5. Angela Y. Davis and U.S. Third World Left Theory and Praxis

No one in the media has dealt with the fact that there exists a tradition behind Angela. They have, instead, described her as if she just popped from the sea, black and beautiful from nowhere.

—Haywood Burns, *Who Is Angela Davis?*

Haywood Burns, one of Angela Y. Davis's lawyers during her now infamous trial on murder, conspiracy, and kidnapping charges, could not have known how true his words from the early 1970s would still ring today. Davis has become a literal icon for the 1960s, most often described as a figure that emerged from the U.S. civil rights movement. Strangely, even the academic community has maintained a certain critical distance. More than thirty years later, with the notable exception of Joy James, few people have examined the particular intellectual and political formation out of which Davis emerged.[1] Though several published interviews have done important contextual and critical work, to date, few full-length critical essays on Davis have been pub-

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lished.[2] This critical silence obscures the complicated political and intellectual tradition in which her early writings and activism must be understood.

This chapter takes up that tradition, situating Davis as a unique U.S. Third World Leftist. Before the twenty-six-year-old Davis found herself on the FBI's "Ten Most Wanted List," she had been a student of Frankfurt School philosophers Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno and had met Algerian, Vietnamese, and Cuban anticolonialists while living and traveling in Frankfurt, Paris, London, and Havana. In fact, Davis spent much of her time between 1960 and 1967 far removed from the modern civil rights movement, living in the northern United States and traveling and studying in Europe. When she did return, she was active in Communist Party circles rather than immersed in civil rights or Black Power circles. Davis's early internationalist orientation impacted her domestic racial politics, rather than the other way around. I want to suggest that it is precisely Davis's complex history, one that does not fit into the neat, conventional narratives of the 1960s, that explains this critical silence. Her identity and her forms of analysis challenge the customary boundaries between political movements, philosophies, and nations, demonstrating that forms of analysis and oppression are always mutually imbricated, even as they seem to depart quite dramatically from one another.

In his essay "On National Culture," Frantz Fanon argued against what he termed "facile internationalism," concluding, "It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows."[3] In one sense, his elusive formulation recognizes that Western colonialism and imperialism bequeathed to the "wretched of the earth" the modular form(s) of the nation-state as the global lingua franca. In Fanon's estimation, it was only once a radical national project was successfully embarked on that emerging postcolonial nations could vigorously support and defend other emergent nations in their quest to overthrow colonial domination. In his view, the history of colonialism and imperialism had left former colonies with little choice but to emulate First World nation-states, despite all their apparent flaws.

If Fanon's ideal anticolonial subject was supposed to move from the local to the global, from the national to the international, Davis's path troubled that prescription. She moved from the local to the global and then back to the local. She moved outside U.S. borders in order to assess its national forms of order and ways of spreading disorder. This is clearly a consequence of Davis's position as an oppressed national minority living at the very heart of U.S. imperialism. Davis's First World position required certain forms of translation. The anticolonial project could not be transplanted whole into the economic and political body of the United States, as Harold Cruse warned in *The Crisis of the*

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Negro Intellectual. Davis did not achieve international consciousness by moving through a nationalist project as others of her generation; instead, Davis's burgeoning international consciousness propelled her deconstruction of the political, social, and economic forms of the U.S. nation-state. Rather than enshrining new, more radical forms of "national consciousness"—to pick up another phrase of Fanon's—Davis began a radically deconstructive project, unraveling U.S. imperialism at its point of origin. She began interrogating the forms that state-sponsored race and class oppression takes in the United States, producing a new theoretical viewpoint from which to fight the oppression she witnessed in the United States and abroad. This involved a critique of the nation-state as the global building block. Instead, her political vision assumed a loose alliance among Third World peoples and oppressed peoples in the First World, assumed a certain geographic and ideological fluidity that cohered into a revolutionary internationalism.

Combining elements of Marxism, feminism, antiracism, and anticolonialism, this revolutionary internationalism was characterized by two critical elements: an intersectional theoretical approach that consistently foregrounds the ways in which class, gender, race, and national oppression produce and reproduce one another; and a focus on state violence and incarceration as tools for consolidating racial oppression in the First World. Davis was deeply marked by the ways in which diverse, seemingly divergent influences—Western Marxism, U.S. antiracism, and Third World anticolonialism—coalesced. Davis's cultural and political formation embodies, if in an extreme form, the complicated ideological and political currents at work among a generation of U.S. Third World Leftists. The first sections of this chapter look at Davis's complex genealogy by analyzing how her 1974 autobiography positions her as an activist-intellectual. In that autobiography, she highlights her childhood in the Jim Crow South, her training with Frankfurt School philosophers, and her encounters with anticolonialists as the keys to her later political and intellectual direction. The final section of the chapter turns to Davis's early essay "Political Prisoners, Prisons, and Black Liberation" to explore how her revolutionary internationalism found articulation in this seminal early piece. Ultimately, I am concerned here with considering how her autobiography and essay articulate a forceful critique of the U.S. nation-state, helping us understand its forms of domestic racism and global imperialism.

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Davis begins her autobiography on the run in the days before the FBI captured and charged her with murder and kidnapping. Her decision to begin there, on the run, literally hunted, cannot help but echo slave narratives. In both cases, the goal is physical freedom, escape from impending captivity. This framing device marks all that follows. Once Davis details her imprisonment, highlighting the kinship networks and modes of solidarity that female prisoners forge, she quickly moves to describe her childhood in Birmingham, Alabama, a city mockingly known as "Bombingham." As she describes it, Davis's early life was indelibly shaped by racial apartheid. The routine indignities of Jim Crow segregation and economic discrimination were underlined by brutal terrorism. As a preschooler, she moved with her family into the neighborhood nicknamed "Dynamite Hill" because of the Ku Klux Klan's frequent bombings of black families within the previously all-white enclave. Under the reign of Eugene "Bull" Connor, the commissioner of public safety from 1937 to 1954, and again from 1957 to 1963, these bombings—if not directly orchestrated by the state—were sanctioned by state and city political inaction. Consequently, Davis learned early on the violent lengths to which many white citizens would go to maintain a system of white supremacy premised on black disfranchisement. "The eyes heavy with hatred on Dynamite Hill; the roar of explosives, the fear, the hidden guns, the weeping Black women at our door," Davis later recalled, shaped her childhood and adolescence.[4] Like many black Southerners, Davis learned to live with state-sanctioned terrorism, literally held captive by it. She reflects, "Every night now . . . I'll hear white crackers planting bombs around the house. We are supposed to be next anyway."[5] Though Davis's family was relatively privileged within Birmingham's black community—her mother and father were schoolteachers before her father opened a gas station—her parents were both politically active. They were members of the local NAACP chapter and Sallye B. Davis was also a national officer in the Southern Negro Youth Congress, a CPUSA-affiliated organization that in the 1930s lobbied on behalf of the Scottsboro Nine. Though they themselves did not join the Communist Party, many of their friends did and were subsequently forced underground during the McCarthy era.[6] The Davises' political involvement no doubt resulted from black Birmingham's long-standing engagement in civil rights and labor activism stretching back to the 1930s. As Robin D. G. Kelley has shown, black sharecroppers' attempts to unionize in the early twentieth century left a deep mark on the city's political landscape.[7]

