# NOTORIOUS PHILOSOPHER

## THE TRANSFORMATIVE LIFE AND WORK OF ANGELA DAVIS

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Angela Davis notes in *Women, Culture & Politics* (1989) that if she has inspired a resurgence of campus and labor activism, then her work over the last two decades has been worthwhile. Indeed, Davis's international notoriety as a once-hunted political fugitive and symbol of resistance has given her a popular platform for speeches and magazine articles that, in addition to her scholarly audience as a philosopher, Black liberation theorist, and feminist theorist, have given her life and work a tremendous transformative impact. The brilliance of her speaking and writing reveals the depth of her analytical skills, developed through intense study of Kant, Hegel, and Marx under the tutelage of Marcuse, Adorno, and Habermas, as well as through her own extensive reading of "other voices" like Douglass, Du Bois, Fanon, Morrison, and Gilman. At the same time, her unswerving commitment to a life of activism has given her public persona mythic proportions, making her both (S)hero and Enemy to millions of people who will never read her books.

This discussion of Angela Davis's life and works will focus on three areas of her transformative contributions to late twentieth-century philosophy and beyond: Critical Theory, Black Liberation Theory, and Feminist Theory. Throughout the discussion, her contributions to a broader social transformation theory and practice will be highlighted, including her unfailing inclusiveness; her rejection of homogenizing universalisms and hierarchical dualisms that downplay the significance of the diverse elements of the complex of gender/race/class, to which she eventually added culture; her strategy of coalition-building among oppressed peoples; her awareness of the importance of popular culture; and her special commitment to aiding the incarcerated who, like her younger self, she views as political prisoners. Some theoretical problems that have at times blemished Davis's work will also be noted, including her earlier lack

of attention to international cultural differences; her loyal refusal to criticize (and perhaps to realize) serious problems within quasi-Marxist socialisms in Cuba and the USSR; her lack of a post-Soviet conception of socialism, which remains her ideal goal and activist commitment; and some lingering essentialisms, though within a broader set of social and analytical categories than those she received from the complex of historical traditions she inherited.

## A Mutual Transformative Impact: Angela Davis and Critical Theory

By 1964, when Herbert Marcuse published *One-Dimensional Man*, Critical Theory had pursued to a methodological and political dead end the project of synthesizing the insights of Marx and Freud to create a transformative philosophy for twentieth-century conditions. An originating precept of Critical Theory in the 1930s had been Marx's dictum that the point of philosophy is not just to criticize the world, but to change it. Yet by the end of World War II, Theodor Adorno had become so impressed with totalizing aspects of mass society within late capitalism that he could see no way out—no way conditions could give rise to the impulse to organize a successful transformative mass struggle—and he had refocused his attention on moments of individual imaginative liberation through the arts. Though Marcuse continued to long for and search for a transformative path to a "free society," he too was pessimistic about the possibility of fundamental and lasting change because of the enormous economic, political, and cultural power of advanced capitalisms, which had drawn the working classes Marx looked to for resistance and eventual revolution into psychic complicity and passivity. In the final chapter of *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse wrote:

> On theoretical as well as empirical grounds, the dialectical concept pronounces its own hopelessness. The human reality is its history and, in it, contradictions do not explode by themselves. The conflict between streamlined, rewarding domination on the one hand, and its achievements that make for self-determination and pacification on the other, may become blatant beyond any possible denial, but it may well continue to be a manageable and even productive conflict, for with the growth in the technological conquest of nature grows the conquest of man by man. And this conquest reduces the freedom which is a necessary *a priori* of liberation. This is freedom of thought in the only sense in which thought can be free in the administered world—as the consciousness of its repressive productivity, and as the absolute need for breaking out of this whole. But precisely this absolute need does not prevail where

> it could become the driving force of a historical practice, the effective cause of qualitative change. Without this material force, even the most acute consciousness remains powerless. (Marcuse 1964, 253)

Though he could not discover any basis for Critical Theory to become anything more than critical—no way to fulfill its original transformative purpose—Marcuse did suggest on the last pages of *One-Dimensional Man* that there might be a crack in the totality of advanced capitalism's social control that would allow change-makers to emerge. Prominent among the particular change-makers he seems to have had in mind were African Americans struggling for civil rights.

> . . . Underneath the conservative popular base is the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable. They exist outside the democratic process; their life is the most immediate and the most real need for ending intolerable conditions and institutions. Thus their opposition is revolutionary even if their consciousness is not. Their opposition hits the system from without and is therefore not deflected by the system; it is an elementary force which violates the rules of the game and, in doing so, reveals it as a rigged game. When they get together and go out into the streets, without arms, without protection, in order to ask for the most primitive civil rights, they know that they face dogs, stones, and bombs, jail, concentration camps, even death. Their force is behind every political demonstration for the victims of law and order. The fact that they start refusing to play the game may be the fact which marks the beginning of the end of a period. (Marcuse 1964, 256–257)

Even if the Civil Rights Movement could begin to end the era of late capitalist social control, Marcuse did not expect change to come easily, nor did he see any way that Critical Theory could assist this change process in theory or in practice, having nothing to offer except solidarity in critical rejection of the status quo.

> Nothing indicates that it will be a good end. The economic and technical capabilities of the established societies are sufficiently vast to allow for adjustments and concessions to the underdog, and their armed forces sufficiently trained and equipped to take care of emergency situations. . . . But the chance is that, in this period, the historical extremes may meet again: the most advanced consciousness of humanity, and its most exploited force. It is nothing but a chance. The critical theory of society possesses no concepts which could bridge the gap between the present and its future; holding no promise and showing no success, it remains negative. Thus it wants to remain loyal to those

> who, without hope, have given and give their life to the Great Refusal. (Marcuse 1964, 257)

By "the most advanced consciousness of humanity," the social element in this era that must bond with "its most exploited force"—African Americans and other oppressed peoples—if change is to occur, Marcuse no doubt meant those intellectuals who have both ethical concern and the clarity of vision about the historical process that a good grasp of Critical Theory expresses and confers. These two extremes were to meet in the critical consciousness and lived experience of his student, Angela Davis.

By the time Marcuse published *An Essay on Liberation* in 1969, his pessimism had turned to optimism, both about the possibility of social transformation and about the contribution Critical Theory could make to it. He began his introduction to this brief, exuberant work by calling for a new self-conceptualization of Critical Theory to respond to the potential for fulfillment of historical possibilities with which he believed the times were ripe.

