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As a result, black women have made significant contributions to struggles against the racism and the dehumanizing exploitation of a wrongly organized society. In fact, it would appear that the intense levels of resistance historically maintained by black people and thus the historical function of the Black Liberation Struggle as harbinger of change throughout the society are due in part to the greater *objective* equality between the black man and the black woman. Du Bois put it this way:

In the great rank and file of our five million women, we have the up-working of new revolutionary ideals, which must in time have vast influence on the thought and action of this land.⁴⁶

Official and unofficial attempts to blunt the effects of the egalitarian tendencies as between the black man and woman should come as no surprise. The matriarch concept, embracing the clichéd “female castrator,” is, in the last instance, an open weapon of ideological warfare. Black men and women alike remain its potential victims—men unconsciously lunging at the woman, equating her with the myth; women sinking back into the shadows, lest an aggressive posture resurrect the myth in themselves.

The myth must be consciously repudiated as myth and the black woman in her true historical contours must be resurrected. We, the black women of today, must accept the full weight of a legacy wrought in blood by our mothers in chains. Our fight, while identical in spirit, reflects different conditions and thus implies different paths of struggle. But as heirs to a tradition of supreme perseverance and heroic resistance, we must hasten to take our place wherever our people are forging on towards freedom.

AFFIRMATION OF RESISTANCE: A RESPONSE TO ANGELA DAVIS

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ANGELA DAVIS'S “Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves” is a masterful attack on prevailing misconceptions about the role of Black women within their families and against an oppressive system during slavery. Professor Davis's

⁴⁶ Du Bois, *Darkwater*, p. 185.

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article is also a positive affirmation of Black people's determined resistance, revolutionary spirit, and creativity under severely adverse conditions—qualities and conditions powerfully demonstrated in Sister Davis's own life. This brief response cannot sum up the arguments so carefully developed in the article. To do so would be an offense to the richness and insight of her thoughts. Neither can it detail the qualities of Blackness, womanhood, and revolutionary radicalism which infuse her life and work. It can, however, emphasize the significance of her essay and suggest a few of the many parallels between her own struggle and that of the Black women who are her subjects.

The prime significance of the article is that it strikes at the heart of the so-called Black matriarchy issue through a refutation of its falsely assumed basis in slavery. The myth of the Black matriarchy, perpetuated in its fullest form by the "Moynihan Report," is, however, only one example of a widespread pattern in which Black folks are accused of being the cause of their own oppression. Stripped of academic jargon and political rhetoric, common assumptions in American society are that aggressive, domineering Black women are the cause of "broken" homes and "illegitimate" children; the laziness and sexual promiscuity of Black folks are the cause of heavy welfare rolls; and the general deterioration of Black American life is caused by the deterioration of the Black family.

Another myth (as long-lived as that of the Black matriarchy and, in fact, related to it) is the notion of Black slaves as relatively satisfied individuals who might have had a few grievances, but who never substantially questioned the concept of slavery through either individual acts of rebellion or organized attempts at revolt. Professor Davis successfully challenges the insidious assumption that Black women not only failed to resist slavery, but were collaborators of the slave class. Although the conditions of her imprisonment forced her to draw on secondary sources exclusively, Professor Davis nevertheless managed to present a number of cases of Black women participating in conspiracies against slave masters and engaging in individual acts of resistance and rebellion. If Professor Davis were able to work with primary sources and without the threat of life imprisonment, she would surely have extended the documentation of Black female resistance during slavery.

Additionally—and significantly—"Reflections on the Black Woman's Role . . ." also demonstrates the compatibility of a revolutionary perspective with excellence in academic scholarship. It is a well established, although seldom acknowledged fact that the questions one asks grow out of one's ideological position. For example, Moynihan's involvement in and commitment to the basic power arrange-

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ments in the United States lead him to advance an hypothesis which blames the victim rather than the victimizing society. Miss Davis's moral sentiments are quite different and lead her to examine the society itself and movements by which it might be changed. Indeed, it is tempting to suggest that it was Angela Davis's own spirit of resistance which encouraged her to see the roles a Black woman might play in a captive situation. Although Professor Davis exercises all the rigor of academic research, it is her revolutionary perspective which leads her to question the entrenched assumptions about Black women and Black society under slavery.

There is an important lesson here. Academic work is unlikely to contribute to liberation of Black people in the context of a new and healthier society until it is pursued by those who have deep commitments to such goals. In the absence of such sentiments, intellectual efforts are likely to be directed towards controlling Black and other oppressed people and perpetuating America as it now exists.

Professor Davis's life and thoughts represent a continuation of both individual and organized Black struggles for freedom and equity. Like the Black women she describes in her article, Angela Davis has taken upon herself the responsibility of helping to liberate those whom America oppresses. And, like Black women under slavery, her job and her work were not necessarily the same. Just as Black women under slavery were assigned jobs in the fields and in the houses of slave owners, their work was to nurture resistance to slavery; so in the case of Angela Davis, her job was as a teacher of philosophy, but her work was and is about the use of philosophy in the interest of correcting the human condition. As she states in *Lectures on Liberation*: "My idea of philosophy is that . . . if it does not tell us how we can go about eradicating some of the misery in this world, then it is not worth the name of philosophy."¹ The conditions she would change, the miseries she would eradicate are those which she identifies as fundamental to American or any capitalist society: the penal system, poor health facilities, a war-oriented economy, serious unemployment, poverty in the midst of affluence.

Like the Black women she writes of, Angela Davis has resisted the advantages which the oppressing class offers for acquiescence. She could have surrounded herself with the rewards which most of us academicians strive for, but refused to remain silent and ignore the misery of others. Instead, she maintained her revolution-

¹ (New York, n.d.), p. 14.

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ary spirit despite the physical and mental anguish to which her jailers subjected her, and like her people was creative and productive under the worst of conditions. Out of racism and exploitation, Black Americans have produced a musical tradition, a wealth of folklore and expressive culture, and an adaptive family organization and structure. In the cell of a California prison, Angela Davis produced the essay reprinted here, as well as the recently published book *If They Come in the Morning*. These works constitute a part of that massive movement of resistance, which now, as a century ago, is required if Black people are ever to be free.