

# Interview: Viola Davis Red Carpet at Chicago International Film Festival

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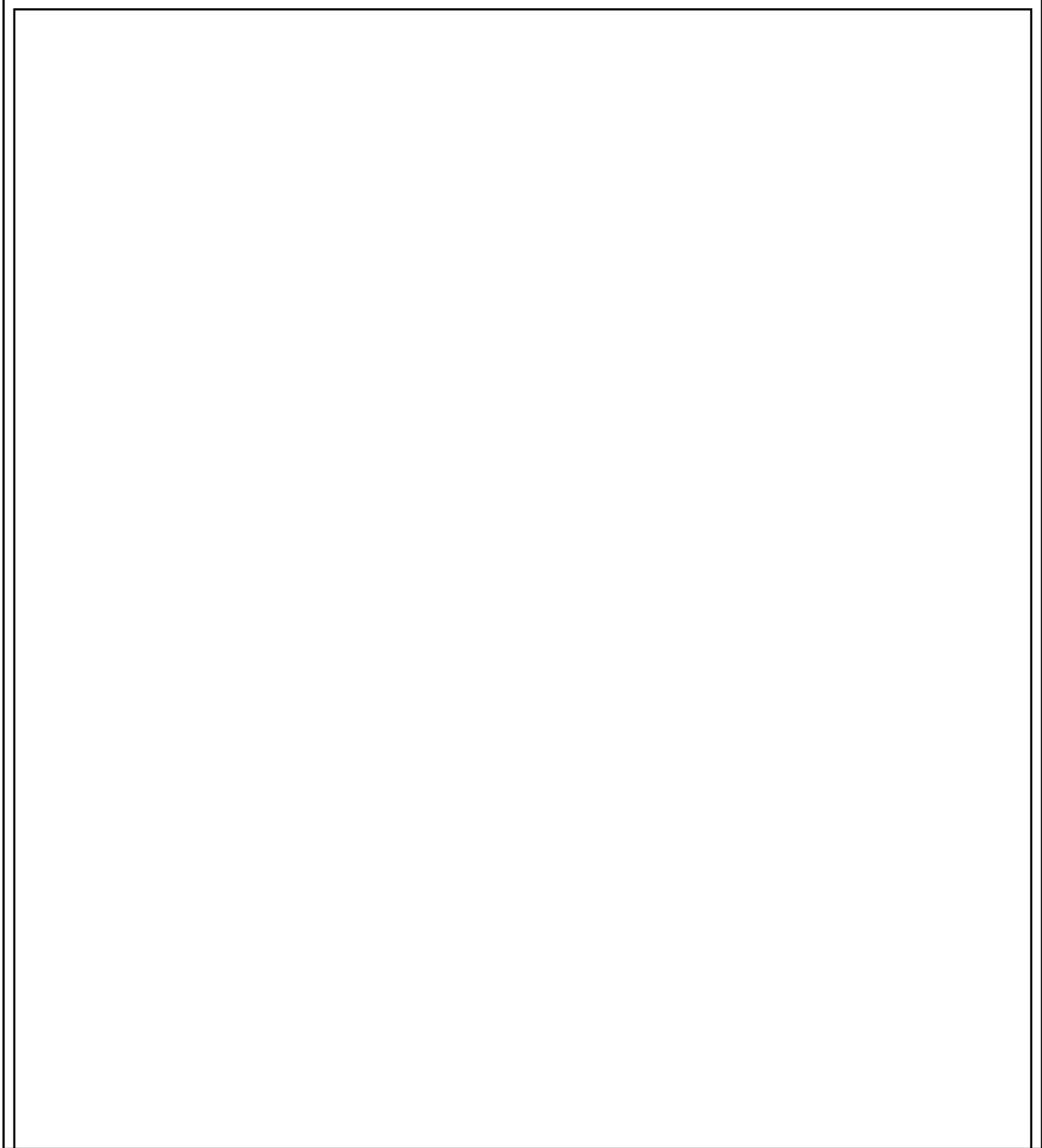
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CHICAGO – Consummate – in both performance style and manner – is a perfect descriptive for actor Viola Davis. The Oscar nominee for “Doubt” and “The Help” is in the hottest period of her career right now, and the Chicago International Film Festival honored her on October 22nd with their Career Achievement Award at the Black Perspectives Tribute.

