

Angela Davis, "Race, Class, and Gender in the Reagan-Bush Era"

Introduction: Roberta Hamilton

Good evening to all of you and welcome to the 1988-89 Dunning Trust Lecture. My name is Roberta Hamilton. I teach in the department of sociology and I am the co-ordinator of Women's Studies. I am also a card-carrying member of the Dunning Trust Committee. The Chancellor Dunning Trust was established in 1946 when an anonymous donor gave \$100,000 to Queen's University to establish a permanent tribute to Chancellor Charles A. Dunning. The income from the trust is to be used to promote understanding and appreciation of the supreme importance of the dignity, freedom and responsibility of the individual person in human society.

We are particularly delighted to be co-sponsoring tonight's lecture with the Kingston Black Women's Collective. This joint effort of the Dunning Trust Committee of Queen's University and the collective has a two-fold purpose. The first is to bring to Kingston a woman of international reputation as author, philosopher and activist in the struggle against inequality and injustice. The second is to intervene in our own community in the struggle against racism, whether that racism manifests itself in schools, on the editorial page of the local newspaper or in our own university.

The university has historically been a privileged location for the dissemination of ideas. The question is whether we use that privileged location simply to confirm the privileges of those who are privileged, or whether we use this space to critically analyze the society that bequeathes its powers and privileges so unequally. It might interest you to know that the Dunning Trust Lecture was not given by a woman until 1970-71, nearly 25 years after its founding, and that our

speaker tonight is only the third woman of color to give the lecture, indeed the first black woman. This indicates that the gender and racial hierarchies in this society are reflected and consolidated within the university, and that the more recent invitations to women, and to men and women of color, reflect their own struggles for emancipation.

The study of history makes clear that those in power seldom move to include ever more people in their charmed circle. Rather, those without power and privilege struggle collectively for inclusion and for transformation of their society. When individual women or people of color by dint of exceptional talent, hard work and fortuitous circumstance do make it into the university, they have a choice: to identify with the privileged whom they find there or to continue to struggle with their sisters and brothers for collective rights.

Tonight we have with us a woman who chose the second route. And let us make no mistake here. The reason that Angela Davis was fired from her first job as a professor of philosophy at the University of California at Los Angeles, and the reason why some people have opposed her visit tonight, is not fundamentally because of her membership in any particular party or organization, but because she had the audacity to choose this second route. Instead of being grateful for the privileges offered by academia, she put her formidable natural talents, her many years of studying philosophy, her experience as a young girl growing up in Birmingham, Alabama, at the service of those still brutally excluded from participation in the so-called "good life." Through her inspirational speeches and her eloquent writing -- her books include *If They Come in the Morning*, *Women, Race and Class* and, most recently, *Women, Culture and Politics* -- Angela Davis has given to those suffering economic humiliation, racial discrimination and oppression as women a clear and brilliantly cast message. Not only do all people deserve, in the words of the Dunning Trust mandate, dignity, freedom and responsibility; not only should they

struggle for those ends, but also -- and this is important -- that the struggle is indeed worth undertaking.

Angela Davis, the person, therefore, continues to be a symbol of hope. The invitation to her to speak tonight means that the Dunning Trust Committee has fulfilled its mandate for this year.

Please join me in welcoming to Queen's University and Kingston, Canada, a courageous and brilliant woman of our times, teacher at San Francisco State University and the San Francisco Art Institute, Professor Angela Davis.

Angela Davis:

Thank you, thank you very much, Roberta Hamilton, for the very moving introduction, and I would like to thank the Dunning Trust Committee for having invited me to deliver the 1988-1989 Dunning Trust Lecture. I know that there are those in this community who are not very happy about this, and that I have heard that people are referring to the controversy stirred up by my visit here. However, I think that it is The Whig-Standard (is that the name of the newspaper?) which is responsible for stirring up that controversy and I should say, before I begin, that it's been a long time since I have experienced, since I have been the target of an attack which is so factually unfounded, which is so full of falsehoods and which is so utterly vitriolic. It reminds me of an article in a newspaper in the Mid- West shortly after I was acquitted; the author of the article made the statement that I had killed three judges, and that I belonged in prison as a result.

