

○ We live in a nation today in which prisons are among the fastest and most profitable “growth industries” and in which there are currently 340,000 Americans who are employed as prison guards. Thousands of low-paid, low-skilled jobs are increasingly outsourced to prison workers, who of course lack the protection of unions and environmental and health safety standards.

Millions of poor, working, and even middle-class whites are also being increasingly pulled into this penal leviathan as well. About one in five Americans now has a criminal record; as jobs at living wages continue to disappear, we should anticipate the prison system soon being flooded with thousands of whites, many of whom previously supported the representative legislation now responsible for their confinement.

The central objective of *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* was “to present a critique of the strengths and contradictions that comprise Black American labor and life, with the purpose of destroying the process of underdevelopment which has imprisoned us for almost four centuries.”<sup>28</sup> Despite its theoretical lapses and limitations, the book largely accomplishes the first part of that goal. I remain convinced that Black people as a group will *never* achieve the historical objectives of their long struggle for freedom within the political economy of capitalism. Capitalism has shown the remarkable ability to mutate into various social formations and types of state rule, but its essentially oppressive character, grounded in the continuing dynamics of capital accumulation and the exploitation of labor power, remains the same. The U.S. capitalist state, in the final analysis, will never be cajoled or persuaded to reform itself through appeals of moral suasion. Fundamental change will require a massive democratic resistance movement largely from below and anchored in the working class and among oppressed minority groups.

In the aftermath of the collapse and disintegration of the Soviet Union and Eastern European Communist states, the authoritarian capitalism represented by Communist China, and the ideological retreat into neoliberalism by many Social Democratic parties, “socialism” might seem to have reached a dead end as a viable political concept. But history is always filled with unanticipated twists and detours. The current speculative stock market boom and wave of corporate mergers will probably give way to an unprecedented global recession and a meltdown of significant sectors of the international capital markets. In December 1999, in downtown Seattle, thousands of U.S. trade unionists, environmentalists, and others protested against the World Trade Organization and the vast corporate and financial cartels it represents. Earlier that same year, more than 1,200 people engaged in civil disobedience and went to jail,

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Introduction to the First Edition

## Inequality and the Burden of Capitalist Democracy: A Point of View on Black History

*What have I or those I represent to do with your national independence? Are the great principles of political freedom and of natural justice, embodied in that Declaration of Independence, extended to us? . . . Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you this day rejoice are not enjoyed in common. The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity, and independence bequeathed by your fathers is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn. . . . What to the American slave is your Fourth of July? I answer, a day that reveals to him more than all other days of the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty an unholy license . . .*

—Frederick Douglass, 1852, in Alice Moore Dunbar, ed., *Masterpieces of Negro Eloquence* (New York: Bookery Publishing Company, 1914), pp. 42-47.

*The process of capital accumulation is a, if not the, principal motor of modern history. Structural inequality and temporal unevenness of capital accumulation are inherent to capitalism.*

—Andre Gunder Frank, *World Accumulation, 1492-1789* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1978), pp. 238-239.

The most striking fact about American economic history and politics is the brutal and systemic underdevelopment of Black people. Afro-Americans have been on the other side of one of the most remarkable and rapid accumulations of capital seen anywhere in human history, existing as a necessary yet circumscribed victim within the proverbial belly of the beast. The relationship is filled with paradoxes: each advance in white freedom was purchased by Black enslavement; white affluence coexists with Black poverty; white state and corporate power is the product in part of Black powerlessness; income mobility for the few is rooted in income stasis for the many. Many politicians, intellectuals and civic leaders condemn the United States on the grounds that white society has systematically excluded Blacks as a group from the material, cultural and political gains achieved by other ethnic minorities. Blacks are employed, economically exploited and politically disfranchised because they are excluded or segregated because of caste or racial discrimination. But there is another point of view on this issue: Blacks occupy the lowest socioeconomic rung in the ladder of American upward mobility precisely because they have been “integrated” all too well into the system. America’s

George Schuyler (1960s)

Thomas Sowell

Walter Williams

Black Reaganites

Table XXVI

Black political and economic tendencies since the Civil War

democratic” government and “free enterprise” system are structured deliberately and specifically to maximize Black oppression. Capitalist development has occurred not in spite of the exclusion of Blacks, but because of the brutal exploitation of Blacks as workers and consumers. Blacks have never been equal partners in the American Social Contract, because the system exists not to develop, but to *underdevelop Black people*.