Regina Taylor (of TV’s “I’ll Fly Away”) was also on the Red Carpet to lend support to Davis. Photographer Joe Arce was there to capture the photos, and HollywoodChicago.com was able to interview both women on their careers and worldview.

## Viola Davis, Oscar Nominee for “Doubt” and “The Help”

Viola Davis was born in South Carolina, grew up in Rhode Island and majored in theater at Rhode Island College. After a stint at the Julliard Drama School, she joined the theater scene in New York City, eventually winning a Tony Award for playing Tonya in the play “King Hedley II” in 2001. She did small roles in notable films, including the Steven Soderbergh films “Out of Sight,” “Syriana” and “Traffic,” and also had a recurring role on TV’s “Law and Order: SVU.” She got her first Oscar nomination for an 11 minute role as Mrs. Miller in “Doubt,” and got another Academy nod for last year’s “The Help.” Davis will be in the upcoming “Beautiful Creatures,” due to release next February.





Viola Davis at the Chicago International Film Festival, Oct. 22nd, 2012  
*Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com*

**HollywoodChicago.com:** The first African American Oscar winner, Hattie McDaniel, once famously said “I’d rather play a maid for \$700 a week than be a maid for \$7 a week.” What does the evolution of the African American actor owe legacy performers like McDaniel, who broke through in the old studio system?

**Viola Davis:** The legacy is that they were there. I think sometimes you have to see a physical manifestation of your dream. Otherwise you have to hope, pray and try to conjure something in your mind to feel like it’s possible. When you see that physical manifestation, like McDaniels, and Alfre Woodard, and Cicely Tyson, it makes you feel like you can do it, that is their legacy.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You have a rural background and your mother was involved in civil rights?

**Davis:** Yes, she was involved in welfare reform and the Head Start program in the 1970s.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** How does that background influence your work today?

**Davis:** You have to understand being an actress, and being an African American actress of a certain hue, I think that you have to be bold with your choices. Even when you’re not bold with your choices, have people see it as bold. That background influenced me because from a very young age I had to take those chances. I had to envision myself in situations and ways that other people couldn’t see, in order to break through and get what I wanted in life.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Since you famously had an Oscar nomination for an 11 minute role in ‘Doubt,’ what advice would you give to actors regarding encompassing a role and making it their own?

**Davis:** Do the work. Create the character, don't wing it and don't hope for an award or the Red Carpet. At the end of day the people who stay in the line the longest are the people who are good.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Finally what roles that casting agents are not considering for that you really want to do?

**Davis:** Do we have time? [laughs] Let's see, a grand, sweeping historical epic, a romantic role, I can be romantic and I've been romantic on stage. I'm working on getting all of those.



**Regina Taylor, Golden Globe Winner for "I'll Fly Away"**

Lending support for her friend Viola Davis was actress Regina Taylor. She hails from Texas, and had an early role as a civil rights hero in 1981's "Crisis at Central High." She also had an award-winning turn as Lilly Harper in the civil rights themed TV show, "I'll Fly Away" (1991-93), which ran on both NBC and PBS. Recently, she played Dennis Hasbert's wife in "The Unit," and continues to work in film and television.



Regina Taylor at the Chicago International Film Festival, Oct. 22nd, 2012  
Photo credit: Joe Arce of Starstruck Foto for HollywoodChicago.com

**HollywoodChicago.com:** I asked Viola Davis about the legacy of early African American movie actresses like Hattie McDaniel. What in your opinion are their biggest contributions to the evolution of the African American Actor

**Regina Taylor:** Those women were typically very strong, they were tenacious and very strong willed, and they send those messages from the past so that we can move forward.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Considering your own career, what was that moment where you stepped back from it, and thought, 'how did I get

here?’

**Taylor:** It was doing the TV show ‘I’ll Fly Away,’ that was the first major thing I’d done in film or television. I remember sitting on that set one day and thinking, ‘oh my goodness, here I am, how did that happen?’ And I enjoyed it very much.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Who were your actor influences, both when you were growing up and when you started in the business?

**Taylor:** I have so many, it’s hard to verbalize and remember them all. But Rudy Dee comes to mind, Diahann Carroll, Cicely Tyson. Amazing women who forged the way for us, so beautiful and brilliant.

*Cinema/Chicago represents the Chicago International Film Festival throughout the year, click on [CinemaChicago.org](http://CinemaChicago.org) [16] for membership information and other film related activities.*



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