

Original Paper

The Strength to Stand Firm: The Life and Activism of Civil Rights Heroine Angela Davis

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Received: October 20, 2025 Accepted: November 5, 2025 Online Published: November 19, 2025

doi:10.22158/lecr.v5n2p29

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/lecr.v5n2p29>

Abstract

The great Angela Davis was a hard-charging civil rights activist, who wasn't afraid of speaking her mind and protesting for the freedom and human rights of Black Americans in the United States. Indeed, Davis can be considered a modern hero of the first order. In this respect, she contributed to the 1964 civil rights legislation that was put in place by a Democratic President, Lyndon B. Johnson, who was a former, white segregationist from Texas.

This paper presents Davis's life and works in a nutshell, as she fought, and continues to fight, the good fight against white supremacy. And inexorably, she has positively affected our society — at large — through every societal and political sectors. Davis was also able to use her charismatic charm to achieve her political and activist goals. In the final analysis, Angela Davis became one of the most important political and contemporary activist in modern American history.

Keywords

Civil rights, feminism, activism, nonviolence, turncoats, racism, prejudice, freedom

1. Introduction

Angela Davis is best known for spearheading the Black women's liberation movement and black freedom movements in the United States, which she led from the front lines, or in the *trenches*, so to speak. In this regard, Davis had an irrepressible spirit, even as she was being constantly *besmirched* and harassed by white supremacists and white segregationists almost at every turn. To be sure, Davis went against the white supremacist *hierarchy*, and they didn't like it. White Americans, especially in the Deep South kept themselves separate from the black population in extremely racist ways. To say the least, Angela Davis, who was born in a segregated city in the South knew that white southerners had always been dishonest and perfidious to blacks and other indigenous people. Furthermore, growing up in the racist South,

integration was never a foregone conclusion, because of white nationalists. Davis also understood that segregating people along racial lines was *insane* and discriminatory. But African Americans wisely segregated their towns, because of a “desire for freedom — economic and political — and by racial pride” (Brooks, 1996, p. 169). As distinguished professor of law at the University of San Diego, Roy L. Brooks (1996) writes:

More than anything else, African Americans wanted to get away from racial violence and discrimination by whites, especially in the South. [Therefore,] black towns were a way of dealing with the failure of American society to transform the hopes of emancipation into the reality of everyday life (p. 169).

It should also be understood that white segregationists enforced their racist and dubious choices in the Deep South — that is, when it came to segregating and separating Black neighborhoods. Davis was totally against the separation of people, and stood up to white segregationists and the discriminatory, governmental establishment. Indeed, Davis firmly believed that all people should be on a level playing field, with an equal chance of success. Consequently, white racists looked down on Davis, perhaps, with a jaundice eye. As a black political activist, starting “in the 1960s, Davis was [also] an advocate for both African Americans’ and women’s *civil rights*” (“Davis, Angela,” 2000, p. 113), which brought a degree of determination, intensity, and credibility to her considerable, political voice. Davis worked hard as a political activist, even though she wasn’t able to get everything that she wanted right away — like ensuring that blacks and other people of color have the right to vote; and eradicating legal or *de jure* segregation. Of course, as a conscientious Black woman, Davis knew that, “Segregation [could not] be eliminated over night as it [involved] matters in which folkways [were] set deep in history.” But Davis, like professor Anson Stokes (1945), was “determined to point out [the] evils [of white supremacy]; [and] to up hold the ultimate goal of a democratic society without any legal segregation on racial lines; and to eliminate one by one its serious manifestations” (p. 549). Davis was also able to hit her stride and fought hard for *equality of opportunity* for Black Americans, as she believed in social justice and the *goodness* of the black community as a whole. Historian Melba J. Duncan (2002) tells us that Angela Davis was a “Political activist, left-of center academic, and world-class political lightning rod” (p. 185). Indeed, she asked important questions that encouraged others to think critically, or more deeply about the racial issues of her day. Admittedly, Davis knew that her activism would take many forms, as she challenged and kept up the fight against white segregationists and other white hate groups, prevailing against the racial odds, *adversity*, and the deadly serious measures taken against her and other Black people in America.

Furthermore, Angela Davis brought more awareness about the deplorable way Black people were being treated throughout the United States by the dominant white group. Hence, she knew, without a doubt, what she was doing and involved in — that is, in terms of civil rights — which was crucial and vitally important work. In this respect, her dogged pursuit for social justice should be admired. Equally important, Davis disliked ‘Uncle Toms’ and the so-called Black *bourgeois*, or those well-off Black Americans, who sat on their hands, or on the sidelines, and did *nothing* to advance the cause of freedom.

