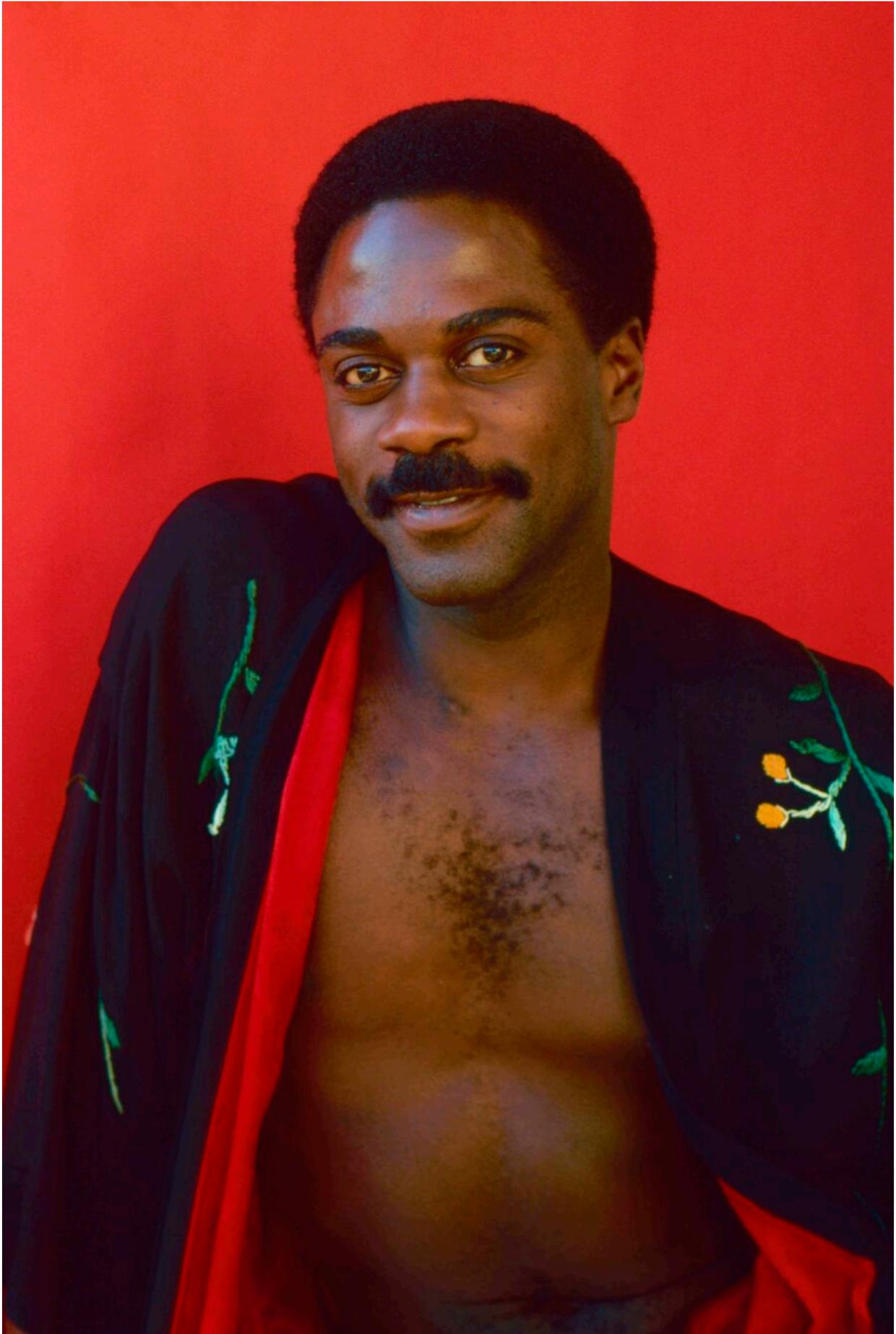

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Howard Rollins, Remember Him?

Elisa Leonelli · Friday, January 20th, 2023

It may seem random to remember [Howard Rollins](#) now, but I recently scanned the slides of the photo layout that I did with him in 1982, when he was in Los Angeles to attend the Golden Globes as a double nominee, New Star of the Year and Best Supporting Actor for *Ragtime* (1981) directed by Milos Forman from the 1975 novel by E.L. Doctorow. He would then star with Denzel Washington in *A Soldier's Story* (1984) directed by Norman Jewison from the 1981 play by Charles Fuller.



Howard Rollins (c) Elisa Leonelli 1982

He graciously agreed to be photographed at his hotel in Beverly Hills and to give me a one-on-one

interview. After scanning those pages, written with my new Olivetti typewriter, I wanted to share what he said forty years ago about being Black in America in answer to my questions.

