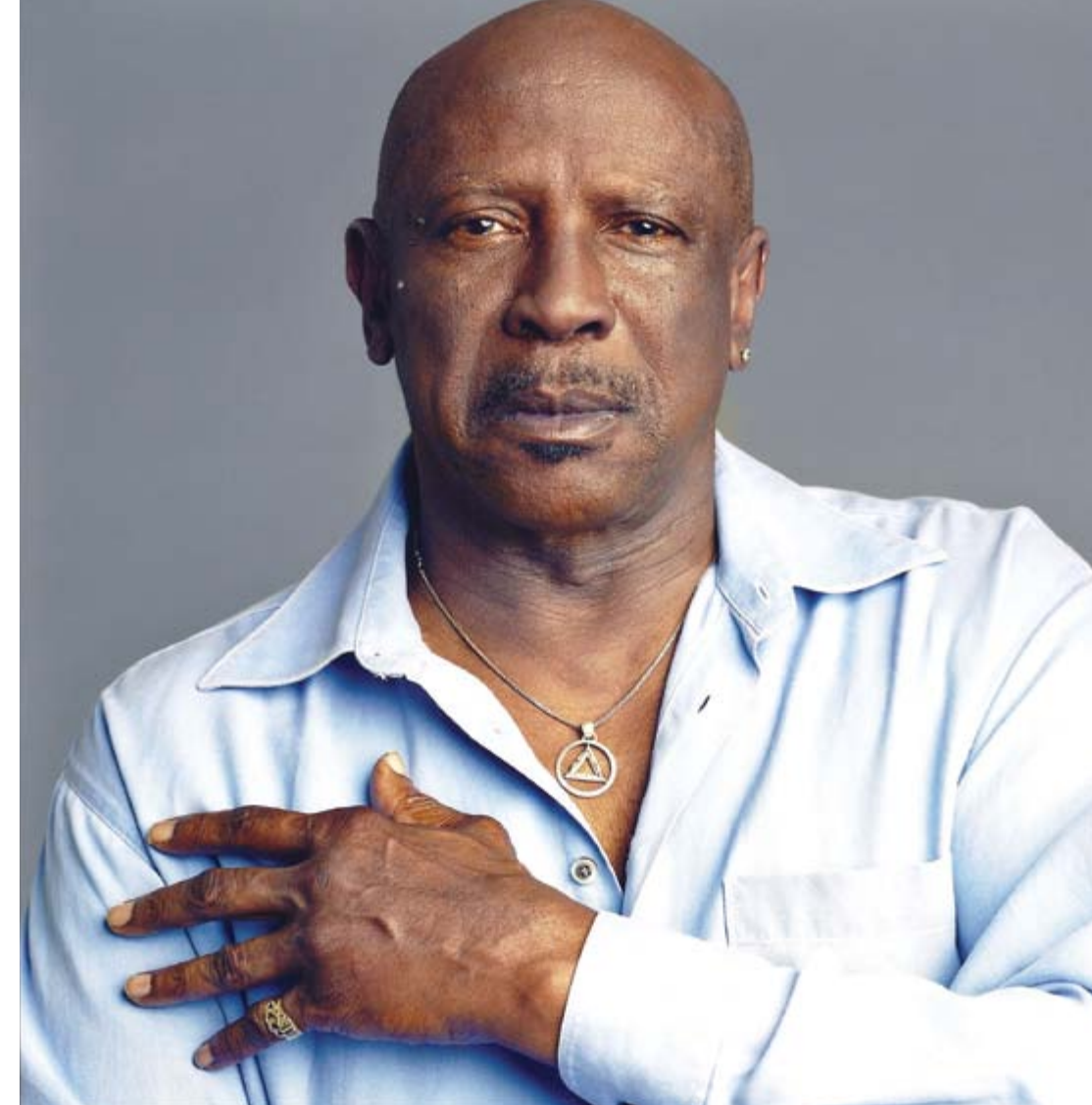


# BREAKING BARRIERS

## A Q & A WITH LOUIS GOSSETT JR.

Academy Award-winning actor Louis Gossett Jr. has been breaking down boundaries since the onset of his career. For over six decades, Brooklyn-born Gossett has entertained us with his repertoire of deeply engaging roles. He portrayed Fiddler on the politically-resonant 1970s miniseries *Roots*, which delved into slavery and emancipation. He is best known for playing Sergeant Emil Foley in *An Officer and a Gentleman*, which won him his Academy Award and put him on the map as the first African American actor to win an Oscar for the best supporting role.