> Up to now, it has been one of the principal tenets of the critical theory of society (and particularly Marxian theory) to refrain from what might be reasonably called utopian speculation. Social theory is supposed to analyze existing societies in light of their own functions and capabilities and to identify demonstrable tendencies (if any) which might lead beyond the existing state of affairs. By logical inference from the prevailing conditions and institutions, critical theory may also be able to determine the basic institutional changes which are the prerequisites for the transition to a higher state of development: "higher" in the sense of a more rational and equitable use of resources, minimization of destructive conflicts, and enlargement of the realm of freedom. But beyond these limits, critical theory did not venture for fear of losing its scientific character. I believe that this restrictive conception must be revised, and that the revision is suggested, and even necessitated, by the actual evolution of contemporary societies. (Marcuse 1969, 3)

Marcuse was now calling for the transformation of the old, gray scientific objectivity of a purely negative, critical characterization of hopeless times into utopian visioning moved by awareness that ideas that had "no place" in recent history might become reality in the fast-approaching future.

In the final chapter of his *Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse sketches a hopeful conception of the "free society" he believed was already coming into being, including some of the new relationships resulting from discovery of what he now called "a 'biological' *solidarity* in work and purpose" (Marcuse 1969, 88). He concluded this prophetic vision by answering the question:

> . . . What are the people in a free society going to do? The answer which, I believe, strikes at the heart of the matter was given by a young black girl. She said: "for the first time in our life, we shall be free to think about what we are going to do." (Marcuse 1969, 91)

Whether or not Angela Davis was the "young black girl" to whom Marcuse referred, this was Angela Davis's answer. Some of its transformative dimensions would include overcoming problems with Marcuse's conception of freedom, dissolving obstacles of essentialism and false universals within Marcuse's vision, and developing a transformative model that gave Critical Theory a concrete basis for hope arising out of activist praxis.

The experiences Angela Davis shares in her *Autobiography* (Davis 1974), "written with freedom on [her] mind," represent the beginnings of examining philosophical issues of importance to her during the formative years that made her a notorious philosopher-activist, ones she has continued to analyze and to which she has been concretely committed in the years that have followed. She tells the reader that she was influenced early on by her mother, Sallye Davis, who, as a college student, worked hard for the freedom of the Scottsboro Boys and was active with the NAACP, although it was illegal in her hometown of Birmingham, Alabama, at that time. Davis learned about racism and slavery from her grandmother (Davis 1974, 79). And her early New York experience of visiting with close family friends made her more aware of segregation and racism in Birmingham. Davis's mother responded to her anguish about racism with the philosophy of seeing white people in terms of their potential, and not so much as what they were (1974, 79). From her political work, in which she had contact with white people committed to improving race relations, Sallye Davis had learned that "it was possible for white people to walk out of their skin and respond with the integrity of human beings" (1974, 79).

While her schooling at Carrie A. Tuggle Elementary School had nurtured her self-esteem with the teaching of African American culture, Angela Davis learned that most of her New York friends were not aware of the achievements of many outstanding African Americans that were known to her. This advantage of segregated schools in the South, however, did not diminish the lack of facilities and other resources which limited the quality of education available to black children. Davis's education in Birmingham was permeated by the Booker T. Washington syndrome, work hard and you will be rewarded (1974, 92). However, Davis doubted this idea and likewise viewed its complementary idea, poverty as punishment for idleness and indolence, as a myth (1974, 89).

During her high school years at Elisabeth Irwin High School in New York City, which she attended under a program for promising Southern

Black students sponsored by the American Friends Service Committee, Davis's reading of the *Communist Manifesto* contextualized for her the African American problems of racism and poverty about which she was so concerned, and related their solution to a working-class movement that must be and ultimately would be a revolutionary communist movement to transform capitalism into socialism (1974, 109–10). She saw Marx and Engel's "scientific socialism" as offering the transformative solution she was seeking (1974, 109ff). Davis wrote:

> Of course, the most powerful impact the *Manifesto* had on me—what moved me most—was the vision of a new society, without exploiters and exploited, a society without classes, a society where no one would be permitted to own so much that he could use his possessions to exploit other human beings. After the communist revolution "we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." (1974, 111)

Being silent, and especially not acting, frustrated Davis tremendously, and she developed an early commitment to contributing concretely to this transformative struggle. She began to participate in meetings and action projects of Advance, a youth organization asssociated with the Communist party, and got to know other young people whose parents were successful scholars and professionals, as well as prominent Communist activists. Though she longed to return to Birmingham, where the Civil Rights Movement was once again heating up in 1961, she stayed on in New York at her parents' urging in order to finish her high school studies.

Davis further delayed her return to the South and her plunge into what she saw as the center of the Civil Rights struggle when Brandeis University offered her a full scholarship, making her one of three Black first-year students. These were important years of struggle in the North, as well, so that she had opportunities to hear both James Baldwin and Malcolm X speak on the Brandeis campus. And they were also years of expanding international awareness for her, during which she became close friends with international students at Brandeis, met revolutionary youths from other parts of the world by participating in the Eighth World Festival for Youth and Students in Helsinki, Finland, and spent her junior year in Paris, studying at the Sorbonne. But the most important event for her of these crucial years may have been the 1963 bombing deaths of four young girls at the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, all of whom were personally known to her as friends of her family. This painful event, she wrote, had a profound clarifying impact on her thinking about transformative struggle.[1]

The most important intellectual influence of these formative years was Herbert Marcuse, whose challenging 1962 work, *Eros and Civilization*, she struggled through on her own, and whom she saw for the first time when he spoke at a campus rally in response to the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962.[2] Davis's initial conversation with Marcuse regarding her desire to study philosophy called forth a commitment that mirrored her growing commitment to political activism. Davis relates that Marcuse asked her slowly, with emphasis on each word, "Do you really want to study philosophy?" making it sound "like an initiation into some secret society which, once you join, you can never leave" (1974, 132). She felt at that moment about the study of philosophy, as she would later feel about revolutionary activism, once committed, one cannot do otherwise. After assuring himself of young Angela Davis's seriousness, Marcuse undertook personal responsibility for guiding her philosophical development through a weekly informal independent study with her, starting with the Pre-Socratics, Plato, and Aristotle.

