

Angela Davis: The Dream Behind Bars (WSU 28th Annual MLK Community Celebration)

RAYMOND HERRERA: Good evening and welcome to the 28th annual Martin Luther King community celebration at Washington State University. I am Raymond Herrera, Assistant Dean of the graduate school and director of our McNair Achievement Program. I'm honored to serve as your emcee this evening. To begin our program please direct your attention to God's Harmony Gospel Choir.

GOD'S HARMONY GOSPEL CHOIR: (SINGING) Ain't gonna let nobody. Turn me 'round. Turn me 'round. Turn me 'round. Ain't gonna let nobody Turn me 'round. I'm gonna keep on walkin'. Keep on talkin'. Marching up to freedom land.

Ain't gonna let [INAUDIBLE] hatred. Turn me 'round. Turn me 'round. Turn me 'round. Ain't gonna let [INAUDIBLE] hatred. Turn me 'round. I'm gonna keep on walkin'. Keep on talkin'. Marching up to freedom land.

Ain't gonna let segregation. Turn me 'round. Turn me 'round. Turn me 'round. Ain't gonna let segregation. Turn me 'round. I'm gonna keep on walkin'. Keep on talkin'. Marching up to freedom land.

Ain't gonna let no policeman. Turn me 'round. Turn me 'round. Turn me 'round. Ain't gonna let no policeman. Turn me 'round. I'm gonna keep on walkin'. Keep on talkin'. Marching up to freedom land.

Ain't gonna let Alabama. Turn me 'round. Turn me 'round. Turn me 'round. Ain't gonna let Mississippi. Turn me 'round. I'm gonna keep on walkin'. Keep on talkin'. Marching up to freedom land.

Ain't gonna let New York City. Turn me 'round. Turn me 'round. Turn me 'round. Ain't gonna let no person. Turn me 'round. I'm gonna keep on walkin'. Keep on talkin'. Marching up to freedom land.

Ain't gonna let no building. Turn me 'round. Turn me 'round. Turn me 'round. Ain't gonna let no building. Turn me 'round. I'm gonna keep on walkin'. Keep on talkin'. Marching up to freedom land.

Ain't gonna let nobody. Turn me 'round. Turn me 'round. Turn me 'round. Ain't gonna let nobody. Turn me 'round. I'm gonna keep on walkin'. Keep on talkin'. Marching up to freedom land.

[APPLAUSE]

God has not given us the spirit of fear. But the Lord has given us-- Power.

God has not given us the spirit of fear. But the Lord has given us-- Power.

Lord has not given us the spirit of fear. But the Lord has given us-- Power.

God has not given us the spirit of fear. But the Lord has given us-- Power.

Power and Love. His joy and peace. His happiness. He has given us a sound mind.

Power and Love. His joy and peace. His happiness. He has given us a sound mind.

God has not given us the spirit of fear. But the Lord has given us-- Power.

God has not given us the spirit of fear. But the Lord has given us-- Power.

Power and Love. His joy and peace. His happiness. He has given us a sound mind.

Power and Love. His joy and peace. His happiness. He has given us a sound mind.

Never shall I be afraid. Never shall I be afraid.

Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift.

Lay your hands on me. Stir up the gift. Lay your hands on me. Stir up the gift.

Touch me Lord. Stir up the gift. Come on. Touch me Lord. Stir up the gift.

Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift.

Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift.

Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift.

Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift. Stir up the gift.

Never should I be Never should I be Never should I be Afraid. Stir up the gift.

[APPLAUSE]

**RAYMOND
HERRERA:**

Thank you, God's Harmony. Beautiful. We have a special evening planned for you featuring our special guest, Professor Angela Davis.

[APPLAUSE]

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the 1965 voting rights campaign in Selma, Alabama. In January of that year, Dr. King joined local activists who had spent years building a movement. The activists endured jail, beatings, and even death. But the movement persevered, and successfully pushed for the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act. In recognition of this and many other key events during that period we gather this evening to celebrate Dr. King and the many others who struggled with him for a better America.

At this time I would like to Mr. Jeff Guillory, director of Diversity Education and Diversity Programs here at WSU for a few words of welcome. Mr. Guillory.

[APPLAUSE]

JEFF GUILLORY: Well, where do I begin? This is just a fantastic history and story. I think I'll begin at the beginning. Professor Davis was born in Birmingham, Alabama. The Birmingham. Yes. The Birmingham, Alabama. Her family lived on a place called Dynamite Hill. It's a neighborhood which was marred by racial conflict. Dr. Davis was occasionally able to spend time on her uncle's farm and with friends in New York city.

Her brother Ben Davis played defensive back for the Cleveland Browns and Detroit Lions in the late 1960s and 1970s. And by the way I played against him in those days, but I digress. Dr. Davis also has another brother, Reginald Davis, and a sister Fania-- and I hope I pronounced that correctly, Davis Jordan. Dr. Davis attended Carrie A. Tuggle School, a black elementary school, segregated school. Later she attended Parker Annex, a middle school branch of Parker high school in Birmingham.