In addition to encouraging political activism, Davis's parents prized educa-

tion. Here again is yet another echo of slave narratives, in which the path to freedom leads through literacy.[8] In fact, Sallye Davis commuted back and forth during summers to earn a master's degree at New York University. During her childhood, Angela and her sister Fania accompanied their mother on these trips, where they got a glimpse of Northern life, which had a contradictory impact on Davis. On the one hand, it only made her "more keenly sensitive to the segregation [she] had to face at home."[9] But on the other hand, Davis reflected that she "felt her blackness more than she ever had in the South—not in the customary racist ways, but because people made such effusive overtures to her and because of their awkward attempts to ignore that she was black."[10] In short, the difference between Northern and Southern racism seemed one of degree rather than kind. The North did not display its racism and race consciousness in the same ways as the Jim Crow South, but it was far from a racial utopia.

Like white middle-class children of the time, Davis was schooled in Western "high" culture, taking ballet and music lessons from a young age. But if her mother expected her to become a debutante, plans that eventually collapsed, she also expected Davis to be a critic of her social environment. "Our parents," Davis reflected in an interview, "encouraged us to look beyond appearances and to think about possibilities, to think about ways in which we could, with our own agency, intervene and transform the world."[11] While political struggles engulfed Birmingham in the mid-1950s, the adolescent Davis spent much of her time at the public library reading Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* and Victor Hugo's *Les misérables*, among other titles. Seeking what she described in her autobiography as an "avenue of escape," Davis applied for and won a Quaker scholarship for Southern students to attend Northern schools.[12] Landing at a progressive high school in Greenwich Village and living with the Melishes, a family of white activists, Davis found herself far removed from the Southern civil rights movement by the fall of 1959.

It was at the Elizabeth Irwin High School, an outgrowth of the Little Red School House, that the young Davis first encountered Marxist theory. The school was a haven for blacklisted schoolteachers expelled from the New York City public school system. In her history classes, she learned about socialism and read Marx and Engels's *Communist Manifesto*. In her autobiography, Davis stresses that she read Marx's text repeatedly, focusing on one passage in particular: "All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interests of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious independent movement of the immense majority." From this passage, Davis glimpsed what she described as "a vision of a new society, without exploiters

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and exploited," one in which the proletarian majority liberated the oppressed minority (109). Linking the progress of human history to a mass movement of the proletariat must have seemed appealing precisely because it foretold a future in which the proletariat willingly emancipated oppressed minorities, a far cry from the reality she observed in the South and the North. Davis's attraction to this passage enabled her to begin coupling the situation of black Americans with the global struggle to end economic exploitation: "What struck me so emphatically was the idea that once the emancipation of the proletariat became a reality, the foundation was laid for the emancipation of all groups in the society" (110). However, Marx and Engels's prediction that the proletarian majority would lead the socialist revolution was not borne out by events in the 1960s and 1970s; instead, a vocal, militant minority sought to transform the structures supported by the immense majority. This reversal occasioned a rethinking of revolutionary theory among Western Marxists, particularly the Frankfurt School and the New Leftists and U.S. Third World Leftists they later influenced.

While in New York, the fifteen-year-old Davis also joined Advance, a CPUSA-affiliated youth organization to which Bettina Aptheker, Eugene Davis, Margaret Burnham, and Mary Lou Patterson, the daughter of the black communist attorney William Patterson, also belonged. Davis's Advance activities included protesting in front of the local Woolworth's store to express solidarity with the Southern sit-in movement she had left behind. Like other Elizabeth Irwin students, Davis also joined SANE (the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy), as well as the local NAACP chapter, and she worked with Inside Pharaoh and Outside Pharaoh gang members and their girlfriends at the Brooklyn Heights Youth Center. These activities had their intellectual counterpart in a series of lectures given by the radical historian Herbert Aptheker at the American Institute for Marxist Studies, where Davis "absorbed," according to biographer Reggie Nadelson, "social theory and economic history."[13] Before she even went to college, Davis had the beginnings of a strong Marxist intellectual foundation.

Once she arrived at Brandeis University in 1961, that foundation was further solidified. Davis, one of ten black students in a college of fifteen hundred, found herself immersed in an environment where "intellectualism was the brain of Brandeis, its political radicalism the guts."[14] Indeed, Davis was not the only sixties radical produced at the college; Abbie Hoffman and several Weathermen were also graduates. While at Brandeis, Davis met James Baldwin and studied with Herbert Marcuse, the Frankfurt School philosopher and media-anointed "New Left theorist" with whom she developed a lasting personal and intellectual relationship.[15] Though cloistered in Waltham, Massa-

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chusetts, at quite a cultural, political, and geographic distance from Birmingham, Davis did not remain immune to the shock waves emanating from the national civil rights struggle. In the fall of 1963, while studying at the Sorbonne, Davis learned that four teenaged girls—Carole Robertson, Cynthia Wesley, Addie Mae Collins, and Denise McNair—had been killed in the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham. It is clear that this event struck a deeply personal chord, in part because the girls were friends of the Davis family. In the intervening years, Davis has since written and spoken about this incident repeatedly, acknowledging that it prompted her to consider her own responsibility to and distance from the civil rights fray. Her sense of horror and outrage was inexplicable to those around her, causing a political dissonance that shaped her future direction. She writes in her autobiography, "No matter how much I talked, the people around me were simply incapable of grasping it. They could not understand why the whole society was guilty of this murder—why their beloved Kennedy was also to blame, why the whole ruling stratum in their country, by being guilty of racism, was also guilty of this murder."[16] The failure of Europeans and white Americans in Paris to acknowledge their own complicity in such brutal white supremacy pushed Davis to further reexamine her relationship to the U.S. nation-state more generally.

