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Black History

This Week In

January 27, 1961—

Leontyne Price, acclaimed opera diva, made her formal debut at the Metropolitan Opera on this day. Brilliantly performing the role of Leonora in Verdi's *Il trovatore*, the audience rewarded her with a thrilling 42-minute ovation. Born Mary Violet Leontyne Price in Laurel, MS, on Feb. 10, 1927, her family life centered around the church where her parents, James and Kate, were active. Introduced to music early on, she began piano lessons at age 4. In 1949, Price earned a bachelor's degree from Central State College in Wilberforce, OH, and attended New York City's famed Juilliard School of Music from 1949 to 1952. One of the greatest opera singers of our time, Price earned 20 Grammy Awards. Now retired, she resides in New York City.

February 1, 1960–

A Greensboro, NC, protest began the civil rights sit-ins on this day when four Black college students from North Carolina A&T College sat at a "Whites only" lunch counter in a Woolworth's store. Their demonstration touched off similar dramatic sit-ins in nine states, which eventually led to legislation ending segregation in restaurants, theaters and concert halls and led to a broader call for equality in housing, health care and education. The students who conducted the protest, **Ezell Blair Jr.**, **Franklin McCain**, **Joseph McNeil** and **David Richmond**, were dubbed the "Greensboro Four." On the 40th anniversary of the Greensboro, NC, sit-in, President Bill Clinton marked Black History Month with an observance of the event. In 1994, the Smithsonian Institution of American History housed an 8-foot section of the counter, four stools, a soda fountain, pie case and other articles from the historic Woolworth's store in Greensboro. The Woolworth Corporation donated the items.

IN OTHER NEWS

FROM THE NATION'S CAPITAL

• **CALL TO SERVICE:** Former Secretary of State **Gen. Colin L. Powell** has joined President Obama's "Renew America Together" service initiative. At a recent news conference in Washington, D.C., Powell asked all Americans to make an ongoing commitment to serve their communities and their country. "We're not just asking the American people for one day of service," Powell said. "We are asking you to make an ongoing commitment of your time—an hour, a weekend, whatever you can spare. Because that's how we're going to rebuild this country and meet our great challenges – together." Powell also unveiled USAservice.org, a new Web site to help Americans find ways to serve in their own community by connecting grassroots volunteers with nonprofit organizations and community projects in their area. Nearly 5,000 volunteer events already have been established on the site. The initiative began with more than 4,000 community service events held across the country on **Martin Luther King Jr.** Day, Jan. 19.

• **MENDING FENCES:** In the election of Barack Obama as U.S. president, former President **Bill Clinton** said that Americans "can be proud of the progress we've made as a nation to lift racial barriers and form a more perfect union." In accepting the Humanitarian Award at the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Memorial Project Foundation's "Dream Dinner," Clinton seemed to once and for all bury the hatchet (the one some say he started swinging in South Carolina as Obama's campaign for change took off during the Democratic primaries). "Never before have we had the power we have today to make Dr. King's dream a reality, and together, we can build a more just and equal world for future generations," said Clinton, who authorized the building of the $120 million King memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. It will be completed next year.

• **WELCOME TO THE CLUB:** Later in the week, Clinton had lunch at the White House with Obama, President **George W. Bush**, his father, former President **George H.W. Bush** and former President **Jimmy Carter**. While gathering for photos in the Oval Office, Bush told Obama that he and his colleagues "want you to succeed. Whether we're Democrat or Republican, we care deeply about this country."

Rob Carr

• **INDICTED:** Baltimore Mayor **Sheila Dixon** was charged with 12 counts of felony theft, perjury, fraud and misconduct. In a 31-page indictment, federal prosecutors accuse Dixon, the city's first Black woman mayor, of not only taking at least $15,000 in gifts and cash from people doing business with the city, but also taking as much as $3,400 in gift cards—some donated to her office for "needy families"—to purchase electronics and other items for herself and her staff. According to the indictment, Dixon, 55, also later perjured herself by failing to include gifts on her city ethics forms. At a news conference, Dixon proclaimed her innocence. "For the past two years, I have done my best to serve the City of Baltimore as mayor, and I will continue to do so. I will not let these charges deter me...I am being unfairly accused. Time will prove that I have done nothing wrong, and I am confident that I will be found innocent of these charges." If convicted on all charges, Dixon, a former teacher and the mother of two, could be sentenced to 85 years in prison.