In analyses that are both original and poignant, Davis lays bare the links between empire, prison, and torture—analyses that will outlast our current historical moment. These interviews are immediate responses—from a former enemy of the state who has become of the most important public intellectuals—to perhaps the most intense crisis of American political and ethical identity of our time.

Politics and Prisons

Angela Davis, you are probably one of the top five most important black women in American history. In 1974, your book Angela Davis: An Autobiography *was published by Random House. Since then it has become a classic of African-American letters that is central to the traditions of black women writers and black political thinkers. In many ways your autobiography also harkens back to the tradition of black slave narratives. How do you see this work now with thirty years hindsight?*

Well, thanks for reminding me that this is the thirtieth anniversary of the publication of my autobiography. At the time I wrote the book I did not see myself as a conventional autobiographical subject and thus did not locate my writing within any of the traditions you evoke. As a matter of fact, I was initially reluctant to write an autobiography. First of all, I was too young. Second, I did not think that my own individual accomplishments merited autobiographical treatment. Third, I was certainly aware that the celebrity—or notoriety—I had achieved had very little to do with me as an individual. It was based on the mobilization of the State and its efforts to capture me, including the fact that I was placed

on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list. But also, and perhaps most importantly, I knew that my potential as an autobiographical subject was created by the massive global movement that successfully achieved my freedom. So the question was how to write an autobiography that would be attentive to this community of collective struggle. I decided then that I did not want to write a conventional autobiography in which the heroic subject offers lessons to readers. I decided that I would write a political autobiography exploring the way in which I had been shaped by movements and campaigns in communities of struggle. In this sense, you can certainly say that I wrote myself into the tradition of black slave narratives.

In what way do you think that the black political biography plays a role within this tradition of American letters?

Well of course the canon of American letters has been contested previously, and if one considers the autobiography of Malcolm X as an example, which, along with literature by such writers as Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker, and Toni Morrison, that has clearly made its way into the canon, one can ask whether the inclusion of oppositional writing has really made a difference. Has the canon itself has been substantively transformed? It seems to me that struggles to contest bodies of literature are similar to the struggles for social change and social transformation. What we manage to do each time we win

a victory is not so much to secure change once and for all, but rather to create new terrains for struggle.

Since we are talking about canons, it seems to me that your work fits within another tradition—the philosophical canon. If we think of the work of Boethius, of Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Luther King, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Antonio Gramsci, Primo Levi . . . these are philosophical figures who have reflected upon their prison experiences. Do you see your work contributing to this philosophical tradition of prison writing, and if so, how?

Well, often times prison writing is described as that which is produced in prison or by prisoners, and certainly Gramsci's prison notebooks provide the most interesting example. It is significant that Gramsci's prison letters have not received the consideration they deserve. It would be interesting to read Gramsci's letters alongside those of George Jackson. These are two examples of prison intellectuals who devoted some of their energies to the process of engaging critically with the implications of imprisonment—at a more concrete philosophical level. Personally, I found it rather difficult to think critically about the prison while I was a prisoner. So I suppose I follow in the tradition of some of the thinkers you mention. However, I did publish a piece while I was in jail that could be considered a more indirect examination of issues related to imprisonment. I wrote an article entitled "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in

the Community of Slaves,"[10] which helped me formulate some of the questions that I would later take up in my efforts to theorize the relationship between the institution of the prison and that of slavery. I produced another piece—a paper I wrote for the conference for the Society for the Study of Dialectical Materialism, associated with the American Philosophical Association—entitled "Women and Capitalism: Dialectics of Oppression and Liberation." Both pieces were published in *The Angela Y. Davis Reader* in 1998. *If They Come in the Morning*, the book on political prisoners I wrote and edited with Bettina Aptheker, is another example of my prison writing. Finally, I also wrote an extended study of fascism which was never published. But it was only after I was released that I felt I had sufficient critical distance to think more deeply about the institution of the prison, drawing from and extending the work of the prison intellectual George Jackson.

You were trained as a philosopher, yet you teach in a program called the History of Consciousness at the University of California. Do you think that philosophy can play a role in political culture in the United States? And, has philosophy influenced your work on aesthetics, jazz, and in particular, the way in which you analyze the situation of black women?

