, Ms. Horne won a Tony award for her one-woman show on Broadway titled, “Lena Horne: The Lady and Her Music,” which ran for 14 months, and also won two Grammy awards for the recording of her show; and

Whereas, She also holds the record for the longest-running solo performance in Broadway history; and

Whereas, Ms. Horne received several awards throughout her career, including the Kennedy Center Honors in 1984 for extraordinary talent, creativity and perseverance, the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1989, and the NAACP award for outstanding jazz artist in 1999, and in that same year she was honored with an all-star salute at Lincoln Center’s Avery Fisher Hall in New York City; and

Whereas, Lena Horne was also long involved in civil rights activism; and

Whereas, During World War II, when entertaining the troops for the USO, she spoke out against the mistreatment of black soldiers and refused to perform for segregated audiences or for groups in which German POWs were seated in front of African-American servicemen; and

Whereas, After the war, Ms. Horne worked on behalf of Japanese-Americans who also faced discrimination; and

Whereas, Lena Horne also worked with Eleanor Roosevelt to pass anti-lynching laws; and

Whereas, During the 1960s, Ms. Horne was involved in the American Civil Rights Movement, and performed at rallies in the South and throughout the United States; and

Whereas, She also participated in the historic March on Washington in 1963, where she spoke and performed on behalf of the NAACP, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), and the National Council of Negro Women; and

Whereas, Lena Horne died on May 9, 2010, at the age of 92 at the New York Presbyterian Hospital in New York City; and

Whereas, Lena Horne was an outstanding woman who took pride in her heritage, refused to compromise her principles, and broke down racial barriers in the film and music industries; and

Whereas, Her extraordinary talent, elegance, grace and dignity, as well as her dedication to ensuring equality for all Americans, has made her a legendary figure; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York commemorates the life and legacy of legendary entertainer and civil rights activist, Lena Horne.

LS #1244
5/18/10
11:15 a.m.
TC