In any event, I am not going to dignify the editorial with a detailed refutation of its argument, but if, during the question and answer period, you would like to pose any questions about it, I will be happy to respond.

Let me say that I am very pleased that this lecture falls during black history month, and I am equally pleased that Canadians are increasingly joining us in celebrating black history month, and I'd like to say a few words about the history of black history month before I enter into the body of my remarks.

Of course, black history has been formally acknowledged as meriting some form of special attention for about 60 years. The first black history celebration took place in the 1920s but it was for one week. It was Negro history week. And I recall as a child reared in the segregated conditions of the Deep South in the 1950s that I always anticipated with great excitement that one week in the month of February when we could, during one week, recognize that white people were not the only ones who had made significant contributions to the history of our country.

As a pupil in a segregated elementary school, I was responsible during that one week for doing posters, finding photographs of black heroes and, later on, doing research papers. For one week out of 52 weeks, as black children we were permitted to affirm our heritage, our ethnic identity and our value as human beings. For one week, out of 52 weeks of the year, we were allowed to challenge and contradict even the historical invisibility imposed upon us and our people. And I remember that each February I experienced, in a sense, a rebirth, a renewal; during that period instead of singing the national anthem, The Star-Spangled Banner, we would sing the black national anthem.

But during that period, as black people we stood alone in celebrating our history. There were few white people outside of the progressive community who were even aware of the existence of Negro history week. And, of course, during the last years our right to acknowledge our history, and the importance of the entire population regardless of their racial or ethnic background in joining us, has been recognized throughout the United States. We celebrate now black history month. Now I always point out that it's still quite backward that we only have one month. We began with one week; now we have one month and I am truly looking forward to the time when we can celebrate and acknowledge black history for 365 days of the year. And it's very ironic -- I usually point out that we happened to have gotten the shortest month of the year.

Of course, even now in Canada increasing numbers of people are acknowledging black history month and there are those historical connections between black people in Canada and black people in the United States, however they might manifest themselves. There are those who are part of this community who are the descendants of slaves and fought to cross the border into Canada in order to achieve their emancipation. And there are our sisters and brothers who come from the Caribbean and from Africa -- we do have a common heritage, whatever the connection might be.

In this part of the world, especially in the United States I would say, the definition of history which is generally promoted in the arena of popular culture, as well as in the institutions designed to impart knowledge to our children, the definition of history is often shallow and inaccurate. People are encouraged to situate history very safely in the past, and to sever all ties between our historical past and the historical present and indeed the historical future. History is seldom seen as a continuum, and so today, even as millions of people celebrate black history month, they often situate the black quest for equality and freedom in the past so as to diffuse the

spirit of struggle inherent in the historical contributions of so many African-American people, and so as to render innocuous the political challenges of the past which ought to continue to be made in the present.

And, of course, during the last eight years in the United States, during which we have had a professional actor at the helm of our government, many illusions have been spun about the historical meaning of the present time. The ideologists associated with the Reagan administration have consistently and systematically attempted to create the illusion that racism is no longer a matter of serious concern in the United States. In fact, Reagan's farewell speech, delivered shortly before he left office to make way for the successor who would indeed, of course, continue the Reagan tradition, Reagan's farewell speech demagogically accused black leaders of pretending that racism still afflicts the United States in order to retain their leadership positions.

Oh yes, Reagan actually said this, even as the media, the established media, have made it very clear that there has been an eruption of racist violence from one end of the country to the other, particularly during the last eight years; Reagan argued that racism is a figment of the imagination of black civil rights leaders who need to continue to force us to believe in the existence of this non-existent racism so that their pay cheques will be forthcoming. And, of course, this kind of argumentation has been characteristic of Reagan's approach throughout the two terms of his office, as if he could wave racism away with the magic wand of Hollywood.

