



CIVICS LESSON

Lena Horne

Civil Rights Activism

In May 1963 meeting in New York City, Lena Horne was one of the participants invited by novelist James Baldwin to discuss the state of race relations with U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy. Some of the others at the meeting were singer Harry Belafonte, psychologist Kenneth Clark, playwright Lorraine Hansberry and young Freedom Rider Jerome Smith. Smith broke down in tears when he recounted how he had been beaten and jailed in Mississippi.

Though tensions flared during the meeting, there was a turning point in Robert Kennedy's attitude about the struggles of Black Americans. Less than a month after this meeting, President John Kennedy — based on his brother Robert's advice — gave a pivotal Civil Rights speech in which he proposed legislation that became the landmark Civil Rights Act the following year.

On November 20, 1963, Horne again with James Baldwin and along with other leaders such as Democratic National Committee Chairman John Bailey, met with President Kennedy at the White House — just two days before his assassination. Civil Rights was again thoroughly discussed.

Lena Horne balanced her successful entertainment career with her civil rights activism, which took her to places of great influence.

How can you manage your commitments and priorities to make time to invest in worthy causes?