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Celebrating 175: Jacob Lawrence, Correspondence, Spelman College, Atlanta, GA, 1977-1978, 1987

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Spelman Officials And Honorees Look To Future

All smiling at 1987 Commencement (l-r) are Dr. Donald M. Stewart, former president of Spelman and honorary degree recipient; Atty. Marian Wright Edelman, Spelman Board of Trustees President (Spelman alumnae); Lena Horne, commencement speaker and honorary degree recipient; Leontyne Price, honorary degree recipient; Dr. Barbara L. Carter, acting president of Spelman; Dr. Johnetta B. Cole, Spelman's new president; and Jacob Lawrence, honorary degree recipient. (Photo courtesy of Spelman College)

Spelman Gives Three Honorary Degrees During Commencement

Spelman College's 1987 Commencement, May 17 at the Civic Center, paid special tribute to achievement in the arts. The college awarded honorary degrees to entertainer Lena Horne, opera star Leontyne Price and visual artist Jacob Lawrence. Former Spelman President Doctor Donald M. Stewart received an honorary degree for his exemplary leadership and commitment to excellence during a decade of leadership at the college.

"WHAT AM I HERE FOR"

Lena Horne delivered the commencement address to the two hundred and ninety eight entitled, "What Am I Here For," (the title of a Duke Ellington song). She moved the audience to laughter, applause and focus as she spoke of her grandmother and the other people who inspired her. Ms. Horne urged the young people to use their time, talents and education to improve the future for black people and for the world in general.

She mentioned the book written about her by her daughter. In emphasizing the importance of past, present and future she stated: "This country we live in places very arbitrary limitations on women. And on black women, but that only makes the question "What Am I Here For?" more urgent. We--you and I--we share a great bond, we're black and we're women, and because of these bonds that we share, common is specific reflections are the things that I would like to talk about. They have to do with the past, the present and the future.

Now, the past is important in this case because it reflects on the future. Specifically, I grew up in an age of female heroes. Right away come to mind Mary McLeod Bethune and Eleanor Roosevelt to name just two for them. And I was fortunate enough to have a family role model as well. My Georgia-born grandmother, Cora Calhoun Horne, a graduate of class 1881 of Spelman's mother school, AU. My grandmother was a perfect example of the educated and activist middle class woman - black or white - who came of age in the turn of the century. She not only believed in "do good," "uplift" and "responsibility," but she was a "new woman," as society named this very unconventional breed. In the south she was a teacher. When she moved north in the 1890's, she expanded her activism. And she was the mother of four sons. During WWI she was a Red Cross organizer, and member of the victory committee of New



York City's mayor. She lost a son in the war in 1918, but she had just began to fight. To fight for the right for women to vote. Cora insisted on this right, and was one of the many thousands who eventually helped win that battle for all women. When she died in 1932, her obituary listed her on so many committees and activist organizations, that I won't go on with them all but they do include The Urban League, The Big Brother/Sister Organization, The National Association of Colored Women, The New York Branch of The Women's International League For Peace, and the Foreign Policy of The Council of Women of The Darker Races. Oh yes, and that was one of the First Third World women's groups, founded in 1922, by women from America, Africa, Haiti, the West Indies, and Ceylon. And, I tell you it's embarrassing, because she was a little bitty woman, and I don't know how she carried all that. And it was all volunteer work too. She managed to keep both her ideals and her political faith through some extraordinary, trying times."

Ms. Horne, looking as youthful and beautiful as ever, was moved to tears as she accepted the honorary degree.

Leontyne Price thrilled the thousands in attendance when her acceptance speech included singing "You've Got The Whole World In Your Hands."

Jacob Lawrence eloquently expressed his appreciation for the honor and his happiness that his community has always supported his artistic endeavors and made his success possible.

Dr. Donald M. Stewart shared his love and gratitude for the Spelman Family, and his deep pride in receiving the honorary degree.

It was under Dr. Stewart's administration that the college began the tradition of awarding honorary degrees.

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