The objective record of the Reagan years reveals an unceasing drive to annul the victories achieved by the civil rights movement during the two decades prior to Reagan's election to the presidency. As a matter of fact, the Civil Rights Commission, a once extremely important federal agency designed to monitor and rectify discrimination, was turned into a rubber stamp agency which followed the official Reagan line that racism is not a problem in the United States during

the decade of the '80s. As a matter of fact, the Civil Rights Commission was responsible for, and has been responsible for, attempting to dismantle affirmative action programs from one end of the country to the other.

Now for a moment let us switch to the most recent president, George Bush, who, interestingly enough, was not taken seriously as a candidate, until the mass media, supported of course by the corporate monopolies, decided that they had to give George Bush a presidential aura so that now they can take him seriously. Bush's comments during his inaugural address further bolstered this notion that racism is a historical problem which has long since been overcome. He did not even mention the word racism once in his address. He mentioned the homeless, disproportionate numbers of whom are of course people of color. But he referred to the homeless as being lost and roaming. And pointed out that the government would like very much to do something about the situation of the homeless. However, he says that we have more will than wallet. Well, of course there are some obvious contradictions because the federal government is in the process of bailing out the Savings and Loans -- a hundred billion dollars is nothing when it comes to bailing out the banks. One hundred billion dollars would very easily solve the problem of the homeless in our country today -- but we'll talk about those contradictions as well.

I want to focus on this issue of racism for a few moments, this issue of racism which has been officially ignored. And I'm not even attempting to argue that the Republicans are responsible for this effort to create a shroud of invisibility, camouflaging the nature of racism today. If one examines the course of the election campaigns, there was only one candidate who really seriously attempted to address the impact of racism, not only on those of us who are its direct targets, but the impact of racism on the country as a whole. And that was of course Jesse

Jackson. Even Michael Dukakis, unfortunately, failed to generate any kind of excitement around his ability to be perceptive in that area. I was, as a matter of fact, extremely disappointed during the Democratic Convention when I heard Dukakis give an entire acceptance speech, accepting the nomination of course, without once referring to the objective institution of racism.

What he did, interestingly enough, was to applaud the achievements of Jesse Jackson's children, creating the impression that he was indeed sensitive to issues that concerned African-Americans or Mexicans, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, Asians, Native Americans. But what he did in assuming that kind of posture was not very different from the approach taken by staunch segregationists during the pre-civil rights era in the south. I can remember as a child hearing about the statements of the most ardent racists who would argue that if indeed their children could attend school with the children of Ralph Bunche, who was at that time representing the U.S. in the United Nations, a black man of course in the United Nations, if their children could attend school with the children of Ralph Bunche they would have no problems at all. So I was reminded of that when I heard Dukakis. Jesse Jackson was really the only presidential candidate who seriously addressed the issue of racism and how it has affected, and will indeed continue to affect, the entire country.

I have been asked to speak about the Reagan-Bush years: the years that have just gone by and the coming years. And I think that we are living in a very complex era, an extremely complex period in the history of our quest for freedom and dignity, to use the words of the mandate of the Dunning Trust. On the one hand we seem to have made very impressive progress in the realm of mass consciousness; as a matter of fact the thought patterns of the population in our country have experienced extremely progressive transformations during the last period.

I would argue, as a matter of fact, that there is far more consciousness on a popular level of the need to eradicate racism today, in the latter 1980s, than in the '70s or the '60s or the '50s. There is a much more sophisticated understanding of the need to eradicate sexism in the latter 1980s. There is a greater understanding of the plight of working people, of the plight of the poor, the homeless. And as a matter of fact, I would suggest that we have achieved majorities in many areas, progressive majorities. There is an anti-racist majority in the United States today; you would never know it if you look at those who have been in control of the government during the last period. There is an anti-sexist majority. There is an anti-nuclear majority. And it's quite interesting: there was a survey done in California in an area called Orange County, which traditionally has been considered to be one of the most conservative, indeed one of the most reactionary sections of the State of California -- that was one of Reagan's strongholds when he was the governor of the state. Just recently, a survey indicated that Mikhail Gorbachev is much more popular than George Bush in Orange County.

