

The Angela Davis Verdict

WASHINGTON—With galling haste, millions of Americans have tried to portray the acquittal of Angela Davis as proof that the American system of justice is fair, throwing equal protections around the poor, the black, the unpopular.

It is galling because the people saying this are, for the most part, the very people who leaped with unbecoming speed to declare Miss Davis guilty of plotting and facilitating kidnapping and murder.

BLACK MILITANCY is itself close to a crime today in many circles of this country, the Justice Department being one of them. Add the fact that Miss Davis is an avowed Communist, a well-known "troublemaker" and one who indulges in rhetoric that enflames the hackles of the "silent majority," and it seemed too much to hope that white jurors would acquit her and then wind up at her victory celebration.

Yet, it is an outrage to call the Davis decision a vindication of our system of justice. The whole of the mess surrounding Miss Davis' prosecution constitutes some very serious indictments of our system of justice.

How can we forget that this woman, now declared innocent, was held in jail for 16 months without bail?

Then there is the case of the "Soledad Brothers," George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo and John Clutchette — three men accused of killing Soledad Prison guard John V. Mills on Jan. 20, 1970.

First, consider the fact that Jackson had served almost 11 years of an "up to life sentence" for a \$70 armed robbery at the time Mills was killed. He was suffering confinement and punishment that tends to get a little stiffer under our system if you are poor, or black, or uneducated, and let no

one doubt that among our 1,600,000 prison inmates are many innocent poor people, and others suffering severe punishment for small offenses.

(It was her love for Jackson, the prosecution contended without convincing the jury, that caused Miss Davis to plot and abet the Marin County kidnap attempt that led to four deaths.)

The bitter fruits of this situation fell anew in August 1971 when Jackson was killed in an alleged escape attempt from San Quentin prison — the "escape" allegation viewed with grave doubts by many Americans, this reporter included.

Then in March 1972 came the bitter irony of Drumgo and Clutchette being found not guilty of the murder of Mills, leaving the horrible picture of Jackson dying while allegedly trying to escape prosecution for a murder he did not commit.

What the Davis acquittal seems to say is this: if you take 12 normally decent Americans, of whatever race, and expose them to competent attorneys, fair judges and all the evidence, those jurors will often rise above the meanness, the bigotry of an ill-informed society that is too often warped by governmental propaganda passed along by a less-than-diligent press.

THAT JURY in San Jose could have looked at the cold evidence and decided "not guilty" and then fled from the scene as fast as possible.

But those jurors saw her as a human being who had suffered a two-year ordeal. They stayed around to celebrate out of empathy, but also out of the satisfaction that they had contributed to the too-weak fight against big-government oppression and political persecutions.