

James Earl Jones

James Earl Jones (born January 17, 1931) is an American actor. His career has spanned more than seven decades, and he has been described as "one of America's most distinguished and versatile" actors^[5] and "one of the greatest actors in American history".^[6] Since his Broadway debut in 1957, Jones has won many awards, including a Tony Award for his role in *The Great White Hope*, which also earned him a Golden Globe Award and an Academy Award nomination for Best Actor in a Leading Role for the film version of the play. Jones has won three Emmy Awards, including two in the same year in 1990. He is also known for his voice roles as Darth Vader in the *Star Wars* film series and Mufasa in Disney's *The Lion King*, as well as many other film, stage and television roles.

Jones has been said to possess "one of the best-known voices in show business, a stirring basso profundo that has lent gravel and gravitas" to his projects, including live-action acting, voice acting, and commercial voice-overs.^{[7][8]} In 1970, he won a Grammy Award for *Great American Documents*. As a child, Jones had a stutter. In his episode of *Biography*, he said he overcame the affliction through poetry, public speaking, and acting, although it lasted for several years. A pre-med major in college, he went on to serve in the United States Army during the Korean War before pursuing a career in acting. On November 12, 2011, he received an Honorary Academy Award.^[6] On November 9, 2015, Jones received the Voice Arts Icon Award.^[9] On May 25, 2017, he received an Honorary Doctor of Arts degree from Harvard University and concluded the event's benediction with "May the Force be with you".^[10]

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James Earl Jones



Jones in 2001

Born	January 17, 1931 <div>Arkabutla, Mississippi, U.S.</div>
Residence	Pawling, New York, U.S. ^[1]
Alma mater	University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance
Occupation	Actor
Years active	1948–present
Spouse(s)	<div>Julienne Marie</div> <div>(m. 1968; div. 1972[2]</div> <div><div>Cecilia Hart</div><div>(m. 1982; died 2016[3]</div></div>
Children	1 ^[4]
Parent(s)	Robert Earl Jones Ruth Connolly

Early life

Childhood

James Earl Jones was born in Arkabutla, Mississippi, on January 17, 1931,^[11] to Ruth (Williams) Jones (1911–1986), a teacher and maid, and Robert Earl Jones (1910–2006), a boxer, butler, and chauffeur. His father left the family shortly after James Earl's birth, and later became a stage and screen actor in New York and Hollywood.^{[12][13]} Jones and his father did not get to know each other until the 1950s, but became reconciled then. He has said in interviews that his parents were both of mixed African-American, Irish and Native American ancestry, as well.^{[14][15]}

From the age of five, Jones was raised by his maternal grandparents, John Henry and Maggie Williams,^[11] on their farm in Jackson, Michigan; they had moved from Mississippi in the Great Migration.^[16] Jones found the transition to living with his grandparents in Michigan traumatic, and developed a stutter so severe that he refused to speak. When his family moved to the more rural Brethren, Michigan, a teacher helped him overcome his stutter. He remained functionally mute for eight years until he entered high school.

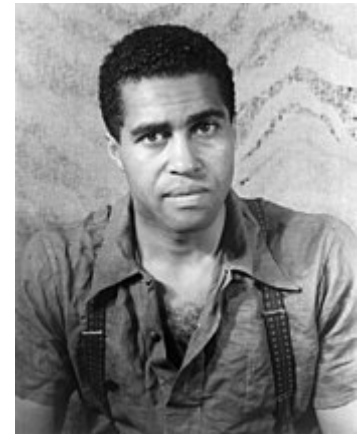
He credits his English teacher, Donald Crouch, who discovered he had a gift for writing poetry, with helping him end his silence.^[13] Crouch urged him to challenge his reluctance to speak.^[17] "I was a stutterer. I couldn't talk. So my first year of school was my first mute year, and then those mute years continued until I got to high school."^[16]

Education

Jones was educated at the Browning School for boys in his high school years and graduated as vice president of his class from Dickson Rural Agricultural School (now Brethren High School) in Brethren, Michigan. He attended the University of Michigan, where he was initially a pre-med major.^[13] He joined the Reserve Officer Training Corps and excelled. He felt comfortable within the structure of the military environment and enjoyed the camaraderie of his fellow cadets in the Pershing Rifles Drill Team and Scabbard and Blade Honor Society.^[18] During the course of his studies, Jones discovered he was not cut out to be a doctor.

