

allow this to constrain his teaching and writing (though he was forced to curtail his lecture schedule). He carried his oxygen tank to classes and meetings with students. Even when limited to his desk by the increasing need for oxygen, he maintained his eternal optimism and continued his work. In July 2010, he underwent a double lung transplant. After his release from the hospital in August, we hoped that he would live somewhere near three years (the average life expectancy for a double lung-transplant patient at the hospital where he underwent the procedure). He continued his research, writing, and editing, determined to finish the biography. In March 2011, he contracted pneumonia as a result of a medication being withdrawn. As always, he battled for his life with all his energy. As he emerged from an induced coma, I looked forward to seeing him and talking with him the next day. However, as a resident was changing a tube, Manning went into cardiac arrest, from which he never recovered. His untimely and unnecessary death occurred on April 1, 2011. The biography of Malcolm X was officially published on April 4.

## The Vision

Based on extensive research, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* was incredibly prescient about the status of Black people today and its historic causes. However, Manning went beyond cataloguing the ills of capitalism to elaborate what could and should be done. He engaged not only in political critique but in thinking about a way forward.<sup>54</sup> As he put it, “The road to Black liberation must also be a road to socialist revolution” (228). In 2002, he noted that, in view of world events and capitalism’s ability to mutate, “socialism might seem to have reached a dead end as a viable concept” (xlv). But, he added, “History is always filled with unanticipated twists and detours” (xlv).

Indeed, inequality both in the United States and throughout the world is greater than it has ever been, with a *massive* transfer of wealth to the 0.01 percent.<sup>55</sup> As the consequences of neoliberalism—market fundamentalism, structural adjustment, and the decline of the welfare state—become widespread, the influence of U.S. capitalism has been in decline. Popular protest in some Latin American and European countries have resulted in the election of left governments that have challenged the current world order. A recent *New York Times*/CBS poll found that 60 percent of Americans think that the government should do something to reduce inequality.<sup>56</sup> Reflecting on the recent recession of 2008 to 2009, some scholars have suggested that “globalized capitalism has so socialized the forces of production and the financial system (and on such a vast scale) that even the enormous resources of the largest capitalist economy in

world are insufficient to rescue it.”<sup>57</sup>

But as Manning notes, “Wherever there is repression, there will be resistance, and from the lessons of struggle will flower the hopes for a better life” (xlvi). Today we see that though capitalism and racism have persisted and, in some ways, become stronger and more repressive as the crisis of capitalism has deepened, so have protests against it. Despite the rise of the right wing and increasing state violence, as predicted in *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, the Occupy movement, for example, has helped to bring the unprecedented inequality to public view. Young African American women have organized mass mobilizations and major demonstrations, often dominated by young people of various races and ethnicities, to confront and protest state violence and mass incarceration. These recent actions, as well as long-term organizing, are forcing some transformations in policing and incarceration. New York State’s Rockefeller drug laws, with their extremely discriminatory application and mandatory harsh prison sentences, have been weakened. In New York City, a U.S. district court judge ruled that “stop-and-frisk,” long a staple of the New York City Police Department’s discriminatory policing, is unconstitutional. A small number of police officers have been charged (though not convicted) for the death of a Black man while under arrest in Baltimore, Maryland, and the Justice Department has initiated at least twenty investigations of the conduct of police departments and officers.<sup>58</sup>

In *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, Manning advocates “socialism from below”—a democratic and popular multicultural society. For Manning, revolution had a moral component. However, he was not naive about the obstacles in the way of a just society. He advanced a program about how this might be accomplished, observing that “history is an organic process” and that “the transition to socialism will not be fixed or predetermined,” but will require a coalition of progressive forces and transitional reformist demands that are antiracist, antisexist, and anticapitalist, which would then be the foundation for an alternative social system (232–33). In 2000, he concluded, “I remain convinced that Black people as a group will never achieve the historical objectives of their long struggle within the political economy of capitalism. . . . The oppressed have in their hands the capacity to make new history and, ultimately, a new society. This is the political perspective taken by *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, and it is the position in which I still passionately believe today” (xlvi).

New York City

trengths and weaknesses as a social analysis of Black America in the early 1980s can be better understood.

