

SUPPLEMENTARY READING:
ANGELA DAVIS ON POLITICAL NEUTRALITY

In 1969, UCLA administrators attempted to fire black panther Angela Davis for her affiliations with the communist party. Her comments on the controversy, offered as part of an address at UCLA 45 years later, are excerpted below. You are encouraged to incorporate this text into your Hum 110 conference discussions.

“Those people who don't understand these internal dynamics of the educational process maintain, as I stated earlier, that political opinions ought to be kept out of classroom. Of course totally ignoring that there are political opinions already in the classroom, but they are political opinions which reflect the political power in this country. Now, in maintaining that the university is no place for political thought, they are denying something which is the most crucial aspect of knowledge-- its transformation into reality. Now when I've made this statement before people have accused me of being utilitarian, pragmatic. "There exists," they say, "And there ought to exist an impotence towards knowledge for the sake of knowledge, the unadulterated pursuit of knowledge is what they're talking about. Now of course knowledge has to be capable of transcending mere material necessity, it ought to be capable of transcending the present political and economic situation. But for what? Should knowledge be cooped up in a vacuum which is unrelated to human reality? My position is that knowledge has to transcend the immediate political reality for one purpose. For the purpose of transforming it. For the purpose of setting the stage for the elimination of human suffering and misery. For the abolition of racism. For the creation of a society which reflects the interests of the people who constitute that society. And I suppose this is why the regents fired me.”

Sources:

UCLA Newsroom, “Angela Davis Returns to UCLA Classroom 45 Years After Controversy,”

<http://newsroom.ucla.edu/stories/angela-davis-returns-to-ucla-classroom-45-years-after-controversy>

American Radioworks, “Angela Y Davis,” <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/blackspeech/adavis.html>