Actor, author, humanitarian and Tony Award-winning producer Wendell Pierce starred in all five seasons of the acclaimed HBO drama *The Wire* and was nominated for an NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Drama Series for the role. He also starred in the HBO series *Treme* and has appeared in many feature films including *Selma, Ray, Waiting to Exhale* and *Hackers*.

Born in New Orleans, Pierce was raised in the historic neighborhood of Pontchartain Park -- one of the first subdivisions developed by and for middle class African-American families -- by his father, a World War II veteran and maintenance engineer, and his mother, who worked as a teacher. He developed his prodigious talent as an actor through education, going from a regular public high school, to arts magnet school, to Juilliard. At the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts, he pursued his education alongside such future stars as Wynton and Branford Marsalis, Harry Connick Jr., and Terence Blanchard. After Julliard, he launched his professional career on stage and in features.

Remarkably versatile, Pierce has appeared in more than 30 films, 50 television shows, dozens of theater productions, and has hosted more than 50 episodes of *Jazz at Lincoln Center*. He performed on Broadway in *The Boys of Winter* (1986) and *Serious Money* (1987) as well as the acclaimed national tour of Duke Ellington’s folk opera *Queenie Pie* in 1986. Pierce’s onscreen work began with minor roles in features like *The Money Pit* (1986) and *Casualties of War* (1989). In 1990, Pierce landed his first television series, *Capital News* (ABC, 1990), a David Milch drama about the staff of a Washington, D.C. newspaper.

Throughout his career, he has used his talent to draw attention to the pressing issues of urban America, most famously through his work on *The Wire*, one of the most acclaimed shows in television history and the inspiration for both a recurring course and a lecture series at Rutgers University-Newark.

Pierce has been a primary force in the entertainment industry for shedding light on the devastation wreaked by Hurricane Katrina on his hometown. Pierce’s neighborhood of Pontchartain Park was at the center of the deepest part of the flooding, and he has been a motivating force for rebuilding its homes and bringing back its residents. For instance, Pierce held celebrity golf tournaments to raise money, and toured throughout New Orleans in a production of Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* that used the actual destruction as the play’s
wasteland setting to raise awareness of the city’s plight. Pierce used neighborhoods that were still recovering from Katrina as outdoor settings, drawing a chilling parallel between the experience of the play’s protagonists, who wait in vain for a person who never arrives, and the plight of New Orleans residents whose lives were lost or turned completely upside down by the hurricane and systemic human failures before and after.

His HBO series, Treme, centered on his beloved hometown and the struggles of jazz artists rebuilding their lives in the wake of Hurricane Katrina.

Spike Lee also interviewed Pierce for his 2006 documentary When the Levees Broke (HBO), which focused on the people of New Orleans and their recovery.

Pierce’s recently published first book, The Wind in the Reed: A Storm, A Play, and the City That Would Not Be Broken, talks about his experience of Katrina and his efforts to aid in the recovery of his neighborhood and others like it.

Pierce has worked with directors ranging from Spike Lee (who cast him as Ben Thomas, one of the accused assassins of Malcolm X in his 1992 biopic, and as Wendell in 1996’s Get on the Bus), to Woody Allen in Manhattan Murder Mystery (1993), to Barry Levinson Sleepers (1997). However, it was his role as Lela Rochon’s co-worker, Michael Davenport, in Forest Whitaker’s Waiting to Exhale (1995), that endeared him to many.

His other films include The Fighting Temptations (2003); Taylor Hackford’s Oscar-winning biopic Ray (2004); the acclaimed HBO movie Life Support (HBO, 2007), and Tanya Hamilton’s acclaimed Night Catches Us (2010).