Davis also didn't like the American law enforcement *apparatchik* that imprisoned, brutalized, and killed innocent Black people, which is, unfortunately, still happening in our society today. Davis always spoke out about these controversial matters with an air of intensity and knowledge. Indeed, Davis was a Black activist in the mold of the political philosopher Herbert Marcuse, whom she studied and trained with as a political philosopher at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts (George, 2020). Marcuse who died in 1979, and was a mentor to Davis, and other anti-fascist and leftist students, "believed that western society was unfree and repressive, [whose] technology had bought the complacency of the masses with material goods, and that it had kept them intellectually and spiritually captive" ("Marcuse, Herber," 2000, p. 1014) (Note 1). Davis took these philosophical notions to heart; and without doubt, she could be combative when expressing her opposing, left-wing beliefs. This is to say that the dazzling Angela Davis was a steadfast presence, who stood tall while executing her grassroots endeavors and political activism plans with conviction, confidence, and courage. In this respect, the fascinating Davis was not some *marionette*, or puppet-on-a-string who could be manipulated by the forces that be. Which is to say that she was characteristically and particularly *off-putting* to white supremacists, who saw her as an *imminent* threat because of her transgressive attitude. Davis especially disliked white nationalists and white racists; and she would have to deal with them almost her entire life. Davis was also against a white supremacist ideology, as she believed that such a *warped* system of beliefs was the cause of all our racial *woes*. After all, white racists and supremacists seem only to want to threaten, undermine, hurt, demean, maim, kill or *lynch* Black Americans and other people of color — to scare and prevent them from fully participating politically, or having a voice, and achieving *parity* with white Americans. Perhaps admitting to the truth of their *demonization* and racial hatred, it was hard for Davis to grasp the white nationalism and racism of white supremacists, as they were always on the wrong side of history. Equally important, the charismatic Davis firmly believed that racial issues should be straightforwardly identified and addressed without equivocation. Moreover, she thought that all Americans should embrace the things that Black Americans have forever wanted, and fought hard for — that is, their constitutionally, guaranteed rights. Simply put, the outspoken Davis knew that the United States would *never* be able to move forward as a multi-racial Democracy without recognizing the *exceptionalism* and inclusion of the descendants of Black American slaves — that is, instead of permanently depriving them of their lives and humanity.



Figure 1.1 Angela Davis Speaking before a Crowd. Source: Photograph in Public Domain.

2. An Early Life

Angela Davis also understood that she lived in a society that was unfair, unequal, *unjust*, divided, and *systematically* and irredeemably racist. She was born on:

January 26, 1944, in Birmingham, Alabama, the youngest child of B. Frank and Sallye E. Davis. Her mother was a school teacher, and her father had been one until, because [black] teachers' salaries were so low, he gave it up to buy a gas station. [Finally, her] family was comfortable financially, [as they lived] in a middle-class area in Birmingham (Thompson, 1993, p. 304) (Note 2).

Although her “mother taught her reading, writing, and arithmetic before she entered school” (Thompson, 1993, p. 304) (Note 3), Davis was *voracious* when it came to knowledge, reading, and learning; and she was probably ahead of the other children at their segregated and terribly *unequal* black school in Birmingham, Alabama. To say the least, Davis was a brilliant student, who won a scholarship “at the age of fifteen,” to “a progressive private school” in New York called the Elizabeth Irwin High school (Thompson, 1993, p. 305). Later, as a young adult and college student, Davis studied in Paris, France at the Sorbonne, and in Germany at Goethe University. As a child, Angela Davis witnessed (sadly) her black classmates in Birmingham go hungry, because they were so poor. Many didn't even have winter clothes (Thompson, 1993). Perhaps it was at this time that Davis realized or figured out what she wanted to do with her life — and that was to help *hapless* people and to fight for racial justice — as she became “highly conscious of social [and racial] differences” (Thompson, 1993, p. 304), while engaging with those who were different from the dominant white group. Indeed, Angela Davis additionally knew exactly what she needed to do to make things happen, as she had found power and purpose instead of having a *bohemian* life. In other words, Davis decided where she stood in the race debate long before she became a full-fledged activist. This is to say that Davis didn't like the idea of ignoring or “white washing” the real

history of African Americans, or covering up the many murders and crimes of white supremacists and white hate groups, like the dreaded Ku Klux Klan. After all, Black American journalist Nelson George (2020) writes: “Two of the four young [black] girls who were murdered in the 1963 16th Street Baptist Church bombing by [racist and hateful] members of the Ku Klux Klan lived near [Angela] Davis family home” (p. 83). To be sure, Davis disliked the Deep South immensely, and knew that she could never live there again on a permanent basis, because of its *entrenched* racism and lawlessness by white supremacists and racists. And she knew sadly that covert prejudices by white southerners would be on the scene in our world, perhaps forever. Therefore, in the final analysis, Davis believed that Black people could not rely on government or the white power structures to help them, particularly in terms of politics and economics. It was a tumultuous period of time in American history, as Davis tried to hammer home the truth about *fascism* and racial oppression by white supremacists.

