




Lena Horne

By Leslie Przybylek, Senior Curator

For singer and actress Lena Horne, Pittsburgh's Hill District provided a springboard to stardom. This photograph captured Horne (1917–2010) just as she was becoming so disenchanted with Hollywood's racism that she largely abandoned her film career. Such challenges confronted her throughout her life, but in Pittsburgh, she turned segregation's realities into an advantage.

Horne's connection here began when her father left the family and opened the Belmont Hotel in the Hill District. Owned by her father and his business partner Gus Greenlee, the hotel was a center of activity in the Hill. Because African Americans were not welcome in downtown's segregated hotels, the great jazz performers congregated there. After beginning her career in New York, Horne relocated here when she met and married Pittsburgher Louis Jones in 1936. Pittsburgh became a training ground as Horne continued performing, and singing at private clubs and parties. She later enjoyed rich creative partnerships with fellow Pittsburghers Billy Eckstine and Billy Strayhorn. Horne landed her first film role in *The Duke is Tops* (1938; later re-released as *The Bronze Venus*, 1943) and signed a contract with MGM in 1942. In 1943, her role in the all-Black movie musical *Stormy Weather* made her a star. 

About the artist:

Portrait photographer Florence Meyer Homolka (1911–1962) was a friend and protégé of Surrealist artist and well-known photographer Man Ray. Her father was a leading financier and newspaper publisher, and this socialite back-



Lena Horne, by Florence Meyer Homolka, gelatin silver print, c. 1950.

Smithsonian Institution, National Portrait Gallery, NPG.2008.19; acquired through the generosity of Elizabeth Ann Hyllton, © Florence Meyer Homolka.

ground may have helped Homolka gain access to the highest ranks of America's cultural elites. She became famous for her images of actors, musicians, artists, and writers such as Charlie Chaplin and Judy Garland. Her striking portrait

of Horne is the only work of a woman artist documented by another woman artist in the exhibition, *Smithsonian's Portraits of Pittsburgh: Works from the National Portrait Gallery*.