

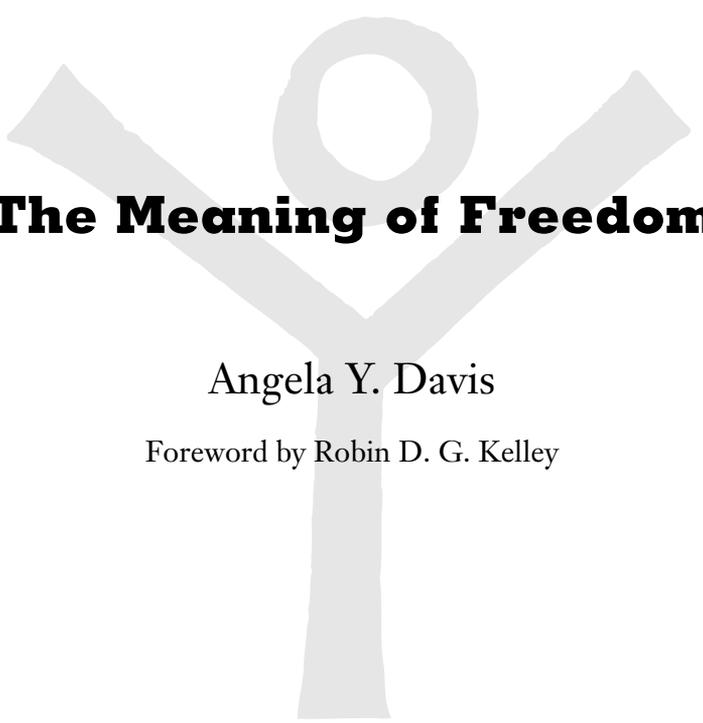
A woman with voluminous curly brown hair, wearing a black leather jacket over a black top, looks upwards and to the right. She is standing next to a wall of blue corrugated metal. Above the wall, several strands of barbed wire are visible against a clear blue sky. The overall mood is contemplative and resilient.

**THE  
MEANING  
OF FREEDOM**

*And  
Other  
Difficult  
Dialogues*

**ANGELA Y. DAVIS**

Foreword by  
Robin D. G. Kelley



# **The Meaning of Freedom**

Angela Y. Davis

Foreword by Robin D. G. Kelley

City



Lights

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San Francisco

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## **Foreword**

*By Robin D. G. Kelley*

What is the meaning of freedom? Angela Davis's entire life, work, and activism has been dedicated to examining this fundamental question and to abolishing all forms of subjugation that have denied oppressed people freedom. It is not too much to call her one of the world's leading philosophers of freedom. She stands against the liberal tradition of political philosophy, the tradition derived from Hobbes and others that understands freedom as the right of the individual to do what *he* wishes without fetters or impediments, as long as it is lawful under the state. This "negative" liberty or freedom places a premium on the right to own property, to accumulate wealth, to defend property by arms, to mobility, expression, and political participation. Davis's conception of freedom is far more expansive and radical—collective freedom; the freedom to earn a livelihood and live a healthy, fully realized life; freedom from violence; sexual freedom; social justice; abolition of all forms of bondage and incarceration; freedom from exploitation; freedom of movement; freedom *as* movement, as a collective striving for real democracy. For Davis, freedom is not a thing granted by the state in the form of law or proclamation or policy; freedom is struggled for, it is hard-fought and transformative, it is a participatory process that demands new ways of thinking and being. Thus it is only fitting that she is among the few major

contemporary thinkers who takes seriously Karl Marx's 1845 injunction that "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it."

