

Notes taken by students

International Symposium

Education and Gender Equality

Wellesley College, October 20 & 21, 2017

Plenary Session – Saturday, 2:00 - 3:30 p.m. – Lecture by Angela Davis

Opening:

- Paula Johnson, President of Wellesley College

Speaker:

- Angela Davis, Professor Emerita of History of Consciousness and Feminist Studies at UC Santa Cruz

Moderator:

- Anjali Prabhu, Director of the Newhouse Center for the Humanities and Professor of French at Wellesley College

Main points:

- There is a racist law and order ideology that pathologizes black women and girls. Black girls are disproportionately receiving corporal punishment, getting arrested, and referred to law enforcement. The adultification of black girls and other girls of color leads to unfair treatment and less tolerance, especially in schools and the justice system.
- Use of prison as punishment based on the convention that people can be transformed through penance and rehabilitation. Women who were criminals were considered to be fallen and not able to be saved until the opening of women's prisons. Women could be rehabilitated into better women, that is, wives. Reformation centers were created where women were taught domestic skills.
- Concept that women's place is in the home is a bourgeois concept. Black women and working class women have always had to work outside the home.
- Hiding police inside the school under the name "school resource officer." These officers are first responsive to the police and then to the school. Black women are targeted by these SROs.
- Lack of humanities education has provoked a crisis in democracy. Humanities education is important, as it can be applied to help solve local and global issues of racial and gender and economic justice.
- If equal education is ever achieved for black girls, it will be achieved for all. When black women enter, the whole world enters with them.
- Slavery and colonization of indigenous people still shape our education system today.

Best practices evoked regarding public policies, corporate actions, civil society or academic initiatives:

- Demilitarization, removal of police and removal of school resource officers from education.
- Racial awareness training and implicit bias training for educators and police officers.
- Abolition of privately owned prisons.
- More people of color as educators, potentially through instilling a quota system.
- The pursuit of an “aesthetic education” (Gayatri Spivak), that is educating the imagination to envision a different world, is important.
- School districts should educate their student bodies about historical and cultural contexts of racism; it’s not too early to teach it if students of color are already experiencing it!
- The foster care system needs to be analyzed critically for the trauma it inflicts and the criminalization that occurs to its participants: city and state governments need to provide more care and support.
- Change the narrative around women prisoners. Do not erase the legacy of slavery in our history.
- More emphasis needs to be placed on not only making education accessible to young women of color but also ensuring that it suits their needs and helps break the cycle of oppression (rather than perpetuating it).