And during this time Dr. Davis' mother was a national officer and leading organizer of the Southern Negro Congress, an organization heavily influenced by the communist party. Consequently, Dr. Davis grew up surrounded by communists organizers and thinkers who significantly influenced her intellectual development growing up. By her junior year, she had applied to and was accepted by an American Friends Service Committee program that placed

lack students from the South into integrated schools in the North.

She chose Elizabeth Irwin High School in Greenwich Village, New York City. And there she was introduced to a socialism and communism and was recruited by a communist youth group, Advance. She also met children of some of the leaders of the Communist Party USA, including her lifelong friend Bettina Aptheker. Hopefully I pronounced that one correctly as well.

Dr. Davis is an American political activist, scholar, and author. She emerged on the scene as a prominent counterculture activist and radical in the 1960s as the leader of the Communist Party USA. And had close relations with the Black Panther Party through her involvement in the civil rights movement, although she was never a party member.

Her interest included prisoner rights. She founded Critical Resistance, an organization working to abolish the prisoner industrial complex. She is a retired professor with the History of Consciousness Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and a former director of the university's Feminine Studies Department. Her research interests are feminism, African-American studies, critical theory, Marxism, popular music, social consciousness, and the philosophy and history of punishment and prisons.

Her membership in the communist party led to Ronald Reagan's request in 1969 to have her barred from teaching at any university in the state of California. And she was twice a candidate for vice-president of the Communist Party USA ticket during the 1980s. Ladies and gentlemen. I present to you Dr. Angela Davis.

[APPLAUSE]

ANGELA DAVIS: Good evening, everyone. We inadvertently skipped a very important part of the program, which you will see the distinguished service awards winners. So I would like to present to you, Geneta Harris and Marina Marvin.

[APPLAUSE]

And I will return to the stage after they've completed the awards.

GENETA HARRIS: Yeah. We're going to present the winners. We're not the winners.

MARINA MARVIN: It's not everyday that Angela Davis says your name Wow.

GENETA HARRIS: Exactly.

MARINA MARVIN: Wow. OK. Good evening. I am Rina Martin and this is Geneta Harris. And it is our pleasure to announce the winners of the 2015 MLK Distinguished Service Awards. When your name is called please come to the stage.

GENETA HARRIS: In the faculty category the award goes to Dr. Faith Lutze.

[APPLAUSE]

Associate professor in the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology. Lutze is a founding member of the Minorities and Women section of the Service Award for promoting diversity and scholarship, teaching and criminal justice. She has produced numerous publications relating to improving the criminal justice system, domestic violence, and human trafficking.

She helped start the Prison Debate Project, which allowed WSU students to collaborate on research with inmates at the Coyote Ridge Correction Center in Connell, Washington. She is widely-known for her community service with groups such as the Whitman County League of Women Voters, WSU's McNair Achievement Program, and the Green Dot Program.

Nominator Sisouvanh Keopanapay, academic coordinator for criminal justice, said Lutze always strives to make other people feeling included. She is one of the people who helped me find my voice and build my confidence in this intimidating world of higher education.

Congratulations Professor Lutze.

[APPLAUSE]

MARINA MARVIN: In the staff category, the award goes to Mariella Lora.

[APPLAUSE]

Enrollment counselor at WSU Tri-Cities, Laura helps students reach their dreams of earning a degree at WSU. According to a nominator Jordyn Wright, she is an advocate for all students, but has a keen interest in working with underrepresented students. She recently started an HB1079 coalition on the Tri-Cities campus, a group that helps undocumented students get into

and succeed in college.

And she works with WSU Tri-Cities to promote a more inclusive campus climate. She also volunteered with programs such as Cougs in the Community and the WSU Tri-Cities 25th Anniversary Committee. Off campus, Lora recently took a mission trip to Bolivia where she helped build a church and volunteered at an orphanage. Summarizing her efforts her nominator wrote, her dedication to student success combined with her personal commitment to serving her campus, local, and world communities exemplified the values of the MLK Service Award. Congratulations Ms. Mariella Lora.

[APPLAUSE]

GENETA HARRIS: In the student category, the award goes to Shain Wright. A Human Development and Public Affairs major at WSU Vancouver. Serving first as a volunteer, Shain now works on campus as a team leader in the Student Diversity Center. Wright has shown leadership in many ways by providing trans-ally training staff, and being the lead organizer for V-day, and co-chairing a team of over 100 students to promote Gender Neutral Bathrooms Week.

