

# Scholarly Activist

Angela Yvonne Davis

By STEVEN R. WEISMAN

To some, Angela Davis's rather bookish upbringing seems an improbable background for the fierce revolutionary cause she espouses. Notoriety, people point out, was something thrust upon her in 1970, when she was dismissed from her post on the faculty at the University of California, Los Angeles. But Miss Davis, her radical beliefs are a natural outgrowth of her past—for

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the most part, one of scholarly pursuits and the evolution of an ideology that animated her later activism.

Many people also found it anomalous that she should continue to associate with the Communist party because the activists she allied herself with, such as the Soledad Brothers, had broken away from Orthodox revolutionary philosophy and embraced a fiery brand of radicalism bred in the streets.

However, friends of Miss Davis often noted that party membership was perfectly in tune with her analytic approach and sense of the history of class struggles. "The fact that I'm a member of the Communist party," she once told an interviewer, "says something about what kind of a mind I have."

After she was accused of involvement in the 1970 California shootout, friends were said to have been incredulous. The Angela Davis they knew, it was widely reported, was not someone who would have given guns to a 17-year-old boy, as she was accused of having done, so that he could take hostages in a courtroom and hold them for ransom.

In the long trial that ended yesterday with Miss Davis's acquittal, some evidence emerged that contradicted much of what many people thought of Miss Davis. Her background, for instance, was often described as serene and middle-class. There were piano lessons, dancing lessons, membership

"For a black person who grew up in the South," she said, "guns were a normal fact of life."

Angela Yvonne Davis was born Jan. 26, 1944, into a teaching family, although her father, B. Frank Davis, left teaching shortly after her birth to open a service station business.

She was the oldest of four children. One brother, Ben, is a defensive back for the Cleveland Browns professional football team.

Miss Davis got a scholarship at the age of 15 to attend Elisabeth Irwin High School in New York and then Brandeis University, where she graduated with honors in 1965.

At Brandeis, Miss Davis's revolutionary ideology took shape in her senior year under the tutelage of Herbert Marcuse, the Marxist professor, who described Miss Davis as "the best student I ever had in the more than 30 years I have been teaching."

She studied at the Sorbonne in her junior year and, after graduation, traveled to Frankfurt, Germany, for graduate study. Her doctoral thesis was to have involved Kant's analysis of violence in the French Revolution.

## Career Interrupted

But her academic career was interrupted by, first, her dismissal from U.C.L.A., where she was a philosophy instructor, another of her growing involvement with radical causes, including that of the Soledad Brothers, the blacks accused of murdering a white prison guard in 1970.

Of the three Soledad Brothers, Miss Davis became particularly involved with the plight of George Jackson, who was later killed allegedly trying to escape from San Quentin Prison last August.

To the prosecution in her trial, Miss Davis's relationship with Jackson was not just an abstract, ideological one. They contended that she loved him, that she considered herself to be Jackson's wife and that her passion led her to try for his release from prison, the motive given for the San Rafael courtroom shootout.

Miss Davis is now free at a time when she is one of best-known political activists of the Left. She has had offers to teach and continue the academic career that has defined so much of her approach.

in the Girl Scouts, diligent work in school, a wholesome family life, and economic security.

## Surrounded by Violence

Miss Davis recalled, however, that her childhood in Birmingham, Ala., had been surrounded by violence. She admitted that she purchased guns in her later years but told the jury that this was not to be considered unusual.