

Viola Davis

Viola Davis (born August 11, 1965)^[1] is an American actress and producer. Having won an Academy Award, an Emmy Award, and two Tony Awards, she is the first black actress to achieve the Triple Crown of Acting.^{[2][3]} *Time* magazine named her one of the 100 most influential people in the world in 2012 and 2017.^{[3][2]}

Born in St. Matthews, South Carolina, Davis began her acting career in Central Falls, Rhode Island, starring in minor theater productions. After graduating from the Juilliard School in 1993, she won an Obie Award in 1999 for her performance as Ruby McCollum in *Everybody's Ruby*. She played minor roles in several films and television series in the late 1990s and early 2000s, before winning the Tony Award for Best Featured Actress in a Play for her role as Tonya in August Wilson's *King Hedley II* in 2001. Davis's film breakthrough came in 2008, when her role as a troubled mother in *Doubt* earned her a nomination for the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress.

Greater success came to Davis in the 2010s. She won the 2010 Tony Award for Best Actress in a Play for playing Rose Maxson in the revival of August Wilson's play *Fences*.^[4] For starring as a 1960s housemaid in the comedy-drama *The Help* (2011), Davis received a nomination for the Academy Award for Best Actress and won a SAG Award.^{[5][3]} In 2014, Davis began playing lawyer Annalise Keating in the ABC television drama series *How to Get Away with Murder*, and in 2015, she became the first black woman to win the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series.^[6] In 2016, Davis played Amanda Waller in the superhero film *Suicide Squad* and reprised the role of Maxson in the film adaptation of *Fences*,^[7] winning the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress.^{[8][9]} She went on to receive a BAFTA nomination for starring in the heist film *Widows* (2018).

Davis and her husband, Julius Tennon, are founders of production company, JuVee Productions. Davis is also widely recognized for her advocacy and support of human rights and equal rights for women and women of color. She identifies as a feminist.^[10]

Viola Davis



Davis at the 2016 San Diego Comic-Con

Born	August 11, 1965 <div>St. Matthews, South Carolina, U.S.</div>
Education	Rhode Island College (BA) <div>Juilliard School (GrDip)</div>
Occupation	Actress, producer
Years active	1996–present
Works	Full list
Home town	Central Falls, Rhode Island, U.S.
Spouse(s)	Julius Tennon (m. 2003)
Children	1
Awards	Full list

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Early life and education

Davis was born on August 11, 1965, in St. Matthews, South Carolina, the daughter of Mary Alice (*née* Logan) and Dan Davis.^{[11][12]} She was born on her grandmother's farm in the Singleton Plantation.^[13] Her father was a horse trainer, and her mother was a maid, factory worker and homemaker.^{[14][15][16]} She is the second youngest of six children, having four sisters and a brother. Two months after she was born, her family moved to Central Falls, Rhode Island, with Davis and two of her sisters, leaving her older sister and brother with her grandparents.

Her mother was also an activist during the civil rights movement. At the age of two, Davis was taken to jail with her mother after she was arrested during a civil rights protest.^[17] She has described herself as having "lived in abject poverty and dysfunction" during her childhood,^[18] recalling living in "rat-infested and condemned" apartments.^[19] Davis is a cousin of actor Mike Colter, known for portraying the Marvel Comics character Luke Cage.^[20]

Davis attended Central Falls High School, the alma mater to which she partially credits her love of stage acting with her involvement in the arts.^[21] As a teen, she was involved in the federal TRIO Upward Bound and TRIO Student Support Services programs.^[22] While enrolled at the Young People's School for the Performing Arts in West Warwick, Rhode Island, Davis's talent was recognized by a director at the program, Bernard Masterson.^[23]

Following graduation from high school, Davis studied at Rhode Island College, majoring in theater and graduating in 1988. Next, she attended the Juilliard School for four years,^[15] and was a member of the school's Drama Division "Group 22" (1989–93).^[24]

Career

1996–2007: Early beginnings

Davis received her Screen Actors Guild card in 1996 for doing one day of work, playing a nurse who passes a vial of blood to Timothy Hutton in the film *The Substance of Fire*. She was paid \$528.^[25] In 2001, she won the Tony Award and a Drama Desk Award for her portrayal of Tonya in *King Hedley II*, a "35-year-old mother fighting eloquently for the right to abort a pregnancy."^[26] She won another Drama Desk Award for her work in a 2004 off-Broadway production of *Intimate Apparel* by Lynn Nottage.