And for a time, Angela Davis became a *symbol* of the civil rights movement, so much so that Black women everywhere *aped* her style and sensibilities. To be certain, Davis made significant contributions to our larger society, all things considered; and we cannot ignore her tremendous work ethic, particularly in civil rights and women rights matters. Of course, she was a *phenomenon*, who had a style that was all her own. And specific photographs of Davis during this time show her having an aggressive look, with a big *Afro* hairstyle, like the famous July 4, 1974 snapshot of her addressing “a rally of 5,000 people who marched through downtown Raleigh, North Carolina, to the Capitol Building to protest the North Carolina death penalty” (Thompson, 1993, p. 305) (Note 4). Davis was certainly in the moment at this time, as she was forged in fire, so to speak, because she embraced her *joie de vivre*. Or so it seemed from the photograph presented in this paper (see Figure 1.1). Davis, however, made it clear that she wasn’t trying to impress *anyone* by her looks, as she tried to stay true to herself and the various political movements that she was involved in, like the freedom movement and/or the women’s liberation movement, which was “a broad cultural and political movement initiated by women to improve their social position by freeing themselves from the constraints and disadvantages of a society said to be dominated by men” (“women’s liberation movement,” 1994, p. 1196). In this respect, Davis had an authoritative manner; and although she was a Black feminist, “the numerous issues of *inequality* facing working-class and poor black women — in addition to destroying the cartoonish sexualization of black men as threats to white women — had never been very vital to the mainstream feminist agenda” (George, 2020, p. 80) (Note 5). Davis is/was a black feminist in every sense of the word, particularly with her transformative actions. In no uncertain terms, Davis also knew that an evasive attitude by white feminists had to change if Black women were to be embraced *wholeheartedly*, or brought into the social movement *mix* — while accepting the feminist philosophy outright.

3. The Political Fight

The provocative Angela Davis probably scared the hell out of white America during her early activism days; and she (has) inspired a generation of progressive activists. Also, the sheer audacity of this

determined Black woman was/is someone to admire. White law enforcement officials were probably afraid of her, too, because Davis stood boldly against white nationalists and their racist actions. Indeed, Davis believed that *racism* in all its evil manifestations should never be tolerated by *anyone*, and under *any* circumstances. Of course, Davis often argued earnestly when it came to her political stance or staunch, righteous positions; and she never took her precious time for granted. For example, she knew and never argued that Black women were the back bone of the civil rights movement, playing a most important role *upfront* and behind the scenes. To be sure, Davis understood that the civil rights movement wasn't some *rogue* organizational movement or operation on the *fringes*. Indeed, this particular movement was a sweeping, comprehensive effort to eliminate or eradicate the systemic racism, segregation, and discrimination in the United States in all its terrible forms. According to journalist and historian Nelson George (2020):

In the [1970s], before the world fully understood who Davis was, they knew her face. She became, in a way very few public intellectuals ever do, an icon, a powerful image of black female hood in a culture that often reduced black women to [awful] stereotypes (p. 80) (Note 6).

