

1972

Angela Davis Acquitted

[Angela Yvonne Davis](#), a black militant, former philosophy professor at the University of California and communist, was acquitted on charges of conspiracy, murder and kidnapping by a jury in San Jose, California on June 4, 1972.



In October 1970, Davis was arrested in New York City in connection with a shootout that occurred on August 7 in a San Raphael, California, courtroom. She was accused of supplying weapons to Jonathan Jackson, who burst into the courtroom in a bid to free inmates on trial there and take hostages whom he hoped to exchange for his brother George, a black radical imprisoned at San Quentin Prison. In the subsequent shoot-out with police, Jonathan Jackson was killed along with Superior Court Judge Harold Haley and two inmates.

Davis, who had championed the cause of black prisoners and was friends with George Jackson, was indicted in the crime but went into hiding. One of the Federal Bureau of Investigation's most wanted criminals, she was apprehended only two months later.

Her trial began in March 1972 and drew international attention because of the weakness of the prosecution's case and obvious political nature of the proceedings. In June 1972, she was acquitted of all charges by an all-white Marin County jury. This case marked a tremendous moment not only for Davis, but for the Civil Rights Movement. The all-white jury raised concerns for the defense as to the fairness of the trial. The lack of diversity led Davis's attorneys to employ psychologists who helped the team analyze the jurors and identify those individuals who would most agree with their argument. After the verdict was announced, the jury was loudly cheered and later personally thanked by Davis.

After leaving the criminal justice system, she returned to teaching and writing and in 1980 was the vice-presidential candidate of the U.S. Communist Party. In 1991, she became a professor in the field of the history of consciousness at the University of California at Santa Cruz. Four years later, she was appointed a presidential chair at the university amid controversy that stemmed from her communist and black militant background. Her writings include *Angela Davis: An Autobiography* and *Women, Race, and Class*. Though no longer a member of the Communist Party, Davis continues to be active in politics, most notably speaking out against incarceration and the death penalty.

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Author

[History.com Editors](#)

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“Angela Davis and the Marin County Courthouse Incident,” by Sean Petersen, April 19, 2017,
blackpower.web.unc.edu