

Freedom
Is a
Constant Struggle

**Ferguson, Palestine,
and the Foundations of a Movement**

Angela Y. Davis

Edited by Frank Barat



Haymarket Books
Chicago, Illinois

© 2016 Angela Davis

Published in 2016 by

Haymarket Books

P.O. Box 180165

Chicago, IL 60618

773-583-7884

www.haymarketbooks.org

info@haymarketbooks.org

ISBN: 978-1-60846-564-4

Trade distribution:

In the US, Consortium Book Sales and Distribution, www.cbsd.com

In Canada, Publishers Group Canada, www.pgcbooks.ca

In the UK, Turnaround Publisher Services, www.turnaround-uk.com

All other countries, Publishers Group Worldwide, www.pgw.com

This book was published with the generous support of Lannan Foundation
and Wallace Action Fund.

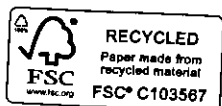
Cover design by Abby Weintraub.

Special thanks to Karen Domínguez Burke for transcribing the interviews.

Printed in Canada by union labor.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data is available.

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2



Contents

FOREWORD

by Cornel West vii

INTRODUCTION

by Frank Barat ix

ONE

Progressive Struggles against Insidious Capitalist Individualism 1
Email interview (2014)

TWO

Ferguson Reminds Us of the Importance of a Global Context 13
Interview in Brussels (September 21, 2014)

THREE

We Have to Talk about Systemic Change 31
Interview in Paris (December 10, 2014)

FOUR

On Palestine, G4S, and the Prison-Industrial Complex 51
Speech at SOAS (December 13, 2013)

FIVE

Closures and Continuities 61
Speech at Birkbeck University (October 25, 2013)

SIX

From Michael Brown to Assata Shakur,
the Racist State of America Persists 77

SEVEN

The Truth Telling Project: Violence in America 81
Speech in St. Louis, Missouri (June 27, 2015)

EIGHT

Feminism and Abolition: Theories and Practices
for the Twenty-First Century 91
Speech at University of Chicago (May 4, 2013)

FOUR

On Palestine, G4S, and the Prison-Industrial Complex

Speech at SOAS in London (December 13, 2013)

When this event highlighting the importance of boycotting the transnational security corporation G4S was organized, we could not have known that it would coincide with the death and memorialization of Nelson Mandela.

As I reflect on the legacies of struggle we associate with Mandela, I cannot help but recall the struggles that helped to forge the victory of his freedom and thus the arena on which South African apartheid was dismantled. Therefore I remember Ruth First and Joe Slovo, Walter and Albertina Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Oliver Tambo, Chris Hani, and so many others who are no longer with us. In keeping with Mandela's insistence of always locating himself within a context of collective struggle, it is fitting to evoke the names of a few of his comrades who played pivotal roles in the elimination of apartheid.

While it is moving to witness the unanimous and continued outpouring of praise for Nelson Mandela, it is important to question the meaning of this sanctification. I know that he himself would have insisted on not being elevated, as a single individual, to a secular sainthood, but rather would have always claimed space for his comrades in the struggle and in this way would have seriously challenged the process of sanctification. He was indeed extraordinary, but as an individual he was especially remarkable because he railed against the individualism that would single him out at the expense of those who were always at his side. His profound individuality resided precisely in his critical refusal to embrace the individualism that is such a central ideological component of neoliberalism.

I therefore want to take the opportunity to thank the countless numbers of people here in the UK, including the many then-exiled members of the ANC and the South African Communist Party, who built a powerful and exemplary antiapartheid movement in this country. Having traveled here on numerous occasions during the 1970s and the 1980s to participate in antiapartheid events, I thank the women and men who were as unwavering in their commitment to freedom as was Nelson Mandela. Participation in such solidarity movements here in the UK was as central to my own political formation as were the movements that saved my life.