After graduating from Brandeis, Davis devoted two years to graduate study in philosophy through the lens of Critical Theory at Marcuse's pre–World War II intellectual home, the Institut für Sozialforschung at the University of Frankfurt, focusing on Kant, Hegel, and Marx, and studying with Jürgen Habermas and others, but especially with Theodor Adorno, who agreed to advise her Ph.D. dissertation. During this time, when her responsibilities to her studies in Frankfurt coincided with her absorption in the news of the Birmingham bombing, the metamorphosis of the Black Liberation Movement, and her developing consciousness of common struggles across different cultures, Davis relates, "[her] ability to accomplish anything was directly dependent on [her] ability to contribute something concrete to the struggle." She states that "I wanted to continue my academic work, but I knew I could not do it unless I was politically involved" (1974, 145).

Eventually, exploding conditions in Watts and elsewhere in the United States made Davis feel an irresistible longing and obligation to participate directly in the social transformation process, so she arranged with Marcuse to work once again under his guidance at the University of California at San Diego, where he had accepted a faculty position, and which was close enough to Los Angeles to allow her to immerse herself in simultaneous activist struggle there. Davis does not mention what courses she took at UCSD, though she mentions studying Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel intensively for her preliminary written exams for the Ph.D. (1974, 190). Activism was the focus of Angela Davis's life from the time she arrived in southern California, though it took her some time to find and build trust with an activist community. Simultaneously with pursuing her graduate studies, she worked successfully for the establishment of ethnic studies

programs at the University of California at San Diego, ran a "liberation academy" for citizens of a poor Black community in Los Angeles, and worked through tense issues of naming, affiliation, and policy involving her own group, the Oakland-based Black Panthers, and the national Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

Marx continued to be her guiding philosopher during this period, even though she found some Black activists uninterested in him as a white European, and in spite of the fact that the only Black Marxists she worked with were members of the Communist party, which she with other members of the New Left in Europe had criticized as too conservative. Eventually, after careful consideration, and influenced by the example of her activist friend Franklin Alexander, Davis made the fateful decision to become a member of the American Communist party (1974, 189). Though she mentions works by Du Bois (1974, 188) and Lenin (1974, 192), in addition to those of Marx, her lived experience of the dialectics of theorizing within movement activism in the local context of her Los Angeles political base seems to have been the most important influence in the development of her own philosophical and political vision during this period. This experience included the sexism she encountered from revolutionary Black men. They thought only men should be in leadership, that she and her close women colleagues were reinforcing "the black matriarchate" the white sociologist Daniel Patrick Moynihan had written about, and that she should be focusing her energies on home and family (1974, 181–82). As with many activist women, this experience seems to have initiated her feminism, which was to become a major focus of her later theoretical and activist work.

After passing her preliminary doctoral examinations, Davis accepted a faculty position at the University of California at Los Angeles so that she could support herself with a relatively light teaching load while finishing her dissertation and continuing her activism. However, almost immediately after the beginning of her first term at UCLA, then-governor Ronald Reagan and the University of California Board of Regents disrupted Davis's reasonable, life-balancing plans by attempting to fire her because of her membership in the Communist party. This led to a protracted, all-engulfing legal battle and a series of related political developments that consumed her time and attention for years. The doctoral dissertation fell by the wayside as she battled successfully in court against the state law that prohibited state universities from hiring communists, and then to have her contract renewed.

However, these successes in struggle gave way almost immediately to disaster as Davis became one of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's "Ten Most-Wanted Criminals," hunted nationwide on charges of conspiracy, kidnapping, and murder in connection with a failed prison escape at-

tempt by a group of Black men incarcerated in Soledad Prison. A federal judge they were using as a hostage and shield in the ensuing gunfight that ended their escape was killed and also one of their own. Davis was charged with shared responsibility for their actions because the "Soledad Brothers" used a gun registered in her name during their escape attempt, and because she had worked actively for their release, calling them "political prisoners" instead of dangerous criminals, as they were regarded by the state. After going underground and living in terror for months, Davis was apprehended and incarcerated. During this period of deep uncertainty about her own future, Davis worked to educate and build solidarity among the women with whom she was incarcerated, as activist friends outside worked to build support for her as a political prisoner, and a worldwide "Free Angela Davis" movement sprang to life. Her first book, *If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance* (Davis 1971a), an edited collection of essays written by her and by others about her and about the movement to free her and other political prisoners, was published during this time of her rise to international notoriety. In July 1972, she was finally acquitted by a jury of all three charges. Beautiful, articulate young Angela Davis with her Afro hairstyle had become through this process of struggle an international symbol of the Black Liberation Movement, hated or loved by countless people who would never meet her or read her books.[3]

Nonetheless, her notoriety created a popular demand for more information about her life and her ideas, so she was asked to write her second book, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, which was published a year and a half later, in 1974. For Davis, "the one extraordinary event of [her] life had nothing to do with [her] as an individual"—given a different twist of history, "another sister or brother could have easily become the political prisoner whom millions of people from throughout the world rescued from persecution and death" (Davis 1974, ix–x). Writing about her life at the unusually young age of thirty, Davis envisioned her story as a

> *political* autobiography that emphasized the people, the events and the forces in [her] life that propelled [her] to [her] present commitment. Such a book might serve a very important and practical purpose. There was the possibility that, having read it, more people would understand why so many of us have no alternative but to offer our lives—our bodies, our knowledge, our will—to the cause of our oppressed people. (1974, x)

In this sense, it was unusual in being both a relational autobiography and a group autobiography, reflecting both her relational psychology and her group-focused political ontology. Davis wrote in her *Autobiography* that her own freedom was a reflection of people's power to organize and

ransform their will into reality (1974, 398). Without organized struggle, he argued, hurt and rage were meaningless (1974, 170). Her own expeience had confirmed the broad transformative claim she had first fornulated when she read the *Communist Manifesto* in high school: it is ritical to bring all liberation struggles and separate movements together, ncluding those focusing on political prisoners, welfare rights, national beration, labor, women, and peace (1974, 382). "Unity," she asserts rom theory-shaping experience, "is the most potent weapon against acism and political persecution" (1974, 399).

Davis's *Autobiography* addresses philosophical issues of race, class, ender, revolution, political prisoners, commitment, organizing, and the ransformational process. During the time when she and George Jackson vere simultaneously incarcerated, she wrote him a lengthy letter about vomen's liberation as inseparable from the liberation of men, which was ead to the jury during her trial (1974, 374). A discussion of women's vork and the intersection of gender, race, and class surfaces when Mrs. Iemphill is being questioned as a potential juror (1974, 353), as well as in ne course of the questioning of Mrs. Young during the trial about her work nd about the comings and goings of Davis (1974, 377). Though it was vritten for and read by a wide audience, Davis's *Autobiography* contains atches of explicit philosophical theorizing. However, most of her theorizng in this work is implicit, including her insightful discussions of commitnent, organizing, and the transformational process. Nonetheless, these re some of its major areas of original philosophical contribution, and vould well repay the efforts of other scholars to make its theoretical pattern explicit.