Davis's analysis may have been inimical to white Americans' conceptions of themselves, but it was by no means inimical to black Americans' conceptions of them. In fact, her analysis reflects the very different assumptions on which black U.S. citizenship has always been premised. Black Americans have historically had—and still have—a fundamentally different relationship to the United States than do their white counterparts. Given that black citizenry possess a contradictory relationship to the nation-state, one defined by hypocrisy and betrayal, black citizenship can only be described as an uneasy, even alienated form of national belonging. It is a belonging unachieved, built on the *long durée* of brutal exclusion from and halting steps toward a marginalizing inclusion within the body politic. One has only to survey U.S. black history to identify multiple manifestations of and responses to this alienation ranging from prolonged exile to armed rebellion. During the modern civil rights movement, these civil contradictions and their attendant forms of alienation intensified. Black citizens could not help but recognize their alien and alienated status, could not help but understand that their citizenship was premised on the denial of rights and privileges, vicious disfranchisement rather than enfranchisement. In fact, mass-media technology disseminated and mediated this knowledge as images on the nightly news and stories in the daily papers

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repeatedly underscored the antagonistic relation between black people and the U.S. nation-state.

Davis's alienated citizenship provoked her to question, and eventually theorize, the place of black Americans in the United States and to question the fictions that undergird all First World nation-states. At a remove from the U.S. nation-state, her physically exiled body paralleled the experience of alienated black citizenship. Geographic distance from the United States mimicked and further encouraged an intellectual and political distance from it. In Paris when news of John F. Kennedy's assassination broke, Davis gathered with other citizens at the U.S. embassy, but she felt estranged from the collective expression of mourning. She later reflected: "I felt out of place at the Embassy, surrounded by crowds of 'Americans in Paris' and it was difficult to identify with their weeping. I wondered how many of them had shed tears—or had truly felt saddened—when they read the *Herald Tribune* story about the murders of Carole, Cynthia, Addie Mae and Denise."[17] White and black U.S. citizens could never experience a so-called national tragedy in the same way, particularly while black lives were so casually devalued by everyday racist practice and institutionalized white supremacy. As happened with other black American activists and intellectuals, Davis's alienated subjectivity served as a model for new forms of international affiliation and solidarity, an impetus for rethinking and transforming the U.S. social order. In a recent article, Robin D. G. Kelley asserts, "The particular transnational, global perspective developed by African American intellectuals . . . was a product of a state refusing to grant black people citizenship . . . and a political refusal on the part of many black intellectuals to prop up American nationalism and its national myths."[18] Davis's belief that the Birmingham bombing formed part and parcel of the structure of exploitation and white supremacy undergirding white citizenship eventually led Davis to think more complexly about how such structures were replicated around the globe.

Viewing the national from the vantage point of the global produced an analysis of the interrelation between the two. The social, cultural, political, and even physical death of black Americans depended on, recirculated, and helped reify a global structure of oppression and exploitation. In other words, the logic of U.S. citizenship and imperialism relied on the fostering and exportation of modes of oppression,[19] the pitting of the white citizen against the black noncitizen.[20] At moments of profound national crisis—Kennedy's assassination, the Birmingham bombing—Davis's inchoate divestment from U.S. national mythologies only intensified. This remove from U.S. nationalism laid

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the groundwork for a more systematic critique of the social, political, and economic world order that her training with Frankfurt School philosophers and encounters with anticolonial activists and artists would develop.

Critical Theory: Constructing a Utopian Imaginary

As a French and then a philosophy major, Davis found herself immersed in Frankfurt School philosophy, an interest that only fueled her radical social practice. During her senior year, Davis sought Marcuse's advice on a course of philosophical study, and their initial meeting turned into weekly one-on-one tutoring sessions. Those sessions were largely responsible for Davis's decision to pursue a Ph.D. at the Institute for Social Research at Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany. While there, Davis wrote a thesis under Adorno, but decided to return to the United States in the summer of 1967 rather than complete her degree in Frankfurt. To a large extent, this decision reflected her desire to participate in U.S. racial struggles, but the move also indicated Davis's preference for Marcuse's philosophical orientation. She immediately enrolled in the philosophy program at the University of California at San Diego, where she began work on her doctorate with Marcuse. Though colleagues and close friends for many years, by the late 1960s, Adorno and Marcuse found themselves increasingly on different philosophical and political paths, particularly after Adorno returned to postwar Germany. Marcuse, with the publication of *An Essay on Liberation* in 1969, became known as a champion for the New Left, while Adorno expressed serious reservations about the New Left's goals and tactics, wondering if they might replicate the same kind of fascism they claimed to oppose.[21] Adorno also became more and more invested in theory as the highest form of praxis, while Marcuse increasingly came to believe that praxis, even flawed praxis, needed to stand at the core of critical theory.

Marcuse grew up in a suburb outside of Berlin as a member of an affluent, assimilated Jewish family in the textile business. The Marcuses' trajectory, argues Barry Katz, closely paralleled the social history of the ascending industrial bourgeoisie of the late empire.[22] Educated in a Wilhelmine German educational system premised on the rigid maintenance of social classes, Marcuse studied the German classics, as well as the French avant-garde literary tradition. Had he not been drafted into World War I, he might have continued along the road to a settled bourgeois life. But Marcuse was drafted in 1916 and because of his bad eyesight was stationed in Potsdam where resistance to the war was brewing within the military ranks. In Potsdam, he began reading Marx, even-

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tually joining the Social Democratic Party (SPD) in 1917, one of three warring factions within Germany's working-class movement. While serving as an elected delegate to the soldier's council in Berlin, Marcuse's active membership in political parties ended abruptly in January 1919 when the SPD helped orchestrate the murder of Rosa Luxemburg, a member of the German Communist Party.[23] That incident precipitated Marcuse's return to academia. He matriculated at the University of Freiburg in 1920, beginning nearly a decade of work with Martin Heidegger and Edmund Husserl during which he studied Marx and Hegel extensively. That collaboration ended when Heidegger's collaboration with the Nazis strained Marcuse's relationship with both men. Husserl did, however, help garner Marcuse an introduction to Max Horkheimer, the newly appointed director of the Institute for Social Research.[24]

In 1932, Marcuse published his first book *Hegel's Ontology and the Founding of a Theory of Historicity*, a work heavily indebted to phenomenology and Heideggerian philosophy. After that, though, he became increasingly drawn into Horkheimer's inner circle where critical theory was being generated. With the consolidation of the National Socialist Party, the institute's members—Horkheimer, Adorno, and Marcuse among them—went into exile in 1933 until after World War II, spending the bulk of their time in the United States at Columbia University and in Santa Monica, where they joined other exiles including Bertolt Brecht and Heinrich Mann.[25] When Adorno and Horkheimer returned to Frankfurt at the war's end, Marcuse chose to stay in the United States, serving between 1942 and 1951 as a low-level intelligence analyst along with over ninety other academics. He was charged with assessing the mentality of German citizens under the Nazi regime. After his stint in U.S. government service, Marcuse taught at universities, first Columbia University and Harvard University, and between 1958 and 1965 at Brandeis, until the administration refused to renew his contract. Eventually he moved to UC San Diego, where he taught until he retired in 1976.

