

MOUNTAINS THAT TAKE WING – ANGELA DAVIS & YURI KOCHIYAMA: A CONVERSATION ON LIFE, STRUGGLES & LIBERATION

(97 MINUTES, 2009)

Thirteen years, two inspiring women, both radical activists — one conversation.

"Telling the story of twentieth-century social change as a chronicle of affection, of correspondence in postcards and letters, of mutual admiration and activist friendship, of two embraces between two comrades, *Mountains That Take Wing* reminds us that the wild wonder of liberation struggle is not only ours for the taking but already, literally, in our own hands. It is a film that educates with tenderness and passion." — ERICA R. EDWARDS, PROFESSOR (UC RIVERSIDE)



January 2008. LEFT: Angela Y. Davis & Yuri Kochiyama at Kochiyama's apartment in Oakland, California.

RIGHT: H. L. T. Quan, Angela Y. Davis, Yuri Kochiyama, S. K. Thrift & C. A. Griffith in Davis' home in Oakland, California. PHOTOS © QUAD PRODUCTIONS

MOUNTAINS THAT TAKE WING – ANGELA DAVIS & YURI KOCHIYAMA features conversations that span thirteen years between two formidable women whose lives and political work remain at the epicenter of the most important civil rights struggles in the U.S. Through conversations that are intimate and profound, we learn about Davis, an internationally renowned scholar-activist and 89-year-old Kochiyama, a revered grassroots community activist and 2005 Nobel Peace Prize nominee. They share experiences as political prisoners and their profound passion for justice. On subjects ranging from the vital but often sidelined role of women in 20th century social movements and community empowerment, to the prison industrial complex, war and the cultural arts, Davis's and Kochiyama's comments offer critical lessons for understanding our nation's most important social movements while providing tremendous hope for its youth and the future. Directed, produced, photographed, recorded & edited by C. A. Griffith & H. L. T. Quan, along with Co-editor Paul Hill, this documentary was completed through a prestigious, Art & Technology post-production residency award at **WEXNER CENTER FOR THE ARTS (2009-2010)**.

WINNER OF THE ST. CLAIR BOURNE AWARD FOR BEST DOCUMENTARY FILM

Also the World Premiere & Opening Night Film of the SAN FRANCISCO BLACK FILM FESTIVAL

PARTICIPANT BIOGRAPHIES

A Professor Emeritus at the University of California, Santa Cruz, **Angela Y. Davis** is an internationally acclaimed scholar, professor, author and activist. Her parents were teachers and activists, and as a child growing up in Birmingham, Alabama, she witnessed and experienced the brutality of the Jim Crow regime of intolerance, violence and hatred. In 1969, she was fired from her Assistant Professor position in UCLA's Philosophy Department because of her political activism and membership in the Communist Party, but was rehired after public protest. A year later, her involvement in the campaign to free the Soledad Brothers led to a warrant for her arrest and placement on the FBI's Most Wanted List. Once captured, international campaigns to "Free Angela Davis" led to her eventual release and acquittal on all charges. Davis remains a staunch advocate for prison abolition and has developed powerful critiques of the criminal justice system. Her books include *If They Come in the Morning*, *Angela Davis: An Autobiography*, *Women, Race and Class*, *Women Culture and Politics*, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, *Are Prisons Obsolete? Abolition Democracy*, and *Beyond the Frame: Women of Color and Visual Representation*.

Born in 1921, **Yuri Kochiyama** is a dedicated grassroots organizer, activist and an archivist of the Civil Rights Era. Nominated for a 2005 Nobel Peace Prize, among grassroots communities she is best known for her political involvement with Malcolm X, the Puerto Rican Independence Movement, the Asian American Movement and campaigns to release U.S. political prisoners.

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After her experience witnessing her father's abduction by the FBI and her family's interment during World War II, Kochiyama was primed for activism. In 1960, when she and her husband moved with their large family into public housing in New York's Harlem, she worked with neighborhood educational struggles and rapidly became a respected community activist and organizer. She met Malcolm X in a courthouse after she'd been arrested in a labor protest. She joined his Organization of Afro-American Unity and supported a Pan-Asian perspective by collaborating with the Hibakusha (Japanese Atom Bomb survivors) and having a strong stance against the Vietnam War. Despite her frail health, Kochiyama remains undaunted in her efforts to free U.S. political prisoners; her personal correspondence has sustained hundreds of men and women – many of whom she has helped gain freedom. Kochiyama devotes her life to progressive causes and is an inspiration to young people and activists around the globe.