The experiences Davis describes in her *Autobiography* have largely naped her subsequent life, precluding any possibility of a conventional areer and providing her with a perennial international platform for ddressing a large audience through public speaking, magazine and joural articles, and books. Since winning her own freedom from incarcerion, Davis has continued to actively participate in as many political ruggles for freedom, justice, and an end to oppression as her physical nd intellectual endurance allows. After her acquittal in July 1972, Davis ecame co-chairperson of the National Alliance against Racist and olitical Repression, a nonpartisan political coalition that includes "Black, hicano, Puerto Rican, Asian, Indian and white people, . . . Communists, ocialists, radical Democrats, and nationalists, . . . ministers and nonnurchgoers, . . . workers and students" (1974, 399). In the epilogue of her *utobiography*, she links the struggles of many other liberation-minded carcerated people to her own as one great struggle calling for unified tion.

> We must ensure that the Black leader Reverend Ben Chavis is not sentenced to the 262 years in prison on the charges which that state [North Carolina] has leveled against him. We must liberate Donald Smith, sentenced at age sixteen to forty years behind bars because he participated in the movement at his high school. And we must rescue our innocent sister Marie Hill, whose death sentence, pronounced when she was sixteen, is not a sentence of living death—life without possibility of parole. Across this country, there are hundreds and thousands more like Reverend Chavis, Donald Smith and Marie Hill. We—you and I—are their only hope for life and freedom. (1974, 399)

Her experience of incarceration with other women has led to articles and political speeches addressing the ills of incarceration for women in general, as well as the difference that differences in race, class, and gender make for incarcerated women. These activities have been accompanied by efforts to implement legislation which protects women from some of the gender injustices of incarceration. A recent example includes Davis's discussions of violence against incarcerated women and calls for legislation that will impact such violence, and also require more equity regarding length of sentencing for women's crimes.

Because of her extensive opportunities and commitments as a notorious public intellectual, Davis has published only one book thus far that was intentionally created as a sustained argument, *Women, Race & Class* (Davis 1981). This book made her reputation as a serious scholar in the field of women's studies, and it makes a transformative contribution to Critical Theory, as well. To this she has added *Women, Culture & Politics* (Davis 1989), a philosophically rich collection of some of her speeches from 1984 to 1989, in which she said of her political endeavors that

> the work of the political activist inevitably involves a certain tension between the requirement that positions be taken on current issues as they arise and the desire that one's contributions will somehow survive the ravages of time. In this sense the most difficult challenge facing the activist is to respond fully to need of the moment and to do so in such a way that the light one attempts to shine on the present will simultaneously illuminate the future. (Davis 1989, xiii)

Some philosophers have mourned the lack of further theoretical works of sustained argument, but others have praised her for choosing to focus her energies into more concrete and imperative arenas for her philosopher-activist commitment.[4]

Through her speaking and writing, Davis continues to participate in the stream of development and influence of Marxism and Critical Theory, a

stream she has turned in a new direction.[5] In contrast with the despairing tendency of Adorno's late work and Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man,* hope reappears in the stream of Critical Theory through Davis's work, growing not out of theoretical observation of historical events and speculation about the tendencies they express, as it did in Marcuse's 1969 *Essay on Liberation,* and not out of an ideal theory of communicative action, as it does in Habermas's work since 1969, but rather out of transformative praxis in which she has immanently lived change, both in social movements and in the minds and personalities of active participants. Hers is a philosophy of what Marcuse called "the underclass," to which she looks for leadership in the change process, rather than to the industrial working class, which Marxists and Critical Theorists had generally regarded before 1969 as the historically appointed agents of revolution, though co-opted and made passive by advanced capitalism. Class is still centrally important in her analysis, but it takes on a new, more complex meaning as it intersects with race, gender, and ethnicity as equally important theoretical and practical concepts, so that solidarities and divisions are drawn along new lines. Her analysis of class thus takes into account various historically and contemporaneously important divisions that earlier analyses had overlooked, e.g., domestic versus factory labor, slave labor and subsequent sharecropping versus free labor, and the "private" economy versus the "public" economy.

Davis treats racism and sexism as well as class bias as the supporting pillars of capitalism. Thus, cross-difference coalitions are her model of transformative agency: cross-class coalitions of black people (including interventions like the Liberation School she directed in Los Angeles), coalitions of black women and men, coalitions of women of color working together, coalitions of the free and the incarcerated, coalitions across sexual preferences, international coalitions, coalitions of those with homes and the homeless, and coalitions of living activists with past generations who struggled for freedom. As a result of this more complex social analysis, though her transformative goal is still a postcapitalist socialism (Davis 1981, 243), the lines of equity within it are differently drawn than in previous models. And the transformative issues she emphasizes are broader, including, for example, personal safety and security, health, and education, as well as jobs, income, and wealth. Davis attacks the inhumane consequences of capitalism through addressing these issues in her speaking and writing because she thinks these issues will have consciousness-altering, coalition-building revolutionary potential. Her transformative tactics focus on consciousness changing and solidarity building as necessary to deeper changes that take more time. Thus, she advocates many direct-action tactics used by the Civil Rights Movement as well as labor movements and peace movements—petitions, boycotts, marches, demonstrations, strikes,

and public confrontations—that may have consciousness changing and solidarity building as their most lasting outcomes. And she emphasizes education, which, even though it takes more time, has even deeper transformative outcomes for the self-concept and the prospective social influence of those involved.

Because of her activist immersion in the change process, Davis has given up any pretense of the detached "scientific" objectivity Adorno, Marcuse, and other early Critical Theorists claimed for themselves, choosing to adopt a standpoint within the struggles that have, at the same time, shaped her life and called forth her partisan allegiance. Nonetheless, like Habermas, Davis claims ethical, historical, and factual support for her standpoint, though unlike him, her argumentative attention has been focused almost entirely on transforming particular practical situations rather than on methodological justification. Likewise, both Davis and Habermas assume and in their differing ways argue for post-Freudian psychologies in which they treat political actors as relational social beings, rather than treating them as or seeking to help them become self-sufficient autonomous individuals (Davis 1981, 242). An important difference, however, is that Davis's political actors are also richly historical beings, shaped in their standpoints, desires, and self-conceptions by particular patterns of power relations and events that must be taken fully into account in analyzing and in transforming their current situations toward a preferable though only broadly specifiable future.