Angela Davis was born and raised in apartheid Birmingham, Alabama, under conditions of extreme and blatant unfreedom. She grew up in the 1940s and '50s, when black middle-class homes were being firebombed regularly by white supremacists with the blessings and encouragement of police chief Eugene "Bull" Connor, and when black opposition to racism eventually brought the city to a standstill. She was nurtured by activist parents whose best friends were members of the Communist Party, and she came of age amidst a community in struggle. By the time she enrolled in New York City's Elisabeth Irwin High School (nicknamed the Little Red School House for its left-leaning philosophy) in 1959, she had already contemplated the meaning of freedom and understood that the question was no mere academic exercise. The quest for freedom drew her to radical philosopher Herbert Marcuse, with whom she studied at Brandeis University. It drew her to the writings of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Jean-Paul Sartre, and to France, where she studied abroad. During her stay in Paris, Davis developed an even more global perspective on the quest for freedom by witnessing the French racism against North Africans and the Algerian struggle for liberation. And, sadly, it was in France, in September of 1963, that she learned of the bombing of Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church and the murder of her childhood acquaintances, Denise McNair, Addie Mae Collins, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley. Their deaths wedded her to a life of struggle. She knew then, contrary to Jean-Paul Sartre's assertions, that there was no freedom in death. Freedom is the right to live, the necessity to struggle.

Davis continued her studies dedicated to producing en-

gaged scholarship. With Marcuse's support and encouragement, Davis pursued her doctorate in philosophy at Johann Wolfgang Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany, with the intention of studying with Theodor Adorno, but by this time Adorno had little interest in engaged scholarship. (Her model at Goethe University was a young professor named Oskar Negt, who never shrank from political engagement and actively participated in the Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund [SDS].) West Germany was too far from the sites of engagement that most mattered to Davis, so after two years she returned to the states to resume her doctoral studies under Marcuse's direction at the University of California, San Diego.

The year was 1967, and it seemed as if every aggrieved group—youth, women, people of color—identified with liberation struggle. Freedom was in the air, and Davis threw herself mind and body into the movement. The rest of the story is quite familiar: her path from the Black Panthers to UCLA and her tangle with Governor Ronald Reagan, to Soledad Prison and the subsequent campaign that forever associated her name with Freedom. As an incarcerated political prisoner, she became the center of an international movement whose supporters pinned their own freedom to Davis's, concluding that to "Free Angela" was a blow to the blatant acts of state violence and unfreedom that crushed protests at the Democratic National Convention in 1968, that murdered Salvador Allende in Chile, that justified the dropping of napalm and herbicides on villages as far away as Vietnam and Mozambique. And like so many incarcerated revolutionary intellectuals, such as Antonio Gramsci, Malcolm X, Assata Shakur, George Jackson, and Mumia Abu-Jamal, she produced some of the most poignant, critical reflections on freedom and liberation from her jail cell.<sup>1</sup>

Davis's trial, subsequent acquittal, and struggle to find

work in the face of ongoing political repression have only reinforced her commitment to engaged scholarship, her explorations of the meaning of freedom, and her radical abolitionist politics. Even if one is not familiar with her leadership in the Communist Party USA, her role in the founding of the Committees of Correspondence, Agenda 2000, and Critical Resistance, or her prolific body of scholarship—from her collection *Women, Race, and Class* on the politics of reproduction, domestic violence, rape, and women and capitalism; her stunning *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* on the politics of black women’s expressive culture; to her more recent manifestoes calling for the end of the prison-industrial complex, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* and *Abolition Democracy*—the speeches published here prove the point.

Delivered between 1994 and 2009, these public talks reveal Davis further developing her critique of the carceral state, offering fresh analyses of racism, gender, sexuality, global capitalism, and neoliberalism, responding to various crises of the last two decades, and always inviting her audiences to imagine a radically different future. They demonstrate the degree to which she remains a dedicated dialectical thinker. Davis has never promoted a political “line,” nor have her ideas stood still. As the world changes and power relations shift from a post-Soviet, post-apartheid, post-Bush world to the mythical “post-racial” one, she challenges us to critically interrogate our history, to deal with the social, political, cultural, and economic dynamics of the moment, and to pay attention to where people are. In the 1990s, she challenged parochialism and creeping conservatism in black movements; told us to pay attention to hip hop and the sigh of youth struggling to find voice; and warned us against nostalgia for the good old days of the 1960s

when, allegedly, resistance movements had more leverage and enemies were easier to recognize. And she consistently takes on the prison-industrial complex. Davis frequently returns to the relationship between the formation of prisons and the demand for cheap labor under capitalism, and their unbroken lineage with the history and institution of slavery in the United States. Her powerful critiques of Foucault and other theorists/historians of the birth of the prison reveal the centrality of race in the process of creating a carceral state in the West. The critical question for Davis centers on how black people have been criminalized and how this ideology has determined black people's denial of basic citizenship rights. Since most leading theorists of prisons focus on issues such as reform, punishment, discipline, and labor under capitalism, discussions of the production of imprisoned bodies often play down or marginalize race.

