

CICELY TYSON

1924-2021



Cicely Tyson was born on December 19, 1924 in East Harlem, New York. Tyson's parents were immigrants from the Caribbean island of Nieves. Her parents divorced when she was 10 and she was raised by an extremely strict religious mother.

Ms. Tyson began her career against her mother's wishes as a model. Her beautiful face graced the covers of Ebony, Jet and Essence magazines. When starting her acting career, she realized that the substantive roles for Black people were few and far between. She vowed to only take rolls that were uplifting and refused any rolls which were demeaning of Black people.

Her first notable film role was in 1968 in the movie. "The Heart is a Lonely Hunter." She followed this in 1972 with her breakout film "Sounder" where she portrayed Rebecca, a woman who in 1952, had to work endless hours to care for her family after her husband is imprisoned for stealing food for his children. When speaking of the story, Ms. Tyson tells the NY Times "the story in Sounder is a part of our history, a testimony to the strength of humankind." "Our whole Black heritage is that struggle of pride and dignity. The Black woman has never been shown on the screen this way before."

Her career included wonderful films including:

1974- Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman

1977- Roots

1978- A Woman called Moses

1981- the Marva Collins Story

1994 – Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All (which won her an Emmy as Best Supporting Actress)

Ms. Tyson was married for seven years to Jazz musician Miles Davis.

During her career she won three Emmys, and in 2013 at age 88, she became the oldest actor to win a Tony for her Broadway role in "the Trip to Bountiful" In the last few years Ms. Tyson was seen on television in "How To get Away with Murder" and in the Tyler Perry movie "A Fall from Grace." She recently completed her biography "Just As I Am."

Ms. Tyson received numerous awards including an honorary Oscar, Induction into the American Theater Hall of Fame, the Television Hall of Fame, and a Peabody award. In 2016 she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by President Barack Obama.

Ms. Tyson was a long-time active member of Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem, New York. She passed away on January 28, 2021 at the age of 96.