And, as a matter of fact, a survey was recently commissioned by the NAACP, carried out by Lew Harris Poll, and that survey indicated that far more white people than ever before are aware of the need to eliminate racism; and would count themselves among those who are determined to eradicate racism.

Now: at the same time, of course, there have been some of the most explosive, some of the most violent manifestations of racism and sexism and anti-working class attitudes in the recent period. Now that seems to be rather contradictory. On the one hand it seems that increasing numbers of white people are expressing their solidarity with the quest to bring an end to racism, for example, but at the same time we find that throughout the country acts of racism are becoming increasingly apparent and increasingly explosive and violent.

There is, for example, an attempt by the organized white supremacist movement in the United States to create out of the skinheads shock troops of the racist movement, and as a matter of fact, according to a report issued by Klan Watch, which monitors white supremacist activity for the Southern Poverty Law Fund, not since the height of Klan activity (and I'm quoting) during the civil rights era has there been a white supremacist group so obsessed with violence or so reckless in its disregard for the law. Skinheads have been linked to murders in Portland, Oregon, San Jose, California, Las Vegas, Reno, etc. And two thirds of all the racial assaults documented by Klan Watch in 1988 involved, in one way or another, skinheads. The victims have been, of course, black people, gays and lesbians, Jews, Asians, Latinos, native American Indians.

Tom Metzger, for example, who is the leader of the organization White Aryan Resistance, is one of the figures responsible for attempting to create a youth element of the white supremacist movement by bringing together skinheads throughout the country. Not very long ago a report was commissioned by the National Council of Churches and the name of that report was They Don't All Wear Sheets. It was a documentation of some of the hate-motivated assaults during the Reagan years. And they documented literally thousands and thousands of incidents. And these must be considered only the tip of the iceberg because in most states in the United States the criminal justice system does not even classify crimes as being motivated by racism or by anti-semitism or by religious bias or by homophobic bias.

As a matter of fact there was a case a year and a half or so ago in which a cross was burned on the lawn of a black family, and the people who were accused of perpetrating this act were indeed arrested. They were arrested, but they were charged with burning without a permit. That was the charge. And I use that as an example because if you look at the laws in most of the

states, or the statutes in the cities, they do not allow for the designation of a specific crime as being racist. So that if it is not reported in one way or another, we never really are able to document the extent to which these crimes are actually taking place. And I mention this because I know that you've had some real serious problems in this community and throughout this country as well. Unfortunately, you seem to be very much bound to our fate, and as I read about some of the incidents that have been happening on the campus here, I was reminded of what has been happening on the campuses of the colleges and universities all across the United States over the last years. From assaults, physical assaults on black students, to cross burnings, to racist, anti-semitic, homophobic graffiti, to threats.

Now why, you are probably asking, is it possible to argue that we are making progress in the realm of ideas with respect to the effort to end racism? How can that be argued and at the same time we acknowledge the factual evidence that racism is on the rise? Well, it appears to be contradictory, but, if one examines the sources of this racism which is on the rise, I think it becomes apparent that the two phenomena can indeed exist side by side. If we are experiencing this outburst of racist violence, if indeed it appears that Pandora's box has been opened, it is because we have for the last eight years been governed by an administration which has issued invitations to all of those who would like to manifest their racism to come out in the open.

The Reagan administration has, for example, dismantled the Civil Rights Commission, as I was pointing out. The Reagan administration has consistently assaulted the main strategy for the achievement of equality that emerged out of the civil rights period -- and that is affirmative action. And we are reaping the very bitter fruits of that assault on affirmative action because not very long ago the Supreme Court ruled indeed that the city of Richmond's, Richmond Virginia's, affirmative action program, or what they called minority set aside program, is unconstitutional.