According to nominator Bola Majekobaje, advisor to the chancellor for Diversity and Community Engagement, the campaign transformed over half the restrooms on campus to be gender inclusive. Shain was invited to present on the campaign at the Power of One Conference in Salt Lake City. The nominator reported, the workshop was excellent and it was great to observe students from other colleges being inspired to promote gender diversity in their own campuses.

Wright also volunteers for a Triple Point, an organization that promotes a safe place for LGBTQA youth in Southwestern Washington. Congratulations Shain Wright.

[APPLAUSE]

MARINA MARVIN: In the community member category, the award goes to Dr. Linda Paul.

[APPLAUSE]

In May of 2013, Paul retired after 26 years of teaching law courses and serving as coordinator of Business Law for WSU's Carson College of Business. She has practiced law in Moscow,

Idaho and taught law at the university of Idaho for many years. Dr Paul's promotion of social justice started as early as the 1970s when she was appointed by Oregon's governor to the first Oregon Women's Commission.

She is a long time member of the Latah County Human Rights Task Force and helped create Moscow's human rights commission. She has previously served as the chairwoman of the Idaho State Bar Diversity Section and continues serving as a frequent presenter and a member of the governing council. She is also co-founder of the Love the Law program created to encourage diverse high school and college students to consider careers in law.

Nominator Nicholas Lovrich, WSU Regents Professor Emeritus, wrote, in her teaching she has touched the lives of many students who have come to understand and be influenced by the vision of a more equitable and just society. Congratulations Dr. Linda Paul.

[APPLAUSE]

GENETA HARRIS: In the WSU organization category, the award goes to the Nigerian Students Organization.

[APPLAUSE]

The mission of the Nigerians Student Organization is to promote awareness about the rich culture and heritage of the Nigerian culture. The group does this in many ways including preparing and sharing authentic Nigerian cuisine, volunteering at events such as Palouse Walk to End Alzheimer's, helping the elderly at Avalon Care Center, and donating books written by influential African writers to Neill Public Library. Congratulations Nigerian Student Organization.

[APPLAUSE]

MARINA MARVIN: And now our last award of the evening, In the faculty group category, the winner is the Team Mentoring Program.

[APPLAUSE]

This program was created in 2007 by the Office of Multicultural Student Services in partnership with the Colleges of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences, Arts and Sciences, Engineering, Architecture, and Veterinary Medicine. The program's purpose is to

increase participation, persistence, achievement, and graduation of underrepresented minority students and women in the sciences, technology, engineering, math, and pre-health disciplines.

Studies have shown that students who participate in the program graduate at a much higher rate than those who do not participate. Faculty members include Bill Davis, Asaph Cousins, Louis Scudiero, Phil Mixer, Mary Sanchez-Lanier, Giuliana Noratto, Nehal Abu-Lail, David Field, Judith McDonald, Bob Olsen, John Schneider, Alex Prera, and Kirk Reinkens. congratulations Team Mentoring Program.

**RAYMOND
HERRERA:**

Social issues related to criminal justice persecution and incarceration are some of the most pressing civil rights issues of our time. Thus, this year's theme for the WSU MLK Program is, The Dream Behind Bars. To share her thoughts, experiences, and wisdom on this theme, we're honored to host Professor Angela Davis. Dr. Davis is known internationally for her ongoing work to combat all forms of oppression in the U.S. And abroad.

Over the years she has been active as a student, teacher, writer, scholar and activist organizer. She is a living witness to the historical struggles of the contemporary era. Professor Davis' long standing commitment to prisoners' rights dates back to her involvement in the campaign to free the Soledad Brothers, which led to her own arrest and imprisonment. Today she remains an advocate of prison abolition and has developed a powerful critique of racism in the criminal justice system.

She is a founding member of Critical Resistance, a national organization dedicated to dismantling of the prison industrial complex. Internationally, she is affiliated with Sisters Inside, an abolitionist organization based in Queensland, Australia that works in solidarity with women in prison. She is the author of many books including, *Women, Race and Class, Are Prisons Obsolete? The Meaning of Freedom*, among others. Her work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies.

She was a recent and outspoken advocate and participant in the 2011 Occupy protests. And this month published an essay in the special of this edition of Essence magazine on the Black Lives Matters Protest. Dr Angela Davis is Professor Emeritus at the Department of Feminist Studies and History of Consciousness at the University of California, Santa Cruz. WSU community, please, give a warm welcome to Professor Angela Davis.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

ANGELA DAVIS: So good evening once again. It seems I had two introductions. Let me say that I am deeply honored to participate in this 2015 convocation, which pays tribute to the life, work, and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King. I would like to thank the choir for the very inspiring music. And I'm especially happy to have been welcomed here by a member of the Nez Perce Tribe or the Niimiipuu. Because I think we need to remind ourselves that we have gathered here this evening on Nez Perce land. And I honor the people.

