

# **Angela Davis Study Guide**

## **Angela Davis by Angela Davis**

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# Plot Summary

Angela Davis An Autobiography by Angela Davis is Angela Davis telling her own story. She was a radical of the 1960s and 1970s era and a part of the Black Liberation movement. She was also a member of the Communist Party. She fought for what she believed in, despite the fact of her incarceration and trial from 1970 to 1972. Angela Davis fought against the political repression of the state and thousands of its citizens. She was still a member of the Communist Party in 1988.

This was the book that Angela Davis was not in a hurry to write. She did not want to make herself appear different than other black women. Her life was shaped by the same forces that shaped the lives of millions of other people and she did not want to obscure this fact. Her way of dealing with these forces was through activism and membership in the Communist Party. She hesitated in writing this book because she did not want it to detract from the movement and the politics of the situation. When she decided to write the book, she decided it would be a political autobiography that told the story of the people, the events, and the forces that brought her to where she was. Davis wanted people to understand the movement and why people felt they had no choice but to sacrifice for the movement.

From her beginnings in Birmingham, Alabama to her inclusion on the FBI's list of the Ten Most Wanted Fugitives, Angela Davis tells her story. She describes the influences on her life and why she made the choices and decisions that she made. She felt a need to be involved in the Black Liberation Movement and to fight for those who were being repressed and abused. This is how she came into contact with the Soledad Brothers and others who were repressed.

Her involvement with radical elements began when she attended high school in New York City. She joined a group called Advance, which had members who were the children of Communists. This is how she began to learn about the Party. She thought long and hard about joining the Communist Party, which she did in 1968. She had traveled outside of the country and was able to compare capitalism and socialism. She thought that the Communist Party provided a way for the liberation of blacks.

She had to go underground because the weapons used by Jonathan Jackson in a Marin County courtroom were registered in her name. Thus began her journey through the prison and court system, which attracted international support for her. In the end, she is found not guilty of all charges.

This is a good book for people who want to learn about the woman and her involvement in the black and Communist movements. Angela explains her reasons and feeling for doing what she did.



# Part 1, Nets

## Part 1, Nets Summary and Analysis

The book opens on August 9, 1970, when Angela Davis and Helen are hiding from the police. She had learned of the death of Jonathan Jackson two days earlier. He, along with two San Quentin deputies, James McClain, and William Christmas, had been killed during a revolt at the Marin County Courthouse. Helen had brought a wig to Angela, who is trying it on. Angela is forcing herself to wear the wig because she must look common and not attract attention when they go out. They are planning to leave as soon as it is dark.

They are both nervous while they are waiting for nightfall: "I don't know how long we had been sitting in the dimly lit room when Helen broke the silence to say that it was probably not going to get any darker outside. It was time to leave. For the first time since we discovered that the police were after me, I stepped outside. It was much darker than I thought, but not dark enough to keep me from feeling vulnerable, defenseless" (Part 1, p. 4). She experienced the same kind of fear that she had felt as a child when she was left alone in the dark.

They travel from Echo Park to the black neighborhood in West Adams. Even though she had driven the way many times, it is different because tonight she is a fugitive. Her life has changed and she now has to learn to avoid being detected. The situation that brought her to this point began two years earlier with a cocktail party fundraiser for the SNCC of the Communist Party. The police raided the apartment of Franklin and Kendra Alexander and confiscated money and guns. The group was charged with armed robbery, but the charges didn't stick and they were soon released. The guns were registered to Angela.

These are the same guns that had been used at the Marin County Courthouse and are now in the hands of the authorities. Angela knows that the police would be looking for her. She'd lost her teaching position at the University of California because of her Party membership and she is involved in a movement to free the Soledad Brothers—a group of men who are being held on murder charges that she feels are fraudulent. Her friends and her roommate, Tamu, are under surveillance.

Her friends provide her with the house in the West Adams area where she could hide. The people hiding her there are Hattie and John, who are sympathetic to the movement. They ask no questions, and rearrange their schedules so that someone is always home. She is happy there, but knows that she has to leave the state for a while. Angela decides to find a friend, David Poindexter, in Chicago, and finds that Hattie insists on staying with her. They leave for Las Vegas during the night and then fly to O'Hare in Chicago and taxi to David's apartment, at which point Hattie says goodbye.



David is scheduled to make a trip to the west and will be gone for several days. Angela is looking forward to the time she will spend alone. He introduces her to Robert Lohman, a good friend of his who lives in the same building. David and Robert have a big battle that ends their friendship, and David and Angela now view Robert as a potential informer. David has to cancel his trip and move Angela to a safer place. They prepare for Angela to leave the city, and she is given another disguise and wig. They decide to rent a car to drive to New York and then take a train to Miami.

Angela watches the news in a motel outside of Detroit and sees a report that she was seen leaving her parent's home in Birmingham that day and that she had attended a Black Panthers meeting. Angela, it was said, out drove them in her 1959 blue Rambler. The report causes Angela to worry about her family but there is no way for her to contact them. They rent an apartment when they arrive in Miami. David could go out whenever he wants, but Angela stays in and hides.

At the end of September, Angela knows that there will be problems. Some men had been asking questions at the house of David's mother, who lives near Miami. Angela knows she should leave the country, but doesn't want to even if it means she would go to jail. She would still be close to her people and the movement. A friend releases a press statement for her, which implies that she is already out of the country.

By October, she is back in New York at a Howard Johnson Motor Lodge with David Poindexter. They are running out of money and spend the afternoon at a movie. On the way back to the motel, Angela begins to notice a lot of men who she thinks are police, but nothing out of the ordinary occurs. A man who rides in the elevator with them arouses more suspicions and fears, just like another guest who exits from a room on their floor. One of the men asks if she is Angela Davis. She and David are forced into different rooms and handcuffed. They are driven away in separate cars.

She is taken to the FBI building where she refuses to answer any questions. She has a call from an attorney, Gerald Lefcourt, whose name she recognizes from his work for the Black Panthers. She is cuffed again and led to the elevator for the ride downstairs, where she is greeted by the flashing bulbs of the press. She is taken to the New York Women's House of Detention. The building is familiar to Angela, who used to walk past it coming home from school when she was younger.

Angela finds that an attorney named John Abt is trying see her, but it is after hours. She is a federal prisoner, the matron tells her, and under the jurisdiction of the federal marshals. Angela complains about not being allowed to call an attorney. She is given John Abt's card. While she is waiting in the receiving section, a sister asks if she is Angela Davis, and tells her that there are demonstrations going on.

The next morning, Angela is taken for her court appearance and is allowed to meet with John Abt, her father's attorney. She recognizes an old family friend, Margaret Burnham, who had recently graduated from law school. Abt explains the legal situation to her. She is arraigned with bail set at \$250,000 and then returned to the holding cell where she is held until evening. When she is removed, she finds Margaret and John waiting to



accompany her to another hearing. She is released on her own recognizance and then taken into custody by the state. At ten that evening, there is another hearing at the New York County Courthouse. She is returned to her cell at the Detention Center, exhausted.

The next morning, the guards reappear, bringing her breakfast. They introduce themselves as Shirley and Tex. Angela is being held in the section for mental patients. Angela protests being held there, but is told it is for her own safety. She asks her attorneys to try to get her into the main population and out of the mental section.

Margaret visits her daily during this time: "Our conversations—about the little world of our childhood, our families, and the larger world of global politics, the movement, the case—sustained me more than anything else during this period. She brought messages from my parents, and continually assured my mother that my health was good and my spirits were high. Margaret was my only link to my comrades, my friends, and she kept me from being totally swallowed up by the madness of that dungeon" (Part 1, p. 37).

Margaret wages the battle to have Angela removed from 4b, the mental section. After a week, Angela is moved to the tenth floor dormitory, across from the hospital. She gets into a conversation with some of the women who ask her to explain communism. She is moved again the next day into an isolation cell. Angela discusses the situation with Margaret and John. They would file a federal lawsuit for discrimination and she would go on a hunger strike.

Kendra Alexander comes to visit Angela. She and her husband had been subpoenaed to testify in the Grand Jury investigation of David Poindexter. She tells Angela about the demonstrations that are beginning outside of the Detention Center that Angela can see from her window. Ten days into her hunger strike, a Federal Court ruling secures Angela's release from solitary. Angela is moved again, this time to the seventh floor, and the sisters help her get settled.

There aren't many activities in the life of the prisoner. The visits to the commissary allow the women to buy the few allowable little things to help make their lives more tolerable. There are church services that allow women to meet and talk with their friends from other parts of the prison. The movies do the same thing. The library has books that are basically mysteries, romances which are books that are emotional forms of escape. There are exercise periods on the prison roof, which Angela enjoys. There are also arts and crafts and game rooms on the roof.