This different perspective raises a basic theoretical question: What is development, and what is its structural relationship to underdevelopment? Most Western scholars and the general U.S. public describe a nation as “developed” if and when it “has several political parties, widespread literacy, a high standard of living, wide circulation of newspapers and books, consensus on the fundamentals of government, a long history of peace, and . . . a white population.”<sup>1</sup> Developed or “modern” nation-states also exhibit other characteristics, according to this view: the secularization of politics; a trained civil service; political activity which is widespread, rather than confined to the capital city; the infusion of Western political and social values into the system; the existence of constitutional government; civilian control of the military; a popular commitment to democracy; and for many, a free market economic system. Modernization then becomes the pattern by which nonwhite peoples transform themselves “through the twin processes of commercialization and industrialization,” moving toward the standard socioeconomic models provided by Western Europe and the United States.<sup>2</sup> For most white political scientists, planners and sociologists, the road toward development for Asia, Africa, Latin America and historically disadvantaged national minorities is not unlike the Puritans’ quest for the perfect “City on the Hill.” For economist Robert L. Heilbroner, development is that glorious “process through which the social, political and economic institutions of the future are being shaped for the great majority of mankind.”<sup>3</sup> Conversely, the lack of integration into the West’s economic and political order means the absence of “cash, commercial credit, advanced technology, and specialized production.”<sup>4</sup>

What all of these liberal interpretations have in common is a kind of economic amnesia. A few social scientists go so far as to discount any relationship between political development and “economic and social factors” relating to modernization.<sup>5</sup> An accurate understanding of underdevelopment begins with the questions raised by Marxist economist Harry Magdoff: “Where would the original accumulation of capital used in industry (in the West) have come from if not from the extraction of wealth from colonies, piracy, and the slave trade? Where would the reproduction and growth of the needed capital for investment have come from if not

On sufficiently large profits arising in the operation of enterprise (in the non-western world)?”<sup>6</sup> The “Great Ascent” of the West since the sixteenth century was fundamentally a process of growing capital accumulation, the endless drive to control the human and material resources of the world’s people. For Western Europe, Great Britain and the United States, domestic development meant the conquest of foreign markets, the stimulation of demand for Western goods within the Third World, the domination of indigenous political and social systems by the bribery of local officials, revolutions, threats, and outright colonial occupation. Development was, more than all other factors combined, the institutionalization of the hegemony of capitalism as a world system. *Underdevelopment* was the direct consequence of this process: chattel slavery, sharecropping, peonage, industrial labor at low wages, and cultural chaos.<sup>7</sup> The current economic amnesia of the West is therefore no accident, because it reveals the true roots of massive exploitation and human degradation upon which the current world order rests. The world “periphery” and capitalist “core” share a common history.