[APPLAUSE]

I honor the people on whose ancestral homeland Washington State University was created. As we commit ourselves to remember Dr. King and the freedom struggles with which he was associated, let us also express solidarity with First Nations peoples and their struggles for sovereignty.

[APPLAUSE]

I've visited this campus almost exactly 31 years ago when I spoke about my then second--third book, *Women, Race and Class*. I don't claim to have such a perfect memory, but I did remember being here many, many years ago. And the archives of the Evergreen Daily provided me with the details. Before I arrived here in this venue I had the opportunity to meet quite a few people on this campus.

First of all, there was a reception at the president's house. And I thank Mrs. Floyd for hosting. I understand that the president is lobbying for a medical school. Am I right? At this moment. Also, I met with a very large group of students and answered many, many questions. And I hope the remaining questions that I did not have time to answer, they were all written questions, and the remaining set of questions had to do with the criminal justice system.

But before I move on to the content of my talk, let me thank the MLK Committee on this campus, which is chaired by Professor Mark Robinson for having--

[APPLAUSE]

--for having invited me to deliver the keynote address this evening. I had the opportunity to have an extended conversation with him and Donna Arnold largely because it takes a long time to get here from the Spokane airport. And I must confess that due to a failure of communication on the part of the speaker's bureau, who contacted me, and it's generally a very good speaker's bureau, it's called Speak Out and does a lot of good progressive work.

But they failed to tell me what the title of my lecture was. So I only learned of this title, the Dream Behind Bars a short time ago, perhaps about an hour ago. But I think that what I prepared is relevant to an understanding of why we need to focus our attention on the more than 2 and 1/2 men, women, and trans persons in our country's jails, state prisons, federal prisons, jails in Indian country, immigrant detention facilities, and military prisons including Guantanamo, which we have to further press Obama to shut down before the end of his term.

[APPLAUSE]

And everyone is aware of the fact that the events of the last six months or so, the police killings of Michael Brown, and Eric Garner, and the protests that have taken place all over the country and other parts of the world. Because of these events there is a very special contexts this year for our observance of MLK day. There's also another special context, the release of Ava DuVernay's film, *Selma*.

And is *Selma* playing in Pullman? OK. That's good. So I assume many of you have seen the film. Am I right? Well, if you haven't seen it, you should see it as soon as possible. It offers us the opportunity to seriously reflect on the history of black freedom movements and to clearly perceive the connections with struggles that continue today. Of course, there's been a great deal of controversy over the depiction of certain characters in the film. A certain character I would say, but it's a film. It's not a documentary.

And I have to admit, I didn't think it was so far off particularly based on the attitudes toward LBJ at the time. But let me say what I find so important about this film is that it portrays Martin Luther King as a human being, as a human being with all of his monumental strengths, but with his weaknesses as well. And perhaps even more important than the portrayal of the man who is considered to be the major figure of the black freedom movement of the mid-20th century.

Perhaps even more important than that is the way it revealed the heroism of ordinary people, of everyday people. And the way we begin to learn-- because many people are not aware of this that women played absolutely pivotal roles in the freedom movement. And of course some of those women are named. There's Amelia Boynton, who was a local movement leader who was played by the actor Lorraine Toussain.

And there is Annie Lee Cooper whose efforts to register to vote helped inspire the movement there. And that is certainly the scene-- one of the opening scenes during which she attempts to register to vote and is asked to repeat the preamble to the constitution. And then to name, and then to say how many judges, county judges there were, and then to name them.

And of course she had all of the answers until she was asked to name-- what was it like 57-- something like that judges. And that struck-- that created a sense of familiarity. Yes. I knew of many cases where people were asked to recite-- paragraph five clause two of the Alabama constitution. I also appreciated the references, the many references to the four young black girls who were killed in October of 1963 in the 16th street baptist church.

And I can say that for those of you who haven't seen the film I won't reveal what actually happens, but one of the most dramatic moments in the film involves these girls. And I've been asking people to please remember their names. Yes. They were four young black girls. And Spike Lee did a wonderful film for little girls, but I think we should remember their names, Carole Robertson. I remember their names because Carole was the youngest sister of one of my best friends and a very good friend of my younger sister.

I remember Carole Robertson. I remember Cynthia Wesley, who lived next door to us. And Denise McNair whom my mother taught as a student and Addie Mae Collins. So many people are quite disturbed that the film is only up for two Oscars, best picture Oscar and best song. And the song is amazing. Has everybody heard John Legend and Common's rendition of *Glory*?

It has already won a Golden Globe award and it's up for a Grammy. And is also up for an Oscar. The movement is a rhythm to us. Freedom is like a religion to us. Justice is juxtaposition in us. One son died. His spirit is revisiting us, true and living, living in us, resistance in us. That's why Rosa sat on the bus. That's why we walk through Ferguson with our hands up.

