

114TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 693

To posthumously award a Congressional Gold Medal to Lena Horne in recognition of her achievements and contributions to American culture and the civil rights movement.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MARCH 10, 2015

Mr. NELSON (for himself, Ms. COLLINS, Mr. SCHUMER, Mrs. GILLIBRAND, Mr. SCOTT, Mr. FRANKEN, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, Mrs. BOXER, and Mr. PETERS) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs

A BILL

To posthumously award a Congressional Gold Medal to Lena Horne in recognition of her achievements and contributions to American culture and the civil rights movement.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Lena Horne Recogni-
5 tion Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 The Congress finds as follows:

1 (1) Lena Mary Calhoun Horne was born on
2 June 30, 1917, in Brooklyn, New York. At the age
3 of 16, Lena Horne was hired as a dancer in the cho-
4 rus of Harlem’s famous Cotton Club, where she was
5 introduced to such legendary jazz performers as
6 Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Count Basie, Ethel
7 Waters, and Billie Holiday.

8 (2) In 1940, she became one of the first Afri-
9 can-American women to perform with an all-White
10 band when she toured with Charlie Barnet’s jazz
11 band as its featured singer.

12 (3) She was discovered by a Metro-Goldwyn-
13 Mayer (MGM) talent scout and became the first Af-
14 rican-American artist to sign a long-term contract
15 with a major film studio.

16 (4) Despite her extraordinary beauty and tal-
17 ent, Lena Horne was often limited to minor acting
18 roles because of her race.

19 (5) Scenes in which she did sing were cut out
20 when they were sent to local distributors in the
21 South and studio executives cast another actress as
22 Julie in the film version of “Show Boat” instead of
23 Lena Horne because they did not want the show to
24 star an African-American actress.

1 (6) However, Lena Horne dazzled audiences
2 and critics in a number of films, including “Cabin
3 in the Sky” and “Stormy Weather” before ultimately
4 turning back to a more lucrative, inclusive
5 career in show business, performing across the Nation
6 in nightclubs and on Broadway.

7 (7) A strong supporter of American troops, during
8 World War II, Lena Horne toured extensively
9 with the United Service Organizations (USO) on the
10 West Coast and in the South. She expressed outrage
11 about the way African-American soldiers were treated,
12 firmly opposing segregation and discrimination.
13 She was appalled to find that the military was implementing
14 such strong measures of separation based on race, and actively
15 protested performing when she saw that German Prisoners of War
16 (POWs) were seated ahead of Black servicemen.

17 (8) In general, Lena refused to sing for segregated
18 audiences and made it a point to speak out on the issue
19 when performing before her large crowds of mixed races.

20 (9) During the period of McCarthyism in the
21 1950s, Lena Horne was blacklisted as a Communist
22 for 7 years because of her civil rights activism and
23 friendship with Paul Robeson and W.E.B. Du Bois.

1 (10) In 1957, Lena Horne recorded Lena
2 Horne at the Waldorf-Astoria, which reached the
3 U.S. Billboard Top 10 and became the best-selling
4 album by a female singer, regardless of race, in RCA
5 Victor's history.

6 (11) Lena Horne rose to international stardom
7 and toured the world, sharing the stage with such
8 names as Count Basie, Tony Bennett, Billy
9 Eckstine, Vic Damone, and Harry Belafonte, and
10 also starred in musical and television specials with
11 such giants as Judy Garland, Bing Crosby, and
12 Frank Sinatra.

13 (12) Throughout her life, Lena Horne used her
14 fame to become a powerful voice for civil rights and
15 equality.

16 (13) In 1963, she participated in the historic
17 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, at
18 which Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his im-
19 mortal "I Have a Dream" speech. Lena had gained
20 renown respect for her courage in maintaining a
21 firm stake in the Civil Rights movement, and met
22 President John F. Kennedy days before his death
23 later that year.

24 (14) Lena Horne also performed at rallies
25 throughout the country for the National Council for

1 Negro Women and worked with the National Asso-
2 ciation for the Advancement of Colored People
3 (NAACP), of which she was a member from the age
4 of 2, as well as the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
5 and National Urban League.

6 (15) She would go on to play herself on such
7 staple American shows as The Muppet Show, Ses-
8 ame Street, and Sanford and Son.

9 (16) Through the end of the 20th century,
10 Lena Horne continued to entertain large audiences
11 of all ages, races, ethnicities and backgrounds. In
12 1981, she captivated audiences with her one-woman
13 Broadway show, “Lena Horne: The Lady and Her
14 Music”, which enjoyed a 14-month run before going
15 on tour, and earned her a special Tony Award and
16 two Grammy Awards. In the 1950s, Lena actually
17 became the first woman to have been nominated for
18 a Tony Award.

19 (17) In 2002, 73 years after the Academy
20 Awards were first awarded, Halle Berry became the
21 first African-American woman to win an Oscar for
22 Best Actress and recognized in her acceptance
23 speech how Lena Horne paved the way for her and
24 other African-American actresses.

1 (18) Lena Horne passed away in New York
2 City on May 9, 2010, at the age of 92.

3 (19) Lena Horne was an entertainer, activist,
4 and mother who used her beauty, talent, and intel-
5 ligence to fight racial discrimination and injustice
6 and rise to international stardom.

7 (20) A symbol of elegance and grace, she enter-
8 tained people of all walks of life for over 60 years,
9 and broke barriers for future generations.

10 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

11 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of
12 the House of Representatives and the President pro tem-
13 pore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements
14 for the posthumous presentation, on behalf of the Con-
15 gress, of a gold medal of appropriate design in commemo-
16 ration of Lena Horne in recognition of her achievements
17 and contributions to American culture and the civil rights
18 movement.

19 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For purposes of the
20 presentation referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary
21 of the Treasury (referred to in this Act as the “Sec-
22 retary”) shall strike a gold medal with suitable emblems,
23 devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the Sec-
24 retary.

1 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

2 The Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
3 bronze of the gold medal struck pursuant to section 3,
4 under such regulations as the Secretary may prescribe, at
5 a price sufficient to cover the cost thereof, including labor,
6 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses,
7 and the cost of the gold medal.

8 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

9 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—The medals struck pursu-
10 ant to this Act are national medals for purposes of chapter
11 51 of title 31, United States Code.

12 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of section
13 5134 of title 31, United States Code, all medals struck
14 under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic items.

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