The U.S. state apparatus was created to facilitate the expansion and entrenchment of constitutional racism in both slave and nonslaveholding states. The solidly bourgeois delegates at the Constitutional Convention held in Philadelphia in 1787 were unconcerned about the “inalienable rights” of Afro-Americans. Their chief concern was the creation of a strong national government that would guarantee property rights—slavery being counted among them. Thus, the result was the drafting of a racist manifesto which avoided the use of the words “slave” or “slavery” while protecting the institution itself. This was accomplished by three specific points: Article One, Section Two, which counted the slaves for purposes of representation and direct taxation as three-fifths of a human being; Article One, Section Nine, which mandated that Federal authorities could not interfere with the transatlantic slave trade for two decades; and Article Four, Section Two, which declared that all fugitive slaves had to be returned to their rightful owners. After the ratification of the U.S. Constitution, the Federal government adopted, even under relatively progressive administrations, a bitterly racist posture toward the rights of all Blacks, slave or free. The Fugitive Slave Act of 1793, signed by the Virginia slaveholder and plantation master George Washington, strengthened the rights of slaveowners to capture runaways in the North and to remove them by force back to the South. The banning of the slave trade in 1808 was relatively inconsequential, since 50,000 Africans were brought into the U.S. after the law took effect. Northern states led the way toward the development of white supremacy as part of local state policy. Free Blacks were barred from voting in Delaware in 1792; in Kentucky, Maryland and Ohio in 1799; in New

ersey in 1807. New York State authorized Blacks to vote only if they owned property valued above \$250, while no property restrictions applied to white voters. Free Blacks were routinely excluded from juries and all public offices. This heritage of collective racial discrimination is the very foundation of what is usually heralded as American democracy.<sup>8</sup>

Yet every stage of Western capitalist underdevelopment, the African population resisted. Throughout the Black diaspora, resistance took the form of runaway slave communities, called maroons (French and English), palenques (Spanish), quilombos (Portuguese) and/or mocambos (Ambundu for “hideout”). In late-sixteenth-century Mexico, for example, African runaway slaves had become such a problem that the Spanish authorities ordered the castration of Black men absent for more than six months. Vigilante systems for patrolling the roads were established in rural areas. The crown granted rewards for the capture of palenque rebels and material incentives were offered to slaves and former fugitives who betrayed their brothers and sisters who were in hiding. In Veracruz, African guerillas regularly destroyed crops, attacked wagons and burned plantation houses to the ground. In the early seventeenth century, a militant palenque of Indians and Africans led by the chief Yanga fought Spanish regulars to a stalemate. Local Spanish authorities were forced to sign a peace treaty with Yanga, which established the legal town of San Lorenzo de los Negros. Between 1731 and 1781, Cuban Blacks created a palenque, Poblado del Cobre, in Oriente Province that comprised over one thousand persons. The greatest maroon of all was Palmares, a series of African quilombos founded in about 1600 and surviving armed assaults by Dutch and Portuguese troops until 1694. The Palmarista general Zambi successfully defended the territory until the combined weight of American Indian, Portuguese colonial and mestizo soldiers, skilled in guerilla tactics, were hurled against him. After a two-year siege of the major rebel city, 200 Palmarista soldiers committed suicide rather than suffer the humiliation of returning to slavery. Two hundred more Palmaristas were killed in hand-to-hand combat on the final day of fighting, with Zambi succumbing only after he was seriously wounded. On November 20, 1695, Zambi was decapitated in a public execution; his head was exhibited before Black slaves “to kill the legend of his immortality.” In the United States, wherever the frontier geography permitted the possibility of maroons, Afro-American Zambis were found. At least fifty maroons existed in U.S. between 1672 and 1864 in the swamps and Appalachian hill country of the Carolinas, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Mississippi, Virginia and Louisiana. As late as the 1970s, “the descendants of many of those maroons who chose to cast their lot with Indians [could] still be found, largely forgotten, and often desperately poor.”<sup>9</sup>