In these respects, Davis's view seems closer to the pragmatism of William James, George Herbert Mead, and John Dewey, whereas Habermas's ideal theoretical approach seems closer to that of John Rawls. Like Davis, James justified his methodology and his epistemology by the lessons of experience and what "works." Like Davis's political actors, Mead's selves are richly historical relational beings, shaped by and shaping others through the interactive process. Like Davis, Dewey was a fierce critic of capitalism; unlike the young Davis, Dewey rejected Soviet-style revolutionary socialism, both because he thought it was brutally excessive and because he didn't think it could work, whereas it seems that Davis has yet to come to terms with the lessons of the Soviet experience since the collapse of the USSR. Like Dewey, nonetheless, and unlike many Marxists, Davis argues for the transformative priority of education.

The central importance of education that builds intellectual skills, teaches history, and increases the self-respect and sense of worthiness of the oppressed resounds throughout Davis's writings, as well as her career as an activist teacher.[6] The educational elements and texts she emphasizes reflect her complex social analysis and her post-Freudian social psychology, as well as her Marxist commitments. Thus, in working with poor and semiliterate black people in her Los Angeles Liberation School, she

helped them work their way through essays by Lenin, building their reading skills, their sense of personal worth, and their consciousness of injustice in the process. At the University of California at San Diego, Davis participated in direct-action efforts to introduce ethnic studies into the curriculum, both for the sake of historical accuracy and inclusiveness and for the empowering potential that texts by authors like Douglass and Du Bois have for black students. In her published initial lectures on *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* for her course in "Recurring Philosophical Themes in Black Literature" at the University of California at Los Angeles (Davis 1971b), she revealed the transformative power of literacy for Douglass and other slaves in terms of opening up new discourses to them that could set off a series of changes in consciousness and in related life patterns. In the process, Davis suggests a new, philosophically rich conception of human freedom.

## Transformative Impacts: Angela Davis and Black Liberation Theory

The role of education in creating a consciousness that refuses to accept anything less than respect from others is one of the key ideas in Davis's lectures on *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, which contain a brilliant analysis of freedom that is very different from and in many ways superior to its predecessors in the Western philosophical tradition, not only John Locke's view but also Jean-Paul Sartre's and Herbert Marcuse's.[7] These initial lectures were to be followed by others on W.E.B. Du Bois, Jean Toomer, Richard Wright, and John A. Williams, interspersed with lectures on poetry from various periods of African American history and theoretical analyses reflecting the contributions of Du Bois and Frantz Fanon, concluding with comments on related work by African writers and the Black Cuban poet Nicolas Guillen, an incalculable loss if the quality of these lectures would have been even remotely comparable to that of her reflections on Frederick Douglass. For these two initial lectures persuasively articulate a conception of the dialectical relationship between inner freedom and freedom of action that is richly born out in lived experience, ironically, not only in Douglass's life but also in the period of her own life that immediately followed them.

Davis argues that the conception of freedom contained in the history of Black literature is more insightful than that contained within all the differing Western philosophical traditions exactly because it reflects the experience of those whose freedom and whose very human existence was denied, in theory and in practice. In the course of her discussion, Davis transforms the concept of freedom from a static natural property easily

taken for granted by those who feel secure in possessing it into the concept of liberation, a dynamic principle of struggle for those whose freedom has been denied. In arguing that freedom must have both an inner and an outer dimension, Davis critiques Sartre's famous claim that even a person in chains remains free because of having the choice between captivity and death. She points out that such a conception of freedom is incompatible with liberation, since in losing one's life, one loses the precondition for freedom-as-liberation. Furthermore, she argues, Sartre's conception of freedom fails to distinguish between two importantly different alternatives to accepting one's captivity, suicide or a struggle for liberation at all costs, which have very different moral and practical implications, and only one of which necessarily implies choosing death. Davis's comments on Douglass also constitute an implied critique of Marcuse's conception of freedom, which treats "freedom of thought" as a necessary precondition of liberation, and which therefore treats liberation as nearly impossible because consciousness of oppression is lacking as "the driving force of a historical practice, the effective cause of qualitative change" (Marcuse 1964, 253). For Davis, freedom is experienced as a journey with an ordered series of dialectically related stages, at the end of which the one who has been denied freedom understands and at least partially achieves its true meaning: the destruction of the master-slave relationship that binds the apparently free master as well as the slave (Davis 1971b, 5). Spurred on by both education and experience, these stages involve changes in consciousness, so that the earlier stages can be seen as inauthentic relative to the final one; these stages in consciousness also involve complementary changes in modes of action and in material circumstances within these institutional bonds.

The inner and outer voyages to freedom, Davis argues, are "mutually determinant" (Davis 1971b, 6), as shown in the life of Douglass. His journey from slavery to freedom began when he asked himself as a child why he or anyone else should be a slave. Davis suggests that such a critical attitude toward one's institutional situation, especially in the face of standard justifications, is a necessary precondition for the change in consciousness that must be a part of transforming one's condition of oppression. What Douglass had responded to, even as a child, was the contradictory nature of slavery and related forms of oppression: freedom is the essence of the human being, but the slave is a human being who is denied freedom, and even, in the attempt to resolve this paradox, denied humanity by those who would control them and who must, in the process of maintaining this system of illusion, abase their own humanity. Resistance offers the slave an alternative resolution to this paradox, which Douglass first realized when he witnessed a slave who refused to accept a whipping, offering his overseer the choice between desisting and shooting him; since he could

not accept the consequences of shooting him, the overseer desisted, and thus made him, in Douglass's words, "while legally a slave virtually a free man" (Davis 1971b, 6). Davis argues that such an act of open resistance—"physical resistance, violent resistance"—signifies the first stage in the journey toward freedom, involving rejection not only of the particular oppressive act but also of the oppressive institutional relationship. The slave experiences a rudimentary form of freedom in rejecting the existence of a slave as authentic, in becoming consciously alienated from his or her own earlier unconscious alienation from freedom within an institutional definition of a human self as property. This stage is extremely painful, since it entails heightened awareness of cruelty and indignity of one's own circumstances and those of all with whom one shares ties of love and kinship.

