

**Speech by the rector at  
the academic ceremony  
for the award of an  
honorary doctorate to  
Angela Y. Davis**

**Barcelona, March 9, 2021**



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Pompeu Fabra  
*Barcelona***

Thank you very much to everyone who has made this ceremony possible.

It is my turn to speak. I will be very careful, because I do not like the idea – let alone in this case – that the rector gets to have the last word, as if rectors had the innate property of soaring above their colleagues. The subjects that Dr Davis has studied – so magnificently explained in the *laudatio* address by Drs Verge and Cole – and the personality of the author herself make me feel something that, although not new for me, is not common either. As trite as it may sound, it is a zoom effect. As you zoom in on a picture and it gets bigger, it changes in nature. The way we look at slavery – even though some aspects of that unspeakable phenomenon often remain far closer to us in time and space than we might think – or at discrimination and inequality of any kind when a particular event grabs the headlines is not the same as what we find when we read Dr Davis's works. The comparison may be odious, and I apologize, but the punches we see when watching black and white clips of legendary boxing matches by Joe Louis or Rocky Marciano are not the same as the sorry spectacle we would see were we to stand ringside at a professional match today. I am referring to the awareness of what her texts are about: it is much more terrible, much rawer. In fact, we still do not see the tremendous injustice of it, the barbarism in our culture.

In Walter Benjamin's fine terms:

'There is no document of culture that is not, at the same time, a document of barbarism.'

But this zoom effect that changes the nature of what we see and makes us mere footnotes to Angela Davis's work and even to her whole career, for those of us who might fancy ourselves contemporaries and – even though we never met Herbert Marcuse and never immersed ourselves in the fine Marxism of the Frankfurt School in person – children of a certain political and philosophical perspective that challenges the beliefs derived from the idea of a one-dimensional humanity... this zoom effect, as I was saying, is even more dizzying for us. Because the thoughtful and committed work that lies open before us shows us that the punches were the same, that the heroic fight against slavery continues in some ways today, here, amongst us, in our daily lives. What it was was also what it is and something that, from so close, we may not always be able to see.

In short, amongst many other things, Dr Davis calls upon us to understand that knowledge of history, whether recent or remote, is a requirement for correct knowledge of the present. She literally calls us, demonstrating the movement by walking. I, who came to this university 25 years ago to dedicate myself to the history of ideas, feel particularly moved by this call. And that is why – although, of course, it is not the only reason – Dr Davis has my full admiration.

I hope we can meet in person soon. Thank you very much.