While Davis's earlier speeches and many of the later ones could not have anticipated the election of Barack Obama, all of her words are incredibly prescient and relevant. Most pundits and commentators were quick to declare jubilantly that Obama's ascent to the presidency marked the end of racism. Color-blindness has triumphed, 'nuff said. Indeed, there is no need to even invoke the "r" word. Moreover, because Obama has been portrayed in such heroic light and his victory treated with such great symbolic importance for the African American community, to criticize or challenge the president is often regarded by liberal Democrats (especially black folk) as an act of disloyalty. But as Davis said in one of her speeches: "We're hardly two years into the Clinton presidency, and we seem to have forgotten how to organize masses of people into resistance movements. Many black people feel obliged to stick with Clinton through thick and thin, now don't they? We seem

to have fallen prey to some kind of historical amnesia.” And again, in 2009, as Obama continues a version of Bush’s military tribunals, decides to hold some of the 9/11 detainees indefinitely, escalates the war in Afghanistan, avoids prosecuting U.S. officials responsible for torture, proceeds to bail out banks, and offers parenting workshops in lieu of restoring federal public assistance for the poor, we seem to be suffering from recurring amnesia. Obama promised to return us to the good old days when the Democrats occupied the White House, but as Davis reminds us, President Clinton’s top priorities were the anti-crime bill and the elimination of welfare; there was no discussion of full employment or creating jobs. She also reminds us that it was the Democratic Senator Carol Moseley Braun who introduced the provision to try young teenagers as adults, thus contributing to the increase in the number of children in the state and federal prison system.

Moreover, Davis has long challenged neoliberal claims that we’ve achieved a color-blind society. She reminds us that any outbreaks of blatant, explicit racism are “now treated as individual and private irregularities, to be solved by punishing and reeducating the individual by teaching them color-blindness, by teaching them not to notice the phenomenon of race.” In one fell swoop, social institutions and state practices are relieved of responsibility. To our peril, Davis warns, the vast majority continues to ignore the fact that the dramatic increase of people of color locked in cages is a manifestation of institutional forms of racism—from the inequities of mandatory minimums to the War on Drugs, racial profiling, and employment discrimination, to name a few.

Never one to shy away from unpopular positions, Davis offers a brilliant and timely critique of the struggle for equality by subjugated groups. What does it mean, for example, for

gays and lesbians to demand the right to enter the military and to serve in every capacity without a critique of the institution's inherent and deep-seated sexism and homophobia? She asks the same of marriage—it is one thing to challenge any and all discriminatory barriers; it is another to interrogate the institution itself. The push to legalize gay marriage is growing by leaps and bounds now, but as early as 2008 Davis explained to an audience in Boulder, Colorado: “The structures of heteronormativity and the various violences these structures and discourses entail, do not necessarily disappear when the sexuality of the participant is changed. I’m not suggesting that we do not claim the right of gays and lesbians to engage in this practice, but we also have to think about the institution itself. It is an economic institution. It is about property. It is not about relations! Not about human relations, or intimate relations.”

Finally, we must acknowledge that in the aftermath of 9/11, when many on the Left openly supported the war in Afghanistan and softened their position on U.S. military policy, Davis's position never wavered. From the outset, she delivered a blistering critique of Cheney and Bush's War on Terror, though it was an unpopular position to take immediately after the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center. She critiqued the erosion of civil liberties, the racial profiling of Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians, and the imposition of an oppressive “security state” fueled by fear-mongering. And she questioned the patriotic turn, the resurgence of nationalism and all of its patriarchal trappings. She asks, “Why the nation?” The nation is constituted through exclusion, and after 9/11 “Americans” were not encouraged to identify with other people outside the nation, with the victims of torture, with Iraqis, with Africans and Asians, with others who might also have suffered from the aftermath of 9/11. Unfortunately, despite President Obama's

assertion that he is a “citizen of the world,” he, too, invoked “nation first” and set out on a foreign policy path that is not radically different from that of his predecessors. He continues to support a softer version of the expansionist, neoliberal, and militarist policies that have driven the last half-century of U.S. foreign policy. He certainly does not intend to limit American military power.