Absolutely, and I think that I draw from my background in philosophy in that I try to ask questions about contempo-

rary and historical realities that tend to be otherwise foreclosed. Philosophy provides a vantage point from which to ask questions that cannot be posed within social scientific discourse that presumes to furnish overarching frameworks for understanding of our social world. I have learned a great deal from Herbert Marcuse about the relationship between philosophy and ideology critique. I draw particular inspiration from his work *Counterrevolution and Revolt* that attempts to directly theorize political developments of the late 1960s. But at the same time the framework is philosophical. How do we imagine a better world and raise the questions that permit us to see beyond the given?

There are beautiful pages in your autobiography about your relationship with Herbert Marcuse, who was your teacher and mentor, and part of the Frankfurt School. You spent some years in Frankfurt in the late 1960s. You also studied with Theodor Adorno, Jürgen Habermas, and Max Horkheimer. Do you see yourself as a critical theorist in this Frankfurt School sense?

Well, I've certainly been inspired by critical theory, which privileges the role of philosophical reflection while simultaneously recognizing that philosophy cannot always by itself generate the answers to the questions it poses. When philosophical inquiry enters into conversation with other disciplines and methods, we are able to produce much more fruitful results. Marcuse crossed the disciplinary borders that separate philos-

ophy, sociology, and literature. Adorno brought music and philosophy into the conversation. These were some of the first serious efforts to legitimate interdisciplinary inquiry.

You ran twice as the vice-presidential candidate of the Communist Party in the United States before leaving the party in the 1990s. After the fall of the Berlin wall and the demise of the Soviet Union, what role, if any, can communism play today?

Although I am no longer a member of the Communist Party, I still consider myself a communist. If I did not believe in the possibility of eventually defeating capitalism and in a socialist future, I would have no inspiration to continue with my political work. As triumphant as capitalism is assumed to be in the aftermath of the collapse of the socialist community of nations, it also continually reveals its inability to grow and develop without expanding and deepening human exploitation. There must be an alternative to capitalism. Today, the tendency to assume that the only version of democracy available to us is capitalist democracy poses a challenge. We must be able to disentangle our notions of capitalism and democracy so to pursue truly egalitarian models of democracy. Communism—or socialism—can still help us to generate new versions of democracy.

Do you think that the anti-globalization movement—the anti-WTO movement—can take up the role that Karl Marx assigned

to the proletariat? In other words, can we say, "anti-globalists of the world unite"?

Well, this transition is a little too easy. But this is not to dismiss the importance of creating global solidarities, cross-racial solidarities attentive to struggles against economic exploitation, racism, patriarchy, and homophobia. And there is a link, it seems to me, between the internationalism of Karl Marx's era and the new globalisms we are seeking to build today. Of course, the global economy is far more complicated than Marx could ever imagine. But at the same time his analyses have important contemporary resonances. The entire trajectory of Capital is initiated by an examination of the commodity, that seemingly simple unit of the capitalist political economy. As it turns out, of course, the commodity is a mysterious thing. And perhaps even more mysterious today than during Marx's times. The commodity has penetrated every aspect of people's lives all over the world in ways that have no historical precedent. The commodity—and capitalism in general—has insinuated itself into structures of feeling, into the most intimate spaces of people's lives. At the same time human beings are more connected than ever before and in ways we rarely acknowledge. I am thinking of a song performed by Sweet Honey and the Rock about the global assembly line, which links us in ways contingent on exploitative practices of production and consumption. In the Global North, we purchase the pain and

exploitation of girls in the Global South, which we wear everyday on our bodies.

The sweatshops of the world.

The global sweatshops. And the challenge is, as Marx argued long ago, to uncover the social relations that are both embodied and concealed by these commodities.

There is a great tradition of African-American political thought that has been deeply influenced by Marxism and communism. But one way that we sometimes talk about black political thought is in terms of two figures in tension. For example, there are the comparisons made by John Brown versus Frederick Douglass; Booker T. Washington versus W. E. B. Du Bois; Malcom X versus Martin Luther King. And in this we are able to discuss the tensions between black nationalism and assimilation or integration. How do you see yourself in relationship to the tension between nationalism and integration?

