

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James Earl Jones

PERSON

Jones, James Earl

**Alternative Names:** James Earl Jones;

**Life Dates:** January 17, 1931-

**Place of Birth:** Arkabutla, Mississippi, USA

**Residence:** Pawling, New York

**Work:** Pawling, New York

**Occupations:** Actor

## Biographical Note

Actor James Earl Jones was born on January 17, 1931 to Robert Earl Jones and Ruth Connolly in Arkabutla, Mississippi. When Jones was five years old, his family moved to Dublin, Michigan. He graduated from Dickson High School in Brethren, Michigan in 1949. In 1953, Jones participated in productions at Manistee Summer Theatre. After serving in the U.S. Army for two years, Jones received his B.A. degree from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor in 1955.

Following graduation, Jones relocated to New York City where he studied acting at the American Theatre Wing. Jones' first speaking role on Broadway was as the valet in *Sunrise at Campobello* in 1958. Then, in 1960, Jones acted in the Shakespeare in Central Park production of *Henry V* while also playing the lead in the off-Broadway production of *The Pretender*. Geraldine Lust cast Jones in Jean Genet's *The Blacks* in the following year. In 1963, Jones made his feature film debut as Lt. Lothar Zogg in *Dr. Strangelove*, directed by Stanley Kubrick. In 1964, Joseph Papp cast Jones as Othello for the Shakespeare in Central Park production of *Othello*. Jones portrayed champion boxer Jack Jefferson in the play *The Great White Hope* in 1969, and again in the 1970 film adaptation. His leading film performances of the 1970s include *The Man* (1972), *Claudine* (1974), *The River Niger* (1975) and *The Bingo Long Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings* (1976). In 1974, Jones portrayed Lennie in *Of Mice and Men* on Broadway. Jones also voiced the iconic character Darth Vader in the 1977 movie *Star Wars*, returning to the role in the subsequent sequels, *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. Jones portrayed Troy Maxson in the original Broadway production of *Fences* in 1987. Two years later, he appeared in the movie *Field of Dreams*, and was cast as the lead character on the television show *Gabriel's Fire*. Jones provided the

voice for Mufasa in the 1994 animated Disney film *The Lion King*. He returned to the Broadway stage in 2005, starring in *On Golden Pond*. He then appeared in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in 2008, and acted in productions of *Driving Miss Daisy* alongside Vanessa Redgrave in London in 2011 and *Angela Lansbury* in Australia in 2013. He also appeared with Cicely Tyson in a 2015 revival of *The Gin Game*.

Jones won his first Tony Award in 1969 for *The Great White Hope*. He then received his second Tony Award for his portrayal of Troy Maxson in *Fences*. In 1991, Jones received Emmy Awards for his roles in *Gabriel's Fire* and *Heat Wave*. In recognition of his fifty plus years in acting, Jones received an Honorary Academy Award in 2011.

Jones has one child, Flynn Earl Jones, with his late wife, actress Cecilia Hart.

James Earl Jones was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on August 10, 2016.

## Related Entries

**Dickson High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

**American Theatre Wing** [STUDENTOF]  
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

**University of Michigan** [STUDENTOF]  
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

**B.A. degree**

**Dr. Strangelove** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

**Actor**

**The Gin Game** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[\[from ? to ?\]](#)

**Actor**

**The Egghead (Broadway)** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[\[from 1957 to ?\]](#)

**Understudy**

**Wedding in Japan** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[\[from 1957 to ?\]](#)

**Understudy**

**Sunrise at Campobello (Broadway)** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[\[from 1958 to ?\]](#)

**Actor**

**Henry V (Shakespeare in Central Park)** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[\[from 1960 to ?\]](#)

**Actor**

**The Pretender** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1960 to ?]

**Actor**

**The Blacks** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1961 to ?]

**Actor**

**East Side, West Side (CBS)** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1963 to ?]

**Actor**

**Othello (Shakespeare in Central Park)** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1964 to ?]

**Actor**

**The Great White Hope (play)** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1969 to ?]

**Actor**

**The Great White Hope (film)** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1970 to ?]

**Actor**

**Of Mice & Men (Broadway)** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1974 to ?]

**Actor**

**Star Wars Film Trilogy** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1977 to 1983]

**Actor**

**Fences** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1987 to ?]

**Actor**

**The Field of Dreams** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1989 to ?]

**Actor**

**Gabriel's Fire** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1989 to 1991]

**Actor**

**Heat Wave** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1991 to ?]

**Actor**

**The Lion King** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1994 to ?]

**Actor**

**On Golden Pond (Broadway)** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 2005 to ?]

**Actor**

**Cat on a Hot Tin Roof (Broadway)** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 2008 to ?]

**Actor**

**The Best Man (Broadway)** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 2012 to ?]

**Actor**

**American Theatre Wing** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Student**

**American Theatre Wing** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Instructor**

**Manistee Summer Theater Company** [MEMBEROf]  
[from 1953 to 1957]