Davis appeared in numerous films, including three films directed by Steven Soderbergh, *Out of Sight*, *Solaris* and *Traffic*, as well as *Syriana*, which Soderbergh produced. Hers was the uncredited voice of the parole board interrogator who questions Danny Ocean (George Clooney) in the first scene in *Ocean's Eleven*.^[27] She also gave brief performances in the films *Kate & Leopold* and *Antwone Fisher*. She also played a secondary role in *Far From Heaven*, a 2002 film directed by Todd Haynes. Her television work includes a recurring role in *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*,^[28] starring roles in two short-lived series, *Traveler* and *Century City*,^[29] and a special guest appearance in a *Law & Order: Criminal Intent* episode entitled "Badge".^[30]

2008–2014: *Doubt*, *The Help*, and further success



Davis at the 81st Academy Awards in February 2009

In 2008, Davis played Mrs. Mueller in the film adaptation to the Broadway play *Doubt*, with Meryl Streep, Philip Seymour Hoffman. Though Davis had only one scene in the film,^[31] she was nominated for several awards for her performance, including a Golden Globe and an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress.^[32] On June 30, 2009, Davis was inducted into the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.^[33]

On June 13, 2010, Davis won her second Tony Award for her role as Rose Maxson in a revival of August Wilson's *Fences*.^[34] She was the second African-American woman to win the Tony for Best Performance by a Leading Actress in a Play, after Phylicia Rashad. Davis played the role



Davis at the U.S. premiere of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows – Part 1* in November 2010

of Dr. Minerva in *It's Kind of a Funny Story* (2010), a coming-of-age film written and directed by Anna Boden with Ryan Fleck, adapted from the 2006 novel by Ned Vizzini.^[35]

In August 2011, Davis played the role of Aibileen Clark, a housemaid in 1960s Mississippi, in the screen adaptation of Kathryn Stockett's novel *The Help*, directed by Tate Taylor.^[36] Davis described her performance in the film as channeling her mother and grandmother saying, "I feel like I brought my mom to life; I've channeled her spirit. I channeled the spirit of my grandmother, and I've kind of paid homage to how they've contributed to my life and the lives of so many people".^[36]

Davis was praised for her performance and eventually received two Screen Actors Guild Awards, as well as her second Academy Award nomination,^[37] which she ultimately lost to Meryl Streep. Davis received Golden Globe Award and BAFTA Award nominations for the same performance.^{[38][39]} In 2012, *Time* magazine listed Davis as one of the most influential people in the world.^[40] Also in 2012, *Glamour* magazine named Davis *Glamour's* Film Actress of the year.^[41]

On June 12, 2012, Davis was presented with the Women in Film's Crystal Award by her friend and Oscar rival that year, Meryl Streep.^[42]

On June 25, 2012, the Walk of Fame Committee of the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce announced that Davis was part of the new group of entertainment professionals who have been selected to receive stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame in 2013.^[43] On January 5, 2017, Davis received the 2,597th star on the Walk of Fame.^[44]

Davis reunited with *The Help* director Tate Taylor in *Get on Up*, a biopic of James Brown, playing Brown's mother.^[45] Her 3-year-old daughter, Genesis also appeared in the movie.^[46] In February 2014, Davis was cast in Peter Nowalk's pilot *How to Get Away with Murder* (executive produced by Shonda Rhimes for her ShondaLand production company) as the lead character.^[47] Her character, Annalise Keating, is a tough criminal defense attorney and professor who becomes entangled in murder plot with her students.^{[48][49][50]} It began as a series in September 2014.^[51]

2015–present: *How to Get Away with Murder*

On September 20, 2015, Davis became the first black woman of any nationality to win the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series for her lead role on *How to Get Away with Murder*.^{[52][53][54][55]} She received a second Primetime Emmy Award nomination for the role in 2016.^[56] Davis also won two Screen Actors Guild Awards for Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Drama Series in 2014 and 2015.^[57] She received nominations from the Golden Globe Awards for Best Actress – Television Series Drama and Critics' Choice Award for Best Actress in a Drama Series for her performance on the show.^[58]

In 2015, Davis appeared in *Blackhat*, a Michael Mann-directed thriller film starring Chris Hemsworth.^[59] Davis also served as executive-producer of the crime drama film *Lila & Eve*, starring herself and Jennifer Lopez in the titular roles.^[60]

In 2016, Davis starred in the courtroom drama *Custody*, on which she also served as an executive producer,^[61] and played Amanda Waller in the film *Suicide Squad*, an adaptation of a DC Comics series of the same name.^[62] Davis reprised her role as Rose Maxson for the film adaptation of *Fences*, for which she received her third Academy Award nomination, making her the first black actress in history to achieve this feat.^[63] She subsequently went on to win the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress, the Golden Globe Award for Best Supporting Actress, the Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by a Female Actor in a Supporting Role,^[64] and the BAFTA Award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role.^[65]

On January 6, 2017, Davis was presented with the 2,597th star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame by her *Doubt* co-star and friend Meryl Streep. While accepting the honor, Davis said that she could not believe her life: "It's like my life flashing before my eyes, and all I can say is, God has blessed my life in abundance."^[66] Davis was also listed among and a featured cover star of *Time* magazine's "100 Most Influential People" List for the second time, her first being in 2012.^[67] Streep penned the article in the magazine, referring to Davis as having "carved a place for herself on the Mount Rushmore of the 21st century", commenting that "her gifts as an artist are unassailable, undeniable, deep and rich and true. But her importance in the culture — her ability to identify it, her willingness to speak about it and take on responsibility for it — is what marks her for greatness."^[68] On January 30, it was announced that Davis would star alongside Julia Roberts in the film adaptation of Jodi Picoult's novel, *Small Great Things*.^[69] On March 4, Davis was awarded the Artist of the Year Award at Harvard University.^[70]