Well, of course it is possible to think about black history as it has been shaped by these debates in various eras. And we shouldn't forget the debate between W. E. B. Du Bois and Marcus Garvey. But I actually am interested in that which is foreclosed by the conceptualization of the major issues of black history in terms of these debates between black men. And I say men because the women always tend to be

excluded. Where, for example, do Anna Julia Cooper and Ida B. Wells stand in these debates? But I am interested precisely in what gets foreclosed by this tension between nationalism and integration. And perhaps not primarily because the actors are male, but because questions regarding gender and sexuality are foreclosed.

So you see your work as contesting this way of viewing the black tradition of political thought . . .

Yes.

. . . that way of making sense of integration.

Exactly.

So you wanted to displace the focus and say there's another way in which black political thought can proceed.

Absolutely, and I think that the assumption today that black political thought must either advocate nationalism or must disavow black formations and black culture is very misleading.

Yes, but one of the things that is attributed to globalization is the end of nationalisms. Do you think that there is a role for black nationalism in the United States? Has it become entirely obsolete, an anachronism?

Well, in one sense it has become obsolete, but in another sense one can argue that the nationalisms that have helped to shape black consciousness will endure. First of all, I should say that I don't think that nationalism is a homogeneous concept. There are many versions of nationalism. I've always preferred to identify with the pan-Africanism of W. E. B. Du Bois who argued that black people in the West do have a special responsibility to Africa, Latina America, and Asia—not by virtue of a biological connection or a racial link, but by virtue of a political identification that is forged in struggle. We should be attentive to Africa not simply because this continent is populated by black people, not only because we trace our origins to Africa, but primarily because Africa has been a major target of colonialism and imperialism. What I also like about Du Bois's pan-Africanism is that it insists on Afro-Asian solidarities. This is an important feature that has been concealed in conventional narratives of pan-Africanism. Such an approach is not racially defined, but rather discovers its political identity in its struggles against racism.

In addition to the recent thirtieth anniversary of your autobiography, we are also celebrating fifty-plus years of Brown v. Board of Education. *Do you think that the forces of black integration, the forces of civil rights, have been betrayed and somehow rolled-back by the past two decades of Rehnquist serving as the Reagan-appointed chief justice?*

The promise of those struggles has been betrayed. But I don't think it is helpful to assume that an agenda that gets established at one point in history will forever claim success on the basis of its initial victories. It is misleading to assume that this success will be enduring, that it will survive all of the changes and mutations of the future. The civil rights movement managed to bring about enormous political shifts, which opened doors to people previously excluded from government, corporations, education, housing, etc. However, an exclusively civil rights approach—as even Dr. King recognized before he died—cannot by itself eliminate structural racism. What the civil rights movement did, it seems to me, was to create a new terrain for asking new questions and moving in new directions. The assumption that the placement of black people like Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice in the heart of government would mean progress for the entire community was clearly fallacious. In this, there were no guarantees, to borrow from Stuart Hall. The civil rights movement demanded access, and access has been granted to some. The challenge of the twenty-first century is not to demand equal opportunity to participate in the machinery of oppression. Rather, it is to identify and dismantle those structures in which racism continues to be embedded. This is the only way the promise of freedom can be extended to masses of people.

But don't you worry about the conservative court? I mean if we think about the role of the Warren Court in advancing the racial

justice agenda . . .

Oh, absolutely!

The justices in today's Supreme Court are very outspoken about their conservatism. What does this mean for racial justice in the future?

Of course I'm worried about that. The only point I'm attempting to make is that past struggles cannot correct current injustices and that people who tend to sit back and bemoan the betrayal of the civil rights movement are not prepared to imagine what might be necessary at *this* moment to challenge the conservatism of the Supreme Court. It's very difficult to recognize contemporary racisms, especially when they are not linked to racist laws and attitudes and when they differently affect individuals who claim membership in racialized communities. I'm suggesting that we need a new age—with a new agenda—that directly addresses the structural racism that determines who goes to prison and who does not, who attends university and who does not, who has health insurance and who does not. The old agenda facilitates assaults on affirmative action, as Ward Connerly pointed out in his campaign for Proposition 209 in California. From his vantage point, what is most important today is the protection of the civil rights of white men.

Right. But very smart strategies are being used, ones that displace

attention from issues of racial justice by speaking in terms of multiculturalism. An example is last year's court decision in Michigan—Grutter v. Bollinger—*that says that affirmative action must be administered for the sake of preserving multiculturalism. What is the difference between multiculturalism and racial justice?*

There's a huge difference. Diversity is one of those words in the contemporary lexicon that presumes to be synonymous with antiracism. Multiculturalism is a category that can admit both progressive and deeply conservative interpretations. There's corporate multiculturalism because corporations have discovered that it is more profitable to create a diverse work place.

