

## Interview: Daphne Maxwell Reid from MLK Jr. to the Fresh Prince

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CHICAGO – This week marks the 50th Anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination and funeral, but locally it was one month later – May 3rd, 1968 – that a “sit-in” took place at Northwestern University near Chicago, as protesting African American students sought change. Future actor Daphne Maxwell Reid was a participant.

Reid is an actor, activist, photographer, seamstress, designer and also currently a spokesperson for Virginia State University. She was an undergrad at Northwestern in 1968, when she and 100 other students occupied the Bursar’s Office for 36 hours, seeking more equity for the growing black student population at the school. The sit-in was successful, as negotiations yielded more services and support relating to admissions, scholarships, housing, curriculum, counseling and facilities for African American attendees, eventually leading to the establishment of “The Black House” at the university. Northwestern will commemorate the historic event at a three-day seminar next month, and Reid will be honored for her contribution and career.



Daphne Maxwell Reid  
Photo credit: Tim Reid

She was born Daphne Etta Maxwell in New York City, and received a scholarship to Northwestern, where she earned a degree in interior design and architecture. She was also the first African American woman to be named Homecoming Queen during her tenure there. She began her modeling career while at the University, and eventually became the first black woman to grace the cover of Glamour magazine. She was working in voiceover when she met actor Robert Conrad, who became a mentor and guide to the next phase of her career, as an actor in Los Angeles. She made her debut on Conrad's TV series "The Duke" in 1979.

After doing a stint on "WKRP in Cincinnati" in 1982, she connected with her current husband Tim Reid. In Chicago, Reid was well known for his comedy team, "Tom (Dressen) and Tim," the first white and African American funny men duo. The newly dubbed Daphne Maxwell Reid continued to work steadily throughout the 1980s, on iconic TV shows such as "Hill Street Blues," "Simon & Simon" and "Frank's Place" (a show starring her husband). Daphne's most notable role was a footnote in TV history... she became the "second" Aunt Vivian in 1993 – replacing the first actress in the role – on "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air," and stayed with the series until it ended in 1996.

Daphne Maxwell Reid continues to act, as well as work her other advocations from her home with Tim Reid in Virginia. HollywoodChicago.com talked to Ms. Reid about her place in local history, her perspective on the 1968 events regarding Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and her ground-breaking career.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** You are an actor, photographer, seamstress/designer and spokesperson for Virginia State College, and it all has roots in your participation in the sit-ins and civil rights movement of the 1960s. What was your journey and background growing in New York City, that led you to that sit-in at Northwestern University in 1968?

**Daphne Maxwell Reid:** I came from a family of activists... my mother was an activist, peacenik and woman's libber way before the feminist movement began. She was always involved in activism that served the community. She was my inspiration for anything I've done outside of just earning a living.





Daphne Maxwell Reid (left) and the Cast of 'The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air'

Photo credit: Warner Home Video

**HollywoodChicago.com:** The atmosphere of campuses in the 1960s seemed more political and more electric. How would you describe the atmosphere of Northwestern University as a campus in 1968?

**Reid:** Physically, it was a beautiful campus, but it was also an atmosphere that wasn't used to having black people around... we were new to them. There had been a few African American undergrads and graduate students before, but it was in doses of five as opposed to the hundreds that were there in the late 1960s. It felt threatening to them, I guess, but it was also something they just weren't considering rather than doing it on purpose.

**HollywoodChicago.com:** Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in April of 1968 and the sit-in occurred one month later. How closely tied were those two events, did King's death fuel some of the energy of the protest?

**Reid:** I'm sure it was an impetus, but the issues that led to the sit-in had been fomenting for years, as other civil rights deaths had alerted us that things weren't right on campus and in other places. The needs of what we were asking for had been in the works for many years before.

**In the audio portion of the interview, Daphne Maxwell Reid talks further about Dr. King and other civil rights history, her acting career and her connection with another TV series character in her stint as Aunt Vivian on "The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air."**

For more information about the Northwestern University "Bursar Office Takeover" 50th Anniversary [click here](#). [24] To visit the website of Daphne Maxwell Reid, [click here](#). [25]



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