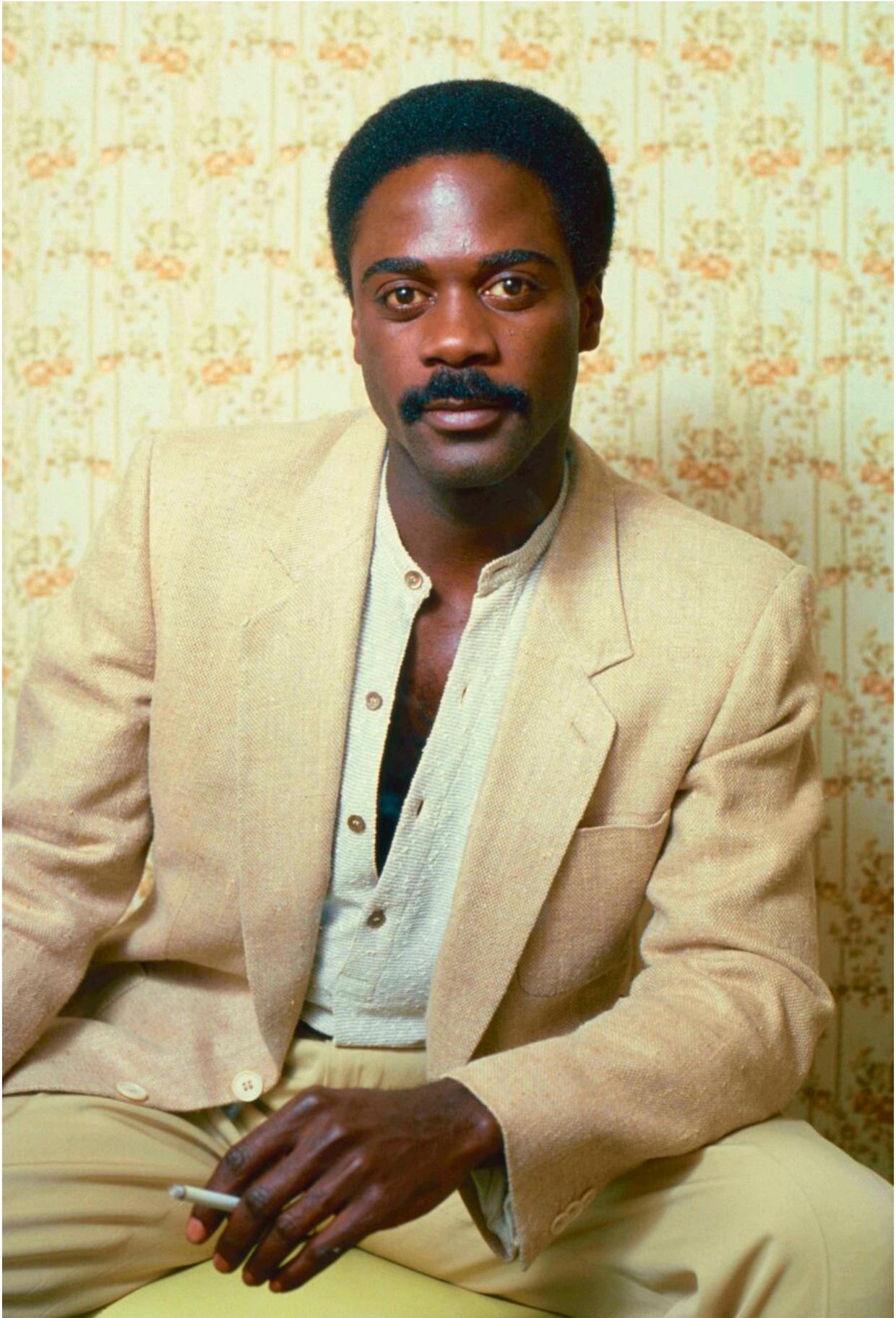
“The way this country is built, it doesn’t concentrate on black people. You have to be very good at what you do in order to have a chance. Everybody seems to be much more aware of it now than before, and that is hopeful, but it doesn’t mean that anything will really change. Today black people are very important in America, we have given it a whole other color if you will, valid and serious contributions. We are Americans, that is the bottom line. It is sad to see such emphasis on the fact that we are different. What is this madness? Let’s just be people. Why don’t we accept that and go on with the business of living.”



Howard Rollins (c) Elisa Leonelli 1982

As a first generation Italian-American, not born and raised in this country, I had to educate myself on African-American history, and I learned a lot more about it in the last couple of years, as I interviewed actors and directors of 2021 movies like *One Night in Miami* directed by Regina King with Eli Goree as Cassius Clay, Kingsley Ben-Adir as Malcom X, Aldis Hodge as Jim Brown, Leslie Odom Jr. as Sam Cooke, *Judas and the Black Messiah* by Shaka King with Daniel Kaluuya as Fred Hampton and LaKeith Stanfield as Bill O’Neill, *The United States vs. Billie Holiday* by Lee Daniels with Andra Day and Trevante Rhodes, *Ma Rainey* by George Wolfe with Viola Davis and Chadwick Boseman, the television series *Genius-Aretha* with Cynthia Erivo as Aretha Franklin. I wrote articles about those movies and about actors like [Andra Day](#), [Uzo Aduba](#), [Tracee Ellis Ross](#), [Amandla Stenberg](#), [Janelle Monáe](#), [Zendaya](#).

In 2022 *A Jazzman’s Blues* by Tyler Perry and *Till* by Chinonye Chukwu explored lynching in the American South in the 1940s and 50s, *The Woman King* by Gina Prince-Bythewood told the story of the fierce female warriors in 1820s West Africa, the Agojie, that served as inspiration for the Dora of *Black Panther* and *Wakanda Forever*.



Howard Rollins (c) Elisa Leonelli 1982

Howard Rollins died of AIDS in 1996 at the age of 46, which reminded me that [Chadwick Boseman](#) died of cancer in 2020 at 43. They both deserve to be remembered.

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