## II

The decade of the 1980s began for me on November 3, 1979, when five antiracist political activists were murdered and nearly a dozen injured by Ku Klux Klansmen and Nazis in Greensboro, North Carolina. In broad daylight, a car caravan containing more than thirty white racists drove casually into the center of a mostly African-American housing project, which was the site of a local antiracist demonstration. The Klansmen and Nazis had been given the route of the demonstrators by local law enforcement authorities. Although the ninety-second massacre was videotaped by a television crew, only sixteen of the racists identified at the scene were indicted, and only six were tried. All six were judged "not guilty" by an all-white jury. A second trial once again declared the killers not guilty. Only six years later were the families of the Greensboro martyrs able to win a civil suit against these racists. The

Greensboro Massacre seemed to indicate that U.S. capitalism was moving into a much more authoritarian mode of class and racial control. The Klan and Nazis were, in effect, being used as "death squads" not unlike those operating in El Salvador or Guatemala at the same time. The fact that these racist vigilantes had no formal ties to the state permitted government officials to plead their neutrality and lack of involvement in their crimes. When many other manifestations of racist violence began to erupt across the country in 1980 and 1981, it seemed like U.S. society was being prepared for some kind of authoritarian takeover, or perhaps a Chilean-style suspension of democratic rights and institutions.<sup>2</sup>

The Miami rebellion of May 1980 seemed in this context to be a logical response by the Black masses to the growing wave of police brutality, racist attacks, and blatant discrimination in the criminal justice system. The event that had sparked the rioting was the acquittal of white police officers who had employed deadly force to subdue and arrest a Black man. I heard about the urban revolt about twelve hours after it had started on a Saturday night, and I immediately flew to Miami. Because my newspaper column regularly appeared in the local African-American newspaper, I was given great freedom of access into Black community-based organizations. What was striking about the uprising was that it was both spontaneous and "planned." There were a number of white-owned businesses or firms employing few or no African Americans that appeared to have been targeted for firebombing. There were even several incidents of racial atrocities, which were committed by both Blacks and whites. Miami

*Sound  
family*

as the largest and most destructive urban riot since the rebellions that swept across U.S. cities in the wake of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination twelve years earlier.

I had barely returned from Miami and was writing my observations into an essay to be published in the *Black Scholar* when the noted Black scholar and activist Walter Rodney was murdered in his native country, Guyana. Rodney was the author of the widely read historical study *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, published originally in 1972 by the small Black radical press Bogle-L'Ouverture, based in London. I had first encountered Rodney's work as a graduate student, when a friend gave me a political pamphlet that contained a collection of Rodney's lectures to a Jamaican working class audience, called *Groundings with My Brothers*.<sup>3</sup> Rodney was very well known to the African-American progressive and radical community. Hundreds of young Black Americans, including myself, had either lived in or had traveled through East Africa in the years Rodney was a professor at the University of Dar Es Salaam in Tanzania. Thousands more had met or heard him speak at African and African-American Studies conferences, or at lectures given in U.S. universities.

I had only met Rodney several times, but I was especially fortunate to have spent some time with him on a few memorable occasions. Rodney was affiliated with an Atlanta-based research center, the Institute of the Black World (IBW), and periodically visited the city. From 1976 to 1978, I was employed at the Tuskegee Institute, in the heart of Alabama's Black Belt, and I frequently commuted to IBW to attend various educational programs and events. Several times during Rodney's visits, I was asked by the IBW's director, Howard Dodson, to take Rodney to lunch or to drive him to this or that place in Atlanta. I don't recall the specifics of the conversations we had together. What I do recall vividly was how talkative I was, and how interested and reflective he was about what I had to say. Walter was a truly gifted intellectual, who brought a deep understanding of history into his interpretation of politics and current events. But he never used his scholarship or vast reservoir of knowledge to intimidate young scholars looking to him for approval. When I learned that he had been murdered, I felt crushed. I decided to try to extend his analysis of the impact of European colonialism and capitalist exploitation in Africa to the oppressed situation of Black people in the United States.

At the time of Rodney's assassination, I was teaching at the Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell University, which was then chaired by James Turner. Six years earlier, Rodney had taught courses at the Africana Studies Center on Black political economy and history. After Rodney's departure from the center, the radical sociologist Ronald Bailey taught courses on political economy there for several years. With my appointment in January 1980, I



assumed responsibility for the Black political economy course. Although my focus was on the United States, I assigned several chapters of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* as required reading.

Rodney's basic thesis was that the transatlantic slave trade and European colonialism were central to the underdevelopment of the African continent over a period of five hundred years. Under colonial rule, vast amounts of wealth were transferred from Africa to Europe. The imposition of monocrop systems of agriculture destroyed local economies, contributing to periodic famines and extreme poverty. Politically, African states "lost their power, independence and meaning—irrespective of whether they were big empires or small polities." Even when "certain traditional rulers were kept in office, and the formal structure of some kingdoms was partially retained," real political power "had passed into the hands of foreign overlords." Rodney's major theoretical argument was that racism as a social force, in both Africa and the Americas, was generally subsidiary to the dynamics of capitalist exploitation. Rodney observed:

[I]t can be affirmed without reservations that the white racism which came to pervade the world was an integral part of the capitalist mode of production. . . . European planters and miners enslaved Africans for *economic* reasons, so that their labor power could be exploited. Indeed, it would have been impossible to open up the New World and to use it as a constant generator of wealth, had it not been for African labor. . . . Europeans at home and abroad found it necessary to rationalize that exploitation in racist terms as well. Oppression follows logically from exploitation, so as to guarantee the latter. Oppression of African people on purely racial grounds accompanied, strengthened, and became indistinguishable from oppression for economic reasons.<sup>4</sup>

The basic correctness of Rodney's emphasis of class above race became crystal clear with the election of Ronald Reagan to the presidency in November 1980. Reagan's electoral coalition had at its core nearly all of the Southern conservatives who had been in the Dixiecrat wing of the Democratic Party two decades earlier. Racists from the former White Citizens Councils and veterans of the George Wallace for President campaigns of 1968 and 1972 also found an ideological soulmate in the former California governor and ex-"B movie" actor. Reagan's racial agenda was unambiguous to friend and foe alike. He opposed affirmative action, minority economic setasides, and enforcement of equal employment opportunity regulations, policy positions that were diametrically different from those earlier Republican presidents such as Nixon and Ford had supported. Reagan manipulated crude racist stereotypes in his standard speeches, such as images of "welfare mothers" abusing food stamps and other public assistance programs. Yet despite the deeply racist character of the "Reagan Revolution," which was how his administration described itself from its earliest months in power, its essential dynamics were driven by the political economy of capitalism.

# ~~Reaganism~~

The severe economic recession of the mid-1970s, the energy crisis, and the falling rate of profits of major U.S. corporations, all contributed to what would become known as Reaganism. Ideologically, Reaganism represented a fundamental departure from the liberal welfare state and Keynesian economic policies that had been followed to a great extent by both capitalist political parties. Politicians from Lyndon Johnson to Richard Nixon had assumed that the government had to play a decisive role in regulating a modern capitalist economy and that welfare programs were necessary to manage social dissent. By contrast, Reagan's view was that the federal government was the problem. Massive reductions in social programs across the board were mandated. On October 1, 1981, more than 400,000 families were removed from federal and state welfare roles. New guidelines were set for welfare recipients, cutting the amount of assets a family could own and still receive assistance from \$2,000 to \$1,000. Undocumented workers and strikers were declared ineligible for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). On September 4, 1981, the Department of Agriculture reduced the amount of food served to 26 million children at more than 94,000 schools across the country. Federal housing expenditures and special programs designed for low-income families virtually came to a halt. Federal housing allocations, which had been \$30 billion under President Jimmy Carter in fiscal year 1981, dropped to \$8 billion within five years. The number of homeless Americans not surprisingly doubled during Reagan's tenure in office. Most other federal social programs, such as job training, community development agencies and cooperatives, and public health clinics, were either eliminated completely or severely curtailed.

Hundreds of billions of dollars that were cut from human needs programs were directly reallocated to an unprecedented expansion of U.S. conventional and strategic nuclear weapons. Reagan initiated a "second Cold War" against the Soviet Union and its allies, with the unambiguous goal of destroying the Communist system, either by military or economic means. Economically, this was a kind of "military Keynesianism," in which the government went billions of dollars into debt building a massive military complex, which in turn, created hundreds of thousands of jobs in the defense industry. The Soviets were demonized relentlessly by the administration as an "Evil Empire." The Reagan administration authorized the deployment of Cruise and Pershing II missiles in Western Europe aimed at the Soviet Union, both of which were classified as "first strike" weapons. The Soviets had no alternative except to counter the U.S. arms buildup with one of their own, allocating at one point about one quarter of their entire gross domestic product toward their military. By 1983, the U.S. had

more than 11,000 strategic warheads, compared to 7,800 Soviet warheads. Both countries had the capacity to suffer a "first strike" from their opponent, and still deliver fire power to destroy the other many times over. This insane military logic was actually termed "MAD," or mutually assured destruction. For the first time since the Cuban Missile Crisis in the fall of 1962, it appeared that the United States was fully prepared to lead the world into a nuclear holocaust.<sup>5</sup>

In the field of civil rights, Reagan made his hostility to Blacks' interests clear by appointing William Bradford Reynolds as assistant attorney general for civil rights, and Black conservative Clarence Thomas as chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Black conservative ideologue Clarence Pendleton was placed in charge of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, which was soon effectively dismantled under the reactionary guidance of executive director Linda Chavez. Within less than a year, the policy direction of the administration was unmistakable. The Department of Labor weakened an executive order that forced corporate recipients of federal contracts to file affirmative action plans, raising the minimum level for submitting such plans from \$50,000 to \$1 million contracts. Annual affirmative action plans were scrapped, and employers were informed that they would be reviewed only once every five years. The Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs privately instructed its field staff to reduce its enforcement activities. The Department of Education pressured the Justice Department to delete gender bias laws aimed to protect female workers at educational institutions. The protective provisions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act were rarely used by Reagan's Justice Department, with almost no lawsuits being filed on behalf of Black plaintiffs. Reagan's judicial appointments similarly followed a racial pattern of exclusion. During his first term as president, the percentage of Reagan's Black appointments to the Federal District Court and the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals was less than 1 percent. Perhaps just as important was Reagan's apparent deep personal animus towards African Americans as a racial group. In fact, during his entire eight years in office, the president formally met with African American delegations and representatives only eight times.<sup>6</sup>