This past spring Gossett spent time in various parts of Nova Scotia filming the highly anticipated miniseries *The Book of Negroes*, which is based on Canadian Lawrence Hill's award-winning novel. The production also features Cuba Gooding Jr. and Allan Hawco of CBC's *Republic of Doyle*. Local Connections Halifax chats with Mr. Gossett on fame, good fortune and Nova Scotia's past.



Q & A by: Tiffany Thornton

**YOUR FIRST MOVIE ROLE WAS AT THE AGE OF NINETEEN, WHEN YOU FILMED ON LOCATION IN KENYA. WHAT WAS THAT LIKE FOR A YOUNG ACTOR?**

I arrived in Kenya to work on a film called "The Bushbaby", and I ended up being in Africa for three months. I had not really traveled that much before, then my movie right after that was filmed in Israel. I had an international education.

**YOU WERE THE FIRST AFRICAN AMERICAN TO WIN AN ACADEMY AWARD FOR BEST SUPPORTING ACTOR. HOW DID YOU NOT LET YOUR EGO GET THE BEST OF YOU, AND MAINTAIN YOUR FOCUS ON YOUR ART?**

You have to behave a certain way and be aware of certain things. You look up one day and you get kind of big headed. It's a challenge. Life had challenges anyway, but when you are being a star it really challenges you. I have been through all of that, and with good fortune and the greater good I came out of all that.

**ROOTS WAS WATCHED BY MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WHEN IT FIRST AIRED. DO YOU THINK IT HELPED TO CHANGE PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS OF SLAVERY IN THE EARLY DAYS OF AMERICA?**

It changed people's perceptions, but it was an education. Thank god for the network for getting that sophisticated. Everybody knows everything now. They dealt with stuff on the surface, not underneath.

**HOW DID YOU FIND FILMING ON LOCATION IN PLACES LIKE LOUISBOURG AND SHELburne?**

We filmed much of the film in Nova Scotia and it was just gorgeous, but almost a little too much oxygen (laughs)! I slept like a baby at night.

**HOW DID YOU COME TO HEAR ABOUT THE TELEVISION VERSION OF LAWRENCE HILL'S "THE BOOK OF NEGROES"?**

They were very interested in having me play the part of Daddy Moses. "The Book of Negroes" is about slavery, but it's also about the dramatic life of a woman. Aunjanue Ellis, the main actress who plays Aminata is just incredible. I would have to be insane to turn that down.

**DADDY MOSES IS AN AFRICAN AMERICAN SLAVE AND A METHODIST PREACHER IN NOVA SCOTIA LEADING A BAND OF RUNAWAY SLAVES TO FREEDOM. WHAT WAS THE EXPERIENCE LIKE FOR YOU ENCOMPASSING THAT ROLE?**

Moses is almost blind; he can see maybe five feet in front of him. He uses it as a ploy sometimes he acts very blind and sometimes he can see more then he lets on. It was a very cathartic experience for me.

**HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE DADDY MOSES' ROLE IN THE STORY?**

There is a scene in the book where Daddy Moses is taking Aminata hunting but of course he is blind. Yet he can hear the rustling of a deer in the forest and shoots it dead in one shot. It's like Moses possesses a level of magic in a way. He imparts so many values onto Aminata while she is dealing with major adversities.

**THE PREMISE OF THE FILM IS A SUBJECT THAT FEW CANADIANS KNOW IS A PART OF THEIR HISTORY. WHAT DO YOU HOPE PEOPLE WILL BE ABLE TO TAKE AWAY FROM THIS MINI-SERIES?**

They will take away the fact that we are all really on one planet, and that we need to share in it equally and be equally responsible. It was difficult filming, but was a multinational production—South Africa, Canada, the United States and England. I looked around my last day and everyone was like a family. We all worked very hard to make those scenes as perfect as possible. I said, "You guys don't realize what you're doing. You have done what the world is trying to do. Carry that message back home with you."

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