Angela talks about the two different levels of prison existence. The first level is the official one, based on the rules and rituals. The second is the world of prisoner culture, which consists of the rules and rituals developed by the prisoners themselves as a form of survival. An example of this is the family system, in which prisoners adopt other prisoners to fill the role of generations of family members. Much of it is based on homosexuality.



As much as Angela thinks about and misses her family, she does not encourage them to visit her. She feels the strain would be too much for her mother, but her mother insists. They arrange a special visit to be held in the social worker's office.

Once Angela is settled in, she begins to talk with the other women about the movement and about communism. They want to know the basics, like what does imperialism mean. There is a togetherness developing among the prisoners, and the prison authorities respond by tightening security. Demonstrations to free Angela continue on the outside, and then one night, right before Christmas, they learn that Angela has lost the fight against extradition to California. Angela is awakened at three am and told that her attorney is there to see her. She goes with the guard and finds that the guards are waiting for her. A fight breaks out, with some of the guards fighting on Angela's side. Angela is dressed in her civilian clothes and put in a police van.

The extradition continues as Angela is transferred from the care of New York to the care of California. She is taken to a military airfield in New Jersey and then flown to California.



## Part 2, Rocks

### Part 2, Rocks Summary and Analysis

Angela grows up in the Birmingham, Alabama area. She is four years old when her family moves into a house in the all white neighborhood on Center Street. "Almost immediately after we moved there the white people got together and decided on a border line between them and us. Center Street became the line of demarcation. Provided that we stayed on 'our' side of the line (the east side) they let it be known we would be left in peace. If we ever crossed over to their side, war would be declared. Guns were hidden in our house and vigilance was constant" (Part 2, pg. 78) Angela describes. When a black family moves on the west side of the street, their house is dynamited. As more blacks continue to move to the area and racial tension increases, there are so many bombings that the area becomes known as Dynamite Hill.

Angela spends several months in New York City with Margaret Burnham's family before she begins school. The Burnham's had moved to New York from Birmingham and their families remain close. It is in New York that Angela learns how segregated Birmingham is. She has to ride at the back of the bus in Birmingham and couldn't go to all of the movie theaters. Blacks aren't allowed at the amusement park in Birmingham as they are at Coney Island, and they can only eat in certain restaurants. Angela likes New York because she thinks it free of the racism that plagues Birmingham.

Angela's mother works on her masters in education in the summers in New York, and takes her children with her. This is during the McCarthy era, and one of their family friends, James Jackson, a Communist, is in hiding. Angela is friends with his daughter and doesn't understand why they are being followed or why they are looking for her friend's father.

Angela learns about class differences at an early age. Her family is the not-so-poor. Her mother is a teacher and her father works in a gas station. They always have enough to eat and adequate clothing. Other kids at her school do not. She watches them go hungry because they do not have lunch money. She begins to quietly steal from her father's bag of coins and give the money to the hungry kids so they can afford the school lunches. She is also aware of the differences between the situation of the blacks and the whites. She can see the difference in the schools and the textbooks.

The teachers always tell them that they will be rewarded for working hard: "On the one hand, I did not entirely believe it. It didn't make sense to me that all those who had not 'made it' were suffering for their lack of desire and defectiveness of their will to achieve a better life for themselves. If this were true, the, great numbers of our people—perhaps the majority—had really been lazy and shiftless, as white people were always saying" (Part 2, pp. 92-93). Angela decides at an early age that she will prove to the world that she is just as good and capable as any white person.





Angela does not like silence or inaction when a wrong has been committed. She is always the one who steps in whenever there is a confrontation. She is always hurt when blacks strike out in anger, because they didn't know how to strike at the real cause of their misery.

As a child, Angela takes ballet and piano lessons. She learns to read at an early age, and loves to spend time at the library. The civil rights movement begins just as she starts high school, but one would never guess it from the lack of interest at Parker High School, the high school annex in Birmingham that Angela attends. The NAACP is declared illegal in Alabama. Both of Angela's parents are members. Angela and some of her friends begin showing support for the movement by refusing to go to the back of the bus.

Angela wants to leave Birmingham. She finds two programs. One is an early entrance program at Fisk University and the other program sends black student to integrated high schools in the north. The Fisk program attracts her because she wants to be a pediatrician and there is a medical school on the campus, but that doesn't get her away from the social situation she wants to escape. The high school program, sponsored by the American Friends, would have her living with a white family in Brooklyn while attending high school. Her mother considers Fisk to be the lesser of the two evils, so they send the Brooklyn family their regrets; however, after talking to her father, she knows that she will not go to Fisk.

She travels to New York by train. Many of her friends are traveling to other places for high school. On the train, she is thinking that she will have to get used to being around white people all of the time. She is met in New York by Reverend and Mrs. Melish, the Brooklyn family she will be living with. They have three sons, who attend the same school that she will be attending in Greenwich Village. The high school is a private school that is owned and operated by the teachers, many of whom are blacklisted by the Board of Education.

In New York, she learns about socialism in school and researches the topic at the library. She discovers the Communist Manifesto. She joins an organization called Advance, to which many Communists or children of Communists belong. She remains in New York City, but wants to return home during her last year to work in the civil rights movement. Her mother tells her to stay in New York and finish school.



## Part 3, Waters

### Part 3, Waters Summary and Analysis

Angela feels like an outsider while she attends high school in New York, but she has enough activities to handle it. Now Angela is a student at Brandeis University. She comments on the difference: "I searched the crowds of freshmen for others who were Black. Just knowing they were there would have made me feel a little more comfortable. But the full scholarship Brandeis had bestowed upon me was apparently a guilt-motivated attempt to increase their Black freshman population of two. We three were all female. I was glad that one of them, Alice, lived on the same floor as I" (Part 3, p. 118).

Angela feels very alienated that first semester at Brandeis. She doesn't study much. She won't join the small communist movement at the school, even though she labels herself a communist. She avoids the social scene. The only thing that excites her is the fact that James Baldwin is going to give a series of lectures. Just as the Baldwin lectures begin, the Cuban Missile Crisis occurs, and Baldwin cancels the lectures. The missile crisis causes a panic among the students, and some flee to Canada.

A rally is held, at which Baldwin speaks, along with Herbert Marcuse and various professors and graduate students. Their purpose is to try to get the government to withdraw its threats. There are rallies, teach-ins, and demonstrations, but they all end as soon as the crisis ends. Angela becomes friends with many of the foreign students, who she feels closer to. She keeps in touch with Flo Mason from her New York high school, and they decide to travel to Helsinki for the Eighth World Festival for Youth and Students. Angela takes a job to earn money for the trip. Since she is now studying, she doesn't have time for much of a social life.

In June, Angela leaves for Europe. She flies to London and spends a few days there before taking a train to Paris. She meets her friend Harriet Jackson and they wait for Flo. When Flo arrives, the three of them share a one room flat. They spend most of their time sight-seeing. This is the time of the Algerian fight for independence in 1962, and Angela attends a demonstration at the Sorbonne that is broken up by the police. Harriet departs for Russia, and Angela and Flo set out on their own, not realizing that it is Bastille Day weekend. They eventually make it to Helsinki for the Festival.

The Helsinki festival attracts youths from all over the world. There are cultural programs, rallies, and seminars. It is three years into the Cuban revolution, and Angela was impressed with the Cuban delegates. When Angela returns to the United States, she is questioned by the FBI. She decides from her experiences in Europe that superficial barriers are what separate people. She decides to major in French, since language was one of the easiest barriers to remove.

It is a quiet year at Brandeis until Malcolm X arrives. Angela attends the event with friends Woody and Gwen. The speech is directed to the white people, and Angela feels



out of place. Angela can't identify with Malcolm X on a religious basis because she is not a Muslim.

Angela receives the news that she has been accepted to study abroad in France for her junior year. She gets her scholarship to cover it. The preparatory courses are held in Biarritz, after the tourist season has ended. The bad thing is that the city has been invaded by fleas. Angela is the only black student among the Americans, and she again feels alienated and disoriented. She learns about the church bombing in Birmingham from reading the international papers. The girls killed were friends of hers. The other students cannot understand Angela's point of view, that the whole of society is guilty of the murders. The group of students moves to Paris in November. Angela and the others stay with a French family named Lamotte. Their classes are at the Sorbonne. Angela and the others are in Paris when President Kennedy is assassinated.

Angela, who is working on a degree in French Literature, really wants to study philosophy. She reads Marx and philosophy whenever she has the time. She decides to do graduate work in philosophy in Frankfurt, which she tells her parents at her graduation ceremony. She then drives back to Birmingham with them. Her father stops and buys some bourbon and packs the sealed bottles in the truck. They are stopped by the police in Tennessee, which is a dry state. The bourbon was confiscated.