Richmond, Virginia. Richmond, Virginia, was the cradle of the Confederacy. This is really ironic that, finally, Richmond, Virginia, developed some kind of affirmative action program in order to guarantee that the construction business that the city gives out would go at least partially to companies owned by people of color. The Supreme Court ruled that this is unconstitutional. So this means that such programs, such affirmative action programs in 32 states and 160 cities may now be challenged.

So is it any wonder that skinheads are physically assaulting black women? Or is it any wonder that black people are afraid to walk into areas of New York because they might be lynched, as was the case in Howard Beach about two years ago? I don't have a problem understanding that. I understand the roots, the source of it. And if one examines the very conscious attempt to change the composition of the Supreme Court over the last period -- Reagan was determined to leave us with a legacy that would remain very much alive long after he has gone to his grave.

And if one looks at that decision regarding the Richmond, Virginia, affirmative action program, the votes were 6 to 3. The only three who opposed may not be on the court very much longer. And of course, who do you think wrote the majority decision? Who do you think? Who would you expect would write the majority decision, those of you who know something about the Supreme Court? No. It was Sandra Day O'Connor, the first woman ever to be appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States. I mention that because there is a message there. There is a message for those of us who are involved in the women's movement that we cannot assume that, when one woman penetrates circles that have previously been barred to women, that that is automatically a victory. Just as we cannot make the assumption that when one black woman or man penetrates circles previously barred to black people that that is a victory. Because, as a

matter of fact, Reagan found the perfect black person to head the Civil Rights Commission. A man by the name of Clarence Pendleton, whose claim to fame was that he was capable of, the way I often put it, out-Reaganing Reagan.

Well, if one looks at the balance sheet for the last eight years, what has happened to people of color, to women of all racial backgrounds, to the labor movement, to working people in general?

Let us begin with the realm of education. The institutionalization of race-based discrimination and gender-based discrimination in our colleges and universities over the last period is absolutely astonishing. More black students, for example, graduated from institutions of higher learning in 1976 than in 1986, both percentage-wise and in absolute numbers.

There has been a downward trend in black enrolment in higher education in general. In 1976, 9.4 per cent of the college population consisted of black students. In 1984, 8.8 per cent. Since 1976 the proportion of black high school graduates who go to college has declined from 33.5 per cent to 26.1 per cent. There were 15,000 fewer black high school graduates entering college in 1986 than in 1976. There has been a similar decline among Latino students. What is so ironic is that there are more black students prepared to enter college today than 10 years ago. Or than 20 years ago. The high school graduation rates have gone up. The proportion of black students graduating from high school rose from 67.5 per cent in 1976 to 75.6 per cent in 1986. Of course, there is a statistic that has gone up and that is the number of black and Latino men and women going into the armed services. That has definitely increased.

The drop-out rate among black students has increased, and it's often assumed that students of color drop out at such high rates because they are not academically up to par with white students. This is the myth. However, studies indicate that most black students drop out of

predominantly white institutions because of financial or other non-academic reasons. And again, if one examines the record of the Reagan administration, the proportion of the budget going to education, and specifically to financial aid for students in institutions of higher learning, has drastically decreased -- drastically decreased.

And, of course, black students, for example, need financial aid proportionately more than white students. Five times as many black students who go to college come from families with incomes less than \$12,000. Five times as many black students as white students come from families with incomes below \$12,000. And so it's not possible to attend a university where the tuition is anything from \$1,000 to \$18,000 a year. There are no more free universities in the United States.

