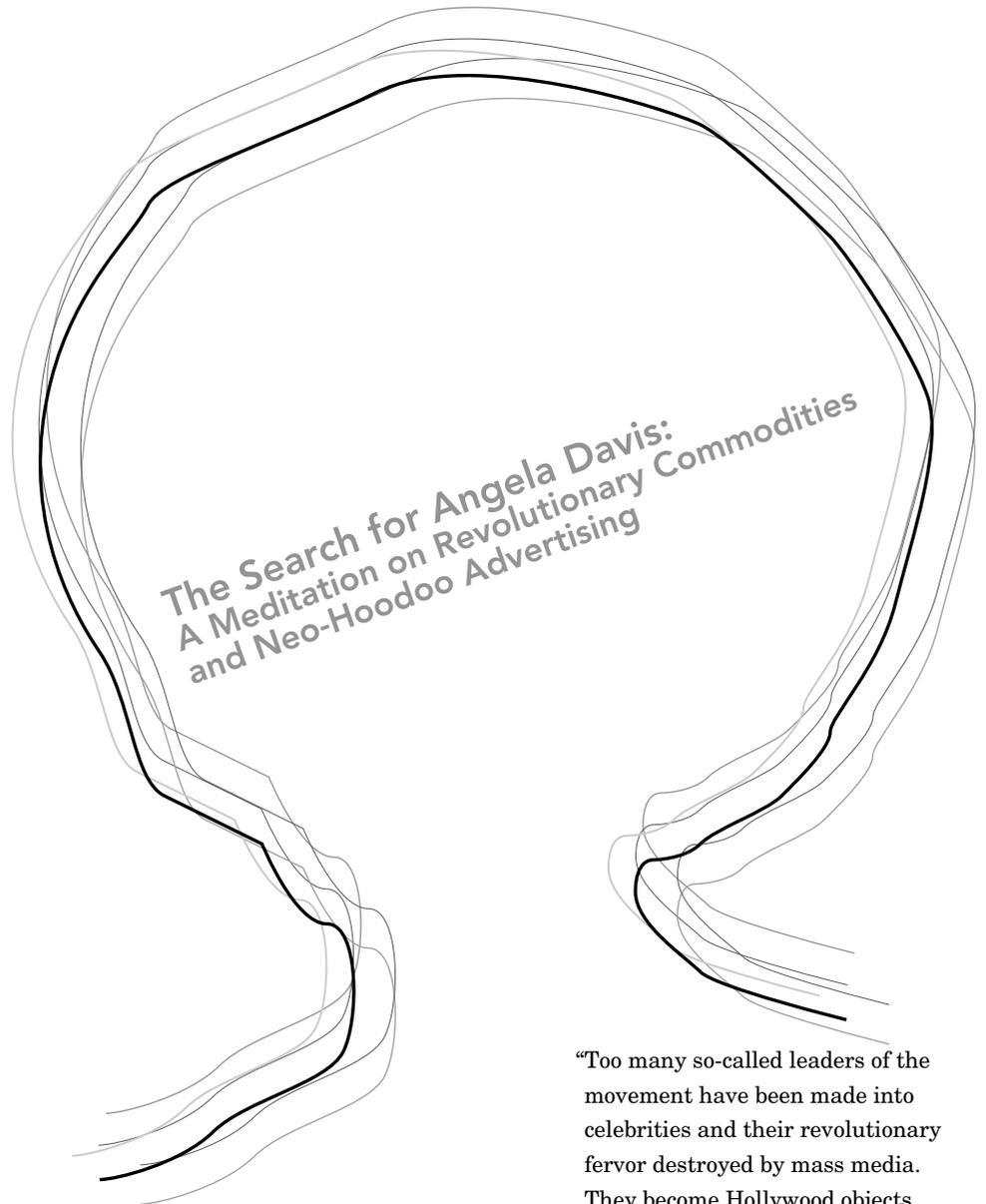


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the
search
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**The Search for Angela Davis:
A Meditation on Revolutionary Commodities
and Neo-Hoodoo Advertising**

Cicely J. Suede  SIGHT LINES 2004

“Too many so-called leaders of the movement have been made into celebrities and their revolutionary fervor destroyed by mass media. They become Hollywood objects and lose identification with the real issues. The task is to transform society; only the people can do that—not heroes, not celebrities, not stars. The revolutionary’s place is in the community with the people.”

