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By Adam Austin

Author, civil rights activist, and former communist, Angela Davis, came to speak at Radford University Jan. 20 in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. The Birmingham, Alabama native touched on a number of different topics such as the over-populated prisons, how to get rid of violence, and the state of security in the United States.

She was welcomed with a standing ovation and started with a quote from Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech.

Davis grew up in Alabama and was no stranger to racial discrimination. She went on to study at Brandeis University and the University of Frankfurt in Germany. Once Davis returned home, she received news of a church bombing in Birmingham where she had known some of the African-American girls that were hurt during it. This was a clear act of racism and would spark a fire in her. She later attended graduate school at the University of California, San Diego. In grad school she found her calling and joined a few different groups such as The Black Panthers and Che-Lumumba club which was an all-black branch of the communist party.

Once Davis graduated, she was granted a position as an assistant professor in the philosophy department at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). However, the then governor of California, Ronald Reagan, requested that she be removed from the position due to her communist affiliation. Davis fought this in court and received her job back. However, she decided to leave at the end of her teaching contract.

After the bombing of a church by the Ku Klux Klan in Alabama, Davis decided to join the civil rights movement, her mother was an active NAACP member.

In honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Davis came to Radford University to speak about diversity and how things can change to move forward as a country. Focusing on the issue of police brutality Davis said, "Only by structural change can the roots of evil be removed."

While she was here she spoke about over population in prisons and violence her main message was one of peace. Davis made it clear that she was not pleased about how the

police force runs and says we need to push for improvement.

She quoted a former Black Panther member, George Jackson, saying, "We need new notions of security without police and prisons." When we put people in prisons we forget about them and what they did. She insisted we must find a new way to handle criminals; she does not just want to incarcerate them, she wants to get rid of the violence that put them there in the first place.

She spoke strongly about believing in yourself and what we stand for as people, saying we need to challenge the system we believe in if we see fit, as well as to stand up for free education. Davis believes that "education should be a right," and as a right it should be free.

Davis' speech was part of Radford's week long Martin Luther King, Jr. celebration. Other events that took part of this celebration were the MLK Day of Service, teach-ins, and a Dine on Diversity that focused on race as a social construct featuring Dr. Lori Hall.

The Center for Diversity and Inclusion had originally planned the NAACP's March on Washington that would start outside Tyler Hall but had to be canceled due to the weather.