

Remembering James Earl Jones – The Voice of Millennials’ Childhood and Titan of the Theater

The most unmistakable voice in Hollywood, James Earl Jones, recently passed away in his home at the age of 93.



For the children of the Millennial and X generations, his voice was an ever-present feature in their homes, thanks to the popularity of *Star Wars*, and *The Lion King*.

Though often remembered for his roles as various leaders, whether of a cult of snake worshipers in [Conan the Barbarian](#), or of a fictional African kingdom in [Coming to America](#), The New York Times eulogized him as “one of America’s most versatile actors in a stage, film, and television.”

The versatility was developed early on in his career following a term of service during (but not in) the Korean War, in which he attended Army Ranger school and became Second Lieutenant of a training unit in the rugged terrain of the Rocky Mountains. As is so often the case with the most beloved actors in society, Jones dove deep into Shakespeare including roles such as Othello and King Lear, Oberon in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and Claudius in *Hamlet*.

The stage would always be a home for Jones, where he performed almost exclusively for more than a decade during which he won the 1969 Tony Award for Best Actor in a Play as the starring role of troubled boxer Jack Johnson in *The Great White Hope*.

In 1977, Jones debuted in a voiceover role as the charisma behind the mask of the armored, fallen Jedi Darth Vader in *Star Wars*, a role which he reprised twice more for the following sequels. At first, he didn't think his name should be listed on the cast credits. He explains why below...

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.

Many fantastic performances followed, including [Field of Dreams](#) and [Hunt for the Red October](#), before his voice was utilized again for King Mufasa the lion in Disney's [The Lion King](#), another pillar of childhood memories for so many American kids.