

# Activist criticizes long-standing racist institutions

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abroad. She is best remembered for her outspoken approach and a 16-month stint in prison while fighting for equal rights of African Americans.

Today, Davis is a professor of the History of Consciousness Department at the University of

California in Santa Cruz. She has also written five books, including the recently published "Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude 'Ma' Rainey, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday."

Davis, who is from the South, remembers protesting outside the old Central

Prison building in Raleigh. She said a structural continuance of racism exists in today's society. She told the audience to look at clear examples of racist trends, such as the educational and the prison systems that she feels should be overhauled.

Davis said the educational system serves as a pipeline

to the prison system, where teachers are forced to put more emphasis on disciplinary matters instead of helping students develop a love for learning.

"No wonder the children tend to see school as boring," she said.

Davis also described capital punishment as barbaric

and racist.

"The institution itself is also racist," she said. "Your state killed a white man last week, and I argue that he died under the arm of racism."

She urges people to take a stand against capital punishment regulations and become the force behind changing laws.

"The death penalty has no place in a society that poses itself toward justice," Davis said.

Ra-Jah Kelly, a junior media communications student at NCSU, said he has always been inspired by Davis' works.

"It was a great opportunity to see her," he said.

Student Candace Powell said she never linked racism, the school system and prison together before.

"It was interesting how she (Davis) made connections between racism and the prison system," she said. "I didn't know about that."

## Dirtiest air likeliest breathed by blacks

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what it was," Williams, 58, a reading specialist at a Garner elementary school.

Tests couldn't find anything wrong with her classroom, leaving Williams to worry that something in the air outside her home is the cause of her health problems and those of her neighbors.

She may be right. The air in South Park -- a neighborhood founded by freedmen 100 years ago where about half of the families currently live below the poverty level -- is among the most unhealthy in the country, according to a government research project that assigns risk scores for industrial air pollution in every square kilometer of the United States.

But while her circumstance is not unique nationwide -- black Americans are 79 percent more likely than whites to live in neighborhoods where industrial air pollution is suspected of causing the most health problems -- it's not as common among blacks and other minorities in North Carolina.

According to an Associated Press analysis, blacks in North Carolina are 12 percent more likely than whites to live in the 10 percent of the state with the worst industrial air pollution. Hispanics are just as likely as blacks to live in those neighborhoods, while Asian residents are 25 percent less likely.

Only eight other states fared better in the comparison between blacks and whites, and in seven of those states, whites were more likely to live in those areas. By comparison, black residents are 72 percent more likely to live in the worst areas in South Carolina, 91 percent more likely in Tennessee and more than three times as likely in Virginia.

The AP's analysis used industrial plant pollution statistics gathered by the federal

Environmental Protection Agency to calculate pollution scores, then mapped those scores with the help of government scientists for every neighborhood counted by the Census Bureau in 2000. That analysis was then used to compare risks between neighborhoods and to study the racial and economic status of those who breathe America's most unhealthy air.

In North Carolina, 38 census tracts -- each the size of a small neighborhood -- were among the worst five percent of tracts nationwide. The South Park tract had the highest rate of racial disparity in the state. Williams can reel off the friends and neighbors who have suffered respiratory problems, as well as possible causes for the pollution: a nearby soybean mill, power station, traffic and surrounding industry.

No one can say for sure if pollutants are to blame for illness in the neighborhood, but Williams wonders if that's the reason. She said she was somewhat glad to learn about the research.

"At least I know I'm not a hypochondriac," she said.

Two doors down from Williams, Gwendolyn Peacox said her husband died at age 57 after experiencing breathing issues.

"We were kind of shocked because he didn't smoke or drink or do anything," she said. And when Peacox's grandson moved in with her, he had his first asthma attack within a month.

When the attack comes on, "I can't hardly breathe," said Demetrius McDade, now 7, stopping to rest while playing with his sister and cousin.

Of the 38 North Carolina census tracts in the nation's worst 5 percent, 15 were located in New Hanover County on the state's Atlantic coast. Only four of those 15 tracts have a black popula-

tion that exceeds the statewide average, one only by a tenth of a percentage point.

There are several emission-producing industries in New Hanover and nearby Brunswick County, including plants belonging to vitamin-maker BASF Corp., chemical producer DAK Americas Inc. and building supplier Louisiana-Pacific, according to the state Division of Air Quality. Progress Energy also operates the largest coal-fired power plant in eastern North Carolina in New Hanover County, just outside Wilmington.

Although the 2002 Clean Smokestacks Act is reducing emissions at North Carolina's coal-fired plants, the Sutton Steam Plant still ranks among the region's largest emitters of sulfur dioxide, which causes acid rain, and nitrogen oxide, an ingredient of smog, according to state data.

"If an area has a concentration of industry, you're going to see people that (are) exposed more to pollution in the aggregate," said division spokesman Tom Mather.

But Mather said that doesn't necessarily mean people in those areas are breathing an "unhealthy concentration of air pollution." Wilmington resident Bill Walsh lives in the Wilmington's Kings Grant neighborhood, a middle-class subdivision of 20- and 30-year-old homes that's inside the census tract that registered the highest health risk in North Carolina.

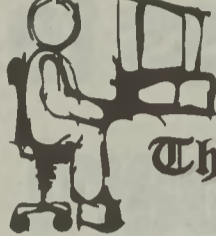
"I don't see a whole lot of people who are sick," Walsh said.

But Dr. Debbie Leiner, a Greensboro pediatrician who worked largely with indigent patients for 18 years, said she has seen respiratory problems in her new practice, which includes many whites.

"There's no question we're seeing an increase in asth-

ma," Leiner said. "It is clear to doctors that environmental issues are causing a lot of the problems that we're seeing now, and I believe it's going to link to more problems in the future."

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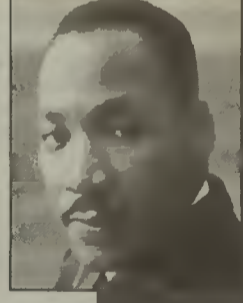
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