Benetton multiculturalism.

Yes. They have discovered that blacks and Latinos and Asians are willing to work as hard, or even harder, than their white counterparts. But this means that we should embrace a strong politically inflected multiculturalism, which emphasizes cross-racial community and continued struggles for equality and justice. That is to say cross-racial community not for the purpose of creating a beautiful "bouquet of flowers" or an enticing "bowl of salad"—which are some of the metaphorical representations of multiculturalism—but as a way of challenging structural inequalities and fighting for justice.

This version of multiculturalism has radical potential.

And along with the question of multiculturalism and racial justice, there's another question that tremendously worries me personally, existentially. That is, we keep talking about the "browning" of the United States; that by the year 2050 a quarter of the American population will be of Latino descent. Do you think that this browning of America will entail an eclipse of the quest for racial justice?

Why should it?

Conservatives claim that questions of racial justice are essentially black questions . . . and that multiculturalism and racial integration of Latinos are separate from racial justice work, affirmative action or reparations.

Well, you see, that's the problem, and it seems to me that contemporary ideologies encourage this assumption that racial competition and conflict are the only possible relationships across communities of people of color. It is as if these communities are always separate and never intersect. But, if one looks at the labor movement, for example, there are numerous historical examples of Black-Latino solidarity and alliances. Regardless of which community might be numerically larger, without such solidarities and alliances, there can be no hope for an anti-racist future. At the same time, it is

important to acknowledge that this is a new era. Conditions of postcoloniality here in the United States and throughout the world convey the message that the "West" has been forever changed. Europe is not what it used to be. It is no longer defined by its whiteness. The same thing, of course, is true in the U.S. among black people who are used to being the "superior minority." We must let go of this claim. There is this prevalent idea that because black people established the historical anti-racist agenda for the United States of America, they will always remain its most passionate advocates. But black people as a collective cannot live on the laurels of its historical past. We have recently received harsh lessons about conservative possibilities in black communities. "Black" can not simply be considered an uncontestable synonym of progressive politics. The work of progressive activists is to build opposition to conservatism—regardless of the racial background of its proponents. That black and Latino communities cannot find common cause is one example of this conservatism. Our job today is to promote cross-racial communities of struggle that arise out of common—and hopefully radical—political aspirations.

In the early 1970s Nixon and Hoover called you an enemy of the State. They also called you a terrorist. Yet, you produced a major indictment of the prison at the time—your autobiography. For the past 30 years since then your work has continued to gravitate around prisons. Are there differences between the emphasis of

your writing in the 1970s and that of work that you have recently published, for instance, Are Prisons Obsolete?

Well, I guess you are right—a protracted engagement with the prison system has literally defined my life. My interest in these issues actually precedes my own imprisonment. I grew up with stories of Sacco and Vanzetti, the Scottsboro Nine, and later Nelson Mandela, and before I was arrested I had been active in a number of campaigns to free political prisoners. What I have been trying to do recently is to think critically about the lasting contributions of that period and to take seriously the work of prison intellectuals. I have also been trying to think more systematically about the ways in which slavery continues to live on in contemporary institutions—as in the cases of the death penalty and the prison, for example.

Let me try to back up and summarize this very long trajectory. My first encounter with the prison as a focus of activism and reflection was staged by my participation in various campaigns to free political prisoners during my teenage years. During the height of my vocation as an activist, I focused very sharply on organizing campaigns to free political prisoners arrested in the late sixties and early seventies. My own imprisonment was a consequence of this work. While I was in jail, I began to think—at least superficially—about the possibility of an analysis that shifted its emphasis to the institution of the prison, not only as an apparatus to

repress political activists, but also as an institution deeply connected to the maintenance of racism. For this approach, I was deeply indebted to George Jackson. Now I am trying to think about the ways that the prison reproduces forms of racism based on the traces of slavery that can still be discovered within the contemporary criminal justice system. There is, I believe, a clear relationship between the rise of the prison-industrial-complex in the era of global capitalism and the persistence of structures in the punishment system that originated with slavery. I argue, for example, that the most compelling explanation for the routine continuation of capital punishment in the U.S.—which, in this respect, is alone among industrialized countries in the world—is the racism that links the death penalty to slavery. One implication of such an analysis is that we need to think differently about the workings of contemporary structural racism—which can injure white people as well as people of color, who are, of course, its main targets. Another implication is that we can think differently about reparations. One of the major priorities of the reparations movement should be the abolition of the death penalty.