Angela is sailing for Germany when the riots are occurring in Watts. She finds a room with a German couple, where she stays until she finds a cheaper room near the university. She is treated to a trip to Berlin during her first year, and spent most of her time in the Eastern sector. While in Berlin, she meets friends of her own and of her parents. On the way back to Frankfurt, the West German police detain her for not having registered with the police when she moved from the room with the German couple. Since she had violated the law by not registering, they consider deporting her. They agree to allow her to remain in Germany as long as she clears the situation with the correct police station in Frankfurt.

Angela is still living in the room at the factory. Most of the students who live there are also studying philosophy or sociology, and most belong to the German Socialist League. She takes part in some demonstrations, but has to be careful because an arrest could mean deportation. While Angela is studying in Germany, the Black Liberation Movement grows in America. Black Power is a term that being heard nationwide. Angela is cut off from what is happening in America. She only knows what she reads or hears. She decides to return to the US. She will finish her dissertation, working with Marcuse.



## Part 4, Flames

### Part 4, Flames Summary and Analysis

When Angela returns home in the summer of 1967, she stops in London to attend a conference where Herbert Marcus and Stokely Carichael are speaking. Angela is approached by the Black Power group as soon as she walks into the conference. She wears her hair in a natural style, which is identified with Black Power in those days. She spends most of her time in London with their group, visiting many Black communities in the area. She thinks they are just like the Black communities in the States, with the enemy being identified as the white man. Viewing the white man as the enemy makes a political solution impossible.

"I was learning that as long as the Black response to racism remained purely emotional, we would go nowhere. Like the playground fights at Parker High, like the sporadic headless anger of those who fell under police clubs in Alabama - it would solve nothing in the long run" (Part 4, p. 150), she says of the black response to racism. She also learns that many Blacks view Marxism as part of the white culture and do not see socialism as figuring into the Black Liberation movement as does Angela. She knows that Stokely is going to Cuba, and feels that he would change his position after his visit. She obtains a Watts address from him for Tommy J., a Black Power leader in Los Angeles. She can't find him when she goes to Los Angeles.

Angela goes to San Diego where she is to complete her studies. She calls a number she was given to offer her services in the Black movement, but is received very coolly. She becomes associated with a campus radical organization and demonstrates against the Viet Nam war. She feels a strangeness among the whites that she had not felt before. Some protesters are arrested at the demonstration when Angela drives back to the campus. She and others help raise bond for them. They are arrested when they go to find out the charges. The charges against them are dropped and an official apology is given.

A few days later, she meets two black students named Liz and Ed, and the three of them decide to organize a Black Student Union. They attract ten other students at their first meeting, and two black professors. They decide to affiliate with other black organizations for strength. When a gun battle breaks out between some of the "unity" organizations, Angela realizes that the only thing that they have in common is skin color. There are deep ideological differences between them. Some are looking for a new culture and value system. Some want to eliminate the white race. Others, like the Black Muslims, want a separate black nation. Others want a return to Africa.

Angela attends several meetings at the time. She is impressed with a presentation by Franklin Alexander on Black Politics and Economics, in which he proclaims that racism is a tool of the white class that results in more profits for them. She attends a small house party afterwards, and meets some more interesting people, including some



people from the Black Panther Political Party (BPPP). Some of the black organizations criticize Angela's leadership role, in spite of the fact that the burdens had fallen upon her since there had been no one else to do any of these things.

By 1968, she realizes that she needs to find a collective to have an association with other revolutionaries. Even though Angela considers herself to be a Marxist at this time, she had yet to join the Party, but she thinks about it and talks to the Alexander's about it. She is invited to join the BPPP, and she accepts the invitation. They would provide her with a base of operation while she thinks over what to do about Party membership, so she becomes their representative in San Diego. This is not the same Black Panther Party as that of Huey Newton, who caused some trouble in Los Angeles trying to get the BPPP to change their name. He held Angela at gunpoint. The Panthers later expelled him, but other people of the BPPP were also threatened.

They finally hold a meeting. Eldridge Cleaver, Bobby Seale, Emory Douglas, and I'll Bobby Hutton are there. At the meeting, it is decided to have two mass meetings on the West Coast of the Black Liberation Movement. The purpose is to demand Huey Newton's freedom. Newton is awaiting trial for the murder of an Oakland policeman. At the rally, held in Los Angeles, Angela is disappointed to hear Stokely Carmichael say that Marx is irrelevant to the Black Liberation Movement. He was, after all, a white man. He thought that African communalism was more important than socialism.

Rap Brown, who followed Stokely as chairman of SNCC, also speaks at the rally and is arrested several days later. Angela is involved in the fundraising drive for his bail. It also results in a large increase in membership, as many Los Angeles blacks are attracted to the Movement. They open a headquarters near Los Angeles, with Angela spending any time she can get away from school working there. Even though Angela's group works with the SNCC, they are independent of them.

On February 18, two men enter into the office and tell Angela and the others the details of a gory murder that had taken place when eighteen-year-old Gregory Clark was slain by the police. Gregory and his friend were driving down the street drinking cans of pop in brown paper bags when they were pulled over by LAPD officer Warren B. Carleson. When Clark was down on the ground with his hands handcuffed, he was shot in the back of the head. Angela and her group call for a community meeting, and more than one hundred people show up. The group does not feel that they are strong enough yet to influence any of the official outcomes, but they can make their presence known.

The group forms a People's Tribunal Committee to uncover and expose the events that had taken place. They hold a mock trial of Carleson and let it be known that they weren't in any way impartial. Carleson is found guilty, but there is no way the Tribunal could impose any kind of penalty, so they decide to pressure the city council, especially the black members, to try Carleson for murder. The crowd is too riled to accept such a conservative approach. They want death for the murdered. Franklin is the only one that is able to quiet the crowd before things get out of control.



On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King Jr. is shot. Angela knows that many people would be looking to the Los Angeles SNCC for leadership in the following days. They are having internal problems at the time over which path to follow, and Franklin emerges as a strong leader. He calls from Chicago, and they tell him to come back. That night there are crowds and problems in cities across the country. Angela feels they had to avoid a confrontation in Los Angeles since their police are the best equipped in terms of riot gear. The desire to fight back has to be channeled into a political outlet, not to one of physical violence. The Black Congress agrees.

All of the black organizations decide to funnel the community's efforts into constructive channels that would culminate in a mass rally. They have to keep the community busy and from exploding into violence. Their sources say that the police around the area are trying to provoke incidents the day after the assassination. During a meeting at the Second Baptist Church, the SNCC leaves three brothers to guard their office. When Angela and the others return, they aren't there. The office has been ransacked and the mimeographing equipment damaged.

Neighbors tell them that ten to fifteen police cars had come. The three brothers were taken away in cuffs: "It was not coincidental that they had attacked our printing machines. The work of our organization was, in the first place, educational. We had just produced hundreds of thousands of leaflets protesting Dr. King's murder, explaining the racist forces behind his assassination and suggesting how we should manifest our resistance. Although they did not often admit it, the ruling circles feared this educational approach far more than they feared the rhetorical threats to 'off the pigs.' They knew that our strategy was to organize the masses and that increasing numbers of people were looking to use for knowledge and leadership" (Part 4, p. 180).

They look over the situation and are eating when they find that there are tacks in the spaghetti sauce that they had left cooking. They decide to leave everything as it was and to bring the press in the next day to see what the police had done. The SNCC's LA chapter is only two months old at this time.

The SNCC is popular within the black community. Much of the organization's work is done by Angela and two other women, Rene and Bobbie, basically because Franklin and Frank weren't available to perform these tasks. The men basically are somewhat critical of the women taking over. In their eyes, this weakens the role of black men. This is an issue in the Black Movement at the time. They call for help from the national SNCC, and a representative comes out to LA. He isn't as concerned with their male-female problems as he is with the fact that their chapter differs from chapters across the country. The LA chapter basically just uses the SNCC name and had formulated their own policies, not conforming to the national.

The national rep criticizes Angela's Liberation School, saying that it should focus on providing job skills and not political and Marxist education. There should be more of an effort on fundraising for the national. A meeting at Franklin's apartment results in the arrest of Franklin and others the night before a rally in front of City Hall for the Gregory Clark cause. The crowd from the rally shifts from City Hall to the court, where Franklin

and the other are being arraigned. The judge drops all of the charges, and the brothers are released. A newspaper article describes Franklin as a Maoist and a communist, and this arouses the concern of the national SNCC rep.