Instead, he focused on drama at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance with the thought of doing something he enjoyed, before, he assumed, he would have to go off to fight in the Korean War. After four years of college, Jones graduated from the university in 1955.^[19]

Military



Jones's father, Robert Earl Jones, in promotional still for the Langston Hughes play *Don't You Want to Be Free?* (1938)

With the war intensifying in Korea, Jones expected to be deployed as soon as he received his commission as a second lieutenant. As he waited for his orders, he worked as a part-time stage crew hand at the Ramsdell Theatre in Manistee, Michigan, where he had earlier performed. Jones was commissioned in mid-1953, after the Korean War's end, and reported to Fort Benning to attend the Infantry Officers Basic Course. He attended Ranger School and received his Ranger Tab (although he said during an interview on the BBC's *The One Show*, screened on November 11, 2009, that he "washed out" of Ranger training). He was initially to report to Fort Leonard Wood, but his unit was instead sent to establish a cold weather training command at the former Camp Hale near Leadville, Colorado. His battalion became a training unit in the rugged terrain of the Rocky Mountains. Jones was promoted to first lieutenant prior to his discharge.^[20]


He moved to New York, where he studied at the American Theatre Wing. He worked as a janitor to support himself.

Film and stage career

External audio

Early career

Jones began his acting career at the Ramsdell Theatre in Manistee, Michigan. In 1953, he was a stage carpenter. During the 1955–57 seasons, he was an actor and stage manager. He performed his first portrayal of Shakespeare's *Othello* in this theater in 1955.^[22] His early career also included an appearance in the ABC radio anthology series *Theatre-Five*.^[23]

 James Earl Jones talks with Studs Terkel on WFMT; 1968/02 (https://www.popuparchive.com/collections/938/items/42489), 49:25, Studs Terkel Radio Archive^[21]

Stage roles

Jones is an accomplished stage actor; he has won Tony awards in 1969 for *The Great White Hope* and in 1987 for *Fences*. He has acted in many Shakespearean roles: *Othello*, *King Lear*, Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Abhorson in *Measure for Measure*, and Claudius in *Hamlet*. In 1973, Jones played Hickey on Broadway at the Circle in the Square Theater in a revival of Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*. (*The Iceman Cometh*. Internet Broadway Database.) Jones played Lennie on Broadway in the 1974 Brooks Atkinson Theatre production of the adaptation of John Steinbeck's novella, *Of Mice and Men*, with Kevin Conway as George and Pamela Blair as Curley's Wife.

Jones received Kennedy Center Honors in 2002. On April 7, 2005, Jones and Leslie Uggams headed the cast in an African-American Broadway revival version of *On Golden Pond*, directed by Leonard Foglia and produced by Jeffrey Finn.^[13] In February 2008, he starred on Broadway as Big Daddy in a limited-run, all-African-American production of Tennessee Williams's Pulitzer Prize-winning drama *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, directed by Debbie Allen and mounted at the Broadhurst Theatre. In November 2009, James reprised the role of Big Daddy in *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* at the Novello Theatre in London's West End. This production also stars Sanaa Lathan as Maggie, Phylicia Rashad as Big Mamma, and Adrian Lester as Brick.

In October 2010, Jones returned to the Broadway stage in Alfred Uhry's *Driving Miss Daisy*, along with Vanessa Redgrave at the Golden Theatre.^[24]

In November 2011, Jones starred in *Driving Miss Daisy* in London's West End, and on November 12 received an honorary Oscar in front of the audience at the Wyndham's Theatre, which was presented to him by Ben Kingsley.^[25] In March 2012, Jones played the role of President Art Hockstader in Gore Vidal's *The Best Man* on Broadway at the Schoenfeld Theatre: he was nominated for a Tony for Best Performance in a Lead Role in a Revival. The play also starred Angela Lansbury, John Larroquette (as candidate William Russell), Candice Bergen, Eric McCormack (as candidate Senator Joseph Cantwell), Jefferson Mays, Michael McKean, and Kerry Butler, with direction by Michael Wilson.^{[26][27]} In 2013, Jones starred opposite Vanessa Redgrave in a production of *Much Ado About Nothing* directed by Mark Rylance at The Old Vic, London.^[28]

In 2014, Jones played the role of Grandpa in the comedy *You Can't Take it With You* at the Longacre Theatre, Broadway. On September 23, 2015, Jones opened in a new revival of *The Gin Game* opposite Cicely Tyson, in the John Golden Theater, where the play had originally premiered (with Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy). The play had a planned limited run of 16 weeks.^[29]

Film roles

In 1964, Jones appeared in his first film in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* as the young Lt. Lothar Zogg, the B-52 bombardier.

