

Riddle of Angela Davis

A Collision With UC

Fifth of a Series

By Jack V. Fox

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If a UCLA student named William Divale, an FBI underground agent, had not written in a moment of pique to the college newspaper fingering Angela Davis as a Communist Party member, she might be teaching philosophy classes there today.

The article appeared in the Daily Bruin on July 1, 1969, and it set off a chain of reactions climaxed by her indictment for murder, kidnaping, and conspiracy in the San Rafael Courthouse tragedy.

Miss Davis had been hired as an acting assistant professor in the UCLA philosophy department for the term beginning that fall at a salary of \$10,260. Her academic qualifications were impeccable. Her other activities were not, however, of the nature to endear her to white parents of the middle class sending their children off to freshman year.

She was hired at UCLA by the head of the philosophy department, Prof. Donald Kalish. Kalish says he did not know she was a Communist Party member at the time but that he would have hired her anyway.

There are approximately 1000 other professors at UCLA teaching non-Communist points of view," he says. "I wouldn't think her single voice would overwhelm them."

Then came Divale's letter. He has written a book in which he describes penetrating the Communist and radical movement in Los Angeles and finally appearing before the Senate internal security subcommittee and naming two friends, members of the Students for a Democratic Society, as party members.

The angry reaction from his former friends was such that Divale tried to justify his action. (In his book he now hails the militant left as the savior of society.) He wrote the Daily Bruin and, in the course of much rationalizing, said the UCLA philosophy department had hired a member of the Communist Party.

He did not name Miss Davis but the identity of the

"Communist" did not require much investigation. Eight days later, reporter Ed Montgomery wrote in The San Francisco Examiner that Angela Davis was the person alluded to and also described her as a "Maoist" active in the SDS and Black Panthers.

A Letter

Two days later, the regents of the University of California instructed Chancellor Young of UCLA to determine whether Miss Davis was a member of the Communist Party. Young wrote a letter.

"I am constrained by regental policy to request that you inform me whether or not you are a member of the Communist Party," he wrote.

Miss Davis received much advice at that time. Attorney John McTernan advised her she did not have to answer. District Communist Party chairman Dorothy Healey recalls telling associates: "She could refuse to answer but, knowing Angela, she won't."

She answered.

"At the outset let me say, that I think the question posed is impermissible. This, on grounds of constitutional freedom as well as academic policy. However, and without waiving my objections to the question posed, my answer is that I am now a member of the Communist party."

Terminated

The Board of Regents met on Sept. 19, 1969. Gov. Ronald Reagan was leader of the faction demanding that Miss Davis be fired. Lt. Gov. Robert Finch, a close associate of President Nixon and later to be appointed Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, went along.

After a heated, hours long discussion, the regents ordered Miss Davis' appointment terminated. Ed Pauley, a multi-millionaire oil man, summed up the attitude of the majority.

"I'm not a Communist and I don't propose to be a member of a Board of Regents or trustees that employs Communists or lets them propound their propaganda for a party that advocates the

Regents



ED MONTGOMERY
Identified Angela

overthrow of the government of the United States. I would not advocate the state giving the university money if we did such a thing."

Miss Davis, with the backing of the overwhelming majority of the UCLA faculty, went to court to fight the dismissal. One month later, on Oct. 20, Superior Court Judge Jerry Pacht struck down the regents' action. He ruled that all policies against hiring Communists passed in the 1940s and '50s had been de-

clared unconstitutional.

'Best Teacher'

The court decision settled — for the time being — the young woman's legal right to teach. Her classes soon had ordinary enrollment, one in black literature dropping to 48 students. She also taught courses in Kant and idealism, Marx and materialism and a popular class in existentialism which drew 442 students.

Most of them thought she was a fine instructor. One was Jim Jordan, a white student who plans to go on to law school.

"She was the best teacher I ever had," he says. "She brought the whole class into discussions, the exchange of ideas. She got people involved instead of standing on the platform and lecturing. If you wished she would give you an oral examination instead of a written one although it took a great deal more of her time."

Although she did a job above reproach in her classes, Miss Davis' outside activities had become frenetic and it became apparent to her associates how tense she had become.

She had also become an international figure overnight.

3 Killed

There were literally hundreds of requests for her to speak, to back black causes. Then she became deeply and emotionally involved in the case of the "Soledad Brothers."

Soledad is a Spanish word meaning solitude, loneliness, homesickness, seclusion. Soledad also is the name of a California state correctional institution south of San Francisco. The inmate population is 2570 — 30 percent Mexican-American and 20 percent black.

In January, 1970, a brawl broke out in an exercise yard among black inmates. A tower guard blew a whistle, then began shooting. Three black men were killed and one guard was wounded.

Three days later a 26-year-old guard, John Vincent Mills, was beaten, dragged up three flights of concrete steps and tossed headfirst to his death on the cellblock floor below. Beside him was a note: "One down, two to go."

Three convicts, George L. Jackson, 29, John Cluchette, 28, and Fletta Drumgo, 25, were indicted for Mills' slaying. They became the "Soledad Brothers" and Angela soon thereafter became their

public champion, part-time private investigator and pen pal.