In international affairs, the Reagan administration's racial policies were central to its relationship with the white minority apartheid regime in South Africa. Reagan's chief adviser on African affairs, Chester Crocker, announced that the administration would follow a new policy of "constructive engagement" with apartheid. The basic idea supposedly was that South Africa would gradually evolve into a democratic, multiracial society without U.S. political or economic sanctions or pressure. The Reagan administration considered the African National Congress a "terrorist" organization and supported the apartheid dictatorship's refusal to

egotiate with African leader Nelson Mandela, who was still imprisoned. The Reagan administration permitted the Pretoria government to send South Africa's Coast Guard to be trained inside the United States. More than 2,500 electric shock batons, in addition to other crowd-control equipment, were sent from the U.S. to the apartheid national police force. Offices promoting U.S. corporate investment were established in Johannesburg and in other South African cities. By 1983, Mobil Oil had \$426 million invested in South Africa, with a labor force of 3,577 workers; General Motors had invested \$243 million, with 5,038 employees. In 1984, U.S. investment inside South Africa came to \$15 billion, approximately 20 percent of all U.S. foreign direct investment.<sup>7</sup>

Deliberately or not, Reaganism created a highly charged political environment, which directly contributed to an increase in racially motivated violence against African Americans throughout the United States. Chapter Nine of *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, "The Meaning of Racist Violence in Late Capitalism," goes into great detail to document individual cases of racist violence, including attacks by vigilante organizations and instances of police brutality. The Ku Klux Klan and white supremacist organizations felt that they had a friend in the White House and that a fundamental corner in the history of U.S. race relations had been turned with Reagan's election, representing the end of the "Second Reconstruction."<sup>8</sup> This was again reconfirmed by the results of the presidential election of 1984. African Americans voted overwhelmingly against Reagan, with levels of support for the Democratic candidate Walter Mondale reaching levels approaching 100 percent among registered voters in many urban and poor Black areas. By contrast, Reagan won the support of 66 percent of all white voters. He received 68 percent of the votes of those who had annual incomes of \$50,000 and above, and 80 percent support from those voters describing themselves as "born again Christians." At the time, it seemed obvious to many African-American activists that we were confronting what was, in effect, a mass conservative white united front, consisting primarily of middle- and upper-class whites, but also supported by a good number of confused but reactionary white working-class and poor people. The entire country seemed to be descending into either a nuclear or racial apocalypse, with only the Black freedom movement apparently capable of constructing a democratic opposition to halt it.

Yet, to the dismay of Black progressives, the bulk of the African-American political establishment seemed to capitulate to mass conservatism. When Reagan was first elected in November 1980, prominent civil rights leader Vernon Jordan declared publicly that the new president deserved "the benefit of the doubt" and that African Americans should consider



whether “equality can be achieved by conservative means.” More than 100 Black academicians, journalists, and aspiring governmental appointees attended a Black conservatives’ conference held in San Francisco in late 1980, hosted by Black economist Thomas Sowell.<sup>9</sup> The conference marked the emergence of Black conservatism as a small yet powerfully influential current within the African-American middle class. There were even a number of Black intellectuals who had advocated “Black Power” and the politics of Black liberation only a decade earlier and now were at the forefront of the ideological retreat. Charles Hamilton, co-author of the 1967 manifesto *Black Power*,<sup>10</sup> participated in the San Francisco meeting and praised the rise of African-American conservatives. Also in attendance was media journalist Tony Brown, a former Black nationalist whose political and moral bankruptcy had led him to embrace the Republican agenda and everything he had once condemned. Brown’s shameless electronic hucksterism financed by generous corporate subsidies promoted “Black capitalism” as the cure-all for African-American economic problems of poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment.