The rep calls a meeting, and the staffers are told that the SNCC doesn't want to be associated with Communists. Franklin is being expelled and he wants all links to Marxism purged from the LA office. The only ones to protest are Angela and Deacon, Franklin's brother. Angela wants to resign from the SNCC, but Franklin and Deacon feel that Angela and Deacon should stay there a while longer. The national appoints a new local chairman, and Angela is relieved of her Liberation School, at which point she resigns. Within a few weeks, what was once the L.A. SNCC is gone.

Angela is critical of the Communist Party at this point. She feels that they don't single out the Black Movement, but rather lump it under the category of exploitation. At this point, Angela is sifting through information, trying to decide if she should join the Party or not. She needs a formal structure from which to work and wants to be a part of a serious revolutionary movement. The Party's black cell in Los Angeles is the Che-Lumumba Club. Club is another word meaning 'cell' and each consists of between five and twenty members. The Che-Lumumba Club had been established in 1967. Since Angela is not satisfied with the information she receives from the Che-Lumumba Club, Kendra and Franklin introduce her to other Party members. After many discussions, Angela joins the Party in July 1968, and then goes on to study for her Ph.D. qualifying examinations.

Having passed her qualifying exams, Angela returns to her political work in Los Angeles. Charlene Mitchell, the founder of the cell, is the Party's nominee for President, the first black woman to ever do so. Angela and Deacon also decide to work with the LA Black Panther Party at this time. Angela gives classes for them and finds that many of them can't read, or spent hours with a dictionary looking up words.

It is soon discovered that the national Black Panther Party has been infiltrated by the police and a purge begins. As with all purges, many innocent people are expelled. Angela feels that many of the decisions are being made by infiltrators. Deacon is given a choice between the Communist Party and the Black Panther Party, but Angela is not. Then some of the Black Panthers begin to be found dead. Angela pulls out of the Panthers and spends her time on campus in La Jolla, where she works with the Black Student Council. They create the Lumumba-Zapata College, showing the solidarity between Chicanos and blacks. They stage a sit-in and win the concessions from the university.

That summer Angela spends a month in Cuba, along with Kendra and a delegation of Communists. They go to Cuba through Mexico City. Part of the time in Cuba is spent working in the coffee and sugar cane fields with the *campaneros*. Angela is determined to keep up with them. Angela says that the Cubans are fond and supportive of Fidel. She becomes convinced that the fight against racism could only be successful under socialism. They leave Cuba on a freighter and run into the blockade. They clear the



blockade and sail to Guadeloupe with a Puerto Rican group that had been with them. In Guadeloupe, the books of the Puerto Rican's are confiscated.

Angela is to begin her year teaching at UCLA. She learns that an FBI agent has published an article in the campus newspaper revealing that the Philosophy Department has hired a Communist to teach at the campus. Another article is published in San Francisco about Angela and her Party affiliation. She at first laughs it off, then learns that the chancellor has been told to question her formally. The hiring of Communists is prohibited by the university. Angela had wanted to finish her dissertation before she began teaching, but the UCLA job offered her a light teaching load. If she wanted to fight to keep her teaching job, she wouldn't have time to finish her degree that year. A movement begins to save Angela's job. This movement is both inside and outside of the university.

There are all kinds of threats against Angela at this time. The Che-Lumumba cell assigns body guards for her. The campus police are always checking out bomb threats until she learns how to check her own car. She knows that her parents would support her, and she is worried about them living in the racist south. When she visits her parents at Christmas, she finds that some of their friends had stopped visiting and some of her father's customers stopped doing business with him.

Soon after she is fired from UCLA, her sister Fania and her husband Sam are using her apartment in Cardiff when Angela receives a call from Fania saying that Sam had been shot and is in the hospital. Angela rushes to her sister's side and is at the apartment when the police come to arrest Fania. They are both arrested for the attempted murder of a peace officer. The charges against them are eventually dropped, but the charges against other members of the Black Movement aren't.

At five am one morning, Angela receives a call from the local Black Panther office that they are having a battle with the police. She arrives there in time to see Franklin Alexander being frisked by the police and taken away. The roof of the office is dynamited, and shooting is taking place. Angela and a man named Josef finally leave the area with the help of local children, who lead them through a maze of alleys and gangways to avoid the police. They see him but he motions them away. He later tells them that he was afraid he was being watched and didn't want them implicated in any way.

The people in the Panther office finally announce they would come out peacefully, since there were now enough people there as witnesses. They decide to hold a massive rally and general strike in two days for the entire black community. Angela and others work to rally support for the strike. They hold a vigil in front of the Panther office, and the group is ordered to disperse. Then they are attacked by the police. Angela is beaten and has to run with the others. They and others are hidden by people in the community. Angela spends the night sleeping on Franklin and Kendra's floor, since it is too dangerous for her to return to her own apartment.





They attend the rally the next day. The crowd becomes unruly and attacks the County Courthouse. Franklin finally gets the people to leave the Courthouse before any further confrontations could take place. The manager of Angela's apartment house accuses her of harboring Black Panthers when she has people over to her apartment. They finally go to another comrade's home rather than provoke a confrontation. The man's strange behavior continues, and one night he follows Angela, who had to go to a corner store for help. Angela decides to move, and finds an apartment she could share with Tamu Ushindi and her baby while Tamu's husband serves time. They are only a few blocks from the home of Franklin and Kendra and the neighborhood is nice.

In February, Angela reads a newspaper article about three black men that are in Soledad Prison, known as the Soledad Brothers. She had heard stories about Soledad from Josef. The Che-Lumumba Club had been asked to help support a movement to free the three prisoners, and Angela feels a need to do something to help. At a rally for the three, their relatives tell the story of what had happened. A prison guard in the gun tower shot three black men in the yard and it was called justifiable homicide. One day, the guard, O.G. Miller, was pushed over the railing. No one knew who did it. This is how the story of George Jackson, John Clutchette, and Fleeta Drumgo began.

The mothers of the men believe that there is a conspiracy against them. Angela wants to become more involved, but knows she already has too many commitments with her fight for her job, her activities in the Che-Lumumba Club, and her efforts in the area of political education. She also has lectures to prepare for her classes at UCLA. In spite of this, she volunteers, and their first meeting is scheduled to be held at Kendra and Franklin's apartment. More than fifty people turn up for the meeting. They make plans for a rally and a picnic. Angela, who is supposed to be the coordinator of campus activities, ends up being the leader of the Los Angeles movement.

Angela takes part in an active speaking schedule, with any fees being given to the Soledad Brothers Defense Fund. As soon as she can manage, she drives up to Salinas for a courtroom appearance. She has never seen the Soledad Brothers in person. She is able to meet them after their courtroom appearance. Over the coming months, Angela comes to know their family well and is in the courtroom with them when they win a change of venue to San Francisco. They also have a big rally planned the day the Regents are supposed to rule on Angela's teaching position. The Regents say they would not rehire Angela the following year.

Tamu's husband is released from prison and they have a visitor from Canada. Angela is finding it impossible to work on her dissertation while staying there, and finds a small inexpensive apartment for the purpose. The only speaking engagements she accepts now are for the Soledad Brothers. She decides to work for the Bay Area Soledad Committee, since she will be able to use the Berkeley campus's library for her dissertation work.

At a courtroom for the trial of James McClain, Jonathan Jackson, seventeen-year-old brother of one of the Soledad Brothers, arrives. After sitting for a while, he pulls out a carbine. The judge, district attorney, and others are led to a van in the parking lot when

a San Quentin guard opens fire. When it is over, the judge and district attorney are dead, along with McClain and Christmas, and Jonathan.

## Part 5, Walls

### Part 5, Walls Summary and Analysis

Angela's extradition trip, from New York to California, includes a twelve hour plane flight. When she lands in California, she is taken to the Marin County Civic Center, where she is booked into the jail. Once she is alone, Angela looks around her cell and then lays down to rest. She hadn't had a chance to talk to her attorneys, Margaret or John, before she left New York. She is told that her lawyer is there to see her. Expecting to see Margaret or John, she instead finds Terrence Kayo Hallinan and Carolyn Craven. Carolyn was a news reporter who enters posing as Hallinan's assistant. Angela knows Hallinan from his work as an attorney in the defense committee.

Margaret and John arrive the next morning. Angela's arraignment is scheduled. Her lawyers obtain a continuance, since her legal team is in the process of being formed. The judge says that he and most of the judges in Marin County have disqualified themselves from the case, because they knew the murdered Judge Haley. He also issues a gag order. John is staying in California long enough to help establish the legal team. Margaret is going to stay and work with the California team.

