

# Nebraska prisoners' cases compared to Mandela's

■ Activists called for the release of the men, who have been incarcerated for 30 years.

BY JOSH FUNK

Supporters of David Rice and Ed Poindexter compared the two men's cases to Nelson Mandela's at a rally marking the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their incarceration.

Two internationally known "warriors in the fight against injustice" joined Nebraska activists on the capitol steps in calling for the release of the two men.

Poindexter and Rice, who later changed his name to Mondo we Langa, were both Black Panther leaders in Omaha during the late 1960s. Their supporters argue that the two men were jailed for their politics, and not for any role in the suitcase bombing that killed Omaha Police Ofc. Larry Minard.

"(These men) have been incarcerated three decades on evidence so flimsy that people around the nation can see that they were victims of a frame-up," said Angela Davis, a former Black Panther.

Charlene Mitchell, a human rights activist, and Davis headlined the capitol event, which also included former Gov. Frank Morrison, Leola Bullock and Cantor Michael Weisser.



Josh Wolfe/DN

Internationally known human rights activist Angela Davis speaks to a crowd of about 175 people on the steps of the Capitol on Monday. Davis and Charlene Mitchell headlined the rally to raise awareness of Black Panther leaders Ed Poindexter's and David Rice's case on the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their incarceration.

Important evidence in the case such as the tape-recorded 911 call that summoned police to the bombing scene was not available until after the trial.

Supporters said the FBI suppressed the evidence as part of an organized campaign to eliminate

the Black Panther party.

"Times have changed. What was considered radical in the 1960s and 1970s is now common sense," Davis said, citing racial profiling as an example.

Davis, who was also a member of the Black Panthers and the

Communist Party, gained notoriety when she was imprisoned for 16 months in the early 1970s and later acquitted of charges that stemmed from a shoot-out in front of a California courthouse.

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Mitchell, the other headline speaker, organized the "Free Angela Davis" campaign and co-founded the National Alliance Against Racism and Political Repression.

Both women have worked together on several campaigns to free political prisoners and fight for human rights since Davis' release.

Mitchell compared we Langa's and Poindexter's case to that of Mandela, who was imprisoned for 27 years. She said it is difficult to maintain public interest when a case spans several decades.

International attention from Amnesty International, the United Nations and other countries is key to a successful campaign to free Poindexter and we Langa, Mitchell said.

When examining this case, Mitchell said it is important to remember that we Langa and Poindexter could not afford to

hire their own attorneys.

Morrison, who was one of the public defenders in the case, said that the justice system is flawed, and the only way to remedy those flaws is if the public demands the truth.

"If we had known the truth, if the jury had known the truth in the Poindexter and Rice case, they never would have spent a day in jail," Morrison, now 95, said.

Both the U.S. District Court and the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals agreed that the case should be re-heard in light of the new evidence, but the U.S. Supreme Court decided that federal courts should not decide evidentiary appeals from state courts. The Nebraska Board of Pardons has refused to hold a hearing in the case.

A crowd of about 175 people gathered in front of the capitol's north steps for the rally including many local activists.

Elizabeth Goodbrake, a UNL senior and member of both

Nebraskans for Peace and Nebraskans for Justice, said Davis' speech was inspiring.

"(The rally) Offered renewed hope that we can keep working to free them," Goodbrake said.

After the rally Mitchell and Davis visited we Langa in prison. What was supposed to be a one hour meeting stretched to two, and both women called it inspirational.

"I told him (we Langa) as we left, 'you defy all the stereotypes,'" Davis said.

After 30 years in prison we Langa still maintains a strong connection with the community, concern for others and a sense of humor, she said.

Poindexter is imprisoned in Minnesota where he completed his high school and college education and earned a master's degree.

Both Davis and Mitchell encouraged local activists to organize an all-out campaign to free Poindexter and we Langa.

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