The economic predicament of the black population in general has very clearly deteriorated. Reagan, of course, argued continually that his administration had lifted the economic level of the nation as a whole. And when Bush campaigned, he campaigned on the basis of the Republican record, that they were responsible for ushering in an era of prosperity -- an era of prosperity. It is true that the poverty rate for the nation as a whole went down during the Reagan years: went down about one-tenth of one per cent. From 13.6 per cent to 13.5 per cent. However, what was not pointed out was that black people and other people of color have gotten poorer, and as the nation as a whole was allegedly entering into an era of prosperity, people of color were becoming more entrenched in poverty. And there is today almost a third of the black population which is officially poor. Thirty, as a matter of fact a little more than 30, 33.1 per cent. Seven-hundred thousand more black people are poor than 10 years ago. Reagan refused to acknowledge -- it is as if we don't exist. And I am amazed that those who are responsible for the governing of the United States continue to pretend that millions of people in our country

simply don't exist. We are not important. It doesn't matter if more black people fall into poverty. It doesn't matter if approximately half of all black children now are poor. It doesn't matter if our children are continually pushed into traps which lead them to prison, or to drug abuse.

And speaking of drugs -- speaking of drugs, the record of Reagan and Bush during the last eight years is absolutely dismal. Utterly dismal. Nancy Reagan, of course, has been travelling all over the country for years saying, "Just say no." "Just say no." But of course she wasn't referring to saying "no" to those who are really responsible for the drug problem. What about the Contras in Nicaragua, who very clearly do fundraising using the drug traffic? What about counter-revolutionaries in other parts of the world? And what about the police? And what about those who consistently refuse to create the institutions that are necessary to provide opportunities to our young people which will steer them away from the drug culture?

Believe me, it is frightening. It is horrifying. And I don't know whether you here in Canada have seen anything as horrifying as what exists in our communities today, where young kids 10 and 11 years old are selling and taking crack. Where children are arrested, children are arrested and the police find \$25,000 on them. And no one can tell me that this is our problem. Everything is our problem.

In Bush's inaugural address he referred to those who are on welfare as "welfare addicts." "Welfare addicts." Well, of course, he was perhaps a little better than Reagan who referred to people on welfare as "welfare queens." But the message of both labels was that those who are the victims of this horrible situation are themselves responsible -- are themselves responsible. The unemployment statistics for the black population: 12 per cent; over 12 per cent. And these are the official statistics. Of course, those who become so disgusted with the inability to find a job after searching and searching and searching that they stop, they are no longer considered to

be unemployed. They're called "discouraged workers." And they are not counted in the statistic of the unemployed. So we have many, many thousands of people who are actually unemployed but are not counted by the government.

45.6 per cent of all black children under the age of 18 are officially living under the poverty level. And what has been clear about the economic patterns of the Reagan years is that the rich have gotten richer and the poor have gotten poorer. The poorest 20 per cent of the population now has 4.6 per cent of the nation's income, as compared to 5.5 per cent in 1967. The wealthiest 20 per cent now has 43.7 per cent of the nation's income as compared to 40.4 per cent in 1967. And this is a direct consequence of the economic policies of the Reagan administration. And even as we attempt to understand the nature of racism we must take these developments into account.

Racism is not a question simply of malevolent forces in educational institutions, in the workplace, wherever, determined to prevent people of color from achieving equality. Sexism is not a question, not an issue of those who hate women deciding they are not going to allow us to achieve parity with men. Socio-economic strategies which are formulated at the very highest levels of government and which directly represent the interests of transnational corporations, which directly profit from racism, from sexism and from class inequalities; these socio-economic strategies are designed to guarantee that this function persists.

So, if we look at the record thus far of the Reagan-Bush years, we see that record is dismal. We are falling further into the oppressive trap of racism, sexism, class inequality. And it is not possible to separate the three forms of oppression. The one nurtures the other. When black people come under attack, the way in which racism and sexism are dynamically bound up with

one another will mean that eventually women, regardless of their racial background, will be targeted.