"There were many criteria which I hoped the other members of the legal team would satisfy. Naturally I wanted lawyers who would be compatible with me and with each other. We would be spending many months working together. However, there was one criterion that outweighed all the others. I had to have lawyers who agreed that the case was a political one. They had to be sensitive to the fact that the trial would be political in every respect. Moreover, the courtroom battle would be interwoven with a battle conducted by a mass movement. The lawyers would have to understand from the outset that what happened in the courtroom would of necessity be related to and coordinated with the campaign in the streets" (Part 5, pg. 288).

Howard Moore is an attorney who had handled civil rights cases in the south. He agrees that Angela has to take part in her own defense because of the political issues at stake. Howard agrees to handle Angela's case. He has previous commitments in Atlanta and cannot stay in California for three months. They need other members of the legal team to handle pre-trial motions and they need California Bar members to handle the actual trial work. They ask Al Brotsky, Michael Tigar, and Dennis Roberts to handle the pre-trial work, along with Sheldon Otis.

Angela sees her co-defendants when she walks into the trial room. Ruchell Magee sits quite a distance away with his court appointed lawyer, Leonard Bjorkland. The press writes articles comparing her and Magee and the differences in their lives. From Angela's point of view, they try to create as much distance between her and Magee as they can with their articles, trying to destroy any solidarity or unity that may have existed between them.



Angela is again being held in solitary confinement, which her lawyers fight. They win a concession for her to use a cell provided for attorney meetings as a work area, since she is specified as a member of her legal team. This work cell causes problems between Angela and the staff. Angela's legal team also obtains a ruling allowing for the admission of legal investigators of the team's designation. Angela receives many visitors this way.

Bettina Aptheker, a friend from her New York high school days, brings word that the Defense Committee in England wants Angela to work on a book. Bettina and Angela decide to work on the book together. In spite of the problems the rules of the jailers cause, Bettina and Angela manage to complete the book. Other people contribute to the book, such as George, Jon, Fleeta, Ruchelle, Bobby, Ericka, Howard, Margaret, Fania, Franklin, and Kendra. All of them have something to write about. The book is published by The Third Press.

In June there is a new judge, Richard Arnason, from Sonoma County. He denies bail for Angela, but lifts some of the restraints of solitary confinement and allows her to have the use of a typewriter and other items she needs as a member of her defense team. She is also allowed to meet with the Soledad Brothers as a part of her defense effort and with Ruchell Magee.

Ruchell wants the trial transferred to the federal court system because he believes he has a better chance that way. He feels that California wants his life no matter what. Angela decides on opting for the state court trial because the lawyers would handle the questioning of jurors. She also feels that she and Ruchell should be tried together as co-defendants, but Ruchell wants removal from the state system. Angela agrees to file Ruchell's petition for removal, with the understanding that if it is denied, they will fight together in the state court. When the motion is denied, Ruchell decides to pursue the issue of removal, so they have to sever their cases from one another.

In August, Angela is meeting with Howard when a matron announces that Howard and the team would have to leave due to an emergency. After a half hour, Angela is led back to her sleeping cell. Later that day she is brought back to the room where Howard and Margaret are waiting. They tell her that George has been murdered, shot in the back. The next day they all meet in the work cell. There are calls for an immediate investigation, and calls to safeguard the lives of the other brothers still inside San Quentin.

Part of Angela's defense is based on the fact that the indictment was handed down by a grand jury and that the members are non-representative since they are selected by a judge and represent the judge's biases and class prejudices. The judge made anti-racial and anti-communist statements on the stand that the defense team feels were representative of Marin County. Angela's team requests a change of venue. The request is granted. Angela and her team want the venue to be in San Francisco because of the diverse nature of the population, but the venue is San Jose.



Angela is transferred to the Santa Clara Jail in the middle of the night. She uses her two phone calls to notify her defense team and her parents about the move. Angela is given clothing that doesn't fit and is huddled up in a cell freezing when Margaret comes to see her. The cell is a holding cell where prisoners are kept for a few hours. They have plans to hold Angela there for several months. After a nation-wide protest and many protesting phone calls, Angela's living conditions change. She has better meals, proper clothing and heat, a television, radio and her typewriter, and a little more room. The original legal team is dissolved because the pre-trial work is completed. Leo Branton, who had worked on the Panther's case, agrees to join Angela's defense team.

One day, while waiting for transport to the courthouse, Angela learns that the California Supreme Court abolished the death penalty. Margaret arrives to tell her they have a bail hearing that morning. The fact that the death penalty has been abolished does away with Judge Anason's argument for denial of bail. She finds that there is already an effort in progress to raise the bail money. Then Angela begins to think about the situation, and tells Margaret that they won't grant bail, they will find some loophole. Angela is correct: the hearing is delayed until the judge has time to review the Supreme Court ruling.

The bail hearing is set for Wednesday. Angela is to be released on bail, after sixteen month of imprisonment. Judge Anason could have waited three months for the Supreme Court decision to become final, as other judges did, but he didn't. Bail is set at \$102,500, which means that \$2,500 has to be paid to the court in cash. The conditions for the bond are met and Angela is released.

Margaret and Angela go to Bettina and Jack's home, where everyone is meeting. Angela meets and thanks the many people who are active in working for her release. She spends a large part of the evening on the phone, calling people who had helped. A crowd gathers at the Solidarity Center and waits for Angela to appear. To do so would violate the conditions of her bond, but she feels that she has to appear and thank them.

Margaret is living in a house loaned by Bob and Barbara Lindsay, and they all decide that Angela would live there with her. The next day is filled with visitors like Fania. Also coming to see Angela is Gus Hall, who had spent eight years in Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary. After agreeing to dinner with Gus Hall and other comrades, Angela runs off to meet her mother's plane. Angela and others attend the Soledad trial.

"Downstairs a huge throng of people had gathered, and the press had been alerted to my presence. Conceivably, because of this the judge could construe my attendance at the Soledad Brothers' trial as a violation of the bail order. But at this point, that didn't matter very much. What mattered was that I reaffirm my commitment to the fight to free all political prisoners - first and foremost , the Soledad Brothers. It was important not only because it put me where I wanted to be - back in the struggle - but also because of the meaning it would have for all the sisters and brothers who had fought for my freedom. It is could not be satisfied with my freedom alone, they could not be satisfied either." (Part 5, pp. 345-346)

## Part 6, Bridges

### Part 6, Bridges Summary and Analysis

The jury selection begins for Angela's trial. Angela, as a part of the defense team, is involved in the voir dire as the team seeks to uncover any biases. They select the best mix that they feel they could have by March 14. On March 27, when the court recesses for lunch, they find out that the Soledad Brothers have been acquitted. The prosecution was building its case on the basis of Angela's passion for George and that this motivated her to violence.

On the trial's second day, when they arrive at the courthouse, they find a large crowd and a lot of sheriff's deputies around and find out that an escape attempt in the men's jail. The security measures are relaxed enough to allow the trial participants into the courtroom where the trial is adjourned until the next day. Newspaper stories make analogies between what happened at the Santa Clara Courthouse and what had happened at the Marin County Courthouse. Angela feels that many of the stories try to plant the idea that she was somehow involved. They could move for a mistrial, but then they would have and to go through another jury selection, and they feel they already have the best jury they could obtain in Santa Clara County.

The next day, Angela delivers the opening statement at the beginning of her trial. She reveals that she was active in the movement to free the Soledad Brother long before she even met any of them, so the talk of any involvement of her with George is ridiculous. Angela says she was interested in ending repression in the prisons and her actions were not based on any passion for George Jackson. She talks about how Jonathan Jackson was only seven when his brother was put behind bars, and speaks of the effect it had on him.

They began to call witnesses at the trial who were present in the courtroom in Marin County when Jonathan entered. When the jury retires, Angela and the others go out for lunch with a journalist from the German Democratic Republic. While they are at lunch in a private dining area, they find the door guarded by police. Howard arrives and tells them about a plane hijacking in Seattle and that the hijackers want Angela to go with them. They return to the courtroom where Angela is asked to remain until they solve the problem. The demands from the hijackers are when they landed in San Francisco, they want Angela to be at the end of the runway wearing a white dress and carrying \$500,000 and to have five parachutes.

They later find that the plane landed in Oakland. Later that day when the truth becomes known it turns out that any demands involving Angela were erroneous. They go back to waiting for the decision of the jury.

On Sunday morning Howard appears and tells them they have to go to the courthouse. The jury had reached a verdict. "The first count was murder. There was a loud, clear



'Not Guilty.' Heavy sobs fell into the moment of silence that followed. It was Franklin. It felt like everyone was breathing deep and hard and with the rhythm of a single being. The second count was kidnapping. 'Not Guilty' rang out again. Franklin was crying louder. I did not think I could hold on much longer. But I had to hear the last verdict, the conspiracy count. My right hand tightened around Kendra's, the other around Margaret's.

