

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Angela Davis

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Davis, Angela Y. (Angela Yvonne), 1944-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Angela Davis,
Dates:	April 3, 2004, December 15, 2015 and June 7, 2003
Bulk Dates:	2003, 2004 and 2015
Physical Description:	13 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (6:33:14).
Abstract:	Civil rights activist and history professor Angela Davis (1944 -) ran on the Communist Party ticket as vice president in 1980 and 1984. In addition to her political activist activities, Davis was an accomplished university professor and lecturer. Davis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 3, 2004, December 15, 2015 and June 7, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois and Oakland, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2003_124
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civil rights and professor, Angela Davis was born in Birmingham, Alabama, on January 26, 1944, the daughter of two teachers. Active at an early age in the Black Panthers and the Communist Party, Davis also formed an interracial study group and volunteered for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee while still in high school. At fifteen, after earning a scholarship, Davis traveled to New York to complete high school. In 1960, Davis traveled to Germany to study for two years, and then to the University of Paris for another year. After returning to the United States, Davis attended Brandeis University, where she graduated magna cum laude in 1965. Davis then returned to Germany for further study before enrolling in the University of California, San Diego, where she earned her M.A. degree in 1968.

Upon earning her master's degree, Davis became an assistant professor at UCSD, but due to her connections with the Panthers and the Communist Party, she was removed a year later. Following her dismissal, Davis worked to free the Soledad Prison Brothers and befriended an inmate, George Jackson. In August of 1970, Jackson and several other inmates attempted to escape from the Marin County Courthouse, and a judge and three others were killed. Davis was quickly put on the FBI's most wanted list, despite the fact that she was not at the crime scene, and was apprehended in New York. After spending eighteen months in jail during her trial, Davis was acquitted in 1972. While in prison, Davis wrote her first book, *If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance*, entirely by hand. After her acquittal, Governor Ronald Reagan vowed she would never teach in California again, but nevertheless, she was immediately hired by San Francisco State University, where she stayed for another twelve years. Entering the political ring, Davis ran on the Communist Party ticket as vice president in 1980 and 1984. When the Soviet Union began to fall apart, however, Davis gave up communism. Davis continued to teach in the History of Consciousness Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Davis toured across the United States and the world lecturing on prison reform, and served on the advisory board

of the Prison Activist Resource Center. Davis also co-founded the Committees of Correspondence, an organization that seeks to unite all socialist groups in the United States.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Angela Davis was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on April 3, 2004, December 15, 2015 and June 7, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois and Oakland, California, and was recorded on 13 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Civil rights activist and history professor Angela Davis (1944 -) ran on the Communist Party ticket as vice president in 1980 and 1984. In addition to her political activist activities, Davis was an accomplished university professor and lecturer.

Restrictions

Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

Persons:

Davis, Angela Y. (Angela Yvonne), 1944-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Davis, Angela Y. (Angela Yvonne), 1944---Interviews

African American women authors--Interviews

African American women political activists--Interviews

Universities and colleges--Faculty--Interviews

African American communists--Interviews.

Socialists--United States--Interviews

Prison reformers--Interviews

African American families

African Americans--Genealogy

African Americans--Social conditions

Foster children

Birmingham (Ala.)

Southern States--Race relations--History

Discrimination--United States

Ku Klux Klan

Public housing

Childhood

Mothers and daughters

Fathers and daughters

New York (N.Y.)

Bedford-Stuyvesant (New York, N.Y.)

Students, Foreign

Germany

Marcuse, Herbert, 1898-1979

Adorno, Theodor W., 1903-1969

Radicalism and reactionary politics in America

Sixteenth Street Baptist Church (Birmingham, Ala.)

Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968

Vietnam War, 1961-1975

San Diego (Calif.)

Chicano movement

Black Panther Party

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.)

Sex discrimination

Reagan, Ronald

Soledad Brothers

Imprisonment

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Civil Rights Activist

HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

Administrative Information

Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Angela Davis, April 3, 2004, December 15, 2015 and June 7, 2003. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Angela Davis, Section A2003_124_001_001, TRT: 0:29:20 ?

Angela Davis describes her parents hardscrabble upbringings, particularly that of her mother, who was taken in by a foster family after being abandoned by her birth parents. Davis also discusses her childhood on 'Dynamite Hill' in Birmingham, Alabama, a neighborhood that was a site of frequent bombings by the Klan and other white supremacists. She recalls the Davis family's move from the projects to a new white house on a hill.

African American women authors--Interviews.

African American women political activists--Interviews.

Universities and colleges--Faculty--Interviews.