—Huey P. Newton¹

Fall 2003—It was the season of protest. As bombs flew over Baghdad and the Bush administration plotted their next phase of world domination, the streets of cities across the globe erupted in a fervor of resistance against U.S. foreign policy. Beginning with the ten million citizens, who, in February, symbolically joined hands to exercise their dissent in worldwide mass demonstrations against the “global war on terror,” the year unfolded with unprecedented events. In Cancun, where thousands had gathered in resistance to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and capitalist globalization, a South Korean farmer, Lee Kyang Hae, sacrificed himself by plunging a small knife into his chest to symbolize the death of small farmers under regulations sanctioned by the WTO. In Washington, D.C., United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) and Act Now to Stop War & End Racism (ANSWER) joined forces in a massive outpouring of opposition to the invasion and occupation of Iraq. In France, ATTAC, the Farming Confederation, and the Co-ordination for Citizen Control over the WTO organized more than seventy-five thousand demonstrators in eighty towns to hold protests against the WTO Millennium Round.

In an effort to cash in on the next epoch of popular culture, the fashion and advertising industries were quick to respond with revolutionary strategies of their own. Organizing around a platform that “celebrated” the season of protest, four internationally distributed lifestyle publications launched issues that commemorated the February protests. *Planet*, a Bay Area–based magazine of “Global Culture and Lifestyle,” released a second anniversary “Peace” issue that declared “Peace is Chic, War is Hell” and displayed supermodel/peace activist Angela Lindvall (of Gap, Hilfiger fame) on the cover throwing up a peace sign.² The magazine featured articles on or by peacefully chic celebrities including filmmaker Shirin Neshat and artist Yoko Ono, and a “War and Peace” fashion spread by photographer Marc Baptiste. *AdBusters*, the Canadian “culture-jamming” publication, hit back with a “Cool Fascismo” issue that revealed the gross indecencies of lifestyle brands like Diesel and Revlon. *Untold*, an urban culture (read: multicultural-leaning-toward-blackness) rag from London, did the predictable by offering a British-style “Black Power” issue with songstress Kelis on the cover. Editorial highlights: an article called “History of Black British Rebellion” and a photo spread featuring “real people” holding protest signs with sayings like “Back to Africa” and “Black is Beautiful.”³



PHOTO BY PHILIP HIRING, COURTESY OF BLACKBOOK PUBLISHING CORP.

Figure 1 BlackBook “Protest” issue, Fall 2003.

BlackBook magazine, a “Progressive Culture” publication, cut to the chase and simply titled their issue “Protest.” On the cover (*Figure 1*), illuminated by a bright red background, it-girl-for-a-minute Scarlett Johansson (just in time to promote the release of her hit film *Lost in Translation*) throws a hip-stance and sports an army jacket, suggestively unbuttoned to

reveal little else but her sun-kissed pink flesh and the waistband of her jeans. An obvious reference to Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara but reinterpreted for the twenty-first century as a hyper-sexy, wispy-haired blonde film star. Behind her, bold black and green text highlights a “progressive” roster of “protestors” (read: celebrity contributors whose



Figure 2 A Thousand Lashes, Ian Wright, 2003.

works were commissioned) including Yoko Ono, Tracey Emin, Pink, David Lee Roth, and Russell Simmons, and a fifty-page “Fashion Protest” by Diesel. Serving as a mission statement of sorts for the magazine’s “progressive” stance, the editorial letter points out that “As diverse as the world’s cultures are, the rally cry of protest

unites us all. Positive or negative... it is the common thread that ties together the controversial world dynamic we call pop culture... It is boycotting SUVs and driving Minis... It is Lenny Bruce and Chris Rock. It is what connects Sid and Nancy to Kurt and Courtney. It is what the mainstream isn’t.”⁴

What the mainstream isn’t, hmmm? Last time I checked, protest, or revolution rather, was a concept that never went out of style. It’s as old as humanity itself, or at least as old as the building of empires and the subsequent overthrowing of them. Popular images of protest and revolution have circulated in the visual landscape for centuries. Since the beginnings of bohemianism in nineteenth-century Europe, countercultural revolutionaries have always sought to distance themselves from society’s dominant cultural groups, that is, the bourgeoisie or the middle class, through unconventional dress and outrageous behavior. Fifties beatniks, sixties black militants and hippies, seventies punks, eighties b-boys and b-girls, and nineties ravers are just some most recent examples of the counterculture designating a distinctive identity for a self-defined, subcultural group. Huey P. Newton, the former minister of defense of the Black Panther Party, defined the revolution as the struggle of the old against the new.⁵ Thus, revolution changes with the times, and heeds the call when needed. Likewise the mainstream has followed suit, creating an institutionalized tendency to adopt and reshape the revolution to serve its needs. These are revolutionary times, after all, and *BlackBook* is banking on the now.