"When the clerk read off 'Not Guilty' for the third time, we screamed, laughed, cried and embraced - completely oblivious to the banging of the judge's gavel. He wanted to close the trial with the same decorum with which he had presided. He read a rather long quote from Twelve Men by G.K. Chesterton, congratulated defense, prosecution and jury, dismissed the last from their duties and declared case number 52613, People of California vs. Angela Y. Davis, closed" (Part 6, pp. 394-395).



# Characters

## Angela Davis

The author, Angela Davis, is obviously the main character of the book. She was born in Birmingham, Alabama. Her mother was a teacher and her father owned a gas station. He was also a history teacher, but found the salary was too low for them to live on. In 1948, when Angela was four years old, her family moved out of the housing projects and into a house on Center Street. They were the first blacks to move into the white neighborhood. Angela attended high school in New York City and lived with a white family in Brooklyn, and then received a full scholarship to Brandeis. She majored in French Literature and spent a year studying in France. After graduation from Brandeis, she attended graduate school in Germany, studying philosophy. She finished her graduate work in San Diego, at the University of California. While there, she was working with black organizations in Los Angeles when she became interested enough to join a revolutionary party. Angela joined the Communist Party in July, 1968. When she began to teach at UCLA, her Party membership became an issue since it violated the rules. She was fighting to keep her job when she became involved in coordinating the Los Angeles movement to free the Soledad Three prisoners. When one of the seventeen-year-old family members of George Jackson used a gun registered to her in the massacre that took place in the Marin County Court, Angela became a wanted woman and went underground. She was arrested in New York City and extradited to California where she awaited trial. She was found Not Guilty on all counts.

## Franklin Alexander

Franklin Alexander and his wife Kendra are friends of Angela's who were members of the Communist Party. Franklin co-chaired a discussion at a conference that Angela attended on Black Politics and Economics, which Angela found very interesting. He was invited to join the Black Panther Political Party at the same time Angela was. Franklin was the local chairman of the Los Angeles SNCC until the national organization discovered that he was a Communist. At that time, they expelled him for the SNCC. He and Kendra helped introduce Angela to various Party members when she expressed an interest in joining the Party. Franklin was also involved with the demonstrations protesting the raiding of the Black Panther office. At many of the rallies, it was Franklin who was able to settle the crowd before violence erupted.

Franklin and his wife Kendra stood by Angela throughout her whole ordeal. They visited her continually when she was in prison and were in the courtroom with her when the verdict was announced. They provided with a place to stay when she needed one and were always there for moral support.





## David Poindexter

David Poindexter was a friend of Angela's who had been living in Chicago. Angela went there to hide when she became a fugitive. When he had a fight with his good friend, it was no longer safe either there at his apartment or in Chicago, so they traveled to Miami, where David's mother lived nearby. When men appeared at his mother's house asking questions, they fled to New York. He is arrested with Angela in New York and is later acquitted of the charges of harboring a fugitive.

## Bettina Aptheker

Bettina Aptheker was a friend of Angela's from her New York high school days. They had both belonged to Advance. In 1964, Bettina was a leader in the Berkeley Free Speech Movement. She was also a contributor to World Magazine, a Party publication. Bettina, married to Jack Jurzweil, taught at the California State University in San Jose. They had a son named Joshua who was four years old at the time. Bettina was working on a book called *The Academic Rebellion: A Marxist Critique*. When Angela was in prison, an English support group wanted her to write a book and sent the message through Bettina, who worked with Angela on the book.

## Ruchell Magee

Ruchell Magee was Angela's co-defendant in the kidnapping and murder case. He was from Louisiana from the poor south. At thirteen, he had been imprisoned in Angola State Penitentiary for the attempted rape of a white girl. He served eight years and was only released when his mother agreed to move him to another state. They moved to California, where he was arrested a year later for fighting. He was convicted of kidnapping and sentenced to life in prison.

## Herbert Marcuse

Marcuse was a professor of philosophy at Brandeis. He had come to the United States from Germany after the Nazis came to power, and established an institute with other intellectuals called the Institut fur Sozialforschung. After the fall of the Nazis, the Institut was attached to the university in Frankfurt. He taught a course at the Sorbonne but was gone when Angela arrived.

## Kendra Alexander

Kendra is the wife of Franklin. Both are members of the Communist Party and friends of Angela's. Kendra, like Franklin, helped introduce Angela to various Party members when she was deciding whether or not to join the Communist Party. Kendra was there



to support Angela when she was arrested in New York, visiting her at the Detention Center. She was in the courtroom with Angela when the verdict was read.

## **Leo Branton**

Leo Branton was an attorney who had worked on the Panther's defense team. He agreed to join Angela's defense team. He and his wife Geri had retired to Mexico for a while when he came out of retirement for the Panther case. He had also worked on various civil rights cases in the south.

## **Henry Winston**

Henry Winston was the chairman of the Communist Party. He was a black who was born in Mississippi. He had served ten years in prison, where he had an untreated brain tumor that left him nearly blind. He also was a visitor of Angela's at the New York Detention Center.

## **Al Brotsky**

Al Brotsky was one of the lawyers hired to handle the pre-trial motions in Angela's case. He was a partner with the Charles Garry law firm which made office space available for the lawyers.

## **Margaret Burnham**

Margaret Burnham is an old family friend who had recently graduated from law school in New York when Angela was arrested. She came to the courthouse where Angela hired her. Margaret worked for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and had a six-year-old son. When Angela was transferred to California, Margaret went with her and was a member of Angela's defense team until the end.

## **Charlene Mitchell**

Charlene Mitchell is a good friend of Angela's. She was a member of the Communist Party's Political Committee and had been their candidate for President in 1968. She visited Angela in prison many times.

## **John Abt**

John Abt is a New York lawyer who was hired by Angela's father when she was arrested in New York City.



## **Stokely Carmichael**

Stokely Carmichael was a Black Power leader of the 1960s and 1970s. Angela met him several times in Europe.

## **James Forman**

James Forman was a leader of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). He met Angela at a conference soon after she arrived in San Diego.

## **Michael Tigar**

Michael was another one of the lawyers hired for the pre-trial work in Angela's case. He taught at the UCLA law school, which is how Angela knew him.

## **Dennis Roberts**

Dennis Roberts was also one of the lawyers hired to handle the pre-trial work for Angela. He was a friend and colleague of Michael Tigar.

## **Sheldon Otis**

Sheldon Otis was a well known trial lawyer from Detroit, who was also a member of Angela's legal team.

## **Howard Moore**

Howard Moore was an Atlanta attorney who handled civil rights cases in the south. He was the lawyer who handled the major burden for Angela's defense.

## **George Jackson, John Clutchette, Fleeta Drumgo**

George Jackson, John Clutchette, and Fleeta Drumgo were the Soledad three prisoners known as the Soledad Brothers.



## Objects/Places

### Echo Park

Echo Park is an area of Los Angeles, California, where Angela Davis hid out with Helen. It is where the book opens.

### West Adams

West Adams is a black area of Los Angeles where there was a hideout house used by Angela.

### Chicago

Chicago is the home of David Poindexter and a place where Angela hid.

### New York City

New York City is where Angela and David Poindexter are arrested by the FBI. Angela is taken to the New York Women's House of Detention in Greenwich Village.

### Birmingham

Angela was born in Birmingham, Alabama. The area of the city where their Center Street house is was known as Dynamite Hill, since there were so many racially motivated bombings in the area.

### Marengo County

Marengo County is where the family farm is located and where Angela's paternal grandparents lived.

### Waltham, Massachusetts

Waltham is the location of Brandeis University where Angela had a full scholarship.

### Frankfurt, Germany

Frankfurt, Germany is where Angela attended graduate school.

## **Berlin**

Berlin at the time of Angela's visit was divided into East Berlin and West Berlin.

## **San Diego**

San Diego is where Angela went when she returned from Germany, planning on finishing her graduate work there.

## **Santa Clara County**

Santa Clara County is where Angela's trial was moved to.



# Themes

## Anger

An undertone of anger is picked up throughout the book. There is the anger of blacks against the repression and mistreatment they have experienced at the hands of whites. This is evident in Angela when she is a child in Birmingham. Her family was the first black family in a white neighborhood. Since they stayed on their own side of the street, they didn't have any problems. When a black family moved on the other side of Center Street, the house was dynamited. Angela notices the differences in the schools for the whites and the blacks.