Where the conditions (political, social, economic) for revolt existed, Africans seized whatever arms they could find and fought desperately to assert their humanity. Along Columbia's Pata River in the 1730s and 1740s, a slave named Jeronimo incited open rebellion and refused an offer of peace rendered by Spanish authorities on the grounds that it required a return of some runaway slaves from his army. In 1647, four hundred Chilean Blacks, armed with clubs, guns and knives, staged an unsuccessful uprising in Santiago. In 1609 and 1612, rumors in Mexico City that the slaves were conspiring a bloody revolt led to extensive repression, with hundreds of Blacks arrested, imprisoned, executed and/or castrated. Gabriel Prosser and Denmark Vessey prepared plans for American slave rebellions in 1800 and 1822, respectively, that involved thousands of Black women and men. Nat Turner led a band of sixty slaves across southern Virginia in 1831, executing 57 whites in a span of two days. The Black diaspora's greatest revolutionaries, of course were the African laborers of San Domingue. The former slaves' leaders were among the most dedicated and brilliant generals who have appeared in the pages of history—Toussaint L'Ouverture, Christophe, and the ruthless Dessalines. The heroism of Haiti's soldiers between 1790 and 1804 is legendary.<sup>10</sup>

White planters and government officials recognized that the slavery regime could survive only with the most repressive and bestial force imaginable. The French tended to be extremely precise in their punishments of rebellious Africans. The *Code Noir* was quite specific: "The fugitive slave who has been absent for one month shall have his ears cut off and his shoulder branded with a *fleur de lis*; if he repeats his crime for a period of (at least) one month, he shall be hamstrung and branded with a *fleur de lis* on the other shoulder." Plantation managers used a variety of tortures: the "empetre" or chain, shackles three feet long with two iron rings fastened at each end to secure the slave's lower legs to impede walking; "cachots effrayants," small maximum security cells without light; the nabot, a large iron circular device weighing six to ten pounds that was cold-riveted to the slave's foot; castration, or amputation of the feet and/or limbs; forcing gunpowder into the anus or vagina of a slave and then blowing him/her up with a light—"to burn a little powder in the ass of a nigger;" burying them in the dirt up to their necks and smearing their heads with sugar so flies and ants would devour them; forcing slaves to eat animal and human excrement; roasting rebellious slaves barbeque-style over hot coals or an open fire. In the United States, however, the most popular form of labor discipline was the whip, or lash. Historian Kenneth Stampp observes that "the whip was the most common instrument of punishment—indeed, it was the emblem of the master's authority. Nearly every slaveholder used it, and few grown slaves escaped it entirely." The rawhide lash was a

savage instrument,” and Stamppp notes that “physical cruelty was always a possible consequence of the master’s power to punish.” Thoughtful white Southerners recognized the barbarism inherent in the U.S. slavery system. One Mississippi slave-owner wrote in 1846 that “a certain class of overseers” were extraordinarily cruel to Black women and men alike. “It is this unrelenting, brutalizing drive, watch and whip, that furnishes facts to abolition writers that cannot be disputed, and that are infamous.” One South Carolina judge confessed in 1847 that many slaveholders “deserved no other name than fiends” because they delighted in the torture of their chattel.<sup>11</sup>

The ordeal of slavery was responsible for accelerating the economic and political power of Europe and North America over the rest of the mostly nonwhite world. Since the demise of slavery, and the emergence of modern capitalism, the process of Black underdevelopment has expanded and deepened. To understand this dynamic of degradation, first, is to recognize that development itself is comparative in essence, a relationship of inequality between the capitalist ruling class and those who are exploited. Underdevelopment is not the absence of development; it is the inevitable product of an oppressed population’s integration into the world market economy and political system. Once “freed,” Black Americans were not compensated for their 246 years of free labor to this country’s slave oligarchy. The only means of survival and economic development they possessed was their ability to work, their labor power, which they sold in various forms to the agricultural capitalist. Sharecropping and convict leasing were followed by industrial labor at low wages. When Blacks performed the identical tasks that whites carried out, they were paid less than “white wages.” Even when Blacks acquired technical skills and advanced educations, they were still paid much less than whites who possessed inferior abilities. At every level of employment, white capitalists accumulated higher profits from Blacks’ labor than they gained from the labor of whites. Throughout the totality of economic relations, Black workers were exploited—in land tenure, in the ownership of factories, shops and other enterprises, in the means of transportation, in energy, and so forth. *The constant expropriation of surplus value created by Black labor is the heart and soul of underdevelopment.*

