



Phyllis Yvonne Stickney is an actress, comedian, poet, playwright, producer, and motivational speaker best known for her television and film roles in the late 1980s and 1990s. Noted in the twenty-fifth anniversary issue of *Essence* magazine as one of 200 African American women who have changed the world, she was inducted into the Arkansas Black Hall of Fame in 1998.

Phyllis Stickney was born in Little Rock (Pulaski County) to Belle and Felix Stickney Jr. She has publicly been vague about her age, and no available sources offer the year of her birth. Her father was an executive with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and the family moved frequently. She has two siblings, one of whom, Timothy, is also an actor and a director. Stickney studied at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and taught drama at the University of Delaware before relocating to New York City in 1979. She eventually settled in Harlem. In 1989, she married Rayford Galen Griffith, a jazz musician; the couple, which had no children, later divorced.

She also received theater training at the University of the Streets Theater and New Heritage Repertory Theatre (now the Heritage Theatre Group), working with her mentor, Robert Furman. Furman, a playwright and director, founded New Heritage in 1964 to provide training, exposure, and experience to artists of color; it is the oldest nonprofit black theater company in New York City. Stickney soon gained recognition for her work with Furman. In 1983, she won an Audience Development Committee Recognition Award (AUDELCO), which rewards excellence in black theater and performing arts, for her performance in Furman's adaptation of Molière's *Tartuffe*, called *Monsieur Baptiste, the Con Man*.

In 1989, Stickney was cast as "Cora," a single mother of five children, in the ABC-TV miniseries *The Women of Brewster Place*, adapted from the Gloria Naylor novel of the same title. The miniseries depicts the lives of seven urban African American women who live in the Brewster Place Housing Project and featured an ensemble cast that also starred Robin Givens, Lynn Whitfield, Cicely Tyson, and Oprah Winfrey.

In 1990, Stickney brought her comedic timing and Afro-centric flair to network weekly television. She co-starred in *New Attitude*, a short-lived mid-season replacement. The comedy featured Stickney and actress Sheryl Lee Ralph as sisters and co-owners of a beauty salon. The series lasted only eight episodes, but Stickney continued to have guest appearances on a variety of television programs, including *Law & Order*, *New York Undercover*, and *Linc's*. Her film credits include *New Jack City*, *Jungle Fever*, *Malcolm X*, *What's Love Got to Do with It*, *The Inkwell*, *Die Hard with a Vengeance*, and *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*.