The anger at their mistreatment is felt in the prison systems. There are many instances where Angela points this out. At one point when they were being moved during an emergency, Angela is cuffed with her hands behind her back, a Chicano woman and another black woman are handcuffed to each other and a white woman is free of any handcuffs. This is evident of the discrimination in the prison system and the difference in treatment according to Angela.

There is also the rage of the black community that is obvious whenever anything happens. Incidents like the death of Martin Luther King Jr. and other events resulted in the breakout of violence. Angela talks of the need for revenge, or to do something, and how various organizations tried to funnel the energy into constructive channels to avert the outbreak of violence. The anger is there from many years of oppression and abuse.

## Commitment

Commitment and the need for commitment are also recurring themes throughout the book. Angela always wanted to be a part of a movement. She had a need to be a part of the movement, whatever the movement was. This was her way of dealing with the anger of repression and abuse.

Angela first became involved with radical elements when she attended high school in New York City. She belonged to Advance and some other organizations that took a proactive view toward various causes. In college, she also felt a need to be involved in the Black Movement and tried to form campus organizations, especially when she was in graduate school. Overseas, as a graduate student, she had contact with various socialist elements.

When Angela heard of the imprisonment of the Black Panthers and the Soledad brothers, she wanted to help. This was the evidence of her commitment to the Black Movement. In many cases, she put her commitment above her own personal needs. She shows up at a rally of her supporters after she is released on bond, in violation of the terms of the bond, because of her commitment to those who supported her and her

cause. The commitment of Angela and other people, like Kendra and Alexander, are a major theme of the book.

## **Desire to Help**

The desire to help others is another theme of the book. This is closely related to the themes of commitment and anger. When Angela hears of somebody who is victimized as a result of frame-ups or repression, she feels a need to help. This was the case with the Black Panthers and the Soledad Brothers. This is why Angela became involved in many causes.

Angela wasn't the only one with this desire to help others. Many people joined the movement or participated in rallies and demonstrations because they felt the need to help others who were victimized. This was true of students attending teach-ins or those who attended Angela's Liberation School classes. They wanted to be a part of something that was helping others. They didn't know how to do things on their own and joining efforts with others gave them a way to express their feelings.

In prison, the women would stick together until the prisoner who needed help was given that help. When Angela obtained some rights, she was angry because it wasn't extended to the other prisoners. This was why her committee bought her cellmate a television set when Angela was allowed to have one. Even when Angela's own trial was taking place, she was still present for the Soledad Brothers until their acquittal.

# Style

## Perspective

The book is written from a first person point of view. This means that the reader sees everything through Angela's eyes and through Angela's perspective. This is a good perspective for a book that is an autobiography because it makes the book that much more powerful.

Angela Davis An Autobiography is the story of Angela Davis as told by Angela Davis. It is a powerful story in that she reveals the reasons behind her choices and how she views various situations. The reader doesn't have someone telling him/her about Angela. The reader has Angela telling him/her about Angela.

Nobody is better qualified to write this book than the author. She is telling her own story in her own words. The fact that the information is coming directly from Angela has a definite impact on the reader, because it is Angela who is telling the reader how she things, and how she feels, and why she reacted the way she did. It is Angela telling the reader what she does and doesn't believe in and why, without anybody else's opinions or views interfering.

## Tone

The tone of the book is straightforward. The author is telling the story in her own words and expressing her own viewpoints. Because of this, the book is not clinically objective. It expresses Angela's views toward various subjects, many of which are controversial. She presents enough facts to explain the situation, but does not go overboard.

Angela states her positions on various issues, like Communism, but doesn't harp on them or try to force them on the reader. She explains her positions and why she made the decisions that she did. The purpose of her book is to tell her story, not to gain converts to her position. In this way she is objective in her book, because she is presenting the facts as she saw them and telling of events as she saw them.

The reader can pick up on the anger in Angela at times when she talks about certain events, although she again doesn't harp on it or make that the issue or use it as an excuse. The anger is there and it leads to violent outbreaks with crowds, which happens several times throughout the book. This is why Angela, Franklin, and others try to defuse the emotions of crowds and divert their energies into constructive endeavors. Even so, the undertone of anger is there.



## Structure

The book has a simple structure, common to many autobiographies. It is divided into six parts or chapters. The first chapter tells of the events that led to Angela becoming a fugitive and going underground. It explains her cross country flight and why it took place, culminating with her arrest in New York City, her imprisonment in New York, and her extradition to California.

Then the second chapter jumps back to her childhood and the following chapters tell her story as she goes through school and travels and becomes involved in the various movements. The last chapter is the chapter of her trial itself and the verdict of Not Guilty from the jury.

Davis chose a good format for the book and it works well. She introduces herself and her cause and situation in the opening chapter, and then she explains how she arrived at the position in the next four chapters. There are some pictures on the title page, but not many. More pictures might have made the situation more personal for the reader but this is not what the author wanted in the book. She wanted the book to be political and not personal and she chose the format and style of writing that made this so.



## Quotes

"But tonight the way seemed strange, full of the unknown perils of being a fugitive. And there was no getting around it - my life was now that of a fugitive, and fugitives are caressed every hour by paranoia. Every strange person I saw might be an agent in disguise, with bloodhounds waiting in the shrubbery for their master's command. Living as a fugitive means resisting hysteria, distinguishing between the creations of a frightened imagination and the real signs that the enemy is near. I had to learn how to elude him, outsmart him. It would be difficult, but not impossible." Part I, p. 5

"I looked at her in disbelief. If they locked me up in a tank for mental patients, their next step might be to declare me insane. Perhaps they would try to say that communism is a psychological illness - something akin to masochism, exhibitionism or sadism." Part I, p. 20

"I not only pressed harder for my own release, but I was becoming increasingly persuaded that something had to be done about this maximum security arrangement camouflaged as a therapeutic cellblock. Regardless of why the women in 4b had been placed there, they were all being horribly damaged. Whatever problems they had initially were not solved, but rather systematically aggravated. I would see the erosion of their will taking place even during the short time I spent there." Part 1, p. 34

"They all explained that they had been driven by necessity to apply for this kind of job. Apparently it was one of the highest-paying jobs in New York that did not require a college education. In a way, these officers were prisoners themselves, and some of them were keenly aware that they were treading ambiguous waters. Like their predecessors, the Black overseers, they were guarding their sisters in exchange for a few bits of bread. And like the overseers, they too would discover that part of the payment for their work was their own oppression." Part 1, p. 43

"What if I tripped while I was talking toward the plane? Their attack reflexes would be set off. And my body would be riddled with bullets. Since this operation was being conducted in secrecy, away from the eyes of the press, there would be no one to contradict them if they said I was trying to escape." Part 1, p. 72

"Though she had grown up in rural Alabama, she had become involved, as a college student, in anti-racists movements. She had worked to free the Scottsboro Boys and there had been whites - some of them Communists - in that struggle. Through her own political work, she had learned that it was possible for white people to walk out of their skin and respond with the integrity of human beings. She tried hard to make her little girl - so full of hared and confusion - see white people not so much as what they were as in terms of their potential. She did not want me to think of the guns hidden in drawers or the weeping black woman who had come screaming to our door for help, but of a future world of harmony and equality. I didn't know what she was talking about." Part 2, pp. 79-80



"And yet I have a very vivid recollection of deciding, very early, that I would never - and I was categorical about this - never harbor or express the desire to be white. This promise that I made to myself did nothing, however, to drive away the wishdreams that filled my head whenever my desires collided with a taboo. So, in order that my daydreams not contradict my principles, I constructed a fantasy in which I would slip on a whiteface and go unceremoniously into the theater or amusement park or wherever I wanted to go. After thoroughly enjoying the activity, I would make a dramatic, grandstand appearance before the white racists and with a sweeping gesture, rip off the white face, laugh wildly and call them all fools." Part 2, p. 84

"This was my first introduction to class differences among my own people. We were the not-so-poor. Until my experiences at school, I believed that everyone else lived the way we did. We always had three good meals a day. I had summer clothes and winter clothes, everyday dresses and a few 'Sunday' dresses. When holes began to wear through the soles of my shoes, although I may have worn them with pasteboard for a short time, we eventually went downtown to select a new pair." Part 2, p. 89

"I discovered two avenues of escape: the early entrance program at Fisk University in Nashville and an experimental program developed by the American Friends Service Committee, through which Black students from the South could attend integrated high schools in the North. I applied for both and, after some months, learned that I had been accepted by both." Part 2, p. 103

"Of course, the most powerful impact the Manifesto had on me - what moved me most - was the vision of a new society, without exploiters and exploited, a society without classes, a society where no one would be permitted to own so much that he could use his possessions to exploit other human beings. After the communist revolution 'we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.'" Part 2, p. 111