And if one examines now the issue of reproductive rights -- I wonder if you have been following the extent to which the Reagan- Bush government has attempted to manipulate the thought patterns of the people in our country around this issue of abortion rights. Bush, of course, he's very confused. As a matter of fact it appeared during the election campaign that he was not even aware that there was a Supreme Court decision in 1973 which rendered abortion constitutional, because he argued that -- well, first he said that any woman who has an abortion is a criminal. And then, of course, his aides had to correct him -- speak to the press, pointing out that Bush really did not mean to imply that every woman who has had an abortion should be in jail. But of course we are witnessing at this very moment the most serious assault on the reproductive rights of women in our country. And I think it is very important to acknowledge the degree to which racism and class-inspired oppression is responsible for the state in which we find ourselves today.

In 1973, when the Roe-v-Wade Decision was handed down by the Supreme Court, the feminist movement which at that time was almost exclusively white, celebrated that decision without recognizing that there were some women who were really totally left out of the argument in that decision.

The decision itself led the way for the offensive which has led to the situation today where the Supreme Court may very well reconsider the constitutionality of the Roe-v-Wade Decision. And what do I mean by that? Well, there are many of us during those days who were very reluctant to become officially associated with the abortion rights movement because we

were arguing that it had little relevance to poor women and especially to women of color, because the other issues with respect to reproductive rights were not related to that campaign.

And indeed in 1973, when the Roe-v-Wade Decision was handed down, the Supreme Court ruled that a woman has the right to decide with her doctor whether or not she will have an abortion, and that decision will be governed by the constitutional right to privacy -- the constitutional right to privacy. The patient-doctor relationship was what was covered by this right to privacy. Now, how many women have doctors? Just think about it. How many women have doctors? There are a lot of women who don't have doctors. They go to clinics. The decision said nothing about a woman having the right to make the decision about ending a pregnancy that will create problems for her. And as a matter of fact, a couple of years after that decision a federal amendment withdrew all federal funds from abortions, so that poor women effectively lost the right to abortion. You see, that wasn't taken into consideration. The underlying class and racial implications of that decision were not even examined or discussed in 1973. So that four years later suddenly the Hyde Amendment is passed, and all over the country poor women effectively no longer have the right to abortion because if they can't pay for it they can't get one.

And what begins to happen at that time is that increasing numbers of poor women begin to be sterilized because the federal government still fully funds sterilization. And we find ourselves in that situation today, that the sterilizations have gone up, and of course every person has the right to decide whether she or he wishes to be surgically sterilized, but many women now are being compelled by the force of things, because they do not have the money to pay for an abortion to have themselves sterilized for free.

And the Hyde Amendment opened up the way for an assault on women's right to abortion in general, so that rich white women today now suffer the possibility of losing their right to abortion. And if the Reagan-Bush forces have their way, this will happen very soon.

Bush has made it very clear: he spoke via telephone to the ultra- right demonstration that took place not long ago on the anniversary January 23 of the Roe-v-Wade Decision. And the Supreme Court agreed to examine a Missouri law. If the Supreme Court rules in the way that Sandra Day O'Connor for example would like to see it rule, then it is quite possible that state funds will no longer be able to be used for abortions, and in the majority of states, those state funds are not even available now. And this is a very serious situation because when abortion was illegal countless numbers of women died as a result of being exploited by quack abortionists. And a good number of those women were women of color, poor women, women who could not afford to fly to Puerto Rico and get an abortion; or to fly to Switzerland.

I mention this because there is going to be a very important gathering of women and men in Washington on April 9. It is called the March for Women's Lives, and we are hoping that this will be the largest gathering in the history of this country to raise the issue of women's reproductive rights and of women's rights in general. And we are attempting to make this a multi-racial gathering. We want as many women of color to participate as possible and all of you are invited to join us. We could use some support from our Canadian friends and certainly you know what it means to fight for women's reproductive rights.

Now what are the prospects for the future? What are the prospects for the future? As we continue to fight for an end to racism, class exploitation, sexism, I would suggest that, given the nature of the Bush victory, the prospects are greater than they have been in a long time. I would

suggest that we are on the verge of an activist era in the United States such as has never been seen before in recent years or during this period.