Ironically, Obama’s election initially had the effect of virtually eliminating social movements from our public discourse. Although grassroots organizing made his election possible, all of our national discussions of policy focus on the president’s individual decision-making to the exclusion of the demands of aggrieved groups. This is also affecting the way history is conceived in the popular consciousness: The New Deal of the 1930s, the foundation of the social welfare state, is now treated as the brainchild of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, not the product of struggles between capital, labor, civil rights organizations, communists, socialists, feminists, and the unemployed. Likewise, Abraham Lincoln, Obama’s other alter ego, is represented to the public as the man who single-handedly ended the institution of enslavement in this country. Even Lyndon Johnson is credited with giving us the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In every case, it is the combination of great men and the law that supposedly generates radical social change, not social movements, not the imaginations and actions of ordinary people. But, again, Davis warns against fetishizing the law as markers of freedom. She reminds us that the Thirteenth Amendment did not abolish slavery, and it did not abolish all forms of coerced labor. While President Obama characterizes the United States as a “nation of laws,” laws do not produce or guarantee freedom.

We still need abolitionists. And we still need an engaged

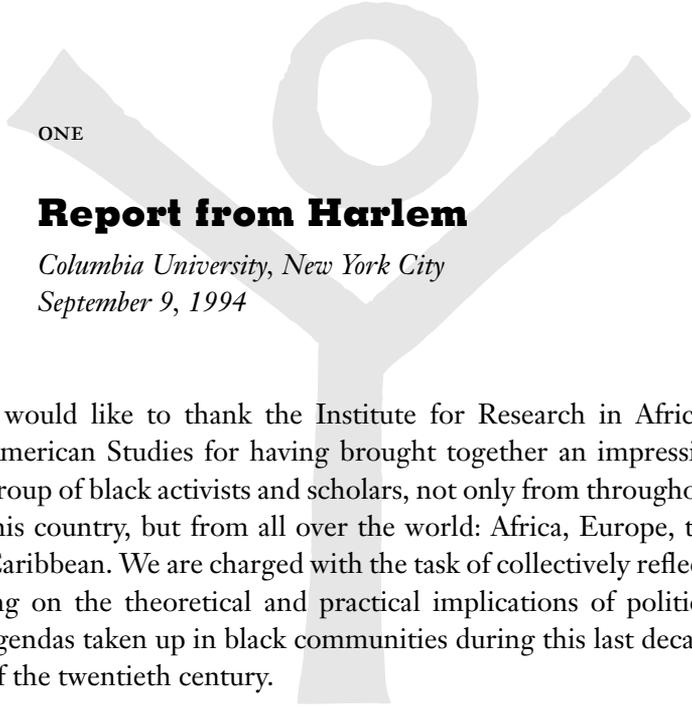
citizenry to organize, agitate, and challenge injustice with movements for change. The year 2011 seemed to give birth to just that: a new wave of global uprisings, rebellions, riots, organizing, and mass movements. In the United States, the wave took form in the unexpected emergence of the Occupy movement, and ever since the first demonstrators settled into New York's Zuccotti Park, Angela Davis has been a powerful spokesperson for, and presence within, the movement. From New York to Philadelphia, from Oakland to Berlin, the people's mic has projected her words to the indignant crowds of people challenging the ascendance of Wall Street and the privatization of what's left of our public institutions. Davis reminds the Occupiers that in our efforts to hold Wall Street accountable for the economic collapse, we must not lose sight of the bigger objective: a new society. In every speech, she envisioned freedom in ways diametrically opposed to the Friedrich von Hayeks, Milton Friedmans, and Larry Summerses of the world—a vision of an inclusive community founded on justice, and equality; the provision of education, health care, and housing; and the abolition of the carceral/police state. She also warned crowds that such a vision of collective freedom requires a radical conception of community. It's one thing to come together in parks and public squares, in streets and the halls of Congress. It is another thing to stay together and remake our relationships with one another. "Our unity must be complex," she often says when addressing Occupy gatherings. "Our unity must be emancipatory. It cannot be simplistic and oppressive." In other words, freedom is a process of becoming, of being able to see and understand difference within unity, and resisting the tendency to reproduce the hierarchies embedded in the world we want to change.