It was “snake-oil,” pure and simple, designed to confuse and divide Black entrepreneurs and elements of the aspiring professional and managerial class from the working class, the poor, and unemployed, who were catching the brunt of capitalism’s offensive against labor. Sadly, many Black liberals and veterans of the great desegregation campaigns of the 1960s went along with the new conservative agenda to some extent. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s chief lieutenants, Ralph David Abernathy and Hosea Williams, actually endorsed Reagan’s candidacy in October 1980. They subsequently floated the incredible proposal that South Carolina senator and former segregationist leader Strom Thurmond serve as “a liaison officer between Republicans on behalf of minorities.” A powerful Black Philadelphia minister, Reverend Leon Sullivan, testified before a U.S. Senate committee in support of the appointment of former Nixon White House Chief of Staff Alexander Haig as Reagan’s Secretary of State. Haig’s appointment, according to Sullivan, was “necessary for America.” The ghost of Booker T. Washington, the chimera of Black capitalism, was now speaking through leaders such as Atlanta mayor Andrew Young, who in 1982 called for “the desegregation of the money markets.” Never one to be outdone as a phrasemaker, the Reverend Jesse Jackson urged one gathering of Black businessmen to “move from Civil Rights to Silver Rights and from aid to trade.” Political struggle could only get the Black community so far. Jackson declared: “The marketplace is the arena for our development.”<sup>11</sup>

Somehow, the Black freedom movement had to transcend these “misleaders” to reclaim the

antle of democratic protest. I felt that the majority of African Americans—workers, the unemployed, poor people, women, and prisoners—were strategically positioned within U.S. capitalism to provide a decisive leadership role for other oppressed groups. What was necessary was a theoretical perspective that could explain that Black working people would form the nucleus of a mass democratic movement against Reagan and Reaganism and why institutional racism could never be dismantled under capitalism. Liberals, both Black and white, no longer had the capacity to provide meaningful opposition to the growth of the far right. The Black freedom movement therefore had to go beyond the boundaries of reform toward a program of socialism.

### III

This was the immediate context and key ideas that informed the writing of *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*. The earliest drafts of the book were developed in the spring and summer months of 1981. I had two tentative working titles for the manuscript-in-progress: *Race, Work, and the State*, and *Race, Work, and Power*, both of which bore the subtitle *Black Political Economy and Society in the 1980s*. There were no subdivisions originally planned in the body of the text. The first draft was organized into eleven chapters, in the following order: “Black Workers”; “The Ghettoclass”; “Dependency and Underdevelopment: Energy, Health, and Welfare”; “The Destruction of Black Education”; “Black Brahmins”; “Black Reaganism: Of Thomas Sowell and Others”; “The Poverty of the Black Intelligentsia”; “Sexual Oppression and the Black Experience”; “Afro-American Nationalism After Black Power”; “A Question of Genocide”; and a bibliographical essay, “Race, Class, and Conflict: Intellectual Debates on Race Relations Research.” At this stage, I had written fragmentary essays on many of these topics, but no conceptual framework formed the foundations of a real thesis.

During the next few months, the manuscript was reorganized around what I thought at the time were two fundamentally conflicting classes: the “Black majority,” an oppressed proletariat created “in the proverbial bowels of the capitalist leviathan,” those “who understood that their masters’ political system of bourgeois democracy was a lie,” versus the “Black elite,” a “privileged social stratum, who were often distinguished by color and caste; who praised the master publicly if not privately . . . who sought to accumulate petty amounts of capital at the expense of their Black sisters and brothers; whose dream of freedom was one of acceptance into the inner sanctum of white economic and political power.” Looking back over the entire span of African-American history, it seemed to me that this inner class conflict

Between the Black majority versus the Black elite was the driving force that explained much of the political and ideological conflicts that had long divided the Black community. The degree of class division among African Americans was so great, I thought, that it had to be responsible for reproducing "two divergent levels of consciousness, which represented two very different kinds of uneven historical experiences."<sup>12</sup>

With this new conceptual structure, the general contents of the book quickly fell into place by the end of 1981. The new title of the revised manuscript was *How Black America Works: Race, Political Economy, and Social Stratification in the 1980s*. The first subdivision of material, "The Black Majority," contained chapters on the Black working class, the poor, prisoners, youth, and "sexism and the Black Economy." The section on "The Black Elite" now featured chapters on the African-American political establishment, or the "Black Brahmins"; "Making It in the System": The Black Entrepreneur in Capitalist Society"; "The Politics of the Black Church"; Black-owned banks and problems of capital investment in the Black community; and "Black Reaganism." In a third section, I had included an essay on "The Destruction of Black Education" and an article on the draconian prospects for Black America under authoritarian capitalism, called "A Question of Genocide." In 1982, I had the good fortune to be invited to lecture during the January term at Williams College in Massachusetts. The New England winter was particularly cold that year, with snowdrifts and ice storms making travel impossible for days at a time. Huddled beside a space heater in an old chilly house, there was little else to do except write, which I did for fourteen hours each day. More than one-third of the book was actually written in those four weeks.