African American communists.

Socialists--United States--Interviews.

Prison reformers--Interviews.

African American families.

African Americans--Genealogy.

African Americans--Social conditions.

Foster children.

Birmingham (Ala.).
Southern States--Race relations--History.
Discrimination--United States.
Ku Klux Klan (1915-).
Public housing.
Children.
Mothers and daughters.
Fathers and daughters.
New York (N.Y.).
Bedford-Stuyvesant (New York, N.Y.).
Students, Foreign.
Germany.
Marcuse, Herbert, 1898-1979.
Adorno, Theodor W., 1903-1969.
Sixteenth Street Baptist Church (Birmingham, Ala.).
Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963.
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.
Vietnam War, 1961-1975.
San Diego (Calif.).
Chicano movement.
Black Panther Party.
Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.).
Sex discrimination.
Reagan, Ronald.
Soledad Brothers.
Imprisonment.

Video Oral History Interview with Angela Davis, Section A2003_124_001_002, TRT: 0:29:10 ?
Angela Davis describes in detail her childhood and family life. She recalls the sights and sounds of a rather joyful and intellectually challenging childhood. She notes the influence of her mother in creating an intellectually nurturing atmosphere and her father's role in helping with daily family chores. Davis also touches upon the tragedies, which have visited her relatives, namely murders related to drugs and other criminal activities.

Video Oral History Interview with Angela Davis, Section A2003_124_001_003, TRT: 0:30:10 ?
Angela Davis remembers the great decision of whether she would start college early to eventually pursue medicine or attend a Quaker school in New York City. Her parents were reticent about letting her attend high school so far away, but her father signaled his support with the purchase of a \$100 dollar sheepskin coat for the harsh New York winters. Davis details her initial impressions on her new home and classmates upon her arrival in the Big Apple.

Video Oral History Interview with Angela Davis, Section A2003_124_001_004, TRT: 0:30:15 ?
Angela Davis details her varied secondary school education. Torn between starting at Fisk University at the age of fifteen and attending a Quaker school in New York City, Davis chose the latter. Spending her final two years of high school living with a progressive Episcopalian minister's family in Bedford Stuyvesant, the young Davis found herself exposed to new and exciting ideas and ideologies. She enjoyed the urban lifestyle of New York City and decided to

attend college on the East Coast. She delves into how she ended up attending a predominantly Jewish college, Brandeis, and the intellectual exposure she found there as well.

Video Oral History Interview with Angela Davis, Section A2003_124_002_005, TRT: 0:29:40 ?

Angela Davis delves into her most poignant memories of youth. Davis fondly recalls of her four years at Brandeis University, especially her study abroad. The international student body and exposure to different cultures and ideas left an indelible mark on her. In particular, it was Davis' exposure to the philosophy of the Frankfurt School of critical theory while studying in Frankfurt, Germany that most influenced her life. She describes how her exposure to great political philosophers like Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno put her on the path to radical political activism.

Video Oral History Interview with Angela Davis, Section A2003_124_002_006, TRT: 0:30:40 ?

Angela Davis recalls the horror of hearing of the bombing of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and assassination of President John F. Kennedy while she was studying abroad at the Sorbonne during her junior year. Upon her return to the U.S., Davis started connecting the struggles for equality of black Americans to the rising revolutionary movements across the globe. In particular, a speech given by Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1965 about his opposition to the Vietnam War facilitated this intellectual transformation. After graduating from Brandeis, she moved to Germany to continue her immersion in philosophy. Again, her study in Germany was a catalyst for her nascent political growth. Following her mentor, Herman Marcuse, to San Diego for further graduate study, Davis begins applying her theory into action by connecting with the growing Chicano civil rights movement at UC San Diego.

Video Oral History Interview with Angela Davis, Section A2003_124_002_007, TRT: 0:30:20 ?

In this segment, Angela Davis details how her ideas of radical activism came to fruition. After moving to San Diego to continue studying under the tutelage of her mentor, Herbert Marcuse, Davis connects with the burgeoning SNCC/Black Panther/black power movement. This represents a shift, for she moves from thought to action in setting up a political education program with SNCC, then the Black Panther Political Party. Davis also discusses how the Los Angeles SNCC office fell apart and the Black Panther Political Party rose from its ashes. She also touches upon the role gender discrimination played in the demise of the L.A. SNCC organization. Davis recalls the high level of scrutiny the Black Panther Party was under, particularly from the FBI and LAPD. She talks about the infiltration by these law enforcement agencies and connection to the murders of various Black Panther members across the country.