Ultimately, the speeches gathered together here are timely

and timeless. They embody Angela Davis's uniquely radical vision of the society we need to build and the path to get there. She still believes in social movements, in the power of people to transform society, and in a non-capitalist path. As she told an audience in 2005, the nation and the world are filled with "people who are not afraid to dream about the possibility of a better world. They say that a non-exploitative, non-racist, democratic economic order is possible. They say that new social relations are possible, ones that link human beings around the globe, not by the commodities some produce and others consume, but rather by equality and solidarity and cooperation and respect."

So all you out there who are not afraid to dream, who wish to end all forms of military occupation, corporate dominance, hierarchy, and oppression: listen, read, and heed the call.

# City Lights



ONE

## **Report from Harlem**

*Columbia University, New York City  
September 9, 1994*

I would like to thank the Institute for Research in African American Studies for having brought together an impressive group of black activists and scholars, not only from throughout this country, but from all over the world: Africa, Europe, the Caribbean. We are charged with the task of collectively reflecting on the theoretical and practical implications of political agendas taken up in black communities during this last decade of the twentieth century.

### **Negotiating the Transformations of History**

It is good to be in Harlem on the thirtieth anniversary of Freedom Summer, one of the most extraordinary moments in the history of the black freedom struggle. Many of us (at least those of my generation and older) tend to look back upon that period with nostalgia. Sometimes we veteran activists simply yearn for the good old days rather than prepare ourselves to confront courageously a drastically transformed world that presents new, more complicated challenges. We evoke a time when masses of black people, Latinos, Native Americans, and Asian Americans, along with our white allies, were on the move, determined to change the course of history. But instead of seeing

past struggles as a source of inspiration impelling us to craft innovative approaches to contemporary problems, we frequently replace historical consciousness with a desperate nostalgia, allowing the past to become a repository for present political desires. We allow the present to be held captive by the past.

More than once I have heard people say, "If only a new Black Panther Party could be organized, then we could seriously deal with The Man, you know?" But suppose we were to say: "There is no Man anymore." There is suffering. There is oppression. There is terrifying racism. But this racism does not come from the mythical "Man." Moreover, it is laced with sexism and homophobia and unprecedented class exploitation associated with a dangerously globalized capitalism. We need new ideas and new strategies that will take us into the twenty-first century.

What I am suggesting is that those of us who are elders have to stop functioning as gatekeepers. We cannot establish age and civil rights or black power experience as the main criteria for radical black political leadership today. How old was Dr. Martin Luther King when he became the spokesperson for the Montgomery bus boycott? He was 26 years old. How old was Diane Nash? How old was Huey Newton? Fidel Castro? Nelson Mandela? Amilcar Cabral? Jacqueline Creft? Maurice Bishop? As for myself, I was only 25 years old when I had to confront Ronald Reagan over the issue of my right as a Communist to teach at UCLA. We cannot deny young people their rightful place in this movement today or it will be our downfall. In many instances, young people are able to see far more clearly than we that our lives are shaped by the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality. Those of us who are older have a great deal to learn from our younger sisters and brothers, who are in a better position than we are to develop the political

vocabulary, the theory, and the strategies that can potentially move us forward.

These last three decades, many years of which have been devoted to intense struggles and sacrifices, have certainly produced victories. Who could have imagined in 1964, when Fannie Lou Hamer tried to gain entrance for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party into the Democratic Party convention, that we would have been able to elect forty black people to Congress, including a black woman to the U.S. Senate? And even more important, who would have imagined that this black woman in the Senate, heir to Fannie Lou Hamer, would sponsor one of the most repressive provisions of the recent crime bill? You see, it is no longer a question of simply resisting The Man. Circumstances are far more complicated than they used to be, or than our perceptions of them used to be.