In 1967, Jones played a surgeon and Haitian rebel leader in *The Comedians*, alongside Richard Burton, Elizabeth Taylor and Alec Guinness.

In 1970, Jones starred in his first leading role *The Great White Hope* co-starring Jane Alexander. Jones portrayed boxer Jack Jefferson, a role he had previously originated on stage. His performance was met with great critical acclaim, earning him an Academy Award Nomination for Best Actor. He was the second African-American male performer (following Sidney Poitier) to be nominated for this award.^[13]

In *The Man* (1972), Jones starred as a senator who unexpectedly becomes the first African-American president of the United States. The film also starred Martin Balsam, and Burgess Meredith.

In 1974, Jones co-starred with Diahann Carroll in the film *Claudine*, the story of a woman who raises her six children alone after two failed and two "almost" marriages. They each were nominated for Golden Globe awards for their performances. Carroll later was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actress for her performance as well.

Jones became a beloved character actor in film, starring in *Conan the Barbarian* (1982), *Matewan* (1987), *Coming to America* (1988), *Field of Dreams* (1989), *The Hunt for Red October* (1990), *Patriot Games* (1992), *The Sandlot* (1993), *Clear and Present Danger* (1994), and *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1995) among many other roles.

Voice roles

As a voice actor, Jones is known for his role as Darth Vader in the 1977 film *Star Wars: A New Hope* and its sequels *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) and *Return of the Jedi* (1983). Darth Vader was portrayed in costume by David Prowse in the film trilogy, with Jones dubbing Vader's dialogue in postproduction because Prowse's strong West Country accent was deemed unsuitable for the role by George Lucas.^[30] At his own request, Jones was uncredited for the original releases of the first two *Star Wars* films,^[31] though he later would be credited for the first film in its 1997 "Special Edition" re-release.^[32] As he explained in a 2008 interview:

When Linda Blair did the girl in *The Exorcist*, they hired Mercedes McCambridge to do the voice of the devil coming out of her. And there was controversy as to whether Mercedes should get credit. I was one who thought no, she was just special effects. So when it came to Darth Vader, I said, no, I'm just special effects. But it became so identified that by the third one, I thought, OK I'll let them put my name on it.^[31]

Although uncredited, Jones's voice is possibly heard as Vader at the conclusion of *Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith* (2005). When specifically asked whether he had supplied the voice, possibly from a previous recording, Jones told *Newsday*: "You'd have to ask Lucas about that. I don't know."^[31] Jones reprised his voice role of Vader for the character's appearances in the animated TV series *Star Wars Rebels*,^{[33][34]} and the live-action film *Rogue One: A Star Wars Story* (2016).^[35]

His other notable voice roles include Mufasa in the 1994 Disney film *The Lion King* and its direct-to-video sequel, *The Lion King II: Simba's Pride*; as well as its 2019 remake *The Lion King*, directed by Jon Favreau (for which he was the only original voice cast member to reprise his role).^[36] According to Favreau, Jones's lines remained mostly the same from the original film.^{[37][38]} Chiwetel Ejiofor, who voiced Scar in the remake, said that "the comfort of [Jones reprising his role] is going to be very rewarding in taking [the audience] on this journey again. It's a once-in-a-generation vocal quality."^[37]

In 1990, Jones performed voice work for *The Simpsons* first "Treehouse of Horror" Halloween special, in which he was the narrator for the Simpsons' version of Edgar Allan Poe's poem "The Raven". He also voiced the Emperor of the Night in *Pinocchio and the Emperor of the Night* and Ommadon in *Flight of Dragons*. Accompanied by the Morgan State University choir, Jones spoke the U.S. National Anthem before the 1993 Major League Baseball All-Star Game in Baltimore.^[39] In 1996, he recited the classic baseball poem "Casey at the Bat" with the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra,^[40] and in 2007 before a Philadelphia Phillies home game on June 1, 2007.^[41]

He also has done the CNN tagline, "This is CNN", as well as "This is CNN International", and the opening for CNN's morning show *New Day*. Jones was also a longtime spokesman for Bell Atlantic and later Verizon. He also lent his voice to the opening for NBC's coverage of the 2000 and 2004 Summer Olympics; "the Big PI in the Sky" (God) in the computer game *Under a Killing Moon*; a Claymation film, *The Creation*; and several other guest spots on *The Simpsons*. Jones also lent his voice for a narrative part in the Adam Sandler comedy *Click*, released in June 2006. Jones narrated all 27 books of the New Testament in the audiobook *James Earl Jones Reads the Bible*.^[42]

