

Lynn Whitfield



With roots that lead back to Louisiana southern aristocracy, lovely leading lady Lynn Whitfield was born in 1953, the eldest of four children and a third-generation BFA graduate from Howard University. Her dentist father was instrumental in developing Lynn's initial interest in acting as he was a prime figure in forming community theater in her native Baton Rouge. She is of African American and Native American descent, specifically Cherokee.

First garnering attention on the stage by studying and performing with the Black Repertory Company in Washington, D.C, she married one of the company's co-founders and pioneers of black theatre, playwright/director/actor [Van Whitfield](#) in 1974. She eventually moved to New York and appeared off-[Broadway](#) in such shows as "The Great Macdaddy" and "Showdown" before earning acclaim in the 1977 Los Angeles production of the landmark black play "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered [Suicide](#)...When the Rainbow Is Enuf" co-starring [Alfre Woodard](#). Lynn eventually became a force to be reckoned with intelligent and principled roles on quality film and TV as well

Lynn's Hollywood career unfolded under a talent development program at Columbia Pictures in 1979. Appearing on such established TV shows as "Hill Street Blues" and in a 1982 PBS version of her "For Colored Girls..." stage hit, she made her film [debut](#) with [Doctor Detroit](#) (1983) and doled out a number of support roles in other popular films as well such as [Silverado](#) (1985), [The Slugger's Wife](#) (1985), [Jaws: The Revenge](#) (1987), and [Dead Aim](#) (1987). It was TV, however, that garnered her the most attention, working her way into top lead and co-star roles. The topical social dramas [The George McKenna Story](#) (1986) (TV) co-starring [Denzel Washington](#), [Johnnie Mae Gibson: FBI](#) (1986) (TV) opposite [Howard E. Rollins Jr.](#) and [Oprah Winfrey](#)'s historical miniseries [The Women of Brewster Place](#) (1989) (TV) were her early highlights. In addition, she found some steadier work on series TV playing classy professionals, including two for ABC (a doctor in "[Heartbeat](#)" (1988) and a news anchorwoman in "[Equal Justice](#)" (1990).)

The peak of her acclaimed career arguably came in the form of highly popular but deeply troubled Follies Bergere headliner-turned civil rights activist Josephine Baker. In the HBO biopic [The Josephine Baker Story](#) (1991) (TV), Lynn played the legendary entertainer with Emmy-winning gusto, a role that stretched her to the limits as she played the role from age 18 to 68. Earning an NAACP Image [Award](#) in 1992 for her role in the miniseries [Stompin' at the Savoy](#) (1992) (TV), she later appeared in [Pauly Shore](#)'s comedy [In the Army Now](#) (1994) and went back to series TV alongside [Bill Cosby](#) in the short-lived "[The Cosby Mysteries](#)" (1994).

Lynn had an upsurge in the late 90s with roles in the films [A Thin Line Between Love and Hate](#) (1996) with [Martin Lawrence](#) and [Gone Fishin'](#) (1997) with "Silverado" co-star [Danny Glover](#). She also earned excellent reviews for her supporting work in [Eve's Bayou](#) (1997), a role that drew on her Louisiana heritage. More quality TV came her way when she starred as Sophie in [Sophie & the Moonhanger](#) (1996) (TV), a mini-movie that focused on the relationship of the wife of a Klansman and her longtime black housekeeper. She kept up the momentum with an unsympathetic role in the [Oprah Winfrey](#) miniseries [The Wedding](#) (1998) (TV), where she again had to cover a long life span, this time from 19 to 47, and [Redemption](#) (2004/I) with [Jamie Foxx](#), an urban film that chronicled the turbulent life of (now) im[prisoned](#) L.A. Crips gang founder Stan "Tookie" Williams.

More recent turns have come with a recurring role in the series "[Without a Trace](#)" (2002), a part in an updated version of [Clare Boothe Luce](#)'s [The Women](#) (2008/I) and a lead role opposite [Ciara](#) in the film [Mama I Want to Sing](#) (2011). Divorced from Vantile Whitfield in the late 70s, Lynn later married British director [Brian Gibson](#) in 1990, by whom she has a daughter, Grace. They parted ways in 1992.