Between 1955 and 1972, Marcuse published three works that proved particularly influential for the New Left, *Eros and Civilization* (1955), *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), and *An Essay on Liberation* (1969). It is clear that Marcuse's work loomed large in Davis's own intellectual formation. Of Marcuse, Davis once reflected, "I never cease to stand in awe of his ability to relate ideas, ostensibly buried under the sands of time, to the current situation we have to deal with in our social and political lives."[26] There are several elements of Marcuse's thought that Davis found useful for her intellectual and political development. They include the conceptualizing of a critical theory; a rethinking of the rela-

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tionship between theory and praxis; a reinvestment in utopia as an achievable political project; and a belief in the power of students and U.S. peoples of color to help ignite—if not sustain—a socialist revolution.

According to Martin Jay, a historian of the Frankfurt School, critical theory's progenitors extend back to the 1840s as leftist Hegelians began to apply Hegel's theories to contemporaneous social and political life in Germany. Their most well-known member, Karl Marx, developed an enormously influential revolutionary theory that held sway for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. By the end of World War I, however, Marx's theory had become a kind of metaphysics, an undialectical paradigm that violated many of the core ideas held by Marx himself. In the early 1920s, Karl Korsch's *Marxism and Philosophy* and Georg Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* ushered in a period of critical rethinking during which Marx's debt to Hegel was examined anew and many of the core epistemological and methodological questions of classical Marxism were investigated. Building on this work, Frankfurt School members reasserted the role of consciousness within Marxist theory. Turning Marxists' dialectical method in a more materialist direction, they began to focus on the question of how to fuse philosophy and social analysis and transform the world through human praxis or practical activity.[27] At its core, Frankfurt School philosophers rejected all metaphysical truths, dismissing any notion of absolute truth, instead stressing the individual's role in society and exploring how social psychology might help bridge the gap between the individual and society. In his writing, Horkheimer stressed the following three points that illustrate more fully the early concerns of critical theory: For one, he suggested that philosophers had gone too far in emphasizing subjectivity and inwardness; second, he argued that they neglected the material dimension of reality; and third, he cautioned that philosophers "overstated their case and seemed to be rejecting reason itself" (51).

Proposing a materialist theory of society, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and other Western Marxists argued that the economic base and the cultural, political, and ideological superstructure constantly interacted; thus civil society and politics had begun to assume a primacy unimagined in Marx's time (53). Frankfurt School philosophers took as their mission a closer analysis of the individual's interaction with the state and civil society, a deeper critique of bourgeois society and its ideological and social conventions. In the 1937 essay "Traditional and Critical Theory," Horkheimer systematically articulated the theoretical orientation that would guide the work of the Frankfurt School.[28] Contrasting traditional theory with critical theory, Horkheimer argues that the historical moment demands a break with Enlightenment modes of inquiry. In

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traditional theory, Horkheimer contends, scientists and social scientists base their models on what they see as transparent, objectively known facts. The explanatory value and validity of traditional theory depends on one's accurate observation and interpretation of phenomena. In explaining historical events, traditional theory posits a cause-and-effect chain in which specific objective conditions lead to certain events; the range of historical outcomes is thus limited by the conditions themselves. Consequently, for Horkheimer, traditional theory's social function was the "critical examination of data with the aid of an inherited apparatus of concepts and judgments."[29] Absent from this type of theory is an awareness that facts and their interpretation are indeed human made, products of a particular social arrangement.

Critical theorists, on the other hand, take society itself as their object of study, seeking to understand the "individual in his real relation to other individuals and groups, in his conflict with a particular class, and finally, in the resultant web of relationships with the social totality and with nature" (211). Unlike traditional theory, critical theory does not assume that the social totality is unified or coherent; nor does it assume that it can be known and understood purely through the exercise of reason. Instead, critical theory begins by recognizing the "two-sided character of the social totality" (207), which entails a dialectical opposition between social life and the natural world. This opposition propels the critical thinker to at once apprehend the rules that govern social life, even as she or he recognizes them to be powerful conventions that obscure the chaos lurking below (34). The theory, in this paradigm, can never be separated from its social context. Its purpose is to rigorously historicize reason and its relation to current social conditions, to ask how facts come to be facts and impact the world in which they exist. In Thomas McCarthy's estimation, "Critical Theory is concerned precisely with the historical and social genesis of the facts it examines and with the social contexts in which its results will have their effects."[30] In this way, critical theorists depart from leftist Hegelians in believing that a "determinant negation" can restore a sense of the rational self. Deconstruction is not the endpoint but rather part of the process in restoring an authentically rational self no longer tied completely to the market.[31] In Jay's words, "Reason . . . was the 'critical tribunal' on which Critical Theory was primarily based." He continues, "The irrationality of the current society was always challenged by the 'negative' possibility of a truly rational alternative."[32] Such an analysis necessitates an engagement with the principles animating society, a questioning of what democratic principles mean in a social order premised on dominance and exploitation. For Horkheimer, critical theory was a form of "philosophically oriented social inquiry"

whose aim was to reveal the ways in which concepts such as *truth*, *justice*, and *freedom* have been distorted by the hegemonic order.[33]

If in Horkheimer's view a ruling-class faction was responsible for the hegemonic order, for black Americans the hegemonic order was also inevitably a racial order. Given her historical experiences, Davis had to incorporate race into critical theory's frame of reference. For her, it was not difficult to believe that truth, justice, and freedom had been unmoored from their egalitarian meanings by a white supremacist order. Developing a useable critical theory required Davis to account for how both race and class structured the current social order. This is not to argue that Davis was any less convinced than Horkheimer that market forces and capitalism ultimately lay at the very core of social injustice; however, for her those market forces were always shaped through and by a white racial order with both local and global dimensions. In a 1971 interview, she remarked, "The only true path of liberation for Black people is the one that leads towards a complete and total overthrow of the capitalist class in this country and all its manifold institutional appendages which ensure its ability to exploit the masses and enslave Black people."[34] Like other black radicals, she saw race and class as complementary not contradictory categories of social analysis; one could not fully describe the dimensions of black oppression without recourse to both of them.