As I mourn the passing of Nelson Mandela I offer my deep gratitude to all of those who kept the antiapartheid struggle alive for so many decades, for all the decades that it took to finally rid the world of the racism and repression associated with the system of apartheid. And I evoke the spirit of the South African Constitution and its opposition to racism and anti-Semitism as well as to sexism and homophobia.

This is the context within which I join with you once more to intensify campaigns against another regime of apartheid and in solidarity with the struggles of the Palestinian people. As Nelson Mandela said, "We know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians."

Mandela's political emergence occurred within the context of an internationalism that always urged us to make connections among freedom struggles, between the Black struggle in the southern United States and the African liberation movements—conducted by the ANC in South Africa, the MPLA in Angola, SWAPO in Namibia, FRELIMO in Mozambique, and PAIGC in Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde. These international solidarities were not only among people of African descent but with Asian and Latin American struggles as well, including ongoing solidarity with the Cuban revolution and solidarity with the people struggling against US military aggression in Vietnam.

A half-century later we have inherited the legacies of those solidarities—however well or however badly specific struggles may have concluded—as what produced hope and inspiration and helped to create real conditions to move forward.

We are now confronted with the task of assisting our sisters and brothers in Palestine as they battle against Israeli apartheid today. Their struggles have many similarities with those against South African apartheid, one of the most salient being the ideological condemnation of their freedom efforts under the rubric of terrorism. I understand that there is evidence indicating historical collaboration between the CIA and the South African apartheid government—in fact, it appears that it was a CIA agent who gave SA authorities the location of Nelson Mandela's whereabouts in 1962, leading directly to his capture and imprisonment.

Moreover, it was not until the year 2008—only five years ago—that Mandela's name was taken off the terrorist watch list, when George W. Bush signed a bill that finally removed him and other members of the ANC from the list. In other words when Mandela visited the US after his release in 1990, and when he later visited as South Africa's president, he was still on the terrorist list and the requirement that he be banned from the US had to be expressly waived.

The point I am making is that for a very long time, Mandela and his comrades shared the same status as numerous Palestinian leaders and activists today and that just as the US explicitly collaborated with the SA apartheid government, it continues to support the Israeli occupation of Palestine, currently in the form of over \$8.5 million a day in military aid. We need to let the Obama administration know that the world knows how deeply the US is implicated in the occupation.

It is an honor to participate in this meeting, especially as one of the members of the International Political Prisoners Committee calling for the freedom of Palestinian political prisoners, recently formed in Cape Town, and also as a member of the jury of the Russell Tribunal on Palestine. I would like to thank War on Want for sponsoring this meeting and progressive students, faculty, and workers at SOAS, for making it possible for us to be here this evening.

This evening's gathering specifically focuses on the importance of expanding the BDS movement—the boycott, divestment, and sanctions movement called for by Palestinian civil society—which has been crafted along the lines of the powerful model of the anti-apartheid movement with respect to South Africa. While there numerous transnational corporations have been identified as targets

of the boycott, Veolia for example, as well as Sodastream, Ahava, Caterpillar, Boeing, Hewlett Packard, and others, we are focusing our attention this evening on G4S.

G4S is especially important because it participates directly and blatantly in the maintenance and reproduction of repressive apparatuses in Palestine—prisons, checkpoints, the apartheid wall, to name only a few examples. G4S represents the growing insistence on what is called “security” under the neoliberal state and ideologies of security that bolster not only the privatization of security but the privatization of imprisonment, the privatization of warfare, as well as the privatization of health care and education.

G4S is responsible for the repressive treatment of political prisoners inside Israel. Through Addameer, directed by Sahar Francis, we have learned about the terrifying universe of torture and imprisonment which is faced by so many Palestinians but also about their hunger strikes and other forms of resistance.