Douglass's "owner" launched him on the path to this painful stage of alienation from his slave existence that eventually produced violent resistance when he unguardedly revealed the consciousness-transforming power of education: "'Learning will spoil the best nigger in the world. If he learns to read the Bible it will forever unfit him to be a slave'"(Davis 1971b, 8). Douglass deduced a different conclusion from this hypothetical syllogism than his "owner" had intended, and than was intended by other master-participants in the slave system by forbidding slave literacy and thereby limiting slave access to ideas critical of the system. Seeing this prohibition as a prescription for self-transformation, Douglass set out to learn to read and to gain as much knowledge of the world of ideas as he could in order to free his mind from the control of his "owner" and the whole master-slave system. Davis calls this his transformation of possibility-opening observed resistance of the slave refusing the whipping into active resistance of his own mind. "Resistance," she argues, "rejection of every level, on every front, are integral elements of the voyage towards freedom. Alienation will become conscious through the process of knowledge" (1971b, 9).

Referring to Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind,* Davis suggests that the contradictions within the master-slave relationship illustrate a dimension of reality that makes movement, process, and activity possible. The independence of the master is always dependent upon the labor of the slave, who possesses the real, concrete power to change the relationship by resistance, and in this sense, possesses the power to become the master of the relationship. Davis illustrates this contradictory character of the master-slave relationship in her discussion of Douglass's eventual eruption into violent resistance. He had been mentally and physically broken by being driven to work to the point of collapse, and Covey had continued to beat him even as he lay on the ground. When Covey next tries to beat him, Douglass fights back, "instinctively, unconsciously" in Davis's words,

because "the fighting madness had come upon me" in Douglass's words, "and I found my strong fingers attached to the throat of the tyrant, as heedless of consequences, at that very moment, as if we stood as equals before the law" (Davis 1971b, 22–23). When no slave will assist him, Covey is unable to enforce his will over Douglass, losing his identity as slave-breaker in that same moment. This same moment is also a turning point in Douglass's life, and Covey never again attempts to whip him. The slave has refused his slavery, and thereby the master has lost his mastery.

The philosophical lessons Davis finds in Douglass's experience include the following ideas. We live in a concrete, historical world, whose actual, experienced features constitute our reality, and which we call upon philosophical reflection to help us change into a world in which we can experience fully human lives. Freedom is necessary for a fully human life, but not a given, unchangeable aspect of human nature; it can be denied by external restraint and limitation of opportunities, by shaping a passive psyche that accepts restraint and limitation, by creating a social milieu in which restraint and limitation are treated as natural and appropriate, and by denying those who are restrained and whose access to knowledge of other ideas and other ways of life is limited. Freedom must be achieved through liberation from real historical relations of domination and oppression, of which the master-slave relation is paradigmatic in showing that neither oppressor nor oppressed can experience freedom until their relation is transformed into one of humane equality. The liberatory process occurs dialectically and in stages of resistance; the meaning and requirements of freedom are understood through experience of its absence as people engaged in liberatory struggle undergo interlinked changes in consciousness, objective conditions, and behavioral responses. Alienation from a fully human existence is a universal characteristic of our species, but most people are unconscious of it, instead living passively and under the influence of illusions, including those created by "normal" social expectations. Coming to consciousness of this alienation is an extremely painful but necessary step on the journey to liberation, a step that is both most possible and most painful for those whose humanity has been most fully denied. Education, including both literacy and the exposure it can bring to the ideas and experiences of others, promotes conscious awareness of their extreme alienation among the oppressed. Consciousness of such extreme alienation does and must provoke resistance, and overt, physical actions of resistance do and must accompany mental resistance. In conditions of extreme restraint and limitation, such actions may be, and may need to be, violent in order to change objective material conditions. No human being can be liberated alone because we are all interlinked within social institutions. Thus, the liberatory project of each individual must entail the liberation of all humanity. The historical experience of our forebears in the

liberation struggle is inseparable from our own, as well as an invaluable guide to pitfalls and possibilities for effective transformation.

Toward the end of her first lecture on Douglass, Davis reveals her sense that his struggle and the struggle she herself is engaged in are one.

> To foreshadow Frederick Douglass' path from slavery to freedom, even when he attains his own freedom, he does not see the real goal as having been attained. It is only with the total abolition of the institution of slavery that his misery, his desolation, his alienation will be eliminated. And not even then, for there will remain remnants and there still remain in existence today the causes which gave rise to slavery (Davis 1971b, 10).

In addition to illuminating the historical and literary dimensions of Douglass's *Life and Times*, Davis aims to explore philosophical themes in the journey to liberation that reveal the dynamics of oppressive institutional and psychic structures and their liberatory transformations as an active tool for continuing and expanding the liberation process in our contemporary world, which is a continuation out of the past.

> The reasons underlying the demands for Black Studies Programs are many, but the most important one is the necessity to establish a continuum from the past to the present, to discover the genesis of problems which continue to exist today, to discover how our ancestors dealt with them. We can learn from the philosophical as well as concrete experience of the slave. We can learn what methods of coming to grips with oppression were historically successful and what methods were failures. The failures are crucial, because we do not want to be responsible for the repetition of history in its brutality. We learn what the mistakes were in order not to duplicate them. (Davis 1971b, 13).

In the process of harvesting these philosophical lessons and concrete experiences from the past, Davis redefines philosophy as a broadly human activity in which even slaves have participated, often with greater insight about central philosophical concepts like freedom than is evidenced by the great master names of the Western world, whose understanding is distorted by privilege and the illusion of independence.[8]

Tracing her view back to Socrates, Davis argues that philosophy should be understood as an active and dynamic guiding process for living well, rather than as a detached attempt to define static concepts devoid of historical and transformative implications.

> Philosophy is supposed to perform the task of generalizing aspects of experience, and not just for the sake of formulating generalizations, of dis-

> covering formulas as some of my colleagues in the discipline believe. My idea of philosophy is that if it is not relevant to human problems, if it does not tell us how we can go about eradicating some of the misery in this world, then it is not worth the name of philosophy. I think that Socrates made a very profound statement when he asserted that the raison d'etre of philosophy is to teach us proper living. In this day and age "proper living" means liberation from the urgent problems of poverty, economic necessity and indoctrination, mental oppression. (Davis 1971b, 14)

Thus, Davis's conception of the raison d'etre for Black Studies in the curriculum is not simply liberal inclusiveness of another viewpoint or another variety of experience, and her claims for the significance of its philosophical dimension require more than simply valuing the views of a racial underclass. Rather, she argues that the history of the philosophical dimension of African American experience more effectively illuminates the American experience, and the larger human experience of which it is a part, than do the works of privileged white male philosophers, even those whose work she greatly admires such as Marx, Sartre, and Marcuse. Moreover, she argues that the conception of philosophy that comes out of the literature of Black experience is not merely an alternative conception, but a superior conception that should stimulate the dominant philosophical enterprise to transform itself from detachment to engagement in the struggle to change the world.