[APPLAUSE]

A powerful song that moves across time and makes the connections between those struggles one of half century ago, 50 years ago and struggles that are unfolding today. Just as we watch *Selma* with eyes that are conditioned by issues and struggle today, we should reflect on Dr King's legacies in ways that help us to further understand what is required of us as we continue to participate and support and encourage struggles for freedom. Every year around this time I'd like to return to my favorite text of Dr. Martin Luther King, which is called Trumpet of Conscience.

It's a collection of five talks that were broadcast in November and December of 1967. That is some six months or so before he was assassinated by the Canadian Broadcasting Company. Revisiting that text helps me to recall the progression of his thoughts and specifically what he was thinking about around the time he was taken away from us. And this year I return very specifically to the lecture on youth and social action because I thought it might offer me some insight into the surge of activism over the last period that has been produced by the involvement of young people.

And also it gives you a different sense of who Dr. King was. Most people are familiar with the I Have a Dream speech. There's far more to Dr. Martin Luther King than the dream that he had. Besides all of us have a dream. Don't we? But in any event he was speaking about young people during that period. And he says that it is ironic that today so many educators and sociologists are seeking methods to instill middle class values in negro youths as the ideal in social development.

Middle class values. Bourgeoisie values. It was precisely he says, when young Negroes threw off their middle class values that they made an historic social contribution. They abandoned those values when they put careers and wealth, and wealth in a secondary role. When they cheerfully became jailbirds and trouble makers. When they took off their Brooks Brothers attire and put on overalls to work in the isolated rural South, they challenged and inspired white youth to emulate them.

Many left school he said, not to abandon learning, but to seek it in more direct ways. They were he said, constructive school dropouts. A variety that strengthen the society and themselves. And so not as to encourage people to leave school, you should recognize that many of them also return and finished their education and got their degrees. But the point that he was making at that time was that this vast experiment, and he's referring in part to freedom

summer of 1964 and also to the movements of '65. He said that their work preceded the conception of the Peace Corps.

And it is safe to say that their work was the inspiration for its organization on an international scale. And so I want to share one other passage with you because it allows us to understand the capaciousness of Dr. King's thought. And the fact that he was calling for what he called a world consciousness. He was calling for people in the US To emerge from the slumber induced by American exceptionalism and American provincialism and recognize that we are citizens of the world. And we don't need papers.

[APPLAUSE]

The consciousness of an awakened activists he said cannot be satisfied with a focus on local problems if only because he sees that local problems are all interconnected with world problems. The young men who are beginning to see that they must refuse to leave their country in order to fight and kill others. It's also interesting that there is another picture up-- another film up for best picture award, *American Sniper*. The young man who are beginning to see that they must refuse to leave their country in order to fight and kill others might decide to leave their country at least for a while in order to share their lives with others.

There is as yet not even an outline in existence of what structure this growing world consciousness might find for itself. But he points out, a dozen years ago there was not even an outline for the negro civil rights movement in its first phase. He concludes by saying, the spirit is awake now. Structures will follow. And this is in a sense very prescient because Dr. King could not have imagined the extent to which Facebook and Twitter would connect us with the rest of the world.

The spirit is awake now. Structures will follow if we keep our ears open to the spirit. Perhaps the structural forms will emerge from other countries propelled by another experience of the shaping of history. So he was inviting us to be humble and to recognize that the US does not always produce the best knowledge in the world. It does not always have the best perspectives in the world.

As a matter of fact, if we recognize the extent to which movements especially black movements for freedom have relied on international solidarity-- could never have achieved the successes they achieved without the involvement of people all over the world. Then perhaps

we should begin to recognise our responsibilities to produce solidarity's to assist our sisters and brothers in struggle in other places.

I can say that I would not be standing here today had not it been for global solidarity movements. I faced at one point the death chamber. I was on the-- some of you may know that I was on the FBI's 10 most wanted list. Yeah. And had not it been for movements that emerged all over the world, I doubt whether I would be standing here today regardless of the fact that I was innocent of the charges filed against me.

[APPLAUSE]

But I want to move on and invoke briefly the surge in activism we have been experiencing over the last period, Ferguson, Missouri, New York, all over the country, indeed, and other parts of the world. In September, I believe it was, I had the opportunity to visit a rather small city in Italy, Savona, which is close to Genoa. And I was invited to speak about the Cuban Five. Because at that point, three members of the Cuban Five were still behind bars.

And of course, you know Obama's trying to do some good things during the last two years. So I definitely appreciate of the fact that there is this effort to normalize diplomatic relationships with Cuba and hopefully also economic relations. And so in the context of this, that of the remaining three Cuban Five have been released. But what I went to Savona to talk about the Cuban Five, everybody was talking about Ferguson.

And I didn't expect that. This is a small town in this sort of rural area of Italy. And people wanted to know what was happening in Ferguson. And then I was in Oxford to observe the 50th anniversary of Malcolm X's appearance in the Oxford Union, and there were people marching in the aftermath of the grand jury, the lack of a grand jury indictment around the policeman who killed Michael Brown.