We speak today about a crisis in contemporary social movements. This crisis has been produced in part by our failure to develop a meaningful and collective historical consciousness. Such a consciousness would entail a recognition that our victories attained by freedom movements are never etched in stone. What we often perceive under one set of historical conditions as glorious triumphs of mass struggle can later ricochet against us if we do not continually reconfigure the terms and transform the terrain of our struggle. The struggle must go on. Transformed circumstances require new theories and practices.

The Cuban Revolution is three and a half decades old. Holding on to a strong vision of socialism in the aftermath of the collapse of the socialist community of nations requires strategies that are very different from previous revolutionary struggles—from the attack on the Moncada barracks and the landing of the *Granma* to the triumph of the revolution. But the struggle does go on. Those of us whose radical consciousness

and political trajectories were fundamentally shaped by Che, Fidel, Camilo Cienfuegos, and Juan Almeida have a special responsibility to stand with our Cuban sisters and brothers during their most difficult period. The embargo must end, and it must end now!

The South African struggle has entered a new phase. Many of us fought for Nelson Mandela's freedom during a substantial portion of our political lives. We protested the apartheid government's repression of South African Freedom Fighters while Mandela survived the brutal conditions of his imprisonment. Today Nelson Mandela is free, and he is president of a new South Africa. This new South Africa is striving to be free, democratic, non-racist, non-sexist, and non-homophobic. The struggle for freedom continues. This victory is not forever guaranteed. If we associated ourselves with the dismantling of apartheid, we should find ways to help shore up that victory today, and tomorrow, and the next day. We often are so captivated by the glamour of revolution that when pivotal though less glamorous moments arise, when our solidarities are needed more than ever, we fail to generate suitable responses. Let us not forget how quickly the revolution in Grenada was brought down by the assassinations of Maurice Bishop and Jacqueline Creft and by the U.S. military invasion.

This brings me back to the earlier point I made about our collective failures to negotiate historical transformations. Some of us remain so staunchly anchored to the discourses and strategies of earlier eras that we cannot adequately understand contemporary challenges. We fail to apprehend the extent to which theories and practices that were once unambiguously progressive become, under changed political circumstances, regressive and flagrantly reactionary. While we do need to be genuinely concerned about the growth and visibility of black

conservatism (from Clarence Thomas on the Supreme Court to Phyllis Berry Meyers, who along with other black conservatives, played a key role in reversing the nomination of Lani Guinier for the Department of Justice's Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights). At the same time we need to beware of the insinuation of conservative ideologies in what is publicly acknowledged as forward-looking strategy for black liberation. Beware of those leaders and theorists who eloquently rage against white supremacy but identify black gay men and lesbians as evil incarnate. Beware of those leaders who call upon us to protect our young black men but will beat their wives and abuse their children and will not support a woman's right to reproductive autonomy. Beware of those leaders!

And beware of those who call for the salvation of black males but will not support the rights of Caribbean, Central American, and Asian immigrants, or who think that struggles in Chiapas or in Northern Ireland are unrelated to black freedom. Beware of those leaders! Regardless of how effectively (or ineffectively) veteran activists are able to engage with the issues of our times, there is clearly a paucity of young voices associated with black political leadership. The relative invisibility of youth leadership is a crucial example of the crisis in contemporary black social movements.

On the other hand, within black popular culture, youth are, for better or for worse, helping to shape the political vision of their contemporaries. Many young black performers are absolutely brilliant. Not only are they musically dazzling, they are also trying to put forth anti-racist and anti-capitalist critiques. I'm thinking, for example, about Nefertiti, Arrested Development, The Fugees, and Michael Franti (whom I have been following since Disposable Heroes of Hiphoprisy). Cultural and political imagination like theirs may help shed light

on our present dilemma and perhaps guide us out of the worst situation black people have faced in this century.

I need not mention the deeply misogynist and homophobic themes that seriously weaken hip hop's oppositional stance. Before, however, we identify hip hop as the main adversary on this account, let us remind ourselves that our ideological universe is saturated with patriarchal and heterosexist assumptions.

