

Topic Page: [Washington, Denzel, 1954-](#)

Summary Article: **Denzel Washington (1954-)**

From *African American Almanac*

Actor

Denzel Hayes Washington was born on December 28, 1954, in Mt. Vernon, New York. He attended an upstate private high school, the Oakland Academy, and then entered Fordham University as a pre-med major. Washington did not originally intend to become an actor, but when he auditioned for the lead role in a student production of Eugene O'Neill's *The Emperor Jones*, he won the part over theater majors. His performance in that play, and later in a production of *Othello*, led his drama instructor to encourage Washington to pursue an acting career.



Washington's first major role was in the Off-Broadway drama *A Soldier's Story*; Washington recreated his role when the play was adapted into a motion picture in 1984. He played Dr. Phillip Chandler on the television series *St. Elsewhere* and appeared in a string of films, including *Carbon Copy* (1981), *Cry Freedom* (in which he portrayed South African activist Steven Biko; 1987), *The Mighty Quinn* (1989), *Glory* (1989), *Mo' Better Blues* (1990), *Mississippi Masala* (1992), *Malcolm X* (1992), *Devil in a Blue Dress* (1995), *He Got Game* (1998), *The Hurricane* (1999), *Training Day* (2001), and *American Gangster* (2007).

Washington has expanded his role to that of director in the films *Antwone Fisher* (2002), and *The Great Debaters* (2007), which he co-produced with Oprah Winfrey. His latest films include *The Book of Eli* and *Unstoppable*, both released in 2010.

Washington's numerous awards include an Oscar for best supporting actor in *Glory* in 1990; two Golden Globes as well as the Silver Bear Award from the Berlin International Film Festival in 1993, the Image Award from the NAACP in 1999 for outstanding actor in the film *The Hurricane* (based on a true story about the life of incarcerated boxer Rubin Carter), and for his performance in *The Great Debaters* in 2007, and an Oscar for best actor in 2002 for his performance in the film *Training Day*, which also earned best actor awards from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association and the American Film Institute. Washington returned to the stage in 2010 and won a Tony Award for his performance in the play *Fences*.

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Denzel Washington (1954--). (2012). In L. Bracks, *African American almanac : 400 years of triumph*,

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Chicago

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