G4S is the third-largest private corporation in the world—behind Walmart, which is the largest, and Foxconn, the second largest. On the G4S website, one discovers that the company represents itself as capable of providing protection for a broad range of “people and property,” from rock stars and sports stars to “ensuring that travelers have a safe and pleasant experience in ports and airports around the world to secure detention and escorting of people who are not lawfully entitled to remain in a country.”

“In more ways than you might realize,” the website reads, “G4S is securing your world.” We might add that in more ways that we realize, G4S has insinuated itself into our lives under the guise of security and the security state—from the Palestinian experience of political incarceration and torture to racist technologies of separation and

apartheid; from the wall in Israel to prison-like schools in the US and the wall along the US-Mexico border. G4S-Israel has brought sophisticated technologies of control to HaSharon prison, which includes children among its detainees, and Damun prison, which incarcerates women.

Against this backdrop, let us explore the deep involvement of G4S in the global prison-industrial complex. I am not only referring to the fact that the company owns and operates private prisons all over the world, but that it is helping to blur the boundary between schools and jails. In the US schools in poor communities of color are thoroughly entangled with the security state, so much so that sometimes we have a hard time distinguishing between schools and jails. Schools look like jails; schools use the same technologies of detection as jails and they sometimes use the same law enforcement officials. In the US some elementary schools are actually patrolled by armed officers. As a matter of fact, a recent trend among school districts that cannot afford security companies like G4S has been to offer guns and target practice to teachers. I kid you not.

But G4S, whose major proficiencies are related to security, is actually involved in the operation of schools. A website entitled "Great Schools" includes information on Central Pasco Girls Academy in Florida, which is represented as a small alternative public school. If you look at the facilities page of the G4S website you will discover this entry: "Central Pasco Girls Academy serves moderate-risk females, ages 13-18, who have been assessed as needing intensive mental health services." G4S indicates that they use "gender-responsive services" and that they address sexual abuse and substance abuse, et cetera. While this may sound relatively innocuous, it is actually a striking example of the extent to which security

has found its way into the educational system, and thus also of the way education and incarceration have been linked under the sign of capitalist profit. This example also demonstrates that the reach of the prison-industrial complex is far beyond the prison.

This company that provides "security" for numerous agencies as well as rehabilitation services for young girls "at risk" in the United States, while operating private prisons in Europe, Africa, and Australia, also provides equipment and services to Israeli checkpoints in the West Bank along the route of Israel's apartheid wall as well as to the terminals from which Gaza is kept under continuous siege. G4S also provides goods and services to the Israeli police in the West Bank, while it offers security to private businesses and homes in illegal Israeli settlements in occupied Palestine.

As private prison companies have long recognized, the most profitable sector of the prison-industrial complex is immigrant detention and deportation. In the US, G4S provides transportation for deportees who are being ushered out of the US into Mexico, thus colluding with the increasingly repressive immigration practices inside the US. But it was here in the UK where one of the most egregious acts of repression took place in the course of the transportation of an undocumented person.

When I was in London during the month of October, speaking at Birkbeck School of Law, I spoke to Deborah Coles, codirector of the organization Inquest, about the case of Jimmy Mubenga, who died at the hands of G4S guards in the course of a deportation from the UK to Angola. On a British Airways plane, handcuffed behind his back, Mubenga was forcibly pushed by G4S agents against the seat in front of him in the prohibited "carpet karaoke" hold in order to prevent him from vocalizing his resistance. The use of such a

term for a law enforcement hold, albeit illegal, is quite astonishing. It indicates that the person subject to the hold is compelled to “sing into the carpet”—or in the case of Mubenga—into the upholstered seat in front, thus rendering his protests muffled and incomprehensible. As Jimmy Mubenga was held for forty minutes, no one intervened. By the time there was finally an attempt to offer him first aid, he was dead.

This appalling treatment of undocumented immigrants from the UK to the US compels us to make connections with Palestinians who have been transformed into immigrants against their will, indeed into undocumented immigrants on their own ancestral lands. I repeat—on their own land. G4S and similar companies provide the technical means of forcibly transforming Palestinian into immigrants on their own land.