Sandwiched between L’Oreal hair color advertisements and *BlackBook*’s makeover of the Madonna *American Life* album cover that reappropriates

Alberto Korda’s famous 1960 photograph of Che Guevara, I come across a portrait of Angela Davis by British artist Ian Wright (Figure 2). Using 903 mascara brushes donated by Make-up Art Cosmetics (MAC), Wright—who became known through his work with the *New Musical Express* in the 1980s and specializes in portraiture of pop cultural icons—recreates her famous Afro. The headline reads “Mask-era of Revolution” which obviously refers to the materials used to recreate her image, but also reveals that there is a concealed narrative within the artwork. As the cannibalization of the image of the revolutionary icon increases in contemporary culture through media and fashion advertising, the image, once a representation of the nationalist or liberationist ideology of a suppressed people against the dominant culture, becomes a commodity. As a commodity, it is subsequently devoured by popular culture, stripped of its historical and sociopolitical context, and regurgitated as an empty ideology repackaged as a lifestyle or a look. The editorial text briefly summarizes the Angela Davis story for the reader by telling us that she is an activist and writer who came to national attention in the 1970s when she was placed on the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted List on trumped-up charges associating her with an escape attempt at the Marin County Hall of Justice. It mentions that the judge and three other people were killed and that she was sentenced to

life for the crime, but latter acquitted after spending eighteen months in prison. It fails, however, to mention other key elements of the narrative, like the names of the prisoners that were being freed (the Soledad Prison Brothers, George Jackson, Fleeta Drumgo, and John Clutchette, who were falsely charged with killing a prison guard); that it was Jackson's brother Jonathan who planned the escape (and lost his life in doing so); that Angela was a member of the Communist party (a position that caused her to lose her job as a professor in philosophy at UCLA); and that the FBI search for Angela was one of the most intensive "manhunts" in U.S. history. Because the emphasis is on the Afro, the narrative is compressed in the visual signifier and reduced to just a hairstyle.

In a globalized world where the word, spoken or written, has lost its foothold in the realm of communicating with a diverse group of people, the primary mode of communication is now visual. With the average television commercial changing frames every two seconds, the rate at which we process visual stimuli has accelerated to an unprecedented height. We are living in an age of visual representation in which everything is mediated by and accounted for through the image. On almost every surface of the

visual landscape we are bombarded daily with advertising that entices us to consume. Baudrillard likened advertising to an "unarticulated, instantaneous form, without a past, without a future, without the possibility of metamorphosis" having "power over all the others."⁶ And as a highly developed system of signs within a capitalist world economy, advertising has become a shining example of globalized production and consumption.

For just as society was changing and becoming more mobilized in the 1960s climate of political and social dissent, the advertising industry was also changing. In his book *The Conquest of Cool*, writer Thomas Frank chronicles how the counterculture became a permanent fixture in American life, first on the streets, and then reflected in visual media. He explains how advertisers sought to appeal to the social dissent of the youthful masses by offering a hip capitalism in which "a new species of hip consumerism... a cultural perpetual motion machine in which disgust with the falseness, shoddiness, and everyday oppressions of consumer society could be enlisted to drive the ever accelerating wheels of consumption" and "citizens could symbolically resolve the contradiction between their role as consumers and their role as producers."⁷

It is the desire to be a participant in this hip consumerism that offers accessibility—albeit the accessibility to buy—to people around the world. However, this accessibility convinces them that they have the agency to mix elements of clothing, speech, and action that may convey certain social, political, gender, or cultural connotations, yet doesn't reveal the underlying motives of the power structures that are protected and upheld. Thus, the stage is set for what has become a permanent fixture in our society and one of the top exports of the United States of America: the consumption of the hip. It is this "hip capitalism" that America exports worldwide through television commercials, brand advertising, product placements on primetime sitcoms, blockbuster films, Free Trade Agreements, and the War on Terror.