In "Philosophy and Critical Theory," Marcuse defined critical theory's primary purpose as social analysis that looks at the cultural supports for unfreedom, injustice, and unhappiness.[35] Central to this type of social analysis was the understanding of how ideologies function within societies. Marx defined ideology as an "entire superstructure of distinct and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought and views of life" that rises under a particular mode of production.[36] In a world buffeted by war and mass extermination, it is not surprising that ideology and cultural production assumed a new primacy. The question of how populations acquiesce to and actively support evil and irrational regimes such as National Socialism in Germany or Jim Crow in the Southern United States involves at its core the question of how ideologies deform one's perspective on the world. For Western Marxists in the postwar period, then, understanding contemporary systems of thought and cultural institutions assumed a new importance. Historically contextualizing existing ideologies was a way of rethinking how such ideologies might be rethought, repositioned, redeployed. According to Barry Katz, in critical theory "the dominant concepts of modern thought and ideology [are] dismantled, traced back to the material circumstances in which they originated . . . and then systematically reconstructed so as to reveal their changed political func-

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tions in new circumstances. The truth as well as the falsehood of the concepts that guide philosophy, science, and social *praxis* is thus exposed, and their ideological hold is loosened."[37] If for Western Marxists ideology's placement within the economic superstructure and thus its implications for class domination constituted primary preoccupations, black Marxists analyzed ideology's function in securing both class and racial domination. A focus on ideology, in this case, allowed black radicals to understand white supremacy's enduring hold on the U.S. nation-state. Racism and class oppression were both constitutive elements of the nation-state; an attack on white supremacy, then, must fundamentally transform the cultural and ideological structures of the United States, if not completely eradicate class oppression.

Just as critical theory formed the centerpiece of Frankfurt School philosophy, utopia was one of its guiding principles. Indeed, Marcuse's work, particularly that of the 1950s, relied on the revivification of utopia as a goal and a basis for praxis.[38] In his recent *Freedom Dreams*, Robin D. G. Kelley defines utopia as the "idea that we [can] possibly go somewhere that exists only in our imaginations."[39] In Marcuse's view, utopia was far from unattainable; it was simply a condition that was being "blocked from coming about by the power of the established societies."[40] A vision of a classless society free of exploitation and racial oppression, then, should not be dismissed as an impossibility; rather, the current state of affairs might be aberrant, the inevitable outcome of a class- and race-based society vulnerable to attack and overthrow. In defense of this idea, Marcuse argued that "the utopian element [has] long [been] the only progressive element in philosophy."[41] Utopian thinking, far from otherworldly, enables us to identify the potential social elements on which to construct a radically different future. In a 1956 lecture, Marcuse contended, "It may be less irresponsible today to depict a utopia that has a real basis than to defame as utopia conditions and potentials that have long become realizable possibilities."[42] Pragmatic social movement building needs acts of radical imagination. It is this type of radical dreaming, Kelley argues, that has motivated black feminists, Pan-Africanists, and other black radicals to conceive of a better, more egalitarian world. Historically, utopia has given black Americans, however paradoxically, a starting point, a place for which to aim. In our dreams, we have long fashioned our future. As Kelley reminds us, effective social movements "transport us to another place, compel us to relieve horrors, and most importantly, enable us to imagine a new society."[43] Amid the grim determination and hopeful optimism of global decolonization and U.S. civil rights, a call for a return to utopian thinking proved uniquely attractive to young antiracist activists. This perhaps holds all the more true in the case of

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activists outside of mainstream civil rights organizations such as the SCLC or CORE, which were conceived within and sustained by black church traditions. Marcuse's brand of utopian thinking was not tied to any religious tradition, did not even depend on a belief in God or an afterlife; rather, it may have served as a kind of secular spirituality that propelled radicals such as Angela Davis to organize against extraordinary odds.

Central to the idea of critical theory was the insistence that theory always implies praxis, even if that praxis does not directly follow from the theory. Jay argues that "*praxis* and reason were in fact the two poles of Critical Theory."[44] The importance of human practical activity was consistently emphasized as one way of refuting Hegel's identity theory with its belief that subject and object were in fact identical. The space for human transformation of the social, economic, and political landscape depends on "the irreducible mediations between subject and object, particular and universal."[45] It is on the relative import of theory versus praxis that Adorno and Marcuse began to differ, particularly by the mid-1960s. For Adorno, theory could never be seen as prescriptive, as a way of forecasting or designing strategy; to collapse theory and praxis was to commit a grand error. In his view, theory was seen as the highest form of praxis, the most important transformative act.[46] As such, correct theory might quite reasonably be seen as critical theory's end goal. Marcuse certainly agreed that there was and should not be any crude, causal link between theory and praxis; however, he insisted that theory must always be tied to an activity in the world, even if the theory did not lead directly to any form of praxis. In a sense, critical theory might be seen as an alienating practice, one designed to defamiliarize or decenter one's perspective on the world in order to realign it. For Marcuse, the messy business of praxis was ultimately necessary if true social change was to occur.

This belief explains in part Marcuse's investment in the New Left as an agent of profound social change. In Morton Schoolman's view, "The New Left came to occupy a definite place in Marcuse's theory as a practical force for sweeping change."[47] With its emphasis on both political and cultural revolution, Marcuse believed that the New Left "gave expression to new conceptions of human need, happiness, and freedom, to goals transcending the established form of life."[48] For Marcuse, "the radical political practice involves a cultural subversion. . . . Political radicalism thus implies moral radicalism: the emergence of a morality which might precondition man for freedom."[49] Ushering in a new moral and political era, Marcuse predicted in *An Essay on Liberation* that the "young middle class intelligentsia" and the "ghetto populations [might] well

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become the first base of popular mass revolt (though not of revolution)."[50] Though Marcuse's formulation did not encompass Davis's identity, one which straddled and ultimately defied his categorization—she was part of a new intelligentsia and part of a black (though not urban ghetto) population—his prediction that the seeds of revolutionary change might not necessarily be sown by the white working class certainly fueled her own revolutionary vision. Echoing prominent anticolonial theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Mao Tse-tung, C. L. R. James, and Mohatma Gandhi, Marcuse's positioning of African Americans and other peoples of color as world historical actors represented a serious revision of Marxist theory, the impact of which cannot be overestimated. At a moment in history when black Americans were fighting for full enfranchisement, this theoretical move placed their struggle within the global struggle for freedom, justice, and equality. Placing "ghetto populations" within a Marxist frame of analysis once again placed class analysis in relationship to race analysis. The question of how the eradication of racial oppression might impact class oppression would inevitably arise, even if the reverse question need not. Marcuse's celebration of new social movements undoubtedly drew Davis closer to his radical philosophy and away from Adorno's seemingly more abstract investment in theory. For Davis, Marcuse served as a critical bridge between Western Marxism and her identity as a young black woman.

If, as I have argued, Davis saw herself as an alienated U.S. citizen, one unmoored from any national affiliation, a philosophical theory designed to reexamine and act to change human hierarchies and oppressive relations must have proven uniquely appealing to her. Marcuse conjectures that this is the case in an open letter he wrote to Davis while she was being held in jail without bail. He writes, "The world in which you grew up, *your* world (which is not mine) was one of cruelty, misery and persecution. To recognize these facts did not require much intelligence and sophistication, but to realize that they could be changed and must be changed required thinking, critical thinking: knowledge of how these conditions came about, which forces perpetuated them, and of the possibilities of freedom and justice. This, I believe, you learned in your years of study."[51] Critical theory, then, was a mode through which Davis could question and act to change her social context. In the face of historical precedent and social custom, it was a means for producing constructive alienation: careful, clear-eyed analysis with the aim of radical social transformation. Davis's interest in Frankfurt School philosophy was not motivated by an investment in European philosophy for its own sake; rather, it provided a tool for rethinking the position of all black Americans in a global field of relations.