The prison in the United States has become a kind of ghetto. And if I hear you correctly, you're suggesting that in the United States there cannot be a non-racial prison system—that a non-racist prison system would be an oxymoron.

Yes, I suppose you may put it that way. As a matter of fact, there is an assumption that an institution of repression, if it does its work equitably—if it treats, say, white people in the same way it treats black people—is an indication of progress under the sign of equality and justice. I am very suspicious of such an abstract approach. James Byrd was lynched in Jasper, Texas a few years ago by a group of white supremacists. . . . Do you remember that incident?

Yes, and he was dragged around as well.

Two of the white men who helped to carry out the lynching were sentenced to death. That moment was celebrated as a victory, as if the cause of racial justice is served by meting out the same horrendous and barbaric treatment to white people that black people have historically suffered. That kind of equality does not make a great deal sense to me.

Can you expand on that? In other words, there's a continuum between the antebellum period, the reconstruction, the ghettos, and the death penalty, which are equally racialized. Indeed, all of these institutions and spaces seem to have their roots in slavery. Are these links and continuities what you are alluding to?

What is interesting is that slavery as an institution, during the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century, for example, managed to become a receptacle

for all of those forms of punishment that were considered to be barbaric by the developing democracy. So rather than abolish the death penalty outright, it was offered refuge within slave law. This meant that white people eventually were released from the threat of death for most offenses, with murder remaining as the usual offense leading to a white's execution. Black slaves, on the other hand, were subject to the death penalty in some states for as many as seventy different offenses. One might say that the institution of slavery served as a receptacle for those forms of punishment considered to be too uncivilized to be inflicted on white citizens within a democratic society. With the abolition of slavery this clearly racialized form of punishment became de-racialized and persists today under the guise of color-blind justice. Capital punishment continues to be inflicted disproportionately on black people, but when the black person is sentenced to death, he/she comes under the authority of law as the abstract juridical subject, as a rights-bearing individual, not as a member of a racialized community that has been subjected to conditions that make him/her a prime candidate for legal repression. Thus the racism becomes invisible and unrecognizable. In this respect, he/she is "equal" to his/her white counterpart, who therefore is not entirely immune to the hidden racism of the law.

The structures of these institutions are thoroughly racialized. An example would be the way in which prisoners get their rights sus-

pended and enter a type of civil death. This is also part of this racism, right? You mention in your book Are Prisons Obsolete? *that Bush would not have been elected if prisoners had been allowed to vote.*

Absolutely. What I find interesting is that disenfranchisement of prisoners is most often assumed to have a self-evident logic. Most people in this country do not question the process that robs prisoners—and in many states former felons—of their right to vote. They might find it amusing to discover that a few states still allow prisoners to vote. Why has the disenfranchisement of people convincted of felonies become so much a part of the common sense thought structures of people in this country? I believe that this also has its roots in slavery. A white contemporary of slavery might have remarked: "Of course slaves weren't supposed to vote. They weren't full citizens." In the same way people think today, "Of course prisoners aren't supposed to vote. They aren't really citizens any more. They are in prison." There remains a great deal of work to do if we wish to transform these popular attitudes.

Your recent work also mentions that there is a symbiotic relationship between the prison-industrial-complex and the military-industrial-complex. How are those relationships sustained? How are they interwoven?

Well, first I should indicate that the use of the term *prison-industrial-complex* by scholars, activists, and others has been strategic, designed precisely to resonate with the term *military-industrial-complex.* When one considers the extent to which both complexes earn profit while producing the means to maim and kill human beings and devour social resources, then the basic structural similarities become apparent. During the Vietnam War, it became obvious that military production was becoming an increasingly more central element of the economy, one that had begun to colonize the economy, so to speak. One can detect similar proclivities in the prison-industrial-complex. It is no longer a minor niche for a few companies; the punishment industry is on the radar of countless numbers of corporations in the manufacturing and service industries. Prisons are identified for their potential as consumers and for their potential cheap labor. There are many ways one might describe the symbiotic relationship of the military and the prison. I will focus on one of the most obvious connections: the striking similarities in the human populations of the two respective institutions. In fact, many young people—especially young people of color—who enlist in the military often do so in order to escape a trajectory of poverty, drugs, and illiteracy that will lead them directly to prison. Finally, a brief observation that has enormous implications: At least one corporation in the defense industry has actively recruited prison labor. Think about this picture: prisoners building weaponry that aids the government in is quest for global dominance.