And with her enormous *Afro* and beautiful, oval face, Davis's very presence was *breathhtaking* — that is, especially when she spoke to an enthusiastic audience in public. Most importantly, as a dignified Black woman, Davis told Black people to stop worrying about making white supremacists feel comfortable. Furthermore, Davis believed in herself and was fixated on many hard, racial issues as she strove to reach the common goal of changing the American government, as well as undermining the political, *judicial*, and economic systems, which were *intractable* for many Black Americans and other people of color. To be certain, Davis was conscious of her political message, as it invited *hostility* from angry, white American citizens. Davis was also capable of seeing things about the freedom and civil rights movements from a black woman's point of view. Additionally, she took a dubious view of those who said that they were on her side when they were not, as Davis advocated for specific things, or enormously difficult things directed toward equal rights for *all* American citizens. Which is to say that she truly believed in *social justice*, especially for Black people. In retrospect, Davis understood the allure of fighting back against extreme racism and people who hated her for her liberal or progressive beliefs. Toward this end, Davis was never pretentious, as her *astute* observations about our racist society were never *tongue-in-cheek*. In other words, Davis knew that there was never really a *so-called* "Black Problem" in the United States, because the racial problems were predominantly created by white Americans, and even institutionalized. In other words, systemic racism in the United States was/is a uniquely white problem. Which is also to say that some white Europeans or their American ancestors have always been racial *monsters* or unbelievably *cruel* — that is, by their inhumane actions and ugly treatment of different minority groups. Unfortunately, over the years, some white Americans saw no problem with perverting the course of our racial history, in terms of social justice, and the "rule of law," perhaps, having no *scruples*, whatsoever, about their cultural biases and prejudices toward Black Americans. Or so it seemed.

Of course, knowing about the truth of these matters is what actually motivated Angela Davis, as a young, energetic Black woman and activist.

At this time, Davis, with discipline and forethought, showed remarkable insights into the enduring racial problems in the United States; and she captivated people with her *eloquent* speeches, especially when addressing racial *strife* and the need for racial changes for our fragile democracy and divided nation — no matter the situation. Her righteous sentiments really spoke volumes to the character of this formidable Black woman. Additionally, to this point, Angela Davis understood that some white Americans had *tunnel vision*, and would always dismiss the notion of *systemic racism* — that is, pretending that it doesn't exist. But for Davis, such misguided beliefs, particularly about the fallacy of white, racial superiority, were something that is further from the truth of things — and *reality*. Furthermore, she was used to taking criticism, and the attacks perpetrated on her character and reputation by white supremacists. Fortunately, Davis was able to ignore the lies of white nationalists and their verbal *bullying*, because their harsh words and opinions about her were unimportant, or *insignificant*. Equally important, she also knew that it was her own personal and moral obligation to advance the causes of freedom, justice, and equality for *everyone*. Engaging with protest groups almost everywhere in the United States, Davis was briefly associated with the infamous *Black Panthers*, which was:

A militant, revolutionary African-American organization in the USA, founded in the late 1960s after the murder of [Dr.] Martin Luther King, Jr. The organization preached violence and acted as a protector of blacks, although much of what [was] advocate[d] was simply [political] rhetoric. It [finally] went into rapid decline with the killing, arrest, and exile of many of its leaders, and also because of internal divisions (“Black Panther,” 1994, p. 153).

Unfortunately, white law enforcement officials wanted to crush or break the back of the freedom movement, so to speak, or the infamous Black Panther Party. But the group was all about fighting the tyranny of the white majority; and in the intervening years, the Black Panthers became “A particular target of the FBI” (“Black Panther,” 1994, p. 153) (Note 7). Among other things, the U.S. government saw the Black Panther Party as a terrorist group and threat to national security. What rubbish. Hence, the FBI wanted to *upend* the group members and others like Angela Davis if they made the wrong noises or moves. Although Davis believed in *nonviolent protest*, she also embraced the concepts of self-defense and “direct action,” as she was clearly “politicized through the Black Panther Party, the Southern Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the *Che* Lumumba group and the Communist Party, [when] she successfully challenged the California state law forbidding communists from teaching at state universities” (Smith, 1994, p. 41). As a formidable, political activist, Davis was trained in nonviolence and unconventional behavior, but she came to accept the whole idea of Black Power, which was “the term used by African-American activists in the USA from the late 1950s,” and beyond “to reflect the aspiration of increased black political power” (“black power,” 1994, p. 153) (Note 8). It was also the revolutionary principle that Huey P. Newton preached, as the co-founder of the Black Panther Party for

Self-Defense; and Angela Davis had some of the same notions and ideals that Newton discussed in an interview during his incarceration in the 1960s. Namely, they both spoke out for black victims of racial injustice and violence from the national, state and local governments — and the threats from white supremacist groups (Evans, 1998-2009). To be critical, Davis didn't always advocate for *nonviolence*, as she talked about wider, harmful, political policies, which wouldn't provide (the possibilities) for a broader pursuit of racial justice. For example, Davis felt that it was a *sham* when the United States advocated for freedom and democracy *overseas* when the “powers-that-be” could not ensure that all American citizens be given such valued things, because of white supremacy.