Another crucial aspect of underdevelopment involves the dynamics of dependency. Political parties in the U.S. are defined ideologically for the public as formations which represent all the people, rather than special interests and sectors of capital. The object of the electoral process is to achieve a majority within the voting population, and to form specific public policies with the goal of gaining majoritarian support among various constituents within the



the apparatus. In the U.S. form of constitutional government, racial minorities can influence major public policies only when their agenda is sufficiently acceptable to one or both of the major white capitalist parties, which in turn assimilate the proposals into their political program for their own purposes. Since Blacks account for 12-13 percent of the U.S. population, and only 10-11 percent of the voters in most general elections, their ability to profoundly influence public policies in the broadest sense is greatly limited by the rules of the game. Blacks are pressured to become dependent on white liberals and moderates to articulate their agendas, in order to acquire majoritarian support. Historically, this has meant that many Blacks have been forced into political coalitions with whites in order to affect U.S. politics, formations which are usually directed by whites, financed by whites, and chiefly comprised of whites. During the period of abolitionist agitation, 1830-1860, many Black political activists were dependent upon the financial and political support of the Garrisonians, the early white feminists, white Free Soilers and others. In the turbulent 1890s, Black croppers were often part of Populist coalitions led by white Southern and Western farmers whose interests and commitments did not in the last analysis always coincide with their own. The NAACP, Urban League, and other civil rights groups in the twentieth century were dependent upon white foundation, corporate and political support. Without an independent capital base for self sufficiency, and operating under a political apparatus which nullifies the impact of minority pressure groups, Blacks repeatedly were trapped into alliances as dependent clients, unable or unwilling to break from the logic of a closed but supposedly democratic system.

Also decisive is the ideological dependency perpetuated among Blacks to divide and to frustrate mass-based actions against racism. The Black child attending public school is burdened immediately with an educational pedagogy which rests on the assumption of his/her cultural and intellectual inferiority. In their places of worship, most Blacks are confronted every Sunday with early Renaissance portraits of Christ, a white deity, and a form of spirituality which theoretically and historically has little direct relevancy to their unique heritage and original African belief systems. The media often carefully select and eliminate glaring contradictions which would evoke outrage and activity by Black people. The aesthetics and popular culture of racist societies constantly reinforce the image of the Anglo-Saxon ideal the minds of Blacks, creating the tragic and destructive phenomenon of self-hatred and cultural genocide. Colleges and universities deny the legitimacy of Black history and Black studies, and propagate the illusion that U.S. democracy works for everyone regardless of socioeconomic, racial and political background. The logic of the ideological apparatuses of

The racist/capitalist state leads inextricably to Black accommodation and assimilation into the status quo, a process of cultural genocide which assists the function of ever-expanding capital accumulation.

Both the ideological and coercive apparatuses of white power were mediated also by yet another powerful structure—patriarchy, or institutionalized sexism. By patriarchy, I mean a sex/gender system of authoritarian male dominance and reinforced female dependency, characterized within capitalist society by certain characteristics. The first and decisive component is males' ownership of almost all private property and an absolute control over all productive resources. Second, all men are able to earn more money than women who perform identical or comparable tasks in the workplace. Men under patriarchy experience greater income mobility, and most women are identified in the ideological apparatuses as "homemakers," a vocation for which no real financial compensation is given. Third, women have few rights within the legal system. Fourth, women are either denied suffrage (prior to 1920) or are severely under-represented within the state apparatus. Fifth, various patriarchal institutions deny sexual rights for women such as abortion and birth control information. Sixth, cultural and social authority is invested in the symbolic figure of the father. The (usually white) male's penis is the necessary and logical prerequisite for power. Finally, the "coercive glue" that holds the patriarchal order in balance is systemic violence against women: rape, involuntary sterilization, "wife beatings," and the constant threat of physical punishment. Male-dominated societies existed before the emergence of capitalism, and the struggle to uproot patriarchy even in socialist or transitional states is often problematic. But under capitalism, patriarchy reinforces and converges with racism in numerous ways, affecting the daily lives of all Blacks and all women. The two groups have been historically victimized by white male violence, denied their civil rights, and their undercompensation in the workplace is accumulated in the form of higher profits for white capitalists. The existence of both systems creates a triple burden for every Black woman—for she is victimized, exploited, raped and murdered because of her class, race and sex. For the Black woman under capitalism, each rape is symbolically also a lynching.