As we know, G4S is involved in the operation of private prisons all over the world. The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) recently spoke out against G4S, which runs the Mangaung Correctional Centre in the Free State. The occasion for their protest was the firing of approximately three hundred members of the police union for staging a strike. According to the COSATU statement:

G4S's modus operandi is indicative of two of the most worrying aspects of neoliberal capitalism and Israeli apartheid: the ideology of “security” and the increasing privatization of what have been traditionally state run sectors. Security, in this context, does not imply security for everyone, but rather, when one looks at the major clients of G4S Security (banks, governments, corporations etc.) it becomes evident that when G4S says it is “Securing your World,” as the company slogan goes, it is referring to a world of exploitation, repression, occupation and racism.

When I traveled to Palestine two years ago with a delegation of indigenous and women-of-color scholar/activists, it was the first time the members of the delegation had actually visited Palestine. Most of us had been involved for many years in Palestine solidarity work, but we were all thoroughly shocked to discover that the repression associated with Israeli settler colonialism was so evident and so blatant. The Israeli military made no attempt to conceal or even mitigate the character of the violence they inflicted on the Palestinian people. Gun-carrying military men and women—many extremely young—were everywhere. The wall, the concrete, the razor wire everywhere conveyed the impression that we were in prison. Before Palestinians are even arrested, they are already in prison. One misstep and one can be arrested and hauled off to prison; one can be transferred from an open-air prison to a closed prison.

G4S clearly represents these carceral trajectories that are so obvious in Palestine but that also increasingly characterize the profit-driven moves of transnational corporations associated with the rise of mass incarceration in the US and the world.

On any given day there are almost 2.5 million people in our country's jails, prisons, and military prisons, as well as in jails in Indian country and immigrant detention centers. It is a daily census, so it doesn't reflect the numbers of people who go through the system every week or every month or every year. The majority are people of color. The fastest-growing sector consists of women—women of color. Many are queer or trans. As a matter of fact, trans people of color constitute the group most likely to be arrested and imprisoned. Racism provides the fuel for maintenance, reproduction, and expansion of the prison-industrial complex.

And so if we say abolish the prison-industrial complex, as we do, we should also say abolish apartheid, and end the occupation of Palestine!

In the United States when we have described the segregation in occupied Palestine that so clearly mirrors the historical apartheid of racism in the southern United States of America—and especially before Black audiences—the response often is: “Why hasn’t anyone told us about this before? Why hasn’t anyone told us about the segregated highways leading from one settlement to another, about pedestrian segregation regulated by signs in Hebron—not entirely dissimilar from the signs associated with the Jim Crow South. Why hasn’t anyone told us this before?”

Just as we say “never again” with respect to the fascism that produced the Holocaust, we should also say “never again” with respect to apartheid in South Africa, and in the southern US. That means, first and foremost, that we will have to expand and deepen our solidarity with the people of Palestine. People of all genders and sexualities. People inside and outside prison walls, inside and outside the apartheid wall.

Boycott G4S! Support BDS!
Palestine will be free!
Thank you.

FIVE

Closures and Continuities

Speech at Birkbeck University (October 25, 2013)

They say that freedom is a constant struggle.

They say that freedom is a constant struggle.

They say that freedom is a constant struggle.

O Lord, we’ve struggled so long.

We must be free, we must be free.

The title of my talk is drawn from a freedom song that was repeatedly sung in the southern United States during the twentieth-century freedom movement. The other verses of that song evoke crying, sorrow, mourning, dying—*they say freedom is a constant dying / we’ve died so long / we must be free.*

And I like the irony of the last line of each of the verses: *we’ve struggled so long / we’ve cried so long / we’ve sorrowed so long / we’ve moaned so long / we’ve died so long / we must be free, we must be free.* And of course there’s simultaneously resignation and promise in that line, there is