

LA Biography

LaDoris Hazzard Cordell  
(La Doris Cordell)

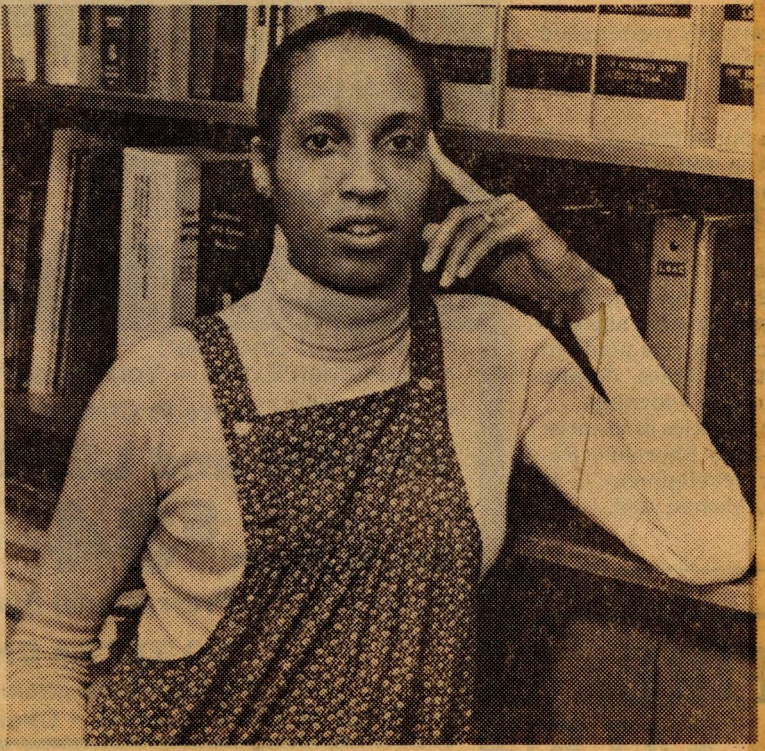
# She fights for rights of blacks

By Phyllis Brown  
Times Tribune staff

STANFORD — In 1974, Angela Davis was brought to the Palo Alto jail to await trial in San Jose on charges of murder, kidnap and conspiracy.

The courts had determined that Davis was not eligible for bail, but a small group of her supporters was determined to have the firebrand black political activist and avowed Communist released.

Peninsula profile



Times Tribune staff photo by Kyle Brehm

LaDoris Cordell divides her time between Stanford University Law School and private practice in East Palo Alto.

(4102) 1338502



LaDoris Hazzard Cordell

LaDoris Hazzard Cordell, then a first year law student here, was one of that group.

The lobbyists eventually got their wish, Cordell said.

"Finally, this big victory was won and they were going to release her," said Cordell, a tall sylph of a black woman, who has been told she looks like Davis.

"I remember going down to the jail and waiting with a group of people who really didn't know each other very well.

"She was supposed to get out in the morning. At night, finally they released her. They pulled her out and put her in the car, but they wouldn't let the car stop. They didn't want her to speak to anyone," said Cordell, rapidly, energetically.

"But she ordered the car stopped, and rolled the window down. People were hugging her, hugging each other. After she left, everyone just kind of turned around and looked at each other, and just hugged each other."

Cordell, intense and articulate, is sitting behind a large desk surrounded by volumes of legal tomes and code books. The telephone buzzes often, but she dispatches the onslaught of duty with ease and efficiency.

The modern office is in Room 109 of the Stanford University Law School. LaDoris Cordell, a 1976 graduate, is now an Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at the school.

But the active concern for the rights of black people that brought her to work for Angela Davis' release in 1974 has not died.

Today the work is carried out at the Law School, where, thanks primarily to her efforts, the proportion of minority students was in 1980 more than double that of major schools with which the university competes.

Her work extends beyond Stanford and the realm of academia to East Palo Alto, where she

opened the first professional law practice in 1976.

For Cordell, activism is something neither new or unusual. It was inherited, almost like her freckles or the shape of her face, it seems, from her parents.

Louis and Clara Hazzard, 63 and 57 respectively, are still active members of the Ardmore, Penn., community where she grew up, she said.

"When the schools were blowing up back in the '60s, my mother set up and ran the picket lines. We had to call every night and make sure our folks were out there. I had a little check list and would do the calling," she said. "I was in, I think it was junior high school, at the time. We knew we had to make sure our people were out there every day, to keep the pressure on. "This is all I have ever seen. My father

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CORDELL (cont.)



# PROFILE

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was the first black to be the president of the PTA. And I went to school in a white community, so it was a big deal." "I can't emphasize my parents enough," she continued. "They are out of sight. All I have heard my whole life is get up early in the morning, get up early and deal, because each day is important."

Cordell's ability to "keep the pressure on," and "to deal," has meant that, in 1980, 22 percent of the Stanford University Law School's students have minority backgrounds.

Out of a total class of 169, there are 20 blacks, 15 Chicanos and three Puerto Ricans. Four Asian-Americans were also enrolled, a high for the school.

In September, Law School Dean Charles Meyers termed the record minority enrollment "a remarkable achievement" and credited "the continuing hard work" of Cordell for bringing the students to Stanford.

Cordell came to Stanford in 1978, after her predecessor, Victoria Diaz, left to join the teaching staff at the University of Santa Clara Law School.

But Cordell said she believes her coming here was, in part, a matter of luck.

"I suspect, a lot of times, it is just a question of being in the right place at the right time. In 1978, this law school had not had a history of having minority students here. I think that, given the times, the pressure was on any major institution to justify why there weren't any of us here, or at least, why there were so few. When the pressure is on, one way of remedying it is to bring in someone like myself," she said.

"I think it is important to have a somebody here who can deal with the needs of minority students. If having me here is the way it gets done, that's the way it gets done."

Cordell said the Law School is "qualitatively a better place to be," than when she began her studies here in 1974.

"I think there was one other black woman here, and

there were seven black men. Statistically, the total black enrollment was about 10 percent of the class.

"It was alienating, because as I said, there were very few blacks here. I was wearing my hair nappy at the time. The professors just weren't used to seeing that. We were the first ones here. Wearing Afros. Really. In 1974. That's ... you know, it wasn't that new a thing, but it was new for here," Cordell said.

Cordell is, as well as being an integral member of the Stanford black community, an integral and vital member of the black community of East Palo Alto.

She decided to use her Stanford degree there, after a stint with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund in San Francisco.

"I've always felt, I guess, that if I get an education, it is my responsibility to contribute whatever I have gotten to the black community. By black community, it doesn't necessarily just mean where I grew up. It's wherever there are black folks. East Palo Alto is my community, if I am here," she said.

She applied for and received an Earl Warren Grant, normally given to black attorneys who return to the South to practice.

Hers was the first grant to be given to a black attorney in the Western United States.

"I said, look, there's a community right here on the West Coast and there is great need," she explained.

In her first year of practice, she said, she had to turn people away.

"In East Palo Alto, unfortunately, I get a lot of people who have been busted. But the community has been great, very supportive all of the way," she said.

Cordell has limited her practice in East Palo Alto because of the demands of Law School and family. Cordell is married to Gary Cordell, 34, an insurance salesman and former professional tennis player whom she met during her undergraduate schooling at Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. She has two young daughters.

But her work at the Law School is not all-encompassing for her, she said.

"I have a real burning desire to do something that has a real positive impact on our people. I don't know what that is yet. My whole life I've been guided by, to do something. There's just this drive inside of me. There's something you ought to be doing," it says.

CORDELL (cont.)