## Transformative Impacts: Angela Davis and Feminist Theory

Angela Davis's subsequent writings on feminist theory closely connect to her 1969 *Lectures on Liberation,* both in her historical method of argument and as extensions of analysis of the meaning of liberation she offers there. *Women, Race & Class* (Davis 1981), *Women, Culture & Politics* (Davis 1989), and her more recent work all derive contemporary analyses from historical antecedents. The problem they address continues to be what she had earlier called liberation from interlinked "poverty, economic necessity and indoctrination, mental oppression" (Davis 1971b, 14). And they analyze the broader question of women's liberation through focusing on the experience and the transformative requirements of women of color, especially African American women who, as the descendants of slaves, continue as a Marcusian "underclass" to carry on Douglass's journey toward the liberation of all humanity. Her work in feminist theory implies and reflects her earlier work and her continuing, expanding lived experience. Thus, to feminist theory, she contributes the legacy

of Marxism and Critical Theory, including class analysis, as well as the legacy of Black Liberation Theory; at the same time, her work in feminist theory contributes a unique, hopeful, and highly insightful class analysis and transformative model to Marxism and Critical Theory, an important analysis of the intersection of gender and class with race to Black Liberation Theory, and, in her latest work, culture as a category in the philosophy of liberatory transformation linking her theorizing and her activist leadership in all these fields.

One important site of Davis's contribution of class analysis to feminist theory and practice is "The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working Class Perspective" in *Women, Race & Class* (Davis 1981). Her critical concern seems to respond to Betty Friedan's white middle class presumptions in generalizing about the domestic situation of all women in *The Feminine Mystique*, and to the similar presumptions of other white middle class feminists who have followed Friedan (Friedan 1963). Davis's particular transformative suggestions echo Charlotte Perkins Gilman's turn-of-the-century call for the socialization of housework in *Women and Economics* (Gilman 1966) as well as her feminist utopian novel, *Herland* (Gilman 1979). While agreeing with other feminist theorists and activists that housework is an obstacle to women's liberation, Davis argues that it differently impacts women relative to differences in class. She argues against the proposal simply to compensate women for previously unpaid housework, and calls instead for its socialization, i.e., for all women to enter the mainstream work force and for the various elements of what is now called "housework" to be done by paid laborers, like any other valued work in the public economy.

Davis's analysis here combines some of her invaluable contributions to feminist theory with some theoretical limitations it will be her challenge to overcome in her future writings. The most striking flaw in this essay is Davis's universalizing overstatement of the oppressive character of housework. For many women today, the problem with housework lies with some of the particular tasks involved (about which women vary as to which are distasteful and which are grounding and satisfying) and overall, having too much of it, especially in combination with too many of the responsibilities outside the home Davis regards as preferable and more respect-garnering. In reality, though some middle class women are fortunate in having relatively fulfilling work outside the home, many working class women find their paid work to be drudgery within labor force conditions of insecurity and non-respect, even if in some cases they are treated equally with men doing the same jobs. While many working class women surely would be glad to have the double burden of working both inside and outside the home lightened, their choice about how to do this would not in all cases be to have their present household responsibilities cov-

ered by others through socialization of housework, so that they could focus their energies more exclusively on their present economically productive work. Nonetheless, what is so important about her discussion there is that it brings class into the analysis of women's condition, breaking down previously widespread essentialism about women based on a middle class model.

In contrast with her dismissal here of the value of housework to women, in her first chapter from the same book, "The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood," Davis argues that slave women's domestic labor for their own families was crucial in maintaining their own and their family's sense of humanity, as well as their related ability to resist oppression, and that some men shared this liberatory "housework." In that context, Davis argues that black slave women's experience of the meaning of housework for their own family was entirely different than that of the emerging industrial middle class white women, in that it contributed to their positive equality with black men instead of undermining it, and in that they experienced it as fulfilling and liberatory, even though it was an arduous second set of tasks after a hard day's work in the fields that they did not experience as fulfilling (Davis 1981, 17, 23, and 29).

This essay taken with the other one suggests that the meaning and value of women's work to themselves and to others is highly contextual, that class is one important factor in understanding differences, and that a historically dynamic larger social and economic system creates highly influential but not totally determinative preconditions for alternative attitudes and experiences. Overly sharp dichotomies of housework versus economic labor, working class versus middle class, black versus white, and desirable versus distasteful may be distorting Davis's analysis somewhat in both essays; the lines are not that sharp, partly because we are all members of more than one group, and partly because individual differences always make a difference, too.

In her 1989 collection of speeches, *Women, Culture, & Politics* (Davis 1989), Davis proposes an approach to resolving "the difference problem," which was the focus of much of her historical analysis in *Women, Race & Class* (Davis 1981), and which still prevents women from effectively working as a united liberatory coalition.[9] The first section of this book, "On Women and the Pursuit of Equality and Peace," interconnects focal feminist issues of violence against women, abortion rights and freedom from involuntary sterilization, black women's health, the crisis of black families, and the struggle to prevent nuclear omnicide with what she regards as their formative and contextual issues of race, class, and the humanly warping effects of profit-oriented capitalism. In the first two essays, "Let Us All Rise Together: Radical Perspectives on Empowerment for Afro-American Women" (1987) and "Facing Our Common Foe: Women and the

Struggle against Racism" (1984), Davis places herself within the visionary framework that motivated the formation of the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs in 1896, identifying herself too as a woman wishing to work with other women "for the benefit of *all* humanity" (Davis 1989, 4). She analyzes the difficulties of forming a united women's movement as due to the same cause then as now: the tendency of relatively powerful white, middle class women to focus only on issues related to their own direct experience of oppression, and to conceptualize those issues in ways that reflect their own relatively privileged experience. Many issues that are of central importance to large numbers of Black women, she points out—such as unemployment, homelessness, racist violence—are relatively invisible to white middle class women. Other shared issues, such as homophobia, child welfare, sexism in the family and the workplace, and international peace and justice, are differently experienced and contextualized, and therefore, the solutions to such problems that seem desirable differ. This is why, Davis suggests, Black women and other women of color do not find women's organizations dominated by white middle class women appealing and responsive to their concerns. A successful women's movement, she argues, must be revolutionary, multiracial, and responsive to the issues affecting poor and working class women, "such as jobs, pay equity, paid maternity leave, federally subsidized child care, protection from sterilization abuse, and subsidized abortions" (Davis 1989, 7). It must work for an agenda that raises up all oppressed peoples (Davis 1989, 13), including an "unequivocal challenge to monopoly capitalism as a major obstacle to the achievement of equality," ultimately working "to forge a new socialist order" (Davis 1989, 14).

