

# Angela Y. Davis Papers at Harvard University



On February 13, 2018, the Schlesinger Library at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University, with support from the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at Harvard University which supports multidisciplinary research on the history and culture of people of African descent and provides a forum for collaboration and the ongoing exchange of ideas and works to stimulate scholarly engagement in African and African American Studies both at Harvard and beyond, and to increase public awareness and understanding of this vital field of study through both established and emerging channels of inquiry in the humanities and the social sciences

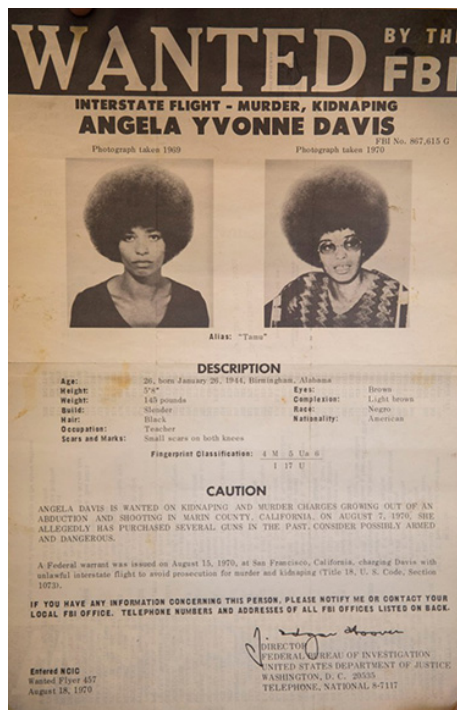
announced its acquisition of the papers of the political activist and pioneering feminist thinker Dr. Angela Y. Davis.

Davis's political activism began in childhood in Birmingham, Alabama, and continued through her high school years in New York. As an undergraduate at Brandeis University, she began studying with the philosopher and social theorist Herbert Marcuse, who also supervised her graduate work at the University of California, San Diego. A cosmopolitan intellectual, Davis studied at the Sorbonne, Goethe University Frankfurt, as well as Humboldt University in East Berlin. In 1969, at the very beginning of her teaching career, she came to national attention when she was removed from her assistant professorship in the philosophy department at UCLA as a result of her social activism and her membership in the Communist Party USA.

Davis continued her career as a thinker and educator in the University of California system. She is the author of many books, including *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* (1974), a key text of the Black radical tradition; and *Women, Race, and Class* (1983), a pioneering work in intersectional and Marxist feminisms. The collection acquired by the Schlesinger includes early drafts of these works edited by Davis's longtime friend Toni Morrison. Davis's recent scholarship has included books on Black feminism and the blues tradition, a new edition of the *Narrative of Frederick Douglass*, and essay collections on freedom struggles from Ferguson to Cuba to Palestine. Now a professor emerita in the departments of history of consciousness and feminist studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Davis continues to lecture nationally and globally as an advocate of prison abolition and racial justice.

Angela Y. Davis is one of the foremost figures in the struggle for human rights and against racial discrimination in the United States, and a foundational thinker in African American feminism. Her long-standing commitment to prisoners' rights dates to her involvement in the campaign to free three California inmates known as the Soledad Brothers, who were accused of killing a prison guard during a riot at the Soledad Prison in Soledad, California. Davis, just 26 years old, emerged as a leader of the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee, which galvanized the American left, including such disparate figures as James Baldwin, Jane Fonda, Jessica Mitford, and Jean Genet. Her activism on the Soledad Brothers' behalf led to her own arrest and imprisonment. In 1970, she was placed on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted List on false charges, and was the subject of an intense police search that drove her underground and culminated in one of the most famous trials in recent U.S. history. During her 16-month incarceration, a massive international "Free Angela" campaign was organized, leading to her acquittal in 1972.

Archivists are processing the collection, which will be available for research by 2020. The archive of the Radcliffe Schlesinger Library has acquired 151 boxes of Davis' documents, letters, papers and photos. The collection reflects 50 years of her work as an activist and scholar.



Widely regarded as the finest archival collection for research on the history of women in the United States, the Schlesinger Library has received more than 150 cartons of unique and rare material from Davis, including correspondence, photographs, unpublished speeches, teaching materials, organizational records, and audio from the radio show "Angela Speaks." Davis's incarceration, trial, and the global "Free Angela" campaign are especially well documented by materials that include personal writings, transcripts, letters received in prison, and banners used in "Free Angela" marches around the world.

The collection also includes some material Davis said she had entirely forgotten, like a 120-page diary that she seemingly kept during her trial. Much of her personal correspondence was reportedly destroyed by a house fire and the fact that so many of her papers were seized by the FBI at the time of the trial.