

Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Richard Roundtree

PERSON

Roundtree, Richard, 1942-

Alternative Names: Richard Roundtree;

Life Dates: July 9, 1942-

Place of Birth: New Rochelle, New York, USA

Residence: Toluca Lake, CA

Work: Los Angeles, CA

Occupations: Film Actor

Biographical Note

Actor Richard Roundtree was born on July 9, 1942 in New Rochelle, New York to John and Kathryn Roundtree. Roundtree attended New Rochelle High School, where he played on the school's nationally ranked football team. In 1961, Roundtree earned an athletic scholarship to attend Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois, but he left school in 1963 to pursue a career as an actor and a model.

In 1963, Roundtree was hired by Eunice Johnson of Ebony magazine to model in the Ebony Fashion Fair. Roundtree went on to join the Negro Ensemble Company in 1967, where he played the role of boxing legend Jack Johnson in the company's production of *The Great White Hope*. In 1971, Roundtree was cast in his most notable role as John Shaft in the 1971 action film, *Shaft*, directed by Gordon Parks. The popularity of the film turned Roundtree into a star with two subsequent sequels: *Shaft's Big Score* (1972) and *Shaft in Africa* (1973). Following the success of the *Shaft* trilogy, Roundtree was awarded the Golden Globe Most Promising Newcomer Award in 1972. Roundtree went on to appear in several films throughout the 1970s and 1980s, including *Earthquake* (1974), *Escape to Athena* (1979), *A Game for Vultures* (1979), and *Day of The Assassin* (1979). In 1977, Roundtree appeared in the ABC television miniseries *Roots*, based on Alex Haley's book *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. Roundtree reprised the role of John Shaft in the 2000 film *Shaft*, starring Samuel L. Jackson as his character's nephew, and directed by John Singleton. Roundtree has also appeared in several television series including *Soul Food*, *Desperate Housewives*, *Heroes*, and *Grey's Anatomy*. In 2013, he became a series regular on the television show *Being Mary Jane*, appearing alongside actresses Gabrielle Union and Margaret Avery. Roundtree also appeared in multiple episodes of FOX's television series *Star* in 2017.

and 2018.

In 1993, Roundtree was diagnosed with a rare form of male breast cancer, and underwent chemotherapy and a double mastectomy. Since then, Roundtree has served as a breast cancer awareness advocate for the Susan G. Komen Foundation and the Know Your Score Men's Health Initiative. Roundtree has received the MTV Lifetime Achievement Award for his role as Shaft, as well as an Image Award nomination in 1998, a Peabody Award in 2002 and a Black Theater Alliance Award Lifetime Achievement Award in 2010.

Richard Roundtree was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on March 1, 2018.

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