And then around the same time we heard about the results of the grand jury case in connection with Eric Garner. And I was really surprised. I mean, I shouldn't be because I consider myself an internationalist virtually all my life. But I recognize how little we do in this country in relation to events that are unfolding elsewhere. The anti-apartheid movement here was very important during the '90s leading up to the dismantling of the apartheid government in South Africa, but that was kind of exceptional.

And what also surprised me was that people in other countries were saying, hands up, don't

shoot. Even in countries where they don't necessarily speak English. Because I had the opportunity to travel to Istanbul about two weeks ago. And people knew about the slogans, and no justice, no peace, no racist police. And they were saying, I can't breathe, as well. And they were saying, black lives matter.

Now, many have characterize the protests that have emerged over the last period as spontaneous. And I want to talk about why they weren't spontaneous. Here in this country we often encouraged not to have a long view of history. Not even have a short view of history. As a matter of fact, not even to remember what isn't on the front page, either in the newspapers, on television, or in social media. And those who argue that these were spontaneous protests act as if all of this is occurred with out the work of organizers and activists.

And let me say nothing happens by itself. That is one of the messages of the film *Selma*. But we can ask, why now? And that is a valid question. A very important question. Why are we witnessing these protests right now at this particular moment? And I would suggest that we are experiencing a special conjuncture, a coming together of a number of conditions. No. First of all, this is the second term of the first black president.

And we are all aware of the proclamation of a kind of post racial condition that was assumed to be a natural consequence of the election of the first black president. I wonder how many more? We always say the first black president as if it's the beginning of a long line of black presidents.

[APPLAUSE]

But I always like to point out that the election of Barack Obama was world historical. It was absolutely important even for those of us who were critical, very critical of the Obama administration.

I often like to point out that it's possible to be supportive and extremely critical at the same time.

[APPLAUSE]

But the importance of that election was not so much the individual, Barack Obama, it was the movement that enabled his election. It was the fact that large numbers of people, vast

numbers of young people, largely young people refuse, refuse to accept that it was impossible to elect someone like Barack Obama. Not only someone who was black, but someone who identified with the black freedom struggle. And the very fact that he was elected was an indication that movements can create the impossible. The impossible.

And I can tell you when I was facing murder, kidnapping, and conspiracy, nobody believed. Even those, especially those who knew that I was not guilty. But nobody believed that it was going to be possible to effectively stand up to the three most powerful figures in this country. And that was Richard Nixon, president. Ronald Reagan, governor. J Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI. So no one believed that we could be successful in our struggle because they were too powerful.

But we won. We achieved the impossible through organizing a movement that had global dimensions.

[APPLAUSE]

And also let's remember, it was six years ago, so some of you were really young. But I guess everybody here, except the very young ones have this vague memory of what it felt like when Obama was first elected. You know many people thought it was the beginning of a new era. Many people thought that the messiah had arrived. And that wasn't exactly true, but particularly in the immediate aftermath of his election there were people celebrating everywhere in the world. Not only everywhere in this country, but all over the planet.

And let's remember that. Let's remember that moment of global euphoria because we have a sense of being connected with people everywhere. And there was a sense of promise at that moment, which we should not forget because it can inspire us to continue to work to achieve the impossible. The Occupy mobilizations in this country, and of course the movements that preceded Occupy, the struggles in Tahrir Square, Spain, all over Europe, and Africa, and Asia, and Latin America. There was this sense that finally we had figured out how to come together to challenge capitalism.

You remember we first started talking the 1% and the 99%, and some of you may have recently read the report that indicates that by next year, by 2016 the 1% will control more wealth than the rest of us. 1% will control more than 50% of the wealth of the entire planet, and that is obscene. Isn't that obscene?

[APPLAUSE]

And Occupy taught us that there might be different ways of organizing movements that we might not always have to depend on the older paradigms. That we could create movements that did not necessarily have leaders who replace their movement in terms of the focus of attention. So instead of thinking about an individual, we have to think about masses of people. Occupy also taught us-- the encampments taught us that we have to figure out how to address a whole range of issues without automatically capitulating to the impulse to call the police.

And so it began to explore different forms of justice in the cases of harm that might have been done by one person against another. Or even in the case of sexual assaults that happened in some of the encampments. People had to figure out how to address these issues without capitulating to the state. And that was really important. Occupy also made it possible for us to engage in public critiques of capitalism, open public critiques of capitalism in the United States, perhaps for the first time since the 1930s when the Communist Party was organizing.

And I have too much more to say, so little time to say it in. So let me just enumerate some of the other enabling conditions. There were a whole number of cases, the Oscar Grant case, which some of you may be familiar with. And the film *Fruitvale Station* depicts his time before he was killed. And then of course there was the Trayvon Martin case, which was known all over the world. And the failure to convict George Zimmerman who I understand was just arrested again for domestic violence.