"James Baldwin announced that he could not continue his lectures without contradicting his moral conscience and abdicating his political responsibilities. In the meantime, a campus-wide rally was being pulled together, while students roamed the campus, either in a silent daze or else screaming out their fear that the world was about to be consumed in a nuclear holocaust." Part 3, p. 119

"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." Part 3, p. 122

"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." Part 3, p. 131

"In historical time, twenty years is not very long - half the people I saw on the streets, and practically all the adults, had gone through the experience of Hitler. And in West



Germany, unlike the German Democratic Republic, there had been no determined campaign to attack the fascist and racist attitudes which had become so deeply embedded." Part 3, p. 138

"I had thought mine was the perfect dilemma: the struggle at home versus the need to remain in Frankfurt until the completion of my doctorate, for I was certain that Frankfurt was far more conducive to philosophical studies than any other place. But each day it was becoming clearer to me that my ability to accomplish anything was directly dependent on my ability to contribute something concrete to the struggle." Part 3, p. 145

"I was distressed to discover that among some of the Black leaders there was the tendency to completely dismiss Marxism as 'the white mans thing.' It had been clear to me for a long time that in order to achieve its ultimate goals, the Black Liberation struggle would have to become a part of a revolutionary movement, embracing all working people. It was also clear to me that this movement must push in the direction of socialism. And I knew that Black people - Black workers - had an important leadership role to play in the overall fight. Therefore I found it disappointing that the nationalist posture of the Black leaders in London involved a strong resistance to socialism." Part 4, pp. 150-151

"Yet, even if these particular problems had not bothered me, I was ill-prepared to join the Party right then. Still, to become a Communist is to make a lifetime commitment that requires a great deal of serious thinking about whether one has the knowledge, the strength, the stamina and the discipline that a Communist must have. During the first months of 1968 I let joining the Party remain an open question." Part 4, p. 163

"The SNCC representative's presentation before the gathering was as simple as it was opportunistic. SNCC simply could not afford to be associated with Communists. It had been incorrect to permit rankling to play such a 'visible' role in the organization, particularly without consulting the New York office first. He was expelling Franklin, so he insisted, in line with the policy of the national organization, and was further decreeing that the office and the operation should be purged of all traces of communism and Marxism. Silence. Was this going to be a reenactment of the McCarthy purges? Franklin's brother Deacon and I were the only ones who resisted this move at all. And we were a tiny fraction of those present. Obviously, we had left a fatal defect in the organization we had built if a man from the New York office could come in and expel the leading figure from our midst without even a feeble effort at resistance. Or was it that the fear of communism was so powerful that it could engender compromises of principle and concessions of all the things we had fought so hard to attain?" Part 4, p. 185

"There was never a doubt in my mind that my mother and father, in their own gentle way, would stand with me. I knew they would not bend under the terrible pressures to denounce their 'Communist daughter'. At the same time I realized that the more strongly they defended me, the more their own safety would be placed in jeopardy; I worried a great deal about them." Part 4, p. 221



"This was the beginning of the story of George Jackson, John Clutchette and Fleeta Drumgo. There was no evidence that they had killed the guard. But there was evidence that George, John and Fleeta were 'militants'; they had been talking with their fellow captives about the theory and practice of liberation. The prison bureaucracy was going to hold them symbolically responsible for the spontaneous rebellion enacted by the prisoners. They were charged with the murder of the guard. The prison hierarchy wanted to throw them into San Quentin's death chamber and triumphantly parade their gassed bodies before thousands of California prisoners, as examples of what the prison and the State did to those who refused to observe the silence of acceptance." Part 4, p. 253

"My arraignment on the charges of murder, kidnapping and conspiracy was scheduled for that morning. Margaret and John requested a continuance for the arraignment, explaining that the legal team was just in the process of being formed. After the presiding judge of Marin County granted our request, he officially announced that he, as well as all the other judges in the county, had disqualified himself because his relationship to Judge Haley would probably prevent him from presiding fairly over the case. He then handed down a gag order designed to prohibit me, the lawyers, and anyone directly or tangentially connected with the case from making public statements about evidence which might come up during the course of the suit." Part 5, p. 286

"But then it struck me that these men were probably even more dangerous than the ones at the base in New Jersey: they were the same men who had been disarmed and held at bay by Jonathan - by a seventeen-year-old man-child. No doubt their behavior was motivated by a combination of shame and embarrassment and an obsessive yearning for vengeance." Part 5, p. 291

"From the inception of the idea, we saw the book as an instrument through which people could deepen their knowledge of repression, through which people could become acquainted with cases of political prisoners, and could learn what was really happening behind the walls in general. I insisted that the content of the book should not only revolve around my case, but had to relate to other political prisoners as well - George, John, Fleeta, Ruchell and the many incarcerated sisters and brothers throughout the country. One of the central theses of the book would be the need to reevaluate the traditional definition of 'political prisoner,' as a result of the intensification of racism. Aside from the scores of men and women in prison because of their political beliefs and activities, there were many thousands more who had been framed or had received disproportionately long sentences for the sole reason that they were Black or Brown. The book had to provide a voice not only for the political prisoners in the strict sense of the term, but also for those who were victimized in one way or another by the racism of the police-court-prison apparatus." Part 5, pp. 305-306

"George was a symbol of the will of all of us behind bars, and of that strength which oppressed people always seem to be able to pull together. Even when we think the enemy has stripped us of everything, left us bereft even of our souls. The strength that comes out of an almost biological need to feel that we have something to say about the direction of our lives. That need had gnawed at George, behind bars all of his adult life -



and, what was most important, he had known how to give the clearest, most universal expression to that need, and his writings had aroused people all over the world." Part 5, p. 317

"Of course! In his original decision denying me bail, Arnason had emphatically stated that if not for the fact that I was accused of a capital crime, he would be more than willing to set me free on bail. Now there were no capital crimes. Arnason's words were on the record. The argument he had invoked when he rejected our bail motion no longer held water. According to the judge's own argument, I was not 'legally' eligible for bail." Part 5, p. 331

"As the first potential jurors were brought into the courtroom, I thought back on that little mock trial which had unfolded more than a decade ago. I felt that same sense of unreality, the feeling that the same sort of game was being played, the contestants with the dangerously obsolete ideas having an unfair advantage." Part 6, p. 351

"This victory would confirm one of the fundamental elements of my defense: the political character of my involvement in the movement to defend the Soledad Brothers and the strategy of developing mass protests and mass resistance to the persecution of the Brothers." Part 6, p. 358

"The evidence will show, members of the jury, that this indictment provoked widespread concern, concern throughout the world, that I was a victim of political repression. I ask you whether or not it would not be reasonable to infer that the prosecutor is aware that no fair-minded juror would convict me on the basis of such evidence. Therefore, he had said to you that he will present no evidence of my participation in the struggle to free the Soledad Brothers. What he has done is that he has transformed the character of this case." Part 6, p. 363

"The ambivalence I felt was disarming. On the one hand, seeing the letter as evidence, I had the impulse to proclaim once more the utter bankruptcy of the state's case - it was with this kind of evidence that they had kept me in jail for those sixteen months. But on the other hand, I felt depressed at having to see my most intimate feelings hurled out into the public like that through the calculating and cold presentation for the prosecutor. And the unmitigated grief was revived, the grief at Jon's death, the grief at George's death, and the burning anger at their murderers. I couldn't cry, I couldn't scream, I had to sit there at the counsel table, waiting for the next piece of evidence which the prosecutor was going to use to try to convince the jury of my guilt." Part 6, pp. 375-376

"During the judicial ritual preceding the reading of the verdict, I was searching for some explanation of this sudden transformation of the jury's posture. Their faces said 'Conviction.' 'Guilty.' But this was impossible, illogical, absurd. Unless the whole thing had been a grand hoax. Unless they had consciously tried to delude us these last months, and these glacial stares were the reality behind the masks they had finally shed. I wanted to rush over and rescue my mother from the consequences. Born of desperation and incomprehension, these disjointed thoughts hook me so furiously that I

had to strain to hear the clerk as he read the papers Ms. Timothy had turned over the court." Part 6, p. 394



## Topics for Discussion

What event caused Angela to go underground in 1970? Why did she become a fugitive?

Why did Angela's attorneys file a federal lawsuit for discrimination in New York? Who was it against and why?

What are the two layers of prison existence? What is the purpose of each?

Why did Angela decide to major in French when she was in college? What factors influenced her decision?

What was Angela's association with the Black Panthers? How did it come about?

Who were the Soledad Brothers and what was their significance to Angela's life?

Why did Angela claim to be a political prisoner?

What was the position of the prosecution during Angela's trial?