We attempted to defeat Bush at the polls. Unfortunately we didn't. But Bush did not get a mandate. He did not even begin to get a mandate. As a matter of fact one of the problems was that the majority of the people did not even vote. We had the lowest voter turnout in the history of the country practically. And it was a real serious difficulty because many people would have registered to vote and would have voted for the Democrats if the candidate had been someone other than Michael Dukakis. Unfortunately we had a candidate that did not understand the nature of this historical moment, because Dukakis backed off on every major issue.

He backed off on issues that would have generated the enthusiasm and support of enormous numbers of people of color. He backed off on the one issue that dramatically distinguished him from Bush (and what's-his-name), and that was the issue of abortion. He very timidly, until the very end of the election, indicated his differences. If he had been more aggressive and stronger on that issue he would have brought forth the support of millions of feminists. And we do have a feminist majority in the United States today. So, Dukakis, you know, my feeling is that it was not George Bush who won the election, it was Dukakis who lost. It was Dukakis who gave it away. Literally gave it away. Because the nature of the campaign indicated that the majority of the people were opposed to the policies associated with Bush and Reagan.

But we lost; we lost. So what do we do now? We were able to generate the basis for a new kind of mass challenge. What we witnessed during the course of the last years is a new ability to create coalitions, and to create, to forge unity. What was perhaps most indicative of this new ability was the campaign to prevent Robert Bork from being confirmed as a Supreme Court

Justice. Everybody came together. It was wonderful to see how the black movement, the Chicano movement, the Puerto Rican movement, the Asian movement, the Native American movement, the women's movement, the peace movement, the environmental movement, the gay and lesbian movement, the seniors movement, the youth movement -- I could go on and on -- came together and effectively prevented this nomination from being confirmed within a very short period of time.

It was very striking to see the kind of support that Jesse Jackson generated during the primaries. Jesse Jackson won in places that one would have never thought that a black candidate could have even shown his or her face before. He won in Las Vegas. He won in Las Vegas! In Alaska! So there's something new about our situation.

And this is why I say that we do have progressive majorities. What we have to do is organize those majorities, and bring to bear the kind of pressure on the Bush administration that will prevent the continuation of the Reagan strategies of the last eight years. And even during the last eight years we've had the largest demonstrations in the history of our country. So we should not be under the impression, or you should not be under the impression, the last eight years have been all dismal. We had the largest peace demonstration in history. We had the most multi-racial demonstrations. The largest gay rights demonstration. There were a half-a-million people who went to Washington last October.

And this is the tradition established during the Reagan administration that we must nurture and further develop. And I am convinced that over the next period, we will indeed increase our activism in domestic areas as well as issues such as solidarity with the people of South Africa, solidarity with the people of Nicaragua.

We will continue our activism in the quest for nuclear disarmament because we must enter the 21st century nuclear-free. We must, if we wish to guarantee to our children and to their children that there will indeed be a future to enjoy. We must get rid of every last nuclear weapon by the year 1999. And I am convinced we can do this. I am very excited about this period. And I certainly hope that you feel that here in your country that there are signs that we will be able to walk together along this path of activism.

As a person who has been involved for many, many years -- I sometimes stand back in amazement when I think that I have been involved in the movement for 30 years, but I have. And of all the three-and-a-half decades that I have been an activist, I find this era to be the most exciting. The world situation has changed, and I think this is the era during which we will be able to establish the kind of organized mass movements that will allow us to achieve enduring victories in the quest to end race-based oppression, gender-based oppression, class-based oppression. And I must admit that I am convinced that we will eventually in my lifetime be able to restructure the social order in the United States, which is what we really need to do.

And so I leave you with this message: I hope that before too many more years have passed, we will be able to join hands as two partners in a global quest to rid the entire world of the very basis of these oppressions, and that is of monopoly capitalism. Thank you very much.