Television roles

Jones has the distinction of being the only actor to win two Emmys^[43] in the same year, in 1991 as Best Actor for his role in *Gabriel's Fire* and as Best Supporting Actor for his work in *Heat Wave*.^[5]

Jones starred in the critically acclaimed the television mini-series *Roots: The Next Generations* as the older version of author Alex Haley,^[13] and widowed police officer Neb Langston in the television program *Under One Roof*, for which he received an Emmy nomination. He also appeared in television and radio advertising for Verizon Business DSL and Verizon Online DSL from Verizon Communications. He appeared on the soap opera *Guiding Light*. He portrayed Thad Green on "Mathnet," a parody of *Dragnet* that appeared in the PBS program *Square One Television*.

In 1969, Jones participated in making test films for the children's education series *Sesame Street*; these shorts, combined with animated segments, were shown to groups of children to gauge the effectiveness of the then-groundbreaking *Sesame Street* format. As cited by production notes included in the DVD release *Sesame Street: Old School 1969–1974*, the short that had the greatest impact with test audiences was one showing bald-headed Jones counting slowly to ten. This and other segments featuring Jones were eventually aired as part of the *Sesame Street* series itself when it debuted later in 1969 and Jones is often cited as the first celebrity guest on that series, although a segment with Carol Burnett was the first to actually be broadcast.^[13]

He has played lead characters on television in three series. First, he appeared on the short-lived CBS police drama *Paris*, which aired during autumn 1979. That show was notable as the first program on which Steven Bochco served as executive producer. The second show aired on ABC between 1990 and 1992, the first season being titled *Gabriel's Fire* and the second (after a format revision) *Pros and Cons*. In both formats of that show, Jones played a former policeman wrongly convicted of murder who, upon his release from prison, became a private eye. In 1995, Jones starred in *Under One Roof* as Neb Langston, a widowed African-American police officer sharing his home in Seattle with his daughter, his married son with his children, and Neb's newly adopted son. The show was a mid-season replacement and lasted only six weeks. From 1989 to 1993, Jones served as the host of the children's TV series *Long Ago and Far Away*. In 1998, Jones starred in the widely acclaimed syndicated program *An American Moment* (created by James R. Kirk and Ninth Wave Productions). Jones took over the role left by Charles Kuralt, upon Kuralt's death.

James has guest starred in many television shows over the years including for NBC's *Frasier* and *Will & Grace*, CBS's *Two and a Half Men*, and the WB drama *Everwood*, *Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman*, Fox's medical drama *House, M.D.*, and most recently CBS's *The Big Bang Theory*^[44]

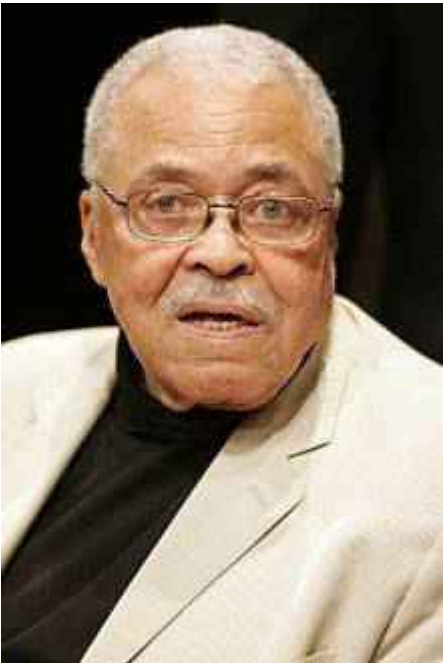
In 2013-14, he appeared alongside *Malcolm McDowell* in a series of commercials for *Sprint* in which the two recited mundane phone and text-message conversations in a dramatic way.^{[45][46]} In 2015, Jones starred as the Chief Justice Caleb Thorne in the American drama series *Agent X* alongside actress *Sharon Stone*, *Jeff Hephner*, *Jamey Sheridan*, and others. The television series was aired by *TNT* from November 8 to December 27, 2015, running only one season and 10 episodes.

In 2015, Jones reprised his role as Mufasa in the television film *The Lion Guard: Return of the Roar* which served as a sequel to the original film, and a pilot to the animated series.