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Anticolonials in the Metropole

As Davis immersed herself in Frankfurt School theory, she also began encountering anticolonial activists in the metropoles of Europe and the outposts of the colonial world. In 1962, just after her first year at Brandeis, Davis visited Paris on her way to the Eighth World Festival for Youth in Helsinki. Her desire to, in her own words, get "a better perspective on things" was satisfied by her encounters with (ex-)colonials living in the French metropole. Witnessing the hard-scrabble struggle of Martinicans searching for work and the racist attacks on Algerians, Davis began to forge an anticolonial perspective. In her autobiography, Davis wrote, "To be an Algerian living in Paris in 1962 was to be a hunted human being . . . paramilitary terrorist groups were falling indiscriminately upon men and women in the colonialist capital because they were, or looked like, Algerians." At a protest for Algerian independence at the Sorbonne, Davis saw state-sponsored terrorism firsthand as police used high-power water hoses against the anticolonial protestors. Such incidents increased her sense that the struggle of French colonials and African Americans shared certain commonalities. "[The French police] were as vicious as the red-neck cops in Birmingham who met the Freedom Riders with their dogs and hoses," Davis reflected. "The new places, the new experiences I had expected to discover through travel turned out to be the same old places, the same old experiences with a common message of struggle."[52] Distance from the United States allowed Davis to link disparate geographic locations, enabling an understanding of the features shared by colonialism and U.S. white supremacy.

The Algerian struggle was not the only one with which Davis closely identified while abroad. Critique of French and more frequently U.S. imperial domination also confronted her via the intense culture of resistance forged by Vietnamese immigrants living in Paris. During a Vietnamese Tet celebration, Davis saw thousands of Vietnamese cheering performances parodying the U.S. government for its military intervention in Vietnam. While studying in Frankfurt, Davis also took part in civil disobedience, mass demonstrations, and teach-ins against U.S. intervention in Vietnam. For Davis, the domestic civil rights movement was beginning to fit into an anticolonial framework in which Third World peoples and African Americans might find a common basis for struggle. It is no doubt quite significant that distance from the United States robbed Davis of some of the privilege and willful ignorance enjoyed by most Americans. Critique of the United States was not obscured by biased news reports; instead her identity as an American implicated her in the forms of oppression being exported across the globe.

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The example set by the Cuban Revolution also focused Davis's anticolonial consciousness on the United States, impressing on her the fact that it was an imperial power to be opposed. At the Helsinki conference, it was the Cuban delegation that most impressed her. In her autobiography, Davis recalled that the young Cuban militants (many of them women) conveyed "a fiercely compelling spirit of revolution" as they satirized the way "wealthy American capitalists had invaded their country and robbed them of all traces of sovereignty" (130). Just as the Vietnamese performers had reduced the United States to an object of ridicule, so, too, had the Cuban delegation—only their triumph had occurred just ninety miles shy of U.S. shores. Davis's interest in Cuba culminated in a month-long trip in July 1969, which she characterized in her autobiography as "a great climax in my life" that left a "permanent mark on my existence" (215). If her view of the Cuban delegation in Helsinki had been romanticized, her reflections about the month-long trip differed considerably. "It was then that I began to realize the true meaning of underdevelopment: it is nothing to be Utopianized," Davis writes; "romanticizing the plight of oppressed people is dangerous and misleading" (208). If Davis's autobiography had until this point stressed the possibilities inherent in Third World solidarity, here she sounds the first cautionary note, beginning to transcend the "facile internationalism" against which Fanon warned. An insistent materiality belies any easy identification with the plight of the Cuban—or any other—masses. Davis does not make the mistake of collapsing her situation into the Cubans, but knowledge of her relative privilege does not produce political paralysis. It is not an excuse for inaction, but rather an impetus for greater nuance and sophistication in crafting a transnational political analysis.

In the summer of 1967, Davis returned from Europe, deciding to pursue her Ph.D. with Marcuse at UC San Diego instead of with Adorno in Frankfurt. On her return to the United States she immersed herself in graduate training and political organizing. Her biographer Nadelson writes, "She saw the task of the intellectual and of the organizer in the streets as basically the same: to make changes, to make revolution."[53] Briefly an ally—though never an actual member—of the Black Panther Party, Davis was also active in the campaign to establish a Third World College at UC San Diego. After much debate and research—Marcuse opposed her decision—she formally joined the CPUSA in the summer of 1968, becoming an active member of the Che-Lumumba Club, a party branch consisting solely of people of color whose main international focus was revolution in the Third World, not the Soviet Union. Before long, one of the Che-Lumumba Club's central campaigns was waged on behalf of the Soledad Brothers, three black inmates—George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, and

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John Cluchette—accused of murdering a white guard at Soledad Prison. The three men, widely believed to have been framed because of their political organizing in prison, were held incommunicado for almost a month without access to lawyers or family members. The case quickly helped ignite a nascent prisoners' rights movement, the reverberations of which California still feels. Like so many others, Davis took a keen interest in the case and in Jackson himself, becoming the L.A. cochair of the Defense Committee for the Soledad Brothers, which hired lawyers, devised legal strategies, raised funds, and organized protests on behalf of the men. A passionate advocate for Jackson and his comrades, Davis also grew close to the Jackson family, serving as a mentor to Jackson's teenaged brother Jonathan who had only been five years old when George was first incarcerated.[54]

While organizing on behalf of the Soledad Brothers, Davis was simultaneously writing a dissertation on Immanuel Kant's analysis of the use of force during the French Revolution. In the spring of 1969, she applied for and won teaching jobs at Yale University and Swarthmore College, though she declined them both to join UCLA's faculty so that she could continue organizing in a large, black community. Davis's tenure at UCLA turned out to be an embattled one. Before she even began teaching, the University of California regents, under pressure from Governor Ronald Reagan, fired Davis on the basis of a Cold War statute prohibiting the employment of known communists. Their decision sparked a pitched battle: on one side, leftists and others supporting the principle of academic freedom; and on the other, staunch anticommunists and conservatives concerned about Davis's increasing visibility as a communist and an advocate for black liberation. During the ordeal, Davis took the University of California regents to court and won, though they ultimately succeeded in firing her by choosing not to renew her contract.