The subject of several documentaries and books, Kochiyama moved to Oakland in 1999. She and Davis live several miles apart and cross paths regularly at conferences and political events. Her book, *Passing It On – A Memoir*, was published in 2004. The reviews includes one by Davis: "In this book, [Kochiyama] passes on a legacy of humility and resolve, vitality and resistance, and, perhaps most important of all, hope for the future."

THE CONVERSATIONS

Yuri Kochiyama and Angela Y. Davis embody personal and political experiences, theories, struggles and art; and together, they constitute a commitment and diversity of lives of women doing liberatory cultural work. They are writers, friends, spiritual leaders, aunts, mothers, lovers, educators, warriors, icons, and role models who inspire and challenge the larger and often hostile society, their own generations, and many generations to come. Together, they constitute a culture of social justice and human rights.

With a combined history of nearly a century of community activism, Angela and Yuri shared time in 1996 to discuss their lives and their passion for justice. Although their paths had crossed many times, this was the first occasion they had an in depth conversation with one another. Their dialogue manifests vitality, humility, resolve and hope as they share with each other about their histories and experiences. What they have to say about the ethical and social implications of war and the vast prison industrial complex on education, civil liberties and the arts proves to be especially perceptive and poignant when they pick up their conversation twelve years later in 2008. ***MOUNTAINS THAT TAKE WING*** is a compilation of the conversations between these two formidable women on life, struggles and liberation. Davis's and Kochiyama's, vast historical knowledge, cogent observations and analyses are passionate and compelling, while offering important lessons in empowerment and community building for current and future generations.

The fervent and diverse styles of teaching and leadership of generations of women inspire the conversational format of ***MOUNTAINS THAT TAKE WING***. The film honors the breadth and depth of knowledge achieved through the recursive nature of conversation – where complex, challenging subjects and often painful memories and histories are brought to light, and then later, a more nuanced and multifaceted understanding is gleaned from the time and additional context provided. The conversational format was also inspired by Co-Director C. A. Griffith's experiences while filming *Eyes on the Prize*, where she observed that many natural, relaxed and fascinating exchanges often happened when shooting paused for sound or reel changes. Griffith and Co-Director, H. L. T. Quan wondered what gems might arise if they had an opportunity to capture what Davis and Kochiyama *had to say to each other*. ***MOUNTAINS THAT TAKE WING - ANGELA DAVIS & YURI KOCHIYAMA*** offers audiences the gift of these remarkable women's lives and their conversations about life, individual and community strategies to resist oppression, and their steadfast resolve that a more just and humane world is not only possible, but vital.

C. A. Griffith and H. L. T. Quan struggled for over a decade to complete this film. Thanks in large part to invitations to screen early cuts of the film and receipt of extensive audience feedback at the University of California Irvine and Riverside, along with the in-kind post-production award from the Wexner Center for the Arts, they were able to complete the documentary in late summer 2009. ***MOUNTAINS THAT TAKE WING*** was filmed in HD, MiniDV and Hi8 video. Originally planned as a series of conversations between Davis and three generations of women doing cultural work – June Jordan, Elizabeth Martinez, Julie Dash, Jude Narita, Abbey Lincoln, The Poetess, among others – the original project scope was too expansive for one film and was refocused on political culture, Davis and Kochiyama.

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FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES

C. A. (Crystal) Griffith is an independent filmmaker and Associate Professor of Film and Media Production in the School of Theatre and Film at Arizona State University (ASU). Raised in Washington, D.C., Griffith sojourned to Barcelona, Spain at age 16 where she learned fluent Spanish and developed a passion for filmmaking. She received her B.A. in Communication from Stanford University and an M.F.A. in Art Studio from the University of California – Santa Barbara. Griffith's film credits include *JUICE* (1992), award-winning PBS and BBC documentaries such as *A LITANY FOR SURVIVAL: THE LIFE AND WORK OF AUDRE LORDE* (cinematographer), *BRANFORD MARSALIS: THE MUSIC TELLS YOU* (camera operator) and *DEPECHE MODE 101* (both directed by D.A. Pennebaker), *EYES ON THE PRIZE I & II*, St. Clair Bourne's *MAKING 'DO THE RIGHT THING'* and music videos from Tracy Chapman and Public Enemy to The Rolling Stones. Griffith's publications appear in *Reinventing North America* (forthcoming), *Filming Difference*, *Black Feminist Cultural Criticism*, *Black Women Film and Video Artists*, *The Wild Good*, the journals *Meridians*, *SIGNS* and *CALYX*. Recruited to help build ASU's new film production program, she relocated to Phoenix in 2006. Previous academic appointments: Columbia College Chicago (2000-2006), Smith College and the University of Massachusetts Amherst (1997-2000).