Although I directly quoted Rodney only several times in *How Capitalism, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* was a major influence in the construction of the central arguments, as well as for how the social science data was presented in the text. For example, Chapter Five of *How Europe* goes into considerable detail to document the various processes of how European banks, mining, and commercial corporations expatriated the African surplus under colonial rule. In one section, Rodney describes the development of Unilever, Ltd., a vast international corporate conglomerate that also included the United Africa Company. From its origins as a manufacturer of soap, the profits from its African-based enterprises helped Unilever to become a truly global corporation. As Rodney observed: "Unilever flourished in war and peace. . . . By the end of the colonial period, Unilever was a world force, selling traditional soaps, detergents, margarine, lard, ghee, cooking oil, canned foods, candles, glycerin, oil cake, and toilet preparations such as toothpaste."<sup>13</sup> Similarly, in Chapter Five of *How Capitalism*, I

Presented an analysis of how U.S. corporations culturally manipulated Black consumers and expropriated billions of dollars in profits from the African-American domestic market. I looked at the growing business management literature on advertising and specific consumer buying patterns, showing how tobacco, liquor, and other corporations used such studies to effectively market their goods within the Black community.<sup>14</sup>

Another key element of Rodney's thesis was the role of education in the underdevelopment of Africa. Rodney insisted:

The main purpose of the colonial school system was to train Africans to help man the local administration at the lowest levels and to staff the private capitalist firms owned by Europeans... It was not an educational system that grew out of the African environment or one that was designed to promote the most rational use of material and social resources. It was not an educational system designed to give young people confidence and pride as members of African societies, but one which sought to instill a sense of deference towards all that was European and capitalist.<sup>15</sup>

Again following Rodney's analysis, I examined the contradictory legacy of African-American higher education. Historically Black colleges never were permitted to "develop a clear pedagogy of Black liberation, nor [were] . . . they organically linked to the daily struggle of the Black masses." Yet despite their severe limitations, they still "created the intellectual and social space" essential for the construction of Black leadership, skilled professionals, and a middle class. I tried to illustrate how in the early 1980s desegregation as interpreted and implemented by federal courts was being used to dismantle historically Black schools. Any independent African-American educational institutions would always be under attack if they called "for the transformation of the racist/capitalist order."<sup>16</sup>

Before sending the final manuscript of my book to South End Press, I drafted an introduction, which outlined "A Point of View on Black History," or the historical premises upon which the entire book had been written. The book's brief preface, written originally in the summer of 1982, was postdated when I received the page proofs for final corrections in the text. I dedicated the book primarily to Walter Rodney, and therefore it was logical to retile the study *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*.

My father frequently uses the expression, "Hindsight is always twenty/twenty." As I read *How Capitalism* again today, at the dawning of the twenty-first century, I can see a number of theoretical lapses, factual errors, and other mistakes that should have been corrected. The most significant conceptual flaw in the work is its central organizational premise—that the totality of African-American history has been polarized and structured around the class division between the Black "haves" and the Black "have-nots." The real contours of Black American social history were always much more complicated, more textured, than this analysis suggests.



During slavery, there were numerous examples of Black freed men or enslaved Africans who exercised certain privileges, who betrayed their masters and deliberately sided with the Black masses. It was the educated Black middle class, consisting largely of school teachers, merchants, attorneys, physicians, and clergy, who formed the core leadership in the construction of African-American social institutions and most African-American political movements: This is not to underestimate in any way the powerful and destructive role of class stratification within the Black community, especially in the years since *How Capitalism* was written. The real problem, however, isn't the contradictory and accommodationist behavior of the Black middle class, but the exploitative policies and practices of the capitalist ruling class. Today, we live in a society in which the richest 1 percent of all households possess a greater net wealth than the bottom 95 percent of all U.S. households. The top 1 percent of all income earners receive more than 40 percent of the total income. The number of African Americans and Latinos in these elite groups is insignificant at best.

A similarly sectarian approach is taken toward electoral politics in general, and African-American politicians in particular. "There is something essentially absurd about a Negro politician in racist/capitalist America," I wrote in 1982. "The Black politician is locked in a world of meaningless symbols which perpetuate the hegemony of the white ruling class. . . . The Black elected official is essentially a vicar for a higher authority, a necessary buffer between the Black majority and the capitalist state, a kind of modern voodoo priest, smelling of incense, pomp and pedigree, who promises much but delivers nothing."<sup>17</sup> I basically thought that electoral politics had absolutely nothing to offer Black people in the way of meaningful social change. One might consider offering "critical support" for anticapitalist politicians like Representative Ronald V. Dellums of California, but the primary vehicle for challenging the capitalist state would be the construction of a "mass revolutionary bloc, which would explicitly call for the transformation of the system as it now exists."<sup>18</sup> This position grossly underestimated the importance to Black people of the democratic rights they had achieved through great sacrifices over several centuries of struggle. When one considers that, in the twentieth century, the majority of African-American voters were permitted legally to cast ballots only after the passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, one begins to appreciate the importance of such electoral victories. As late as 1964, there were only 100 African-American elected officials in the entire country. Blacks had been able to exercise the franchise for only a generation. They would not so quickly lose their faith and hopes in the potential power of electoral politics, despite the betrayals of individual Black officials.