See, there's a connection. And maybe we'll talk about that connection before the end of my talk today. But also in response to these cases and the case of Troy Davis, the largest anti-death penalty mobilization developed around the case of Troy Davis. It did not unfortunately save him from the death chamber, but people were mobilized all over the country and new youth formations began to emerge. The dream defenders in Florida for example, and in Chicago, in New York, in a number of urban areas you have witnessed the development of very radical youth organizations.

And then the emergence of a youth movement over time, over the last perhaps 15 or 20 years that focuses on the prison industrial complex. And this is a movement that not only challenges over-incarceration, but also the extent to which incarceration has become a profitable industry. And it challenges the globalization of the prison industry and the security industry both in terms

of private prisons and in terms of punishment or security services, in general.

And in terms of the United States providing the global model for incarceration as an alternative. Imprisonment as an alternative to jobs, to health care, to education, and a whole range of services that human beings need to survive. Look at the global South where you see the proliferation of prisons, and at the same time the deterioration of education, and a deterioration of accessible health care.

What we have witnessed in terms of the Ebola epidemic should not have happened in that way. And as a matter of fact has been exaggerated precisely because of the policies of structural adjustment that have led to a shift of capital away from human services to more profitable sectors of the economy. Precisely in order to satisfy the demands of world financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF.

[APPLAUSE]

And so these young activists understand that structural racism is incorporated into systems of over-incarceration. They recognize that black people are vastly disproportionately represented among incarcerated populations as are Latino communities. And that native people are per capita more incarcerated. That is to say they have the highest rate of incarceration than any other group of people. And that trans people of color, who are the most over-criminalized group of people in this country especially black trans women who cannot easily pass.

So the point that I'm making is that these young people have developed a very sophisticated political consciousness that recognizes the role that racist police departments play in the systematic criminalization of people of color.

[APPLAUSE]

They also understand the need to be inclusive in our analyses and to realize that we cannot abstractly focus on race without considering how class and gender figure in. And how anti-racists struggles require us to resist homophobia and transphobia. And how the over-incarceration of our communities has been helped along by the use of incarceration as a strategy against physically and intellectually disabled people.

[APPLAUSE]

Now, so why have we been seeing these mobilizations recently? In large part because people

like that have been engaged in grassroots on the ground organizing for a long time. And I think that it is so important to recognize the role of the organizer. Dr. King could have never emerged as the spokesperson for that movement had not there been organizers to create the movement. He didn't do-- I mean, I of course respect Dr. King a great deal, but he didn't do the most important work, he didn't do the work that made the movement, he simply gave voice to those people who were organized.

And I have to say that it was largely youth and largely women.

[APPLAUSE]

And it was sometimes young men and women and then older women. I mean older-- older, older women, like Rosa Parks and Ella Baker, and all of these amazing women. But let me-- I did have a section in which I was going to talk about-- all of the cases of people who have been killed by the police. And I want us to beware of our tendency to exceptionalize, to individualize and exceptionalize because oftentimes we are implicated in the reproduction of racism when we assume that a racist act, which we know is quite normal given the historical and existing conditions in this country.

When we perceive that racist act as exceptional, as somehow shocking. And besides even if police perpetrators are found guilty what real difference will that make? And let me say that we've been assisted in asking these kinds of questions about the way in which we should approach these issues of racist police violence by the questions that the prison abolition movement has been raising for a long time.

If imprisonment does not solve the problems it is putatively designed to solve, how do we conceptualize strategies to address problems facing people in prison, and those who may have been harmed by people behind bars? And so abolitionists have developed a dual strategy. On the one hand, devote resources to education, and health care, and housing, and jobs et cetera. And I think it's good that Obama has come up with this strategy to make community education effectively free.

[APPLAUSE]

Community college education. But it should not only apply to community colleges, It should also apply to four year colleges.

[APPLAUSE]

As a matter of fact, it should be possible to get an education from child care all the way up to the postgraduate level. But these are precisely the kinds of developments that would reduce prison populations. But then there are those who say, well, what about the really bad people? Shouldn't we put them in prison? But abolitionists ask us to re-envision what it means to move toward justice. And to try to imagine a justice that does not depend on violence, and revenge, and retribution.

[APPLAUSE]

And a justice that also would help us to understand why certain people commit such horrible acts, so that we can eventually purge our societies of that violence. So you see the role that prison plays in reproducing that violence over and over again. Often times people who go to prison for having committed horrendous acts of violence they only become more violent within the context of an institution that is grounded on violence and that reproduces violence every day.

But then we have to ask, if prison, and of course the death penalty in this country, which is very much linked to over-incarceration in the US is still the only so-called advanced industrial country in the entire world that uses the death penalty as a routine mode of punishment. So we should ask, if prison and the death penalty don't work in general and especially for the communities that are systematically criminalized. Why would they work for police officers who commit acts of racism?