A finalist for the 2010 Sundance Screenwriters Labs, Griffith's feature-length screenplay, *BLUES FOR THE SEA* is adapted from her short screenplay, winner of the 2007 Martha Muñoz Award of the Latino Screenplay Competition. Also awarded a 2004 Illinois Arts Council Fellowship in Media Arts, and a 2000 Panavision/Kodak University Outreach Program Grant, Griffith's short film, *BORDER.LINE...FAMILY PICTURES* won the Vision in Color Award of the New England Film/Video Festival. In 1999, she received an in-kind grant from Digital Media's Avid Feature Film Camp for her film, *DEL OTRO LADO (THE OTHER SIDE)*. Shot on location in Mexico City and screened extensively at U.S. and international film festivals, Griffith directed, co-edited and co-produced this Spanish language, independent feature on love, AIDS and immigration.

H. L. T. Quan is a political theorist and documentary filmmaker. An Assistant Professor of Justice & Social Inquiry in the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University, and an Affiliate Faculty in African/African American Studies, Asian Pacific American Studies and Women's and Gender Studies, she received her Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of California – Santa Barbara. Her research centers on race, gender, and economic and radical thought. She is currently writing a book about savage development and its tendentious propensity to secure order and capitalist expansion. This study investigates foreign policy conducts by Japan in military Brazil, the United States in occupied Iraq, and China in South Africa amidst humanitarian disasters. She is also working on a collaborative project on the historical and political development of Black capitalism in the United States, a 17-city comparison.

Professor Quan has produced, hosted and served as a regular correspondent on radio and community access television public affairs programs for almost twenty years. Her work has been published in *Social Identities*, *Race and Class*, *Meridians*, and *SIGNS*.

S. K. Thrift is a member of QUAD Productions and was the Associate Producer on *Mountains That Take Wing*. She is a LEED AP and currently works as an independent consultant on creative and sustainable projects, with a particular interest in writing, development and green building. She received her B.A. in English from the University of California – Santa Barbara and an M.A. in Literature from the University of California – Santa Cruz.

QUAD PRODUCTIONS

H. L. T. Quan and C. A. Griffith are co-founders of **QUAD Productions**, a non-profit media collective focused on the research, development and production of film and video projects that support and effect progressive social consciousness. Together, they produce short, social justice themed documentaries and provide media training to progressive community organizations. **QUAD** frequently collaborates with local, national and international organizations and individual activists with forward thinking and action.

Since its founding in 2000, QUAD has co-produced one feature-length documentary, one music video and over half a dozen short documentaries – all focusing on various social justice campaigns. This spring, in collaboration with Third World Newsreel, QUAD co-produced *Arizona Women and Children Rise: Resisting SB1070* for the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, National Domestic Workers Alliance and

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Puente Movement. Griffith and Quan conducted interviews and filmed protests and community testimonies in Phoenix about the devastating impact of the law to a national Women's Human Rights Delegation. QUAD's footage was quickly edited in New York by Third World Newsreel to create an eighteen-minute cut that was sent to the White House and members of Congress in May. The four-minute trailer is available on YouTube, Vimeo and numerous web sites. Other QUAD Productions short documentaries include *All the Voices: A Passion for Community Radio*, *In Plain Sight: A Guide to Freedom and Safety*, a collaborative project with Video Machete of Chicago on youth of Color's response to their world after 9/11, *What If I Were To Remain Here?* a public arts project on Tomás Rivera by Mary Ann Peters at UT-San Antonio, and *Another World is Possible: A.M.A.R.C. International at the 2003 World Social Forum*.