### **Clinton, the Crime Bill, and Race**

We are not yet two years into the Clinton presidency and the possibilities of oppositional politics vis-à-vis the state have steadily diminished. Black people play a major role in immunizing the Clinton presidency against mass critique. It is as if black people felt obliged to stick with Clinton through thick and thin. We seem to have forgotten how to assume stances of opposition and resistance, how to identify submerged racial codes and markers, how to recognize racism even when the conventional markers are no longer there. This ability has historically earned African American activists a special place among people of color worldwide, and among people of all racial and national backgrounds. What used to be a sophisticated appreciation of racism seems to be collapsing. In the aftermath of the collapse of socialism, and in the context of many problematic regimes throughout Africa, how can we extol Bill Clinton as a symbol of radical change? This is deeply problematic.

In the August 29 issue of *Jet* magazine there is a revealing article about a birthday party for Clinton organized by a coalition of black, Asian, and Latino Democrats. Approximately 1,500 people of color attended that party, and an unprecedented \$1.2 million was raised. According to the article, "For most minorities, President Clinton still was 'the main man,' holding to a commitment when human rights issues seem to have lost

their glow.” The fact that black people, along with Asian Americans and Latinos, could raise more than one million dollars in one evening should indicate to us that the political landscape has fundamentally changed. It should indicate to us that class configurations within the black community have undergone an important metamorphosis over the last two decades.

Contrast that million-dollar party with the situation that prevails here in Harlem. Some of us are far wealthier than we ever dreamt we would be. But far greater numbers of us are ensconced in a poverty that is far more dreadful than we could have ever imagined three decades ago. The film *Blade Runner* evokes the dystopian future of black inner cities—not only in Los Angeles but in East Oakland, Harlem, and the South Bronx—throw-away zones.

The *Jet* article praises Clinton for his many black appointments: Mike Espy, Ron Brown, and three others to his cabinet and more than five hundred black people to other posts in his administration. The article also praises Clinton for “boldly pressing for the nation’s first health care and anti-crime bill.” In fact, Clinton has established the crime bill as his number-one political priority, even more important than health care. Why was he so resistant to the single-payer initiative in health care? Why was this crime bill more important than a jobs bill? The last extensive discussion on full employment was the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act in 1978. Consider also that Clinton’s proposed welfare reform legislation will force women on welfare to work after two years of receiving welfare payments. But where will they find jobs?

In the aftermath of the Cold War, the most important priority should have been to convert the wartime economy that had consistently drained the country of jobs, created structural unemployment, and led to the development of a struc-

turally unemployed group of people in the black community and other communities of color, into a peacetime, full-employment economy. In 1994, why is it so easy to forget full employment, health care, education, recreation? Why is there such widespread acceptance of Clinton's law-and-order posturing? When the Republican Nixon first raised the cry of law and order, black people had no difficulty understanding the racial codes of that slogan. When the Republican Bush and his anti-crime campaign presented Willie Horton as the archetypal criminal—a black, male rapist and murderer of a white woman—it required no extraordinary intelligence to grasp the discursive link between crime and blackness.

Today, however, Clinton, a Democrat, who received proportionately more votes from the black community than from any other group of people in this country, is lauded as the quintessential warrior against crime, with his shrewdly racist policies divested of all explicit racial content. Intentionally making no direct allusions to race, Clinton employs a rhetoric that focuses on victims of crime. The quintessential contemporary victim is the white girlchild Polly Klaas. Please don't misunderstand me. Her murder was horrible, and I convey my sympathy to her parents. What I criticize is the rhetorical manipulation of her image as a crime victim. Clinton constantly has evoked Polly Klaas, and did so in the aftermath of the initial stalling of the crime bill. Although the suspect in the Polly Klaas case is a white man, there is enough socially constructed fear of crime entangled in the national imagination with the fear of black men that Richard Allen Davis, the white suspect, becomes an anomaly perceived as one white face representing a sea of black men who, in the collective mind's eye, comprise the criminal element.