Video Oral History Interview with Angela Davis, Section A2003_124_002_008, TRT: 0:31:15 ?

Angela Davis details how she started putting thought into action. Her first step was joining the Communist Party and forming an all-black branch. She also joined the Black Panther Political Party and began a political education program, which meshed perfectly with her new position as an assistant professor at UCLA. Davis's political activism set off a chain of events which propelled her into great acclaim and notoriety. Then-California governor, Ronald Reagan, attempted to have her tenure revoked for her Communist affiliation which then led to a heightened level of political activism for Davis. She became an active spokesperson for a fair trial for the Soledad Brothers, which in turn led to more threats against her. For protection, she kept several guns, which she left with Jonathan Jackson, the teenage brother of George Jackson, a Soledad Brother. Jonathan attempted to free his brother from custody, using Davis's weapons, and was subsequently involved in a deadly shootout. Law enforcement soon traced

the weapons to Davis and she then began her life on the run.

Video Oral History Interview with Angela Davis, Section A2003_124_002_009, TRT: 0:29:45 ?

Angela Davis describes in gripping detail her life as one of the FBI's Ten Most Wanted. She also discusses her arrest and incarceration on false charges such as fleeing justice and aiding known felons. Although jailed for sixteen months, often in solitary confinement, Davis found a groundswell of support in family and friends. Childhood friend and noted NAACP Legal Defense Fund attorney, Margaret Burnham, provided the cornerstone of Davis' legal defense. Davis also served as co-counsel in her defense and her effort eventually led to her acquittal.

Video Oral History Interview with Angela Davis, Section A2003_124_003_010, TRT: 10:29:14 ?

Angela Davis was imprisoned in New York City in 1970 as a result of her political activism. She spent part of her time in solitary confinement, and received mental health treatment from Dr. Tolbert Small. Davis went on to serve as co-counsel on her own defense team, which included attorneys Howard Moore, Jr., Leo Branton, Jr. and Doris Brin Walker. As a result, Davis was granted permission by Judge Richard Arnason to participate in the jury voir dire process. She also delivered the opening statement during the trial. During this period, Davis gained support from well-known European intellectuals like Herbert Marcuse, Inge Neumann, Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. At this point in the interview, Davis talks about the campaign to fund her bail that involved celebrities like Aretha Franklin. Davis' family members, such as her mother, Sallye Bell Davis, and her sister, Fania Davis, were also politically active.

Video Oral History Interview with Angela Davis, Section A2003_124_003_011, TRT: 11:30:02 ?

Angela Davis was prosecuted by the California assistant attorney general Albert W. Harris, Jr. as a result of her political defense of the Soledad brothers. She was eventually acquitted of the three charges that were brought against her. Davis then traveled nationwide to thank her supporters in cities like Los Angeles, Chicago and New York City as well as international destinations like Cuba, Chile and the Soviet Union. In 1973, Davis helped found the National Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression, which handled the cases of Benjamin F. Chavis, Jr. and the Wilmington Ten as well as activists from the American Indian Movement at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. At this point in the interview, Davis talks about the prison industrial complex and the prison abolitionist movement. She also describes the impact of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, a bill introduced under President Bill Clinton's administration.

Video Oral History Interview with Angela Davis, Section A2003_124_003_012, TRT: 12:31:27 ?

Angela Davis published 'Angela Davis: An Autobiography' in 1974, three years after her acquittal. In writing the autobiography, Davis was advised by author Toni Morrison, who was an editor at Random House Inc. In the 1980s, Davis ran in the election for the vice president of the United States as a member of the Communist Party. Around this time, she taught at the San Francisco Art Institute in San Francisco, California. As a result of her participation in the Bay Area art scene, Davis met and married photographer Hilton Braithwaite, however, the couple divorced a few years later. In 1983, Davis' father, B. Frank Davis, died suddenly. At this point in the interview, Davis talks about her early undergraduate mentor, the philosopher Herbert Marcuse; her European travels; and the importance of social and political activism, which informed her values of justice and equality.

Video Oral History Interview with Angela Davis, Section A2003_124_003_013, TRT: 13:31:56 ?

Angela Davis served on the faculty of the History of Consciousness Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz from 1991 to 2008. During this period, Davis witnessed the growth of numerous activists in the University of California system, such as the Black Lives Matter movement co-founder Patrisse Cullors. At this point in the interview, Davis talks about her political identity; and the LGBTQ and Black Lives Matter movements. She also talks about the lingering impact of slavery; and describes how she would like to be remembered. Davis concludes the interview by reflecting upon her legacy.