

ALCEE L. HASTINGS  
20TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT  
FLORIDA

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SENIOR DEMOCRATIC WHIP



**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0920**

April 1, 2016

The Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee (CSAC)  
United States Postal Service  
475 L'Enfant Plaza, SW  
Rm. 3300  
Washington, DC 20260-3501

**RE: Commemorative Stamp Proposal - Ms. Lena Mary Calhoun Horne**

Dear CSAC Members:

I write to propose that American born, Lena Mary Calhoun Horne (June 4, 1917 - May 9, 2010) of Brooklyn, New York, be put on a postage stamp. At the age of 16, Ms. Horne was hired as a dancer in the chorus of Harlem's famous Cotton Club, where she was introduced to such legendary jazz performers as Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Count Basie, Ethel Waters, and Billie Holiday. In 1940, she became one of the first African American women to perform with an all-White band when she toured with Charlie Barnet's jazz band as its featured singer. She was discovered by a Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM) talent scout and became the first African American artist to sign a long-term contract with a major film studio. Despite her extraordinary beauty and talent, Ms. Horne was often limited to minor acting roles because of her race. Scenes in which she did sing were cut out when they were sent to local distributors in the South and studio executives cast another actress as Julie in the film version of "Show Boat" instead of Lena Horne, because they did not want the show to star an African American actress. However, Ms. Horne dazzled audiences and critics in a number of films, including "Cabin in the Sky" and "Stormy Weather" before ultimately turning back to a more lucrative, inclusive career in show business, performing across the nation in nightclubs and on Broadway. A strong supporter of American troops, during World War II, Lena Horne toured extensively with the United Service Organizations (USO) on the West Coast and in the South. She expressed outrage about the way African American soldiers were treated, firmly opposing segregation and discrimination. She was dismayed to find that the military was implementing such strong measures of separation based on race, and actively protested performing when she saw that German Prisoners of War (POWs) were seated ahead of Black servicemen.

PLEASE RESPOND TO:

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In general, she refused to sing for segregated audiences and made it a point to speak out on the issue when performing before her large crowds of mixed races.

During the period of McCarthyism in the 1950s, Ms. Horne was blacklisted as a communist for 7 years because of her civil rights activism and friendship with Paul Robeson and W.E.B. Du Bois. In 1957, she recorded *Lena Horne at the Waldorf-Astoria*, which reached the U.S. Billboard Top 10 and became the best-selling album by a female singer, regardless of race, in RCA Victor's history. She rose to international stardom and toured the world, sharing the stage with such names as Count Basie, Tony Bennett, Billy Eckstine, Vic Damone, and Harry Belafonte, and also starred in musical and television specials with such giants as Judy Garland, Bing Crosby, and Frank Sinatra. Throughout her life, Ms. Horne used her fame to become a powerful voice for civil rights and equality. In 1963, she participated in the historic March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom at which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his immortal "I Have a Dream" speech. Ms. Horne had gained renowned respect for her courage in maintaining a firm stake in the Civil Rights movement, and met President John F. Kennedy days before his death later that year.

Ms. Horne also performed at rallies throughout the country for the National Council for Negro Women and worked with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), of which she was a member from the age of 2, as well as the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. and National Urban League. She would go on to play herself on such staple American shows as *The Muppet Show*, *Sesame Street*, and *Sanford and Son*. Through the end of the 20th century, she continued to entertain large audiences of all ages, races, ethnicities and backgrounds. In 1981, she captivated audiences with her one-woman Broadway show, "*Lena Horne: The Lady and Her Music*," which enjoyed a 14-month run before going on tour, and earned her a special Tony Award and two Grammy Awards. In the 1950s, she actually became the first woman to have been nominated for a Tony Award. In 2002, 73 years after the Academy Awards were first awarded, Halle Berry became the first African American woman to win an Oscar for Best Actress and recognized in her acceptance speech how Lena Horne paved the way for her and other African American actresses. Ms. Lena Horne was an entertainer, activist, and mother who used her beauty, talent, and intelligence to fight racial discrimination and injustice and rise to international stardom. A symbol of elegance and grace, she entertained people of all walks of life for over 60 years, and broke barriers for future generations.

Lena Mary Calhoun Horne was an extraordinary community leader whose contributions and courageous spirit helped transform our nation from a segregated society to a nation committed to the never ending challenge of perfecting our union.

It was Ms. Horne's struggles and triumphs that made it possible for us to stand here today and continue the fight for equality, justice and progress for all, regardless of race, religion, gender or sexual orientation. It is for these reasons that I ask the Committee to consider Ms. Horne for a Commemorative Stamp.

I thank you for your time and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alcee L. Hastings". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

Alcee L. Hastings  
Member of Congress