4. Black Activist at Work

Therefore, the fearless Angela Davis would come to believe that “revolutionary politics” was the only way to go — that is, moving forward into the next century. And she always trusted her instincts. But it was during the late 1970s that Davis really came into herself, and became a member of the Communist Party in the United States, twice running “for vice president on the Communist Party ticket” (“Davis, Angela,” 2000, p. 441), during the 1980s. It was a turning point also in her personal life. Today, Davis still believes in the basic communist ideology/philosophy; however, she left the USA Communist Party, “because the party refused to engage in processes of democratization” (George, 2020, p. 84), which essentially means the transference of a government from a *totalitarian* political system to a truly equal, democratic society/system. Davis was also a fierce advocate for *civil disobedience* and defying the established (government) rules, especially if they were *unjust* and *illegal*. Perhaps Davis had been desperate to show her *bona fides*, as she also became “a champion of the cause of black prisoners” (“Davis, Angela,” 2000, p. 441). To say the least, Davis's greatest contribution to the cause of freedom was to question “white authority” and a broken criminal justice system. In this way, she was able to check her ego at the door, to use the metaphor. In this regard, Davis never believed that she had to explain her actions or define her life to *everyone*. And in so many ways, her spirit for life and what she thought was the right things to do shaped the way she viewed the law and American justice system. This is to say that Davis always agitated for racial justice as an adult. Long story short: Angela Davis was able to use her intelligence and affect changes for the immediate legal battles and perils to come. To wit, she was “known for her raised fist and struggle for *black liberation*” (Kelly, 2010, p. 62) (Note 9), and her freckled, light brown-skinned face seemed always to show a sense of urgency and strength. Consequently, Davis never stopped demanding for the better treatment of blacks and other oppressed people. And her activism made her a hero in the black community, even today. Black men found Davis attractive, and they were mesmerized by her beauty. And with her serious, sensual mouth and lips, they probably thought that she was a most sexy, Black woman.

Angela Davis had even been married to a man in the 1980s, but “came out as a lesbian in 1997 and now openly lives with her partner,” or female *paramour*, “the academic Gina Dent” (George, 2020, p. 84). In this respect, Davis never believed that she had to define or explain her sexuality to *anyone*, as she had to

constantly fight for her constitutional and personal rights. As a civil rights activist, Davis was *savvy*, and made (political) things happen. And like other political activists, Davis channeled all of her energies into her work, challenging herself — at every turn. To say that she struggled is an understatement, but Davis never unduly *speechified*, or congratulated herself. She certainly didn't like when people tried to put her in an awkward position or category. Eventually, Davis came to embrace Malcolm X's and Stokely (later Kwame Ture) Carmichael's ideas of defending black people from white supremacists by violence or by *any* means necessary. Attending "a two-week-long Dialectics of Liberation Conference" in 1967 in London, Angela Davis "spent enough time with Stokely... to ask him for political contacts for her planned return to California" (Joseph, 2014, p. 198). At this eye-opening conference, according to black historian Peniel E. Joseph (2014), Davis's "own Marxist beliefs place her at odds with black nationalists who openly dismissed socialism as unsuitable for African Americans" (p. 198) (Note 10). However, Davis was philosophical about such matters, knowing without a doubt that some blacks in the freedom movement were cowards and *turncoats* to the cause. Keep in mind that Davis was not one to run away from a political fight. To be sure, she was willing to die for the cause of freedom. Paradoxically, African Americans had to live through *atrocities*, tragedy, deprivations, and other horrors, as they were devalued by the larger white society. Obviously, Davis thought about things in a very conscious way, as she continuously struggled to make sense of racism, discrimination, and the resolute ignorance of white supremacists and white nationalists. Indeed, the whole idea of racial hatred *upset* Davis immensely — but she had a unique way of raising her voice in frustration in her many speeches. She would rave that our nation must not turn a *blind eye* about the dehumanization and mistreatment of some of its citizens. This specific sentiment was shared by most people in the civil rights movement at the time. Equally, she believed that Blacks deserved justice just like any other American citizen. But this was not the political reality, nor was it some kind of *unorthodox* thinking. Moreover, Davis believed that talking about "human rights" to other nations, but acting differently was hypocritical, particularly given that the rights of Black people and other minorities in the United States were violated on almost a daily basis.

And despite what some Black conservatives have said to the contrary about *not* having discrimination and prejudice in our country — what they have stated and pushed forward is ambiguous at best (Williams, 2020) (Note 11). To be certain, racism, discrimination, and prejudice still characterize American society as a whole today. Of course, such injustices (in our history) are not ancient. Davis also believed that white supremacists could care less about forming "a more perfect union," even if they are reminded of what our country is supposed to be — that is, a Constitutional Democracy or Republic.