Consequently, because of its anti-electoral orientation, *How Capitalism* did not anticipate two of the most significant mass democratic opposition movements that would develop against the Reagan administration—Harold Washington’s successful mayoral campaign in Chicago in 1983 and the Rainbow Coalition presidential campaign of 1984. The Washington campaign was technically aimed against the Cook County Democratic Party organization in Chicago, but in reality was a multiracial, multiclass, democratic protest against the white conservative agendas of both major parties. Washington was not a socialist, but he openly encouraged the participation of Communists, feminists, lesbians, gays, community activists, and Black nationalists in his political mobilization. The overwhelming mandate given to Washington by the Black electorate, with 80 percent turning out to vote, proved that electoral politics could be a powerful tool in fostering social change. Similarly, *How Capitalism* dismisses Jesse Jackson as part of “the integrationist Old Guard,” and characterizes Jackson’s Operation PUSH as an opportunistic organization designed to “capture headlines with political maneuvers which are more style than substance.”<sup>19</sup> Thus I could not anticipate Jackson’s decision to challenge Walter Mondale for the 1984 Democratic presidential nomination, running on a progressive program similar to that of Harold Washington. To his credit, Jackson grew dramatically in political stature, reaching out to environmentalists, feminists, racialized ethnic minorities, lesbians and gays, and a host of liberal and left constituencies. Although Jackson would ultimately retreat into political accommodation with the Democratic Party, collapsing the Rainbow Coalition as an independent force, he had illustrated that electoral politics could be used for progressive ends.

The root cause of the sectarian errors of political judgment in *How Capita/ism* is found in its analysis of the U.S. capitalist state. At points, the book attempts to make a critical distinction between traditional bourgeois or capitalist democracy with authoritarian fascism. “U.S. bourgeois ‘democracy’ is oppressive and under Reagan is even moving toward unambiguous authoritarianism, yet is not specifically fascist in the classical sense.” It was still possible for progressives to influence public policies of the state “via electoral participation, lobbying, civil disobedience, mass demonstration, etc.”<sup>20</sup> Yet in the chapter on “The Meaning of Racist Violence in Late Capitalism,” I asserted that “the function of the rise of racist attacks the preparation of the ideological and cultural foundations necessary for a potential ‘Chilean Solution’ to resolve the crisis of U.S. capitalism. . . . Whether this regime is ‘fascist’ in the classical model of Nazi Germany, or ‘authoritarian,’ which would permit some democratic rights, could be simply a question of semantics.”<sup>21</sup> *How Capita/ism* does not make a clear and

precise delineation between various modes of capitalist political power and governance, and underestimates the very complicated role of competing social classes, elites, and interest groups in influencing policy outcomes.

The capitalist ruling class has never been politically monolithic. There are real and important differences of opinion that divide multinational, global capital from smaller corporate capital located in national or regional markets. (For example, witness the recent debate in the 1990s over the North American Free Trade Agreement, with billionaire Ross Perot leading the opposition in the business community.) Recent developments in global capitalism, such as the growth of information technologies and the mega-mergers of international corporations, indicate a relative decline in the authority and political power of the traditional nation-state. This is part of the reason behind the collapse of South Africa's apartheid state and its increasingly anachronistic model of authoritarian, racialized state capitalism in the 1990s. This crude system of racial domination, very much like Jim Crow segregation in the U.S. South, no longer served the needs or interests of both South African and international capital. "Corporate multiculturalism," with the integration of transnational markets managed by international bureaucracies coordinating the exploitation of a truly global proletariat, is the future direction of world capitalism. The power of individual nation-states, even that exercised by the United States as the world's only remaining "superpower," is rapidly being eclipsed by mammoth geopolitical cartels such as the World Trade Organization. This fundamental transformation of the global political economy means that any oppositional movement that largely or exclusively focuses on the political developments within nation-states will not be successful.

Finally, there is a real problem in *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* with its language and style. About four years after the publication of *How Capitalism*, I visited London and spent much of one afternoon with C.L.R. James. "Nello," as he was known to his political comrades and friends, lived at the time in the upper flat of a tall, narrow building in the Brixton neighborhood. James was resting on his bed, and beside him were well-worn and thoroughly marked-up copies of two of my books, *How Capitalism* and *Black American Politics*, which had been first published in Britain in 1985.<sup>22</sup> James and I talked about many things, even voting about an hour to debate the strengths and errors in the work of the Marxist theorist Rosa Luxemburg.