Current QUAD Productions projects include ***MOUNTAINS THAT TAKE WING-ANGELA DAVIS & YURI KOCHIYAMA*** and ***AMÉRICA'S HOME*** (working title), a feature-length documentary in progress that explores the impact of colonization through a matrix of race, gentrification and displacement, empire and popular resistance in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Griffith and Quan received a *second* Art & Technology post-production residency award from the **WEXNER CENTER FOR THE ARTS**. They anticipate completing ***AMÉRICA'S HOME*** in summer 2011.

MOUNTAINS THAT TAKE WING received five distribution offers; QUAD Productions selected WOMEN MAKE MOVIES to distribute the film domestically, and the recently launched GLOBAL BROADCASTING COMPANY to distribute the film internationally. QUAD welcomes invitations to screen and/or present the film at national and international film festivals, in communities, at conferences and educational institutions.

TRAILER:

www.QuadProductions.org – www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJik3l2vb1g – www.imdb.com/title/tt1538867/

OFFICIAL FILM FESTIVAL SELECTIONS & UNIVERSITY SCREENING DATES:

2009

- **October 31: University of California Santa Cruz. * Angela Davis: Legacies in the Making:** A Symposium Recognizing the Academic, Activists and Cultural Interventions of a Contemporary Visionary. Special event with Angela Y. Davis and Yuri Kochiyama. October 31-November 1.

2010

- **February 26: Arizona State University – Tempe, Arizona. * **** Local to Global Justice 2010 & benefit for Earthquake Relief in Haiti.
- **March 25: Macalester College, St. Paul, Minnesota. * “American Studies Luncheon Colloquium & Women Speak Out! Stories of Resistance, Liberation, and Solidarity.”** Sponsored by Women's History Month 2010 & Jane Rhodes, Dean for the Study of Race and Ethnicity.
- **May 19: University of California Santa Barbara. * Multicultural Center Theater "Cup of Culture."**
- **June 17: San Francisco Black Film Festival (SFBFF). * World premiere and opening night film of the 12th anniversary SFBFF at the Sundance Kabuki Cinemas. WINNER of the St. Clair Bourne Award.** <http://www.sfbff.org/index-01b.html>
- **June 20: Frameline34 – The San Francisco International LGBT Film Festival. * Standing room only at the Roxie Theater. Our first distribution offer immediately after the screening.** <http://www.frameline.org/festival/film/detail.aspx?id=2000&FID=47>
- **July 29: Cinemapolis Theater – Ithaca, NY. * ** Benefit for the Tompkins County Worker's Center.** <http://www.cinemapolis.org/2009.asp?page=movie&id=796>
- **July 31: Cornell University/The Future of Minority Studies (FMS). * Ithaca, New York. 5th Annual FMS Research Project – Summer Institute Colloquium.** <http://fmsproject.cornell.edu/2010summercolloquium.htm>
- **September: Harlem International Film Festival, New York, New York. September 22-26.** www.harlemfilmfestival.com
- **September 24: Eastside Cultural Center – Oakland, California. * ** “Eastside Arts Alliance Final Fridays Films of Resistance & Solidarity Series.”** Special event with Angela Y. Davis, Yuri Kochiyama & QUAD Productions.
- **September 26: COMMFEST (Global) Community Film Festival –Toronto, Canada.**

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- **October 1: BAAD! The Bronx Academy of Art and Dance – The Bronx, New York.** BlakTin@ Performance Series.
- **October 13: Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York.** * Democratizing Knowledge Project
- **October 16: La Femme International Film Festival – Los Angeles, California.** Rennberg Theatre, Hollywood, California.
- **November: International Film Festival South Africa – Kwa Zulu Natal, South Africa.** November 1-5.
- **November 4: California State University Los Angeles.** * Cross Cultural Centers “Independent Visions.”
- **November 6: California State University Los Angeles.** * 2nd Annual Womyn of Color Conference.
- **December: This Human World: International Human Rights Film Festival – Vienna, Austria.** December 2-12.

2011

- **January 17: Willamette University, Salem Oregon.** * Opening event, Martin Luther King Holiday Celebration.
 - **March: University of California Riverside.** * Critical Ethnic Studies Conference. March 10-12.
 - **March 16: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.** * The Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History, Spring 2011 “Diaspora Festival of Black and Independent Film.”
 - **TBD in Spring/Summer: The Japanese American National Museum.** * Los Angeles, California.
- * Film screening & discussion with filmmakers.
 ** Benefit screening/presentation. Pro-bono and/or proceeds donated to community organization, social justice or humanitarian efforts.

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