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Sidney Poitier

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Poitier, Sidney (b. Miami, 20 February 1927). Bahamian actor. Born in the United States but a citizen of the Bahamas, Poitier moved to New York City and studied acting at the American Negro Theatre (ANT), eventually performing in many of their productions. Gaining prominence in the midst of the civil rights era, his roles on stage and screen are notable for their emphasis on equal rights for African Americans. As a performer with ANT, Poitier was featured in productions of *You Can't Take It With You* (1946), *Juno and the Paycock* (1946, with Harry Belafonte), and *Freight* (1949), which also ran for a week on Broadway. His greatest stage success came in Lorraine Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun* (1959) in which he originated the role of Walter Lee opposite RUBY DEE as Ruth Younger, reprising the role in the 1961 film version. He has also directed for the stage, leading the 1968 integrated cast of *Carry Me Back to Morningside Heights* starring Louis Gossett and Cicely Tyson.

Poitier's career on film has held great sway over the film-going public eager for positive representations of black male characters. He made history by becoming the first black male to win an Academy Award, for his portrayal of Homer Smith in *Lilies of the Field* (1963). Other notable film roles were in *The Defiant Ones* (1958, Oscar nomination), *Porgy and Bess* (1959), and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967). He has also directed numerous films such as *Uptown Saturday Night* (1974) and *Stir Crazy* (1980).

Poitier was a founding member of the Committee for the Negro in the Arts (est. 1947), and served as an ambassador of the Bahamas to Japan and to UNESCO. In 2009 he was presented with the United States Presidential Medal of Freedom for his commitment to the pursuit of racial equality.

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S. Poitier, *The Measure of a Man: a Spiritual Autobiography* (San Francisco, 2000)