5. The Infamous Court Case

No doubt, Angela Davis was not of the mind that things would always be positive or a certain way for Black Americans. But she had a "tried and true" method of reaching out to Black people and even white progressives when she became "a dazzling and opinionated [philosophy] professor" at UCLA (Duncan, 2002, p. 185), teaching university classes about the oppressive white racism of the 1960s. At this time

Davis *never* believed that she and other black activists were fighting a losing battle. However, white supremacists and their shouts of *vituperation* and grievances were/are a threat to people of color everywhere; and Davis made no bones about pointing this out to her students, which was more than inflammatory, unsettling, and upsetting to the California Board of Regents in 1970. Nevertheless, Davis was also direct, argumentative, and persistent, and became an influential social critic of the criminal justice system. Unfortunately, she made “international news in 1970 when her [registered] gun was linked to the murder of a white judge...” (Kelley, 2010, p. 62). At the same time, Davis knew that it was not a coincidence, and she was probably angry beyond measure, but she “fled the jurisdiction” of California (Kelley, 2010, p. 62) (Note 12) anyway, for approximately two months. Later, Angela Davis was detained (in a New York motel), extradited and inexplicably arrested, harassed, and charged with conspiracy, murder, and “complicity in the abortive [Marin County] courtroom escape and kidnapping attempt led by the so-called *Soledad Brothers*, in which four people, including the trial judge,” as earlier mentioned, “were killed” (“Davis, Angela, 2000, p. 441). Davis was utterly shocked and confused about her arrest and imprisonment, but she was not afraid. All the same, Davis knew that she was being unjustly accused of a crime that she had nothing to do with. In this regard, Angela Davis should have been released immediately, but the California prosecutors moved forward with the case against her instead. As it turned out, the sensationalized case was almost certainly based on politics or for political reasons. For Davis, it was infuriating. Also, it was during this time that, “The ‘Free Angela’ movement erupted. The slogan appeared on urban walls, on bumper stickers, and in newspapers.” Ultimately, “her face appeared on posters and on T-shirts” (Thompson, 1993, p. 306). Eventually, Davis was granted bail on 23 February 1972 for \$102,000, and released pending her trial. Still, Davis was perplexed and flabbergasted that she was personally charged with such heinous crimes. Fortunately, she was intimately involved in her case, and allowed to speak in her own defense at the trial before *the California State Court* and jurors (Davis, 1974) (Note 13). In her autobiography, Davis (1974) writes:

I tried to show the [all-white] jury how my activities around the defense of the Soledad Brothers were part of a history of involvement in the movement to defend and free political prisoners such as Huey Newton, the New York Panther 21, Bobby Seale and Ericka Huggins, the Angeles Panther 18 and the seven other brothers from Soledad Prison also charged with killing a guard (p. 365) (Note 14).

Nonetheless, the California prosecutor(s) tried to paint the unapologetic Davis as a vicious, left-wing radical, who cared nothing about murdering others to prove a political point, or to advance her so-called *wicked* ideology and beliefs. For the most part, the American public was electrified, as it was called the crime of the century, or “one of the most famous trials in U.S. history” (Kelley, 2010, p. 62). The trial also gave Davis time to pause and think about what she was going to do moving forward. When it was all said and done — after being locked up, making bail, and waiting for the trial itself — Davis was later *exonerated* and *acquitted* on all counts, and cleared of all charges by an *all-white jury*. As things turned out, the prosecutors did not have the smarts or the ability to contextualize what was going on when it