This recently passed crime bill allocates over \$30 billion

over the next six years to protect “us” from the criminals. Read the racial codes embedded in the discourse around the crime bill. They have become infinitely more complicated, and a good number of black people have been led to believe in the inherent criminality of certain groups of African Americans. They, like people of other racial backgrounds, need protection from these black criminals. The crime bill authorizes \$8.8 billion over the next six years to put 100,000 new policemen and women on the streets of cities across the country; \$7.9 billion in state construction grants for prisons and boot camps; \$1.8 billion to reimburse states, which are encouraged to incarcerate more undocumented immigrants from Central America, the Caribbean, and Asia.

Ever greater numbers of people will be herded into prison and under the three-strikes-you’re-out initiative; they will receive ever longer sentences, both in the state and the federal system. Ironically, under the provision introduced in the Senate by its first black woman member, Carol Moseley Braun, it will be easier to try young teenagers as adults. As a result we will soon have children in the state and federal prisons as well. There are already one million people in prison in the United States. This does not include the 500,000 in city and county jails, the 600,000 on parole, and the three million people on probation. It also does not include the 60,000 young people in juvenile facilities, which is to say, there are presently more than *five million* people either incarcerated, on parole, or on probation. Many of the people who are presently on probation or on parole, would be behind bars under the conditions of the recently passed crime bill.

So, you see, even without the draconian measures of the crime bill, black people are already 7.8 times more likely to go to prison than are white people. If we have any doubts about

the move away from conceptualizations that prioritize rehabilitation as an aim of incarceration, consider the fact that prisoners will no longer be eligible for Pell Grant assistance for higher education. Not only is the duration of imprisonment drastically extended, it is rendered more repressive than ever. Within some state prison systems, weights have even been banned.

Having spent time in several jails myself, I know how important it is to exercise the body as well as the mind. The barring of higher education and weight sets implies the creation of an incarcerated society of people who are worth little more than trash to the dominant culture. The crime bill does not impact just the black community, it has consequences for Latino communities, Native American communities, Asian communities, Arab communities, poor white communities, and immigrants.

As black scholars and activists, our analysis and concerns should extend beyond what we recognize as black communities. Our political communities of struggle embrace all people of color—black, Latino, Asian, indigenous—as well as the poor in this country. The very same conditions of globalization that have robbed the black community of so many jobs have also led to increased migration into the United States. Capital migrates from country to country in search of cheap labor, and in the process it opens up circuits of human migration into this country. But now, according to the crime bill, the federal government will fund the incarceration costs of undocumented immigrants. We will all end up in the same place, whether we're African Americans, Haitians, Cubans, Latino Americans, Salvadorans, Mexicans, Chinese, Laotians, Arabs, so we'd better figure out how to build a resistance movement together.

Who is benefiting from these ominous new developments? There is already something of a boom in the prison construction

industry. New architectural trends that recapitulate old ideas about incarceration such as Jeremy Bentham's panopticon have produced the need to build new jails and prisons—both public and private prisons. And there is the dimension of the profit drive, with its own exploitative, racist component. It's also important to recognize that the steadily growing trend of privatization of U.S. jails and prisons is equally menacing. With this new crime bill, the Corrections Corporation of America, which is currently the largest company in the prisons-for-profit business, is very likely to grow. The union-busting trend that characterizes transnational capital is used by private prisons to cut their costs. Thus Corrections Corporation of America disallows unionization in its prisons. Moreover, its employees have no pension plan.

What was most worthy of note in the debate on the crime bill was that the black caucus insisted throughout on the inclusion of a racial justice act that would permit death-row defendants to use race as a mitigating factor. Unfortunately, that provision failed to be included. We therefore ask: How many more black bodies will be sacrificed on the altar of law and order? Why has it been so difficult to openly address issues of the social construction of race? Why haven't we more effectively challenged Clinton's erasure of race in the law-and-order rhetoric he has inherited and uncritically embraced? Perhaps because during the Reagan-Bush era the discourse on crime had already become so implicitly racialized that it is no longer necessary to use racial markers. What is troubling about the Clinton rhetoric is that the racisms that were so obvious in the law-and-order discourse of previous eras are becoming increasingly unrecognizable.