George Jackson's younger brother, Jonathan, 17, became her almost constant companion and bodyguard.

In one of her speeches at Berkeley, Angela said:

"Maybe the real criminals in this society are not all of the people who populate prisons across the state but those people who have stolen the wealth of the world from the people."

"Those are the criminals. And that means the Rockefellers, the Kennedys, you know the whole Kennedy family, and that means the state that is designed to protect their property because that's what Nixon's doing, that's what Reagan's doing, that's what they're all doing."

Tender Note

Miss Davis had met George Jackson, one of the accused Soledad convicts, at court sessions but they had never even been permitted to talk in seclusion. Yet Jackson began writing her letters of a very personal nature. In one, printed in his book, he wrote:

"You may never read this and I may never touch you but I feel better than I have for many seasons. You know that I live and I hope that by some means you have discovered that I love you deeply, and would love you tenderly, warmly, fiercely if I could, if my enemies were not at present stronger."

Although her outside activities increased enormously, Miss Davis continued faithfully to teach at UCLA through the spring of 1970 until the term was concluded. Then she went off with the "venceremos brigade" to help cut sugar cane in Castro's Cuba.

Very Tired

On June 19, 1970, the Board of Regents by a vote of 15 to 6 declined to renew Angela's contract for the next year. The report of the ad hoc committee this time made no mention of communism but said her "extra university commitments and activities interfere with her duties as a member of the faculty."



FLEETA DRUMGO **GEORGE JACKSON** **JOHN CLUCHETTE**
 Angela became deeply and emotionally involved in case of "Soledad Brothers"

Regent Frederick Dutton, one of those who voted against the resolution, called it an attempt by Reagan and the board majority to "feed on fear and divide the people of the state."

"A 26-year-old bookish black girl surely is no threat to our state or our country or the traditional values that the overwhelming majority of us believe in," Dutton said.

Miss Davis vowed to fight the second firing in the courts again but she now was spending most of her time with the younger Jackson in the San Francisco area on the Soledad crusade.

In the later part of July, 1970, she came to see Professor Kalish, her sponsor, in his office at the philosophy department at UCLA. He says she told him she was very tired and was going to Birmingham to spend a few weeks with her family and rest. But she never did go.

"That's the last time I saw her that summer," Kalish says.

In one of her last speeches before her arrest, Miss Davis said:

"Of course, anybody who's talking about overthrowing the government, overthrowing capitalism, faces the possibility of losing his life. But that doesn't paralyze you because you don't see your life, your individual life, as being so important. If I have to lose my life in the struggle, well then, that's the way it will have to be."

Hostages

What Miss Davis did after that is, of course, the subject of the charges against her.

On the record is the fact that on Aug. 7 her young friend and bodyguard, 17-year-old Jonathan Jackson, walked into the San Rafael court of Judge Harold J. Haley carrying four guns. Holding the courtroom at gunpoint, he freed James McClain, 37, a San Quentin convict on trial for assaulting a guard, and Ruchell Magee, 31, another convict waiting to

testify. Magee went outside the courtroom and freed another prisoner, William A. Christmas, 27, also waiting to testify.

Wiring a shotgun around the neck of Judge Haley, they took him. Assistant District Attorney Gary W. Thomas, and three women jurors as hostages, intent on escaping in a yellow rental van waiting outside the courthouse. Officers opened fire. All the kidnapers but Magee died. Judge Haley's head was half blown off by the shotgun. Thomas was shot in the spine and permanently paralyzed. One of the women jurors was shot but survived.

Disappears

A week later District Attorney Bruce B. Bales formally charged that of the four guns brought into court by Jackson three had been "purchased by Angela Davis" in Los Angeles in January, 1968, April, 1969, and July, 1970. The fourth, he alleged, had



GIVING BLACK POWER SALUTE
Angela Davis and attorney Howard Moore Jr. in court

been bought by her in San Francisco two days before the courtroom shootout.

Angela Davis disappeared. Police said she flew out of San Francisco to Los Angeles only hours after the shootings. Four days later she was placed on the FBI's "10 most wanted" fugitives list. On Oct. 13, she was arrested at a Howard Johnson motel near Times Square in New York along with David R. Poindexter Jr., 36, of Chicago. They were registered as "Mr. and Mrs. George J. Gilbert."

Poindexter subsequently was acquitted of charges of knowingly harboring a fugitive. How and where he and Miss Davis became acquainted has never been made too clear. One version is she was put in touch with him through the Che Lumumba branch of the Communist Party in Los Angeles to which she belonged. Poindexter himself, who had recently

come into money through an inheritance, has told interviewers he once was a Communist Party member but dropped out in 1962 because he didn't care for the party discipline.

Throughout Angela Davis' story men appear to have flitted in and out of her life, beginning with the unhappy love affair with the young German exchange student, Manfred Lorenz, and including the badly-smitten teenager Jonathan Jackson who died at the San Rafael courthouse.

With the exception of Lorenz, there is no record that romantic love played a large role in her life. As her friends tend to put it, Angela Davis as she matured found little time for personal love, despite the beauty that attracted men to her. Other things were more important.

End of Series