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You have also argued that there is no correlation between crime and imprisonment. That the "prisonization" of American society has transformed the racial landscape of the United States. What is this relationship then? We are under the assumption that we have so many prisoners because there are so many people committing crimes, but you argue otherwise.

Well the link that is usually assumed in popular and scholarly discourse is that crime produces punishment. What I have tried to do—together with many other public intellectuals, activists, scholars—is to encourage people to think about the possibility that punishment may be a consequence of other forces and not an inevitable consequence of the commission of crime. Which is not to say that people in prisons have not committed what we call "crimes"—I'm not making that argument at all. Regardless of who has or has not committed crimes, punishment, in brief, can be seen more as a consequence of racialized surveillance. Increased punishment is most often a result of increased surveillance. Those communities that are subject to police surveillance are much more likely to produce more bodies for the punishment industry. But even more important, imprisonment is the punitive solution to a whole range of social problems that are not being addressed by those social institutions that might help people lead better, more satisfying lives. This is the logic of what has been called the imprisonment binge: Instead of building housing, throw the homeless in prison. Instead of developing

the educational system, throw the illiterate in prison. Throw people in prison who lose jobs as the result of de-industrialization, globalization of capital, and the dismantling of the welfare state. Get rid of all of them. Remove these dispensable populations from society. According to this logic the prison becomes a way of disappearing people in the false hope of disappearing the underlying social problems they represent.

Is this also—this process of disappearing people without resolving the social contradictions—related to the 1996 Welfare Reform Act and the subsequent increase in the number of women in prison?

Absolutely. As a matter of fact, women still constitute the fastest growing sector of the imprisoned population—although immigrants may not be far behind—not only here but in other parts of the world as well. In part, this has to do with the disestablishment of the welfare system, which, although it did not provide a serious solution to the problems of single, unemployed, or low-skilled mothers, was nevertheless a safety net. One visits a women's prison and sees the huge number of women imprisoned in connection with drug-related charges, and it should not be difficult to see the awful consequences of dismantling even the most inadequate alternatives, such as the federal program Aid to Dependent Children.

Do you think, in parallel to the symbiotic relationship that exists between the military-industrial and the prison-industrial complexes, that there's a symbiotic relationship between the prison industry and the judiciary in the United States?

Well, but they are part of the same system: law, law enforcement and punishment. The sentencing practices that have developed over the last two decades are immediately responsible for the huge number of people that are behind bars. The more than two million people in the various jails and prisons are there as an appalling consequence of mandatory sentencing laws, "truth in sentencing," three strikes, etc.

There's a fascinating phenomenon—one that you talk about in your work—that at the same time that building more prisons seems to make people feel safer, that there has actually been a declining rate of crime since the 1970s. Why is that? Why do people feel safer having prisons?

You are correct to ask what makes people *feel* safer, rather than what actually makes people be safer. It is ironic that with the continued pandemic of intimate violence—violence in the home—that the family is still considered to be a safe place, a haven. The threat to security appears always to come from the outside, from the imagined external enemy. There are multiple figurations of the enemy (including the immigrant and the terrorist), but the prisoner, imagined as murderer and

rapist, looms large as a menace to security. So now there are over *two million* people behind bars, the majority of whom have not been convicted of violent crimes, considered to be embodiments of the enemy. This is supposed to make people feel better, but what it really does is divert their attention away from those threats to security that come from the military, police, profit-seeking corporations, and sometimes from one's own intimate partners.

Today people seem to feel that we are continually under the threat of a possible crime, a sense that seems to be instigated by the media. Is this sense of panic fabricated, or is there some substance to it?