In the midst of Davis's fight to keep her job, the Soledad case took an unexpected turn. During the trial of James McClain, a black prisoner accused of assaulting a prison guard who sustained no injuries, the seventeen-year-old Jonathan Jackson staged a doomed prison-break attempt. An armed Jackson spontaneously enlisted inmates McClain, William Christmas, and Ruchell Magee, who took hostages (including a judge and a prosecutor) and hurriedly exited the courthouse, entering a waiting van. Minutes later, shots were fired by San Quentin guards and the captured prosecutor, killing Jackson and Judge Harold Haley. Days later, it was learned that three of the weapons used by Jackson were registered to Davis, a revelation that prompted the FBI to issue a warrant for Davis's arrest on kidnapping, murder, and conspiracy charges. Davis immediately went underground, evading capture for two months until

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she was eventually arrested in New York. In a bitter parallel to the Paris police dragnets she had witnessed, Davis's warrant served as the excuse for massive police dragnets that eventually rounded up hundreds of light-skinned, Afro-wearing women around the country. Over the next two years, Davis became the most well-known political prisoner in the nation and possibly the world. The struggle to secure her freedom sparked an international movement; activists in Oakland, New York, Accra, and Havana signed petitions, raised money, and lobbied local and California state officials, all of which helped create the political climate for Davis's eventual acquittal.[55]

The Praxis Becomes Theory

While in prison awaiting trial, Davis wrote "Political Prisoners, Prison, and Black Liberation." Though its immediate inspiration was her own impending trial and imprisonment, it was also spurred by the political work she had been doing in defense of the Soledad Brothers and her own observations of state violence against colonized peoples. The essay's intersectional approach to race, class, and national oppression depends on Davis's analysis of U.S. prisons and prisoners as opposed entities in a structure of relations that bears striking resemblance to colonialism. For Davis, revealing the oppression that permeates U.S. prison policies enables a two-pronged attack on U.S. racism and First World colonialism and imperialism.

By asserting that the penal system has been "transform[ed] into a prominent terrain of struggle, both for the captives inside and the masses outside,"[56] Davis really sets out to produce it as such through an analysis of prison's social-control function. Seeking to undermine the ideological support for U.S. laws and their attendant practices of criminalization, the essay illustrates the prison's role in maintaining race and class inequality and fortifying a repressive U.S. state. Using historical examples, Davis understandably begins with enslavement. The injustice of chattel slavery, she argues, compelled black people "to openly violate those laws which directly or indirectly buttress[ed] our oppression" (20). Thwarting slave catchers, harboring fugitive slaves, and in the spectacular instances of Nat Turner and John Brown organizing slave rebellions, black people and their white allies have repeatedly questioned the validity of unjust laws through direct extralegal action. Surveying postbellum American history, Davis compares this principled opposition to that of Southern blacks resisting the Black Codes, Ku Klux Klan violence, and Jim Crow segregation. Davis's historical examples appear to be aimed at the choir of black American readers—she repeatedly uses the personal pronouns "we" and

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"our"—but she is also chiding white liberals for whom "redress through electoral channels is . . . a panacea" for U.S. racial woes (19). Recourse to courts and legislation, she asserts, represents a fundamentally flawed strategy. If, as I have argued, it is more accurate to consider black people in this period as alienated (non)citizens, then they were not endowed with rights respected by courts and legislators. Pushing this logic further, if this marginalized position was not only endemic to the U.S. nation-state but also critical to its maintenance of power, then appeals to the democratic rhetoric of equality and social justice would never prove successful. Davis's argument implicitly undercuts the very sense that black people are indeed (North) Americans with inalienable rights, and so she understandably categorizes them, as well as Puerto Ricans and Chicanos, as "nationally oppressed people" (20). These groups are quite literally citizens of nations distinct from and oppressed by the United States. Placing people of color in a structurally different position than white Americans and distancing them from the label of *U.S. minority* allows Davis to reference and hail international anticolonial and Marxist constituencies to whom black and Chicano people may look for support. It exposes the alienated position inhabited by people of color and thus reveals the structurally racist foundation on which U.S. laws rest.

Davis then takes her argument a step further, arguing that the United States uses its legal system to both identify and neutralize political threats to its stability. It seeks to isolate, disempower, and further alienate those at the margins, in reality beyond the structural limits of its national identity, whose exclusion enables the maintenance of state power. The essay fills out this line of reasoning in two steps. First, Davis distinguishes between an individual breaking the law "in the interests of a class or a people" or for her or his own "individual self-interest" (21). Where "at stake has been the collective welfare and survival of a people," the imprisoned reformer or revolutionary might be identified as a "political prisoner," while in the other instance the self-interested lawbreaker is simply labeled a criminal. Neither case is as straightforward as it might seem, however. In the first instance, the very category *political prisoner* stands on shaky, ever-disappearing ground, for how can a liberal democracy, indeed the premier liberal democracy reigning during what *Time* publisher Henry Luce described as the "American Century," produce political prisoners? A hallmark of U.S. democracy is the belief that well-established, constitutionally protected channels exist to protect political dissenters. Davis demonstrates, however, that U.S. structures of law and order render invisible the existence of political prisoners by labeling them criminals rather than political threats to the stability of the state. She lists several examples: International

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Workers of the World (IWW) organizer Joe Hill was framed for murder; Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti were convicted of robbery and murder; armed self-defense advocate Robert Williams was falsely accused of kidnapping and forced into exile; and even the elderly W. E. B. Du Bois was indicted by the federal government. Davis concludes, "The offense of the political prisoner is political boldness, the persistent challenging—legally or extra-legally—of fundamental social wrongs fostered and reinforced by the state" (25). Though she neglects to mention her own case, Davis's writing of the essay from prison and its placement in *If They Come in the Morning*, a volume designed to aid in her defense, underscores the point that the fighter for black liberation is imprisoned for contesting the very conditions that oppress her. She writes, "The political act is defined as criminal in order to discredit radical and revolutionary movements. A political event is reduced to a criminal event in order to affirm the absolute invulnerability of the existing order" (25). It does more than that, though, serving the ideological function of resolidifying the state's democratic edifice, confirming the belief that fundamental political opposition does not exist because it *need* not exist. To admit the existence of political prisoners, then, calls into question the state's legitimacy. Political prisoners pose a challenge to the U.S. nation-state, testing its status as just, benign, and stable, while criminals presumably do not.