Often times with no intention at all to be racists because many of them can with good conscience say, I'm not a racist. But I think all of us have been infected by racism regardless of our ethnic or racial backgrounds. So Neo-liberal ideology constantly drives us to focus on individuals, on individual victims, individual perpetrators. And so how can we call on individual police officers to bear the burden of this long history? We've only now become attentive to the fact that all over the country all the time people from criminalized communities of color are targets of police violence.

And this is been going on. It has a long history. It can be traced back to the era of slavery. It can be traced back to the colonization of indigenous people. Now, just very briefly because I know I've already run out of time. Well, the organizers might not think so. But let me just say

very briefly that it has been important that we have come to associate with these cases of racist police violence larger issues over the last period.

And one is the militarization of the police because when we saw the images of this small town police force in Ferguson, Missouri wearing military fatigues, and carrying military weapons, and driving in military armored cars, armored vehicles, people began to ask, what is this all about? Is this the US? Or is it Palestine? And then we found out that the Defense Department has this excess property program through which it has been offering weapons, and gear, and strategies, and technology, and so forth to police departments all over the country, including campus police departments.

And so that makes us ask the question, well, why this militarization of local police forces? Police are supposed to protect and serve. Some people think they do at least. But members of the military are supposed to shoot to kill. And so what is happening to our police departments? Well we found out that many of them have been trained in Israel. Trained in counter-terrorism. As a matter of fact, the Sheriff of St. Louis county has sent members of the Sheriff's department to be trained in Israel in strategies of counter-terrorism.

And this has been happening all over the country. We found out shortly after Oscar Grant was killed. He was killed by BART police, but that the Oakland police had, had a joint training session with the Israeli military. And all this of course began to happen in the aftermath of 9/11. So I think it's so important for us to recognize all of the damage that has been done in the name of fighting the war on terror.

And the anti-Muslim racism that has developed globally in this context of protecting the world against terrorism. It reminds me so much of the way the term communism was once used. And all of the violence and damage that was done in the name of fighting communism. And just two final points. One has to do with the fact that Assata Shakur, who was one of the most important figures of the black liberation movement, who now lives in Cuba.

And she was recently named one of the 10 most wanted terrorists in the world at the age of 67. Right? I mean, it's not saying that older people can't-- but you know what-- but it's like ridiculous. She has been living in Cuba since she escaped from a US prison in the 1980s and she has been productively contributing to society there, teaching, and writing, and learning, and working.

And suddenly she's placed on the 10 most wanted terrorist list and a two million dollars award

is offered to any mercenary. And the with the privatization of the military we have many private soldiers now who might be willing to travel to Cuba to kidnap her and bring her back in order to collect that two million dollars reward.

I wanted to also talk about feminism, but unfortunately I am not going to be able to share all of this with you. But let me just say that I wanted to emphasize that personal is political. And--

[APPLAUSE]

And feminist strategies that help us to make the connection between and among issues and conditions that might otherwise appear to be unrelated. And so my very last example reflects a global pandemic from which no population in this country is exempt. From which no community is exempt and I'm referring to sexual violence. I'm referring to intimate violence. What we often call domestic violence. What we consider to be private violence. Intimate violence is not unconnected to state violence. Where do perpetrators of intimate violence learn how to engage in practices of violence?

I wanted to briefly evoke the case of Marissa Alexander who fired a weapon in the air and attempting to protect herself from her abusive husband who was attacking her. No one was hurt. No one was hit. But in the same judicial jurisdiction where George Zimmerman was found not guilty, Marissa Alexander was found guilty and initially sentenced to 20 years in prison. And then the prosecutor attempted to bring about a re-sentencing that would cause her to spend 60 years behind bars.

So I want us to think about the connections. I want us to recognize that while we tend to focus on young black men and young Latino men as the most usual targets of violence because this is the violence that happens in public places. We should remember that women are the most consistent targets of violence in the entire world.

[APPLAUSE]

And so I want to urge us to imagine the expansion of freedom and justice in the world here in Palestine, in South Africa, in Turkey, in Colombia, and Brazil, and the Philippines and the US. And I think now is the time when we have to recognize that we have to stop pivoting the center. That we have to stop being concerned about moderation. We have to be willing to stand up and say no. To create communities of struggle. Communities of resistance. To

combine our intellects. To combine our passions. To combine our voices.

And finally, Dr. King wrote in that essay or that lecture I shared with you earlier he says, we do not have much time. The revolutionary spirit is all ready worldwide. If the anger of the peoples of the world at the injustice of things is to be channeled into a revolution of love and creativity, we must begin now to work urgently with all of the peoples to shape a new world. Thank you very much.

[APPLAUSE]