Because advertising endows the consumer with agency through a world of fantasy and desire, it becomes a tool that facilitates and allows for experimentation in shifting modes of dissent against the dominant culture. Subsequently, the co-optation of revolutionary imagery and dissent in American global consumer culture has led to the total assimilation of worldwide historical and cultural narratives of resistance and liberation into a system that leaves the narratives open to reinterpretation under the (dis)guise of freedom, while concealing that they are often used to exercise power over the people. As visual narratives in the historical trip

of commodification, the widespread reappropriation of revolutionary icons can stand as a testament to both the political empowerment and disempowerment of the people who embrace them with a desire to access that revolutionary history.

Can the hidden narratives associated with these icons be uncovered or redeemed to serve as routes toward *overstanding* our collective revolutionary historical past? What happens to the revolution when those who stand to inherit the revolutionary ideologies of the past such as the Black Panther or anti-Vietnam War movements seek to "reclaim" their icons only to re-commodify them? Can the narratives be retold through this recontextualization? How does the marriage between advertising media and the revolutionary icon aid or hinder the creation of modes of dissent? What power struggles ensue between reality and fiction when the narratives of revolutionary history have been informed by a constructed image?

It is here that I will begin the search for Angela Davis.



Figure 3
Rocawear
advertisement,
as seen on the
back cover of the
Fall 2003 issue of
TRACE magazine.

COURTESY OF ROCAWEAR, INC.

I came across another likeness of Angela Davis today. This time it was in a Rocawear advertisement on the back cover of the “Uncommon!: Fall Fashion Special 2003” issue of *TRACE* magazine (Figure 3). While magazines like *BlackBook* were commenting on the season of protest, *TRACE* was focusing on a mission to “alter the world’s low tolerance levels” by uniting “all cultures from around the globe through a celebration of ethnic diversity and creativity.”⁸ As a manual of “Transcultural Style” that positioned itself on the “cutting-edge of international urban cool,” this issue offered a pretty standard

set of fashion features geared toward a multicultural audience while keeping a safe distance from making any references to the proliferation of international demonstrations happening right outside its pages.⁹ That is, until you check out the back of the book.

Free from competition with any other editorial fodder, the advertisement stood out, shocking me into attention. Something like how I imagine white folks reacted to Rosa Parks when she refused to move to the back of the bus. Looking like the offspring of an Angela Davis-Huey P. Newton fantasy fusion, supermodel Naomi Campbell

sits dead center in a wicker chair, sporting an Afro and a brown suede jacket with a fur collar. With a gaze that looks you straight in the eye with a hint of defiance, she extends her arm in a right angle “Black Power” fist as if to say, “Don’t hate me because I’m black and beautiful, baby!”

Now, I’ve grown accustomed to seeing reproductions of Davis’s image in the most interesting places—she’s just as likely to show up in a fashion spread as she is to appear on a T-shirt at an antiwar rally. But there was something not quite right with this image, something that hadn’t occurred in the images of Davis that I was familiar with. Up to now, visual representations of Angela Davis had been dupes or various reinterpretations of the famous FBI Ten Most Wanted poster (Figure 4) that was put on display at post offices, government buildings, and on the television program, *The FBI*, or images from her much-publicized court trial, each emphasizing the requisite Afro and “Black Power” fist salute used by many black youths of the time to demonstrate their solidarity with the black liberation struggle.¹⁰ These images most often featured Angela with a stoic gaze that could be read both as a “tough sista” stance that implied a distrust of or defiance against the established order and as a contemplative look that reflected a sharp intellectual prowess. Other photographs featured profile shots of Angela with her mouth open like an Amazon letting out a battle cry.

But this image was different. The Afro was there. Even the fist was there, although bent at the elbow instead of a full-fledged, arm-extended salute. But what was up with the chair? And the leather jacket? I don’t recall seeing a photograph of Angela sitting in a rattan chair. Nor do I remember seeing her in standard Black Panther garb, which usually consisted of a black leather sports jacket, black slacks, and black beret. But there they were, the leather jacket—albeit a modern take on the Harlem Renaissance meets Blaxploitation (brown instead of black, suede instead



Figure 4 FBI Most Wanted Poster.

Figure 5 Huey P. Newton, minister of defense of the Black Panther Party.