What was most memorable about my conversation with James in London was a query I raised about the character of his own work. I asked James what he regretted most about his

political essays and histories. James thought a minute, and replied that he mostly regretted the angular, polemical style of so much of his work. The writer must persuade, not coerce, he suggested. I took his comments to mean that political writing should have some of the best qualities of literature, possessing the power to inspire. Occasionally, *How Capitalism* endeavors to achieve this lofty stylistic goal. In the conclusion, I insist that progressives in the U.S. must “articulate their demands in a popular and historical discourse, in a language readily accessible to the majority of American workers and nonwhite people.”<sup>23</sup> Yet it is one thing to state this, and a very different thing actually to *do* it. One can still despise capitalism and everything it stands for but explain one’s socialist views in a language and style that effectively convinces an audience that an alternate point of view makes sense. Over the years, my writing style has changed considerably, I hope for the better, along the lines that James suggested.

To its credit, there are also some things that *How Capitalism* accomplishes well. In some respects, it was well ahead of its time. Probably the most important theoretical contribution the book makes is the attempt to link gender, race, and class as interlocking factors in the underdevelopment of Black America. At Cornell University, I had initiated and taught a lecture course on African-American women’s history in 1981. I became very familiar with the literature in the new and growing field of Black feminist thought, including Angela Y. Davis’s *Women, Race, and Class*, Michele Wallace’s *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, and bell hooks’ *Ain’t I a Woman*.<sup>24</sup> These important feminist insights were integrated into my own analysis. Rodney’s book had very little to say about the material conditions and status of African women, beyond several brief comments about how “the social, religious, constitutional, and political privileges and rights” of women under colonialism “disappeared, while the economic exploitation continued and was often intensified.”<sup>25</sup> I tried to go well beyond this, reexamining Black history from the vantage point of African-American women. Yet I also recognized:

The final history of the systematic exploitation of Black women in capitalist America will not be written by whites, or by Black men, no matter how sympathetic they might be to the struggle against racism and patriarchy. Historically, Black women have carried the greatest burden in the battle for democracy in this country. . . . [No] road toward the ultimate emancipation of the U.S. Black working class exists outside of a concomitant struggle, in theory and practice, to destroy every vestige of sexual oppression within the Black community.<sup>26</sup>

The chapter specifically criticized, by name, prominent African-American male political leaders and scholars whose views had reinforced patriarchy, including Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad, Haki Madhubuti, and Robert Staples.

Second, *How Capitalism* correctly anticipated the phenomenon of the “deracialization” of



U.S. politics, or the emergence of what might be termed “post-Black politics.” Racial segregation had imposed a degree of group solidarity and social accountability upon African-American middle-class leaders. With the legal desegregation of U.S. civil society, the growth of Black suburbs, and the increased assimilation of African-American culture into the white corporate mainstream, it was inevitable that a generation of Black politicians would be produced who had few connections with Black mass organizations and traditional institutions. The “Black Reaganites” criticized in *How Capitalism* were only a minor tendency within the formation of this new political caste. By the 1990s, a significant number of prominent African Americans in both major parties, such as Colin Powell, the former chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the late Ronald Brown, former head of the Democratic National Committee and subsequently commerce secretary under Clinton, were essentially “deracialized” politicians. Another excellent example of this deracialization phenomenon is provided by the powerful attorney Vernon Jordan. When *How Capitalism* was written, Jordan had recently served for a decade as head of the Urban League, the nation’s most conservative civil rights group. Twenty years later, he exercised power in the fields of corporate law and investment banking, and was widely acknowledged to be the closest “personal friend” of Bill Clinton. The physical reality of Jordan’s “Blackness” had become almost irrelevant to his relationships and access to vast corporate and political resources and power. Deracialized Black cultural icons of the 1990s, such as Michael Jordan, Michael Jackson, and Tiger Woods, occupied a parallel assimilationist role.

Finally, the analysis presented in *How Capitalism* of what would later be termed the “prison-industrial complex”—and the essential role of the criminal justice system as a means for managing redundant labor and racialized ethnic minorities—was unfortunately all too correct. When *How Capitalism* was first published, there were “over 500,000 men, women and youths who were incarcerated in more than 6,500 penal institutions of various types.” As of June 1981, 827 Americans were on death row.<sup>27</sup> Today, more than 1.8 million Americans are incarcerated, about one-half of whom are African Americans. About one third of all prisoners are unemployed at the time of their arrests, with the majority averaging less than \$15,000 in annual income prior to their arrests. About one-third of all prisoners are employed at the time of their arrests, with the majority averaging less than \$15,000 in annual incomes prior to their arrests. The number of Americans currently on death row is 3,400 and is growing rapidly with the elimination of Constitutional safeguards and legislative restrictions against capital punishment.