But Davis undercuts even this distinction when she returns to the figure of the supposedly self-interested criminal. In familiar Marxist fashion, she asserts that "the majority of criminal offenses bear a direct relationship to property" and thus the prison functions as an "instrument of class domination" (27). Theft, from this perspective, is "at once a protest against society and a desire to partake of its exploitative content," while imprisonment constitutes a "means of prohibiting the have-nots from encroaching upon the haves" (27). Though this line of argumentation seems fully in line with traditional class analysis, Davis pushes further, challenging the frequent Marxian dismissal of the "criminal class" as part of a lumpen proletariat inherently untrustworthy and immaterial to the coming revolution. Acknowledging her debt to the Black Panther Party, which saw great organizing potential in the lumpen class,[57] Davis advocates on the lumpen's behalf, noting that many black, Chicano, and Puerto Rican men and women are unemployed at a rate twice that of their white counterparts and thus structurally positioned within the lumpen proletariat because of racial oppression. Davis then reminds readers that Marx himself described the lumpen proletariat as "capable of the most heroic deeds and the most exalted sacrifices," *before* following with the clause "as of the basest banditry and the dirtiest corruption."[58] From the vantage point of a race-based

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analysis, criminality—"banditry and the dirtiest corruption"—is revealed as a structurally derived fiction useful for the perpetuation of class inequality and white supremacy, rather than a viable basis on which to construct Marxist theories of revolution.

Returning to the issue of criminality by way of the lumpenproletariat allows Davis to make her second critical point: that the penal and judicial systems—police officers, judges, prison guards, parole boards—merely reinforce the line between white citizens and alienated black and brown noncitizens that has already been demarcated by ghetto life. Unemployment, squalid housing, police surveillance, and the everyday realities of the inner city mirror the codes of disfranchisement that define colonial societies. For black people in the United States, colonial domination means both relative isolation and extreme brutality: "In Black communities, wherever they are located, there exists an ever-present reminder that our universe must remain stable in its drabness, its poverty, its brutality. From Birmingham to Harlem to Watts, Black ghettos are occupied, patrolled and often attacked by massive deployments of police. The police, domestic caretakers of violence, are the oppressor's emissaries, charged with the task of containing us within the boundaries of our oppression" (32). Davis, like other U.S. Third World Leftists, viewed the ghetto as an internal colony, a miniature manifestation of colonial dynamics. For Davis, the black and brown ghetto dwellers and inner-city police had their colonial counterparts in the Third World. "Fanon's analysis of the role of colonial police," Davis insists, "is an appropriate description of the function of the police in America's ghettos" (32). Ghettos are primary manifestations of the deepening social contradictions produced under capitalism and imperialism. Geographically isolated, economically exploited, and brutally policed, they warehouse a black and brown reserve labor army. If the penal and judicial systems, particularly in moments of heightened cultural and political crisis, work within a system of "preventive fascism" to stifle opposition to the state's practices and policies, they also unevenly target people of color. "The disproportionate representation of the Black and Brown communities," Davis writes, "the manifest racism of parole boards, the intense brutality inherent in the relationship between prison guards and Black and Brown inmates—all this and more cause the prisoner to be confronted daily, hourly, with the concentrated, systematic existence of racism" (29). But one could go further: The (white) U.S. nation-state treats its black and brown populations as if they constitute a continuous and palpable threat to its very survival, as if their very presence—let alone demands for justice and equality—creates an ongoing po-

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litical crisis that must be managed with the harshest tools at the state's disposal. Given this reality, even the self-interested criminal can be viewed as a political prisoner. If indeed the state manages a perceived threat from ghetto populations by surveying more acutely, punishing more severely all crimes, even petty ones, then it is all the more crucial that inmates of color be reimagined, resituated within an antiracist and anticapitalist political context. Inmates of color are on the political front lines, their predicament a critical site at which state violence, racist repression, and economic exploitation visibly articulate (to) one another. It is not that black inmates are a priori revolutionaries or even political activists; rather, it is that their structural position within the U.S. nation-state may propel them to "swiftly becom[e] conscious of the causes underlying their victimization" (29). Davis is careful here not to essentialize black people as revolutionaries, framing her appeals in optimistic tones designed to spur black political organizing rather than forecast its imminent success.

As is the case with Third World Newsreel, the analogy of ghettos to internal colonies allows Davis to place massive black and brown incarceration within an anticolonial context that connects U.S. peoples of color to Third World populations. It allows her to bridge local, national, and international levels of analysis and struggle. Beginning with a distinction between political prisoners and "ordinary" criminals, Davis proceeds to deconstruct this binary, indirectly revealing how her own status as a political prisoner mimics the commonplace situation of poor black Americans. Placing both the ghetto and the prison at the center of her analysis reveals the blind spots of both orthodox Marxist and antiracist struggle, demonstrating that class struggle mandates antiracist struggle, just as antiracist struggle mandates anticolonial and anti-imperial struggle.

In its historical moment, "Political Prisoners, Prisons, and Black Liberation" constituted an important political intervention on many different levels. Not only did it attempt to stretch the retracted boundaries of Marxist organizing in the United States but it also troubled the middle-class moorings of mainstream civil rights activism. If integration's political appeal required an affirmation that black people were indeed citizens faithful to the ideals of the nation-state, Davis implicitly reframed civil rights disobedience as an act of resistance to the nation-state that went beyond the challenging of Jim Crow segregation. She was not alone here, of course. Much of the Black Power phase of the civil rights movement in the late sixties and early seventies challenged the belief that black equality meant black assimilation. In this instance, though,

Davis gives political shape to black rebellion by relying on the forging of an imagined anticolonial community made up of black Americans and their counterparts across the Third World.

This chapter has taken up the political and intellectual formation of Angela Davis as a way of engaging questions of black radicalism, transnational identification, and their various intersections with the project of disarticulating and dismembering the body of U.S. imperialism. Without attention to the complicated ways in which Davis's experience of alienated citizenship, her training with Frankfurt School philosophers, and her encounters with Third World anticolonialists shaped her, one cannot fully make sense of Davis's political and intellectual trajectory. If today Davis has been reinscribed as a product of U.S. civil rights, she was just as clearly impacted by Third World decolonization and developments in Western Marxism. I do not intend here to compare Davis's internationalism to the alleged parochialism of U.S. civil rights; rather, I wish to resituate U.S. civil rights, revealing the movement's ongoing dialogues with anticolonial and Marxist theory and praxis. Such a project also punctures the pervasive American exceptionalism that clearly perceives the impact of U.S. culture and politics on the rest of the world but rarely the reverse. For at the same time that Davis and other U.S. Third World Leftists agitated for full empowerment and social justice, they contributed to a global vision of Third World liberation. They participated in a very particular anticolonial and Western Marxist moment in which radicals in the United States and the Third World recognized and targeted the United States as a producer and disseminator of a new imperialism premised on the fiction of free markets and the triumph of (state-protected) capitalism.[59]

If Davis used her sense of alienation as a way of forging international affiliations, the UCLA filmmakers examined in the next chapter explored what happens when one's alienation is so acute, one's existence so bounded, that affiliation, productive political activity, appears foreclosed. They visualized the internal-colony's effect on the body and the mind. This appears fitting as the era shifted to a more conservative time, one with fewer avenues and productive channels through which to exercise a certain kind of transnational analysis. In response, narrative filmmakers in the 1970s turned inward, exploring the psychic internal colony.

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