PHOTO BY STAFF, COURTESY OF THE HUEY P. NEWTON FOUNDATION

of leather)—and the wicker chair, a popular piece of furniture that could be found in many households during the seventies. I do, however, remember the famous photograph of Huey P. Newton (*Figure 5*), minister of defense of the Black Panther Party for Self Defense (a party that Angela Davis was only loosely associated with through her support for the liberation of the Soledad brothers). In the notorious Black Panther photo, Huey P. Newton sits on a wicker chair with a gun in one hand, a spear in the other like an African king ready for battle. The shields framing the background and the zebra skin carpeting add to the “back to Africa”

aesthetic. According to Bobby Seale, chief of staff of the Black Panther Party and the man responsible for orchestrating the photograph, the shields, and the imagery as a whole, were intended to represent “a shield for black people against all imperialism, the decadence, the aggression, and the racism in this country.” This photograph would become the most widely circulated image associated with the Black Panther Party.

While studying for her doctorate at UC San Diego, Angela was affiliated with John Floyd’s Black Panther Political Party (BPPP), which is

not to be confused with the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense founded by Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale. Although she initially expressed interest in joining the Black Panther Party, she opted out due to the rampant sexism inherent among its members. Founded in Oakland, California, in 1966 by Merritt College students Newton and Seale, the Black Panther Party grew to become a revolutionary movement with international alliances in Cuba, Africa, Latin America, and China. On Sept. 11, 1968, J. Edgar Hoover declared that the Black Panther Party “was the greatest threat to the internal security of the country” and set out to aggressively stifle the party through an illegal counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO).¹¹ That same year, Davis joined the Che-Lumumba Club of the Communist Party USA, which organized black members of the party to address the concerns of the black liberation struggle. In 1969, she became assistant professor in philosophy at UCLA, the first black woman to ever hold such a position. Even as a professor at a prestigious university, Angela remained open about her radical, antiracist, Communist beliefs, and soon found herself under the scrutiny of the state and police agencies. While defending her right to teach, she organized the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee. During the campaign she befriended one of the prisoners, George Jackson. In 1970, despite her excellent teaching record, the California Board

of Regents refused to renew her appointment as a philosophy lecturer. Shortly after Davis left her job, Jackson’s brother, Jonathan, planned an escape and kidnap attempt from the Marin County Hall of Justice. During the incident, guards fired shots that killed the trial judge and three people, including Jonathan, and seriously wounded the district attorney, several jurors, and prisoner Magee. Although Davis was not at the crime scene, the state charged her with murder and conspiracy because the police claimed that the guns used had been registered in her name. Davis maintained that she knew nothing about Jackson’s plans, and fled underground, consequently spawning one of the largest “manhunts” in FBI history. After her arrest in New York City in August 1970, activists effectively mobilized a massive, international Free Angela Davis movement. This is how Angela would become known as a national figure of black militancy for some and black liberation for others.

Based on the historical narrative behind the image, it looks like someone’s got it wrong, y’all. While the average consumer is checking the Rocawear ad and feeling Naomi Campbell in the Black Power stance, behind the pastiche there’s some serious black liberation struggle marketing going on. By pastiche I’m referring to the mixing of disparate elements as well as Frederic Jameson’s understanding that “pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or

unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without sense of humor."¹² But if pastiche is the "neutral practice of mimicry" devoid of satire or sense of humor, then are we expected to take this imagery seriously?

With a multicultural target audience similar to that of *TRACE* magazine's "a virtual collision of all cultures,"¹³ perhaps Rocawear, the masterminds behind the image, are banking on Frank's "hip consumerism" model. Founded in 1999 by commercial hip-hop capitalists Damon Dash and Jay-Z, whose collective accomplishments include a multimillion dollar (\$500 million to be exact) conglomerate of fashion, media, record, alcohol, and marketing brands, Rocawear has established itself as one of the top clothing companies by specializing in an "urban culture" aesthetic with global domination strategies.