came to her activism and the absolute truth. Perhaps they just wanted to find her guilty based solely on *general principle*, as they wildly exaggerated her involvement during the trial, particularly by taking her words out of context, and providing dishonest scenarios that didn't match the reality of the case. But rightly, the *all-white jury* didn't buy into such judicial nonsense, as they rightly found Davis innocent. Unfortunately, what happened to Angela Davis was quite the disappointment; but it has always been a negative, different reality for Black Americans being prosecuted in our (cursed) criminal justice system. Although she was/is a larger-than-life educator and critical thinker, Davis never finished her doctorate; but she was later able to get her job back as a philosophy professor after her famous trial, returning to the college classroom, teaching "at San Francisco State University," lecturing widely (Smith, 1994, p. 41) (Note 15). However, in 2008, Angela Davis "retired from teaching at U.S. Santa Cruz" (George, 2020, p. 80) (Note 16), but (today) she hasn't given up the fight for freedom. Most of all, Davis knows that our survival as a nation still depends on *equality*, integrity, and the ideals of freedom, democracy, and justice. Unfortunately, she also knows that white supremacy, racism, and cruel, racial hatred will always be with us, especially in the Deep South. Furthermore, it should be noted that Davis is still a very powerful Black woman in her old age; but she probably needs to present her thoughts with greater clarity, particularly about whether the civil rights movement is still necessary in our society today. Also, Davis still thinks of her activism days from a different, broader perspective. Indeed, her autobiography is still an intellectual *blue-print* toward exploring the life and times of a brilliant Black woman and activist who got things done. To be certain, Davis stubbornly embraces her "blackness" without fail, and still with a fierceness. Furthermore, Davis believes that white supremacists will never see things in a *pragmatic* way, or from her particular point of view. Of course, Davis has always been upfront and enthusiastic about confronting "white rule," and conservative fascism/autocracy. And the spark of her activism days is always with her. Equally important, Davis also knows that white supremacy will continue to be a serious threat to the existence of our nation. Today, Davis often tries to point this reality out to *anyone* who will listen, as this is her continuing mission — and *legacy*. Therefore, she will continue to provide ways to critique the arguments of the "racist mind." Is this why she is still so hated by white supremacists? Perhaps. Of course, Davis was upfront about her thoughts concerning white supremacists — that is, how poorly Black Americans have been treated by some white Americans. And by all accounts, she detested such cruel, angry, and heartless individuals.

6. Conclusion

Angela Davis's undiminished *charisma* is still present (in her) as an elder, Black stateswoman. More importantly, she still chafes at the idea that Black people can't gain wisdom from their harsh, shared experiences and the past. Finally, as an activist, she knows that the phenomenon of social change *cannot* be ignored in the United States, no matter how hard white supremacists and others have tried to dismiss and undermine the importance of the civil rights movement, black activists — and our country. To be certain, Davis's passionate desires have always been to make things right for Black Americans, if possible,

in this sometimes God forsaken country. To wit, cultural and political things should not change *unilaterally* in America, unless they benefit all Americans. Why? Because it must take all of us. Davis's struggles against the forces of evil are *on-going*, as she continues to move forward with intelligence, patience, and purpose. For example, she co-founded "the National Alliance against Racism and Political Repression," whose major objective has been "to help in the defense of political cases" (Thompson, 1993, p. 306) (Note 17), particularly for people of color. As a consequence, Davis very much wants Black Americans to be *something* more — that is, other than having a lowly existence in America. At this stage in Davis's life, with all her experience as a revolutionary, activist, and college professor, she only wants racial *parity* and generational freedom for *everyone*. As discussed, Davis accurately diagnosed the racial problems in the United States, especially from a *social justice* perspective. In the final analysis, Davis who is universally known and celebrated paid particular attention to the civil rights movement, feminist movement, and freedom/humanist movements, and she is still a fierce *advocate* and activist *extraordinary*. Today, Angela Davis still matters.

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Notes

Note 1. Marcuse was “a member of the Frankfurt school, but he fled Germany in 1933. After working in U.S. intelligence during World War II, he taught at several universities, principally UC – San Diego (1965-76).” See the same reference and page number.

Note 2. Davis was raised “in a [black] neighborhood called Dynamite Hill because of the racist bomb attacks on the homes of middle-class black residents there.” See George, N. (2020, October 25). Angela Davis. *The New York Times Style Magazine* (p. 83).

Note 3. See also Davis, A. (1974). *With My Mind On Freedom: An Autobiography*. New York: Bantam Books.

Note 4. Accordingly, “the demonstration was sponsored by the National Alliance against Racist and Political Repression.” See the same reference and page number.

Note 5. See also feminist philosophy. (2000). In *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Encyclopedia* (p. 570). Massachusetts: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.

Note 6. Davis always talked about racial issues, trying to persuade others to invest in themselves and the ideals of the various movements, particularly the civil rights movement. Davis had a lot to consider during this time, which was a tall order for her.

Note 7. Unfortunately, the original Marxist-influenced Black Panthers “ceased to exist by 1974.” See the same reference and page number. But prior to this time, the Black Panther Party gave Angela Davis their qualified support. Davis, of course, went wherever they (activists) thought she could do the most good for the freedom movement.

Note 8. The Black Power movement “formed part of the more radical wing of the civil rights movement, [which] was against integrationist policies, and used force to advance the black cause.” Of course, nonviolent protest worked, and so did rioting and violent protests. To be sure, “Some political results were achieved in terms of registering black voters.” See the same reference and page number.