In 2018, Davis starred in the Steve McQueen-directed heist thriller *Widows*, an adaptation of the popular 1983 British miniseries.^[71] On January 22, Davis debuted *Two-Sides*, a documentary series exploring police brutality towards the African-American community. The series debuted on TV One, running through till mid-February.^[72] Davis also starred alongside fellow *Shondaland* costar Kerry Washington for a special two-hour crossover episode of *How to Get Away with Murder* and *Scandal*, aptly titled *How to Get Away with Scandal*. Davis's guest appearance garnered her a fourth Emmy Award nomination, and her first for Outstanding Guest Actress in a Drama Series.^[73]

On March 1, Davis announced that she would star alongside Lupita Nyong'o in *The Woman King*, inspired by true events that took place within The Kingdom of Dahomey.^[74] The film will tell the story of Nanisca, the general of an all-female military unit, played by Davis, and her daughter Nawi, played by Nyong'o.^[75]



Davis at 2015 Screen Actors Guild Awards

Children's Book Author

On October 10, 2017, Davis announced that she would write the sequel to the classic picture book *Corduroy*, titled *Corduroy Takes a Bow*. In a press release, Davis stated that "Corduroy has always held a special place in my life, first as a child paging through it, and then again with my daughter, introducing her to the adventures of that adorable teddy bear".^[76] On March 13, 2018, Davis shared the cover of the book on her [Twitter](#) account.^[77] The book was published by Penguin/Random House on September 4, 2018.

Philanthropy and activism

In 2011, Davis donated funds to her hometown public library in Central Falls, Rhode Island, to assist in preventing its closure due to a lack of city funding.^[78] In 2018, Davis donated funds to her alma mater, Central Falls High School, for its theater program.^{[79][80][81]}

As part of her partnership with [Vaseline](#) to promote the *Vaseline Healing Project*, Davis attended the groundbreaking of a free community health center in Central Falls, Rhode Island in October 2016 that was sponsored by the project.^[80] The project provides dermatological care to help heal the skin of those affected by poverty around the world.^{[82][83][84]}

Since 2014, Davis has collaborated with the *Hunger Is* campaign to help eradicate childhood hunger across America.^[85] Speaking on her work, Davis said that "seventeen million kids in this country, so one in five kids in this country, go to bed hungry. I was one of those kids, because I grew up in abject poverty; I did everything that you could possibly imagine to get food: I rummaged in the garbage cans, I stole from the local store constantly."^[86]

As an honoree at the 2014 *Variety* Power of Women luncheon, Davis further commented that "the thing that made me join...was the word 'eradicate', 'get rid of' - not by thirty-percent not by twenty-percent not by fifty-percent, but to do away [with it]. Because everyone should be a child, and should grow up and have a chance at the American dream".^[87] In September, 2017, Davis kick-started the *\$30K in 30 Days Project* with *Hunger Is*, awarding a \$1,000 grant to the Rhode Island Community food bank in her home state.^[85]

Personal life

Davis married actor Julius Tennon in June 2003.^[88] In 2011, Davis and her husband adopted an infant daughter. Davis is a stepmother to Tennon's son and daughter from previous relationships.^[89]

Davis is a [Christian](#) and regularly attends services at [Oasis Church](#) in Los Angeles.^{[90][91]}

Acting credits and awards

According to [Rotten Tomatoes](#) and [The Numbers](#), Davis's most commercially successful and critically acclaimed films include *Traffic* (2000), *Doubt* (2008), *Law Abiding Citizen* (2009), *Knight and Day* and *Eat Pray Love* (2010); *The Help* (2011), *Suicide Squad* and *Fences* (2016).^{[92][93]}

Throughout her career, Davis is a recipient of many films, critics and societies awards. For her stage work, she has won two [Tony Awards](#), three [Drama Desk Awards](#), a [Obie Award](#) and [Theater World Award](#). She holds the distinction of becoming the first and only actress of color to win a [Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in a Drama Series](#) and is the first African-American to win five [Screen Actors Guild Awards](#).^[94]

She has been nominated for four [Golden Globes Awards](#), two [British Academy Film Awards](#) winning one for each and by earning the [Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress](#) honor for *Fences*, Davis became the first black actor to achieve the [Triple Crown of Acting](#): winning a competitive [Oscar](#), [Emmy](#) and [Tony](#) in acting categories.^[95] She is one of only two black actresses (the other being [Octavia Spencer](#)) to have received three Academy Award nominations.^[96] Davis was awarded an [honorary doctorate](#) in Fine Arts from her undergraduate alma mater, [Rhode Island College](#), in 2002.^[97]

See also

- [List of Rhode Island College people](#)
- [List of Juilliard School people](#)

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External links

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 - [Viola Davis \(https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/37520\)](https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-cast-staff/37520) at the [Internet Broadway Database](#)
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 - [Works by or about Viola Davis \(https://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-no2008-47755\)](https://worldcat.org/identities/lccn-no2008-47755) in libraries ([WorldCat catalog](#))
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