Today commercial hip-hop artists have a tendency to equate the struggle for liberation and equality with the ability to get paid. Rather than comb the depths of the psyche

to confront and bring to light the shackles that consumer capitalism puts on the mind, they prefer to imitate the style of revolution in dress and performance, but not the substance. And perhaps it's because they don't have to. Seeing as the growing majority of hip-hop consumers and the chief financial supporters are white (for example, notice Victoria Beckham in the next generation of Rocawear ads), but the aesthetics remain heavily steeped in "transcultural" urbanism¹⁴ (read: black culture), perhaps they think that they are providing an education of sorts. Hip-hop has long been on its way down the same path as the other black-inspired art forms that came before it, such as rock-n-roll, jazz, and the blues. Like these cultural innovations, the aesthetics of hip-hop, and by extension its advertising campaigns, are being co-opted by the mainstream. Which is not surprising, taking into consideration hip-hop's lineage in the long history of black culture's ability to assimilate the norms of the day by processing and then reinterpreting them to reflect a distinctly African Diasporic experience. Cultural critic Kobena Mercer called it "improvisational aesthetics" in his description of the influence of the Jazz era on Afro-American dress, speech, and culture.¹⁵ Writer-poet Ishmael Reed called the aesthetic "Neo-HooDoo," a subversion through the layering of meaning in order to revitalize and revalidate a positive black cultural history.¹⁶



Figure 6
These Images were widely circulated to familiarize people with Angela's look in disguise and in reality.

Today we emulate images emulating us. We mask ourselves in order to mirror the world around us. We sample looks like a hip-hop DJ mixing on the turntables. It no longer matters which came first, the image or the ideology. It's not who you are, but what you envision yourself becoming, temporarily, ambivalently, fictionally. Is it possible that a clever mix of Angela Davis with Huey P. Newton could point to the continuing lineage of black liberation struggles? Rocawear is well aware that there is a new generation of consumers whose only recollection of the Black Power and Black Liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s is through the stories and images in visual media that were being produced simultaneously with the movement, and so by "creating culture vs. adopting one"¹⁷ they are attempting to sell a sense of empowerment by depicting a revolutionary history, albeit a distorted one, through signifiers of the movement such as clothing, hair, and hand positions.

The Afro-Politics of Angela Davis

In 1974, Angela Davis released her autobiography. In spite of a plethora of print and media coverage devoted to her image, trial, and cause, she had managed to keep a fierce secrecy around her private life. Until this publication no one had heard the story from her perspective. Written mostly while she was awaiting trial on charges associated with the Marin County Courtroom siege, Angela recounts the story of her life, from growing up on Dynamite Hill in Birmingham, Alabama, to one of the most politically significant trials of the twentieth century; from her journey to the U.S. Communist Party to her political activity with the Soledad Brothers; from her post as professor in UCLA's Philosophy Department to the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list. It is the FBI's Ten Most Wanted list poster that crystallizes the Afro into a symbolic visual representation of the black revolutionary (*Figure 6*).

In an effort to reclaim her image, which had been "disconnected from the historical context in which it arose" and reproduced as a style, Davis makes it a point to be photographed

for her autobiography in a “less predictable posture,” unlike the media images that displayed her as a militant black woman with big natural hair (Figure 7).¹⁸ For this image, she was photographed with softer lighting that cast a gentle glow around her face and shifted emphasis onto her gaze and off of her now infamous Afro.

Although the Afro began its course through style history in pre-colonial Africa and paved a way in slavery-era America, it was not considered a “stylish hairstyle” in African American circles until it was thrust into the ethnochic cultural landscape in the mid-1950s as the hottest ‘do for the downtown black artistic set. In his essay “Nap Time: Historicizing the Afro,” historian Robin D. G. Kelley

16 says that when the Afro first surfaced as a hairstyle, it was considered to be a sign of chic amongst both blacks and whites. It wasn’t until the 1960s that the Afro would come to be known as a political hairstyle through its association with the civil rights and black liberation movements. As the civil rights era revolutionized the Afro, the former history of the hairstyle as a chic and artistic expression would become so eclipsed by a political rebirth that the 1960s would be credited with its creation.¹⁹ Ironically, by the mid-1970s, the Afro would experience another (r)evolution and become stripped of its political history and reduced to just a “style” again.

Some thirty years after the book cover came out, it’s apparent that Davis’s

efforts to “rethink” her image have done little to nothing to remove the connotations of the Afro as a “style” that was made popular through the Black Power movement and once implied a threat to the state via revolution and freedom. Even though this photograph was created with a different goal in mind, the propaganda surrounding her case had already propelled her image, and in relation, the Afro hairstyle, into mass consciousness as a militant representation of black liberation. It no longer mattered whether one was down with the cause or not, it had been imprinted on the collective visual memories of the masses through COINTELPRO announcements, the media, and protest posters.