Note 9. Davis was unapologetic about her political activism. And she was deadly serious and never felt disillusioned about what she was doing as an activist — that is, Davis, with her public persona, became a powerful voice for the rights of marginalized people. Indeed, Davis's advocacy and activism became her political *pedigree*, so to speak.

Note 10. Davis believed that African Americans had to hunker down and protect themselves and their communities from hateful white supremacists or white extremist groups.

Note 11. Davis wanted a broader understanding of what it meant to form “a more perfect union,” especially for those who went against our nation’s racist roots and traditions. For example, things were fundamentally unfair for blacks during the Jim Crow era. And it seemed like white supremacists only wanted to oppose *equality* for African Americans.

Note 12. According to Nelson George, “J. Edgar Hoover placed Davis on the F.B.I.’s Ten Most Wanted list, making her the third woman ever to be included.” See George, N. (2020, October 25). Angela Davis. *The New York Times Style Magazine* (p. 79).

Note 13. What happened in the California court system seemed harsh and unfair by the standards of due process, equal justice under the law, and being provided with a jury of her peers, instead of having *all-white jurors*. Davis was never bored or complacent when it came to her criminal case. Or Davis didn’t just let her defense lawyers fight her legal battle. And she didn’t really worry about what might happen to her. But Davis probably wondered if she would be railroaded.

Note 14. Clearly, the unflappable Angela Davis could speak her mind without getting into trouble, or hurting her case. However, Davis probably felt *discombobulated* that she was put on trial in the first place. It was quite the experience, but she was never frazzled, when the prosecutors tried to throw the book at her, because of their power of judicial discretion. To say the least, Davis’s autobiography is also a compelling tapestry of black, feminist power.

Note 15. After her time in jail, Davis probably savored her *acquittal* and release. According to Nelson George, “During the trial, Davis’s profile transformed. Before, she had been a noted scholar. After, she became an international symbol of resistance.” See George, N. (2020, October 25). Angela Davis. *The New York Times Style Magazine* (p. 79). Newspaper headlines around the world later trumpeted her acquittal and innocence.

Note 16. According to George, Davis’s “optimism is particularly remarkable when you consider how long she’s believed that America *could* change.” See the same reference and page number.

Note 17. Davis’s books include *With My Mind On Freedom: An Autobiography* (1974), *If They Come in the Morning* (1971), *Women, Race, and Class* (1981), and *Women, Culture, and Politics* (1989). It should be noted that being a role model for young, black men and women has been the greatest privilege of her lifetime.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

EARNEST N. BRACEY is a retired Army Lieutenant Colonel, with over twenty years of active military service. He was commissioned through Reserve Officer Training (*Distinguished Military Graduate*) at Jackson State University, where he graduated with honors (*Magna Cum Laude*), and received his Bachelor of Arts degree in political science in 1974. In addition, he received the Masters of Public Administration in 1979 from Golden Gate University, his Masters of Arts degree in International Affairs in 1983 from the Catholic University of America, his Masters of Business Administration in 2009 from California Coast University, and his doctorate of Public Administration (with emphasis in Public Policy)

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A recipient of numerous military awards and civilian honors, he is also a graduate of the United States Naval War College and the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and previously served as Director of Administration at the prestigious Industrial College of the Armed Forces, Washington, D.C. He was also recognized as Who's Who Among America's Teachers in 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006.

Dr. Bracey is professor of political science, and currently teaches American Politics and Black American History at the College of Southern Nevada in Las Vegas. He was formerly Chair and Professor of Political Science at Jackson State University and Chairperson of the Political Science and History Department at Hampton University. He has also served as an editorial board-member for the Nevada Historical Society Quarterly. His work has appeared in professional journals and other publications, and he is the author of the books, *Prophetic Insights: The Higher Education and Pedagogy of African Americans*, University Press of America, 1999, *On Racism: Essays On Black Popular Culture, African American Politics, and the New Black Aesthetics*, University Press of America, 2003, *Daniel "Chappie" James: The First African American Four Star General*, McFarland & Company, Inc., 2003, *Places in Political Time: Voices From the Black Diaspora*, University Press of America, 2005, *The Moulin Rouge and Black Rights in Las Vegas*, McFarland & Company, Inc., 2009, and *Miles Davis and Jazz as Religion*, Lexington Books, 2021. He also co-authored the book, *American Politics and Culture Wars* (2001). He is also the author of the novels, *Choson* (1994) and *The Black Samurai* (1998), and the books of short stories, *Requiems for Black Folks* (2002) and *The Big Black Three* (2022).