Well, these moral panics have always erupted at particular conjunctures. We can think about the moral panic about black rapists, particularly in the aftermath of slavery. The myth of the black rapist was a key component of an ideological strategy designed to recast the problems of managing newly freed black people in the aftermath of slavery. And so the moral panic around crime is not related to a rise in crime in any material sense. Rather, it is related to the problem of managing large populations— particularly people of color— who have been rendered dispensable by the system of global capitalism. This may be a superficial analogy but I do think it works.

In this complex web of relations between criminalizing populations, punishment, and prisonization, you make a suggestion that is quite glaring to me, and very provocative. You say that the criminalization of youth because of the so-called "war on drugs" occurred simultaneously with an explosion in the use of doctor-prescribed psychotropic drugs. But there's a difference between crack and Prozac, isn't there?

Well, yes. One provides enormous amount of profit for the pharmaceutical corporations and the other doesn't—although street drugs do provide enormous profit for underground drug economies. While I would hesitate to talk about the chemical similarities or dissimilarities, I would argue that there is a major contradiction between the "war on drugs" discourse and the corporate discourse within which legal psychotropic drugs, available by prescription to those who have money or health insurance, and are promoted by the pharmaceuticals as chemical inducements to relaxation, happiness, productivity, etc.

Ritalin for the kids . . . and Viagra for the older folks, for instance.

That's right. It seems that there is a drug prescription available for any possible problem one might have. How might you feel if you were a poor person at the receiving end of the daily barrage of commercials about the miraculous powers of drugs

available by prescription? This commercial discourse must help create an increase drug traffic—both the legal and the underground kinds.

In your work you have also discussed the continuum connecting the Cold War with the war on drugs to the current war on terrorism. What are the continuums, the similarities? What are the differences?

Well. It would be very complicated to explore all of the differences and similarities, but I would like to suggest that the terrain for the production of the terrorist as a figure in the American imaginary reflects vestiges of previous moral panics as well, including those instigated by the mass fear of the criminal and the communist. Willie Horton is the most dramatic example of the former. Anti-communism successfully mobilized national—perhaps I should say nationalist—anxieties, as does the so-called war on terrorism today. None of these figures are entirely new, although the emphasis has been different at different historical conjunctures.

Perhaps I can be allowed to draw an example from my own life. When I was on the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list, President Nixon publicly referred to me as a terrorist. In this case all three figures were articulated together: I was communist, terrorist, and criminal. Collective emotional responses to the evocation of the terrorist are entangled with those summoned by the criminal and the communist. All

represent an external enemy against which the nation mobilizes in order to save itself. Nationalism always requires an enemy—whether inside or outside the nation. This is not really new. The material consequences are of course horrendous. People of Muslim or Arab descent—or those who appear to be Muslim or Arab (whatever that might mean) are suffering terribly inside the U.S. and European countries. The U.S. occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan is producing dreadful and unimaginable consequences.

You have been working on a major new book entitled Prisons and History. *Can you tell us about it?*

O.K. Hopefully it will encourage people to think not only about the institution of the prison but also about the particular version of democracy to which we are asked to consent. Democratic rights and liberties are defined in relation to what is denied to people in prison. So we might ask, what kind of democracy do we currently inhabit? The kind of democracy that can only invent and develop itself as the affirmative face of the horrors depicted in the Abu Ghraib photographs, the physical and mental agonies produced on a daily basis in prisons here and all over the world. This is a flawed conception of democracy.

I want to touch on an example that challenges conventional ideas about the separation of prison and society, one that resituates our shocked responses to the recent images of sexual

coercion in Iraq. We acknowledge the fact that women in prisons all over the world are forced, on a regular basis, to undergo strip searches and cavity searches. That is to say their vaginas and rectums are searched. Any woman capable of imagining herself—not the other, but rather herself—searched in such a manner will inexorably experience it as sexual assault. But since it occurs in prison, society assumes that this kind of assault is a normal and routine aspect of women's imprisonment and is self-justified by the mere fact of imprisonment. Society assumes that this is what happens when a woman goes to prison. That this is what happens to the citizen who is divested of her citizenship rights and that it is therefore right that the prisoner be subjected to sexual coercion.

I want to urge people to think more deeply about the very powerful and profound extent to which such practices inform the kind of democracy we inhabit today. I would like to urge people to think about different versions of democracy, future democracies, democracies grounded in socialism, democracies in which those social problems that have enabled the emergence of the prison-industrial-complex will be, if not completely solved, at least encountered and acknowledged.