Art critic John Berger wrote, “photographs are relics of the past.” They are “traces of what happened. If the living take that past upon themselves, if the past becomes an integral part of the process of people making their own history, then all photographs would acquire a living context, they would continue to exist in time, instead of being arrested moments.”²⁰ Although Americans were unfamiliar (and still remain so to an extent) with the legacy of black female freedom fighters, through the proliferation of her image in popular media, Davis became the feminine face of “black liberation.” More important, it was her Afro, a type of hairstyle that many black women were sporting at the time to show their alignment with the cause of liberating the minds

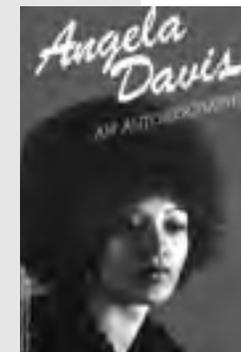
of oppressed peoples, that became the defining symbol. The political statement of “freeing your hair so that your mind could follow” became fashion. Before we could even become acquainted with the revolution that Angela Davis represented, her image was depoliticized, stripping power away from a struggle of resistance many people were fighting, and reduced to just a style, an “arrested moment.” Or was it?

The Transcultural Dream

Branded bodies lead to branded selves.

The revolution is (r)evolving into a manufactured copy of a dream. The fallout can potentially lead to a pacification of the spirit of resistance within us. It represents a complacent dream of revolution without any historical context for what revolution represents in the past, present, or future. Ideology was once the foundation of the movement and the celebrated (celebrity) image the support. Now the marriage of the celebrity image to the revolution is the (de)ciphered icon; an image taken out of rotation. The cipher is then branded and manufactured. The image takes precedence, kicking ideology to the curb.

Figure 7
Cover of *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, 1974.



It seems more than a symbolic gesture that just as the imperial power of Anglo America wages war on third world nations for national resources, the images of revolutionary icons are now being reproduced at such a mass quantity in fashion media, t-shirts, and in everyday products like key chains and tissue paper. It then becomes easy to appropriate the fashionable look of an Angela Davis or Che Guevara when the style of revolution stands in for the history of a revolutionary moment.

But are we truly willing to put into action what it means to be a revolutionary? Let’s get real. To be a revolutionary, to use the words of Che Guevara, requires that one must be willing to die for what one believes in. Furthermore, it requires that one fight against injustice wherever it may be. If history is to serve as the document of humanity that it was intended to be, then we must be willing to look deeper to uncover the missing narratives of our revolutionary past. Perhaps there we will find the seeds of the revolutionary spirit that lives in all of us.

Endnotes

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- 3 *Untold*, "Black Power" issue, October 2003.
- 4 "Protest." *BlackBook: Progressive Culture*, Fall 2003, p. 48.
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- 19 Robin D. G. Kelley, "Nap Time: Historicizing the Afro," *Fashion Theory*, 1997, 1(4), p. 345.
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the search for angela davis: a meditation on revolutionary commodities and neo-hoodoo advertising

About the Thesis Project

As the genesis of a much larger thesis on the relationship between subcultural style commodities and the creation of revolutionary icons/political celebrities and modes of dissent, this section of the thesis investigates the co-optation of the visual narratives of the revolutionary icon or celebrity in consumer culture. More specifically, it will establish the historical and cultural narratives embedded in the different faces and appropriations of Angela Davis as a symbol at the forefront of the black liberation struggle. These narratives demonstrate how the popularity and commodification of a revolutionary icon can serve as commentary on the increasing historical amnesia of the resistance or liberation movements associated with the icon. As visual narratives in the historical trip of co-optation, the widespread reappropriation of these icons stands as a testament to both the political empowerment and disempowerment of the people who embrace them with a desire to access that revolutionary history.



About the Author

Cicely Sweed earned her BA in creative writing from San Francisco State University. She has worn many hats as a cultural critic, editor, photographer, and curator. Sweed served as online editor for two years at the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, and was the managing editor of Oakland's *Urban View* newspaper. Her

writing has appeared in arts and culture publications including *SF Weekly*, *SOMA Magazine*, *Chickclick.com*, *360hiphop.com* and *SFStation.com*. As an independent curator, she collaborates with artists to showcase work that confronts issues surrounding representations of gender and identity. Her purpose is to make visible the invisible themes and rituals that influence, drive, or counteract cultural landscapes of the present-past-future.