Filmography

Personal life

Jones married American actress/singer *Julienne Marie* in 1968, whom he met while performing as Othello in 1964.^[47] They had no children, and divorced in 1972.^[48] In 1982, he married actress *Cecilia Hart*, with whom he had one child, son *Flynn Earl Jones* (born 1982).^{[49][50]} Hart died on October 16, 2016, after a year of living with *ovarian cancer*.^[51] In April 2016, Jones spoke publicly for the first time in nearly 20 years about his long-term health challenge with *type 2 diabetes*. He has been dealing with diabetes since the mid 1990s.^[52]



Jones in 2013

Awards and nominations

EGOT

While James Earl Jones is technically a recipient of the *EGOT* (Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, Tony), Jones has yet to win a competitive Oscar, having received an *Honorary* one instead.^[53]

Tony Awards

Year	Award	Nominated work	Result
1969	<i>Best Actor in a Play</i>	<i>The Great White Hope</i>	Won
1987	<i>Best Actor in a Play</i>	<i>Fences</i>	Won
2005	<i>Best Actor in a Play</i>	<i>On Golden Pond</i>	Nominated
2012	<i>Best Actor in a Play</i>	<i>The Best Man</i>	Nominated

Academy Awards

Year	Award	Nominated work	Result
1969	<i>Best Actor</i>	<i>The Great White Hope</i>	Nominated
2011	<i>Honorary Award</i>		Won

Primetime Emmy Award

Year	Award	Nominated work	Result
1963	<u>Guest Actor in a Drama Series</u>	<u>East Side/West Side</u>	Nominated
1990	<u>Supporting Actor in a Miniseries</u>	<u>By Dawn's Early Light</u>	Nominated
1990	<u>Supporting Actor in a Miniseries</u>	<u>Heat Wave</u>	Won
1990	<u>Leading Actor in a Drama Series</u>	<u>Gabriel's Fire</u>	Won
1994	<u>Guest Actor in a Drama Series</u>	<u>Picket Fences</u>	Nominated
1995	<u>Supporting Actor in a Drama Series</u>	<u>Under One Roof</u>	Nominated
1997	<u>Guest Actor in a Comedy Series</u>	<u>Frasier</u>	Nominated
2003	<u>Guest Actor in a Drama Series</u>	<u>Everwood</u>	Nominated

Grammy Award

Year	Award	Nominated work	Result
1970	<u>Best Spoken Word</u>	<u>The Great White Hope</u>	Nominated
1977	<u>Best Spoken Word</u>	<u>Great American Documents</u>	Won
2001	<u>Best Spoken Word for Children</u>	<u>The Christmas Miracle of Jonathan Toomey</u>	Nominated

Film and Television Awards

Golden Globe Awards

Year	Award	Nominated work	Result
1971	<u>Most Promising Newcomer -Male</u>	<u>The Great White Hope</u>	Won
1971	<u>Best Actor in a Drama Film</u>	<u>The Great White Hope</u>	Nominated
1975	<u>Best Actor in a Comedy or Musical Film</u>	<u>Claudine</u>	Nominated
1990	<u>Best Actor in a Television Series - Drama</u>	<u>Gabriel's Fire</u>	Nominated
1991	<u>Best Actor in a Television Series - Drama</u>	<u>Pros and Cons</u>	Nominated

Screen Actors Guild Award

Year	Award	Nominated work	Result
1995	<u>Male Actor in a Miniseries or TV Movie</u>	<u>Cry, the Beloved Country</u>	Nominated
2009	<u>Lifetime Achievement Award</u>		Won

Independent Spirit Award

Year	Award	Nominated work	Result
1987	<u>Best Supporting Role</u>	<u>Matewan</u>	Nominated

Honors

- 1985 Induction into the American Theater Hall of Fame^{[54][55]}

- 1987 First recipient of the National Association for Hearing and Speech Action's Annie Glenn Award^[56]
- 1991 Common Wealth Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Dramatic Arts
- 1992 National Medal of Arts
- 1996 Golden Palm Star on the Palm Springs, California, Walk of Stars^[57]
- 1996 Golden Plate Award of the American Academy of Achievement.^[58]
- 2000 Daytime Emmy for Outstanding Performance in a Children's Special Summer's End
- 2011 Eugene O'Neill Theater Center Monte Cristo Award Recipient^[59]
- 2012 Marian Anderson Award Recipient^{[60][61]}
- 2014 Voice Icon Award sponsored by Society of Voice Arts and Sciences at the Museum of Moving Image
- 2017 Honorary Doctor of Arts from Harvard University^[62]
- 2019 Batch of Disney Legend^[63]

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