Creating an agenda for a united feminist movement is only one of the many interlinked issues Davis addresses in *Women, Culture & Politics* (Davis 1989). In another essay in this volume, "Women in Egypt: A Personal View," Davis confronts her own ethnocentric assumptions, making culture visible as a feminist category of analysis and a practical liberatory characteristic that must be taken into account. In an essay entitled "Brushstrokes for Social Change: The Art of Rupert Garcia" from the collection's last section, "On Education and Culture," Davis implicitly replies to Adorno's aestheticism by praising politically transformative art. And in another essay from this same section, "Imagining the Future," Davis challenges a graduating class of high school seniors to create their own utopian vision for the future that will continue the liberation struggle that had made this moment possible for them.

> Now it is your turn to imagine a more humane future—a future of justice, equality, and peace. And if you wish to fulfill your dreams, which remain the dreams of my generation as well, you must also stand up and

> speak out against war, against joblessness, and against racism. (Davis 1989, 172)

It is this sense of the liberation journey and one's personal life and career path as being one that represents the nature of Angela Davis's own converging commitments to speaking, writing, teaching, and political activism. Such a lived commitment to an activist life that goes beyond theory to embrace concrete involvement with the various political struggles Davis has supported locates her in the same arena with historical and recent heroes who, like her, have transformed the liberation struggle for freedom, justice, and an end to oppressions. That Davis is counted among these was shown by her reception as keynote speaker at the historic national conference "Black Women in the Academy: Defending Our Name, 1894–1994," meeting at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, at which 2,000 women embodying the entire spectrum of colors and cultures leaped to their feet as she stepped to the speaker's podium, let out a prolonged roar of joy, and continued to laugh, to cry, and to cheer throughout her remarks. Being counted among the heroes of liberation, especially in light of the scarcity of recent ones, and the even greater scarcity of recognizable American (S)heroes as well as African American ones, makes her an extraordinary philosopher, so beloved by those who share her ideals and her transformative vision, and so notorious among those who oppose them.

## NOTES

1. Davis also writes about her experience in Cuba, the Watts Riots, and the birth of Black Power as turning points which began her concrete commitment to the liberation struggle.

2. With Horkheimer and Adorno, Marcuse had been a key participant in the development of Critical Theory within their Institut für Sozialforschung at the University of Frankfurt, before the Nazis impelled them to flee to the United States. Marcuse had remained in America when Adorno returned to Frankfurt after World War II, and Davis had heard some of his lectures during the summer of 1964, after her studies at the Sorbonne, and had begun to read the earlier works of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse in English translation.

3. In an essay written some twenty years after the events that made her notorious and her image recognizable around the world, Davis self-mockingly expresses the also-serious concern that to many young people of a later generation, she is remembered primarily for the transformative fashion influence of her Afro hairstyle. See her "Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia" (Davis 1994a).

4. In reply to such a lamentation and implied criticism from Anatol Anton, Leonard Harris wrote as follows: "I do not believe that the arena of professional philosophy in America at this stage in history is the best place to pursue substantive issues arising from the reality of oppression—it is one site of struggle but not a site that makes much difference to the way the world is. And influencing my profession of philosophy to substantively take into account the reality of the oppressed by participating in that profession seems to me far less a worthy endeavor than might be supposed. The reason for this is that professional philosophy is more often influenced by events and trends outside of the profession (civil rights movement, socialist revolutions, feminism, etc.) than by its own internal dialogues. I believe that Angela is empowered to address any issue she so chooses, despite the oppressive forces that have been arrayed against her. No doubt those forces tend to sway radicals away from the field of philosophy (understanding here that philosophy is one tool in the arsenal of weapons that can be aligned on behalf of the oppressed). At the same time, the field of philosophy as currently structured is barren. Analogously, racial segregation is an evil, but assimilation into a capitalist class order is not a good. The exclusion of Angela from the professional field of philosophy is an evil, but addressing Kant and Hegel is not necessarily a good—particularly if we read Angela's work as a body of texts themselves conveying and developing a philosophy out of social analysis. Such a reading does not require addressing Marcuse, Kant, Hegel, or Marx—it requires reading Angela Davis as the central subject and broadening our conception of what's philosophically interesting." See Harris 1990.

5. Selected examples of Davis's speeches and essays since 1989 are included in the references (below).

6. After her court battles and subsequent worldwide speaking tour, Angela Davis returned to her activist work in education, teaching in various departments at a series of California universities until she developed ongoing relationships with San Francisco State University (1978–91) and the San Francisco Art Institute (1977–89). She also has been an instructor in the Education Program of the San Francisco County Jail (1990–91). She is presently Professor of the History of Consciousness at the University of California at Santa Cruz. She resumed teaching Critical Theory at Santa Cruz in 1995.

7. A revised and abbreviated version of her lectures is included as "Unfinished Lecture on Liberation—II" in Harris (1983). This version lacks some of the detail and immediacy of the original lectures. The remaining lectures in Davis's class on "Recurring Philosophical Themes in Black Literature" were never given because of Governor Ronald Reagan's and the California Board of Regents' decision to fire her from her faculty position because of her membership in the Communist party. Though she eventually was able to overturn their decision in court, the time for composing the other lectures was lost to the legal battle.

8. Davis's analysis of the master-slave relation strongly suggests the influence of Frantz Fanon, just as her analysis of the importance of education strongly reflects the influence of W.E.B. Du Bois.

9. Davis assembled this collection at her mother's suggestion as "an effort to retrospectively provide some continuity to a life that has been informed for almost two decades by local and global struggles for progressive social change," an activist life that has very little time for quiet scholarly reflection and carefully crafted book-length arguments (Davis 1989, xiii-xiv).

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