The historical product of racist and sexist underdevelopment for Black America has been the creation of a unique national minority within the world's second-most racist state (South Africa deserving honors in this category). Blacks are an integral and necessary part of an imperialistic and powerful capitalist society, yet they exist in terms of actual socioeconomic and political power as a kind of Third World nation. As a result, Black America shares some



imilarities with other national minorities or oppressed nationalities within European countries; e.g., the Basques in northern Spain, the Welsh and the Irish in the United Kingdom, the Sardinians of Italy, the Corsicans of France. The critical distinction between our conditions and theirs is the factor of white racism—the systemic exploitation of Blacks as a subcaste in both the economic sphere and within civil society. Like Africans and West Indians, Black Americans are not only victims of class but also white racist exploitation. Because of its peculiar historical development, the U.S. is not just a capitalist state, but with South Africa, is a *racist/capitalist state*. The immediate task before the Black movement in this country is to chart a realistic program to abolish racist/capitalist underdevelopment. We must analyze the historical foundations of underdevelopment, and articulate a theory of social transformation which will overturn capitalism, patriarchy and white supremacy.

## II

Developing a vision of an alternative, noncapitalist development for U.S. Blacks begins with a detailed critique of the American past. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century the most outstanding proponent of democracy, socialism and Black equality was W. E. B. Du Bois. Contrary to the judgment of some of his biographers, DuBois' views on these issues remained remarkably consistent, despite tactical detours and modifications in his outlook caused by the Great Depression. Examining U.S. economic and political life, DuBois arrived at five theoretical positions which governed his practice and posture toward the entire panorama of public policy issues between World War I and the 1960s. His insights comprise the basic orientation of this work.

“The first and fundamental and inescapable problem of American democracy,” DuBois wrote in 1921, “is Justice to the American Negro.”<sup>12</sup> The knotty dilemma of racism was not simply a question of America's failure in race relations. Racism was at the core of every issue relating to power, economic production, culture and society. Thirty years later, writing in the *National Guardian*, DuBois argued that the twin pillars of white capitalist oligarchy were domestic racism and colonialism. Until international and domestic racism were smashed, no serious discussion of democracy could even occur in the United States.<sup>13</sup> For DuBois, the centrality of racism was not just a burden for nonwhites, but had to be openly and unconditionally recognized by white progressives. It was only through the development of an antiracist politics that the real material needs of all oppressed people could be addressed. The fight for Black liberation is the “realization of democracy for all . . . ”<sup>14</sup>

Second, DuBois concluded early in his career that *no real democracy has ever existed in the United States*. The most obvious and racist manifestation of the lack of popular democracy was the segregation codes which prohibited most Blacks from participating in the electoral process from the late 1890s until the 1960s. Periodically throughout the disenfranchisement period, DuBois documented the undemocratic character of voting patterns and electoral processes in the South. Analyzing the election of 1920 in the *Crisis*, for example, he illustrated the low level of voter participation and the denial of Black voting rights.<sup>15</sup>

In 1948 DuBois declared that the great problem of American democracy was that “it had not yet been tried.” Neither Blacks nor whites had been freed to exercise democratic principles of governance because of the powerful controls of white capitalist America’s upper classes.<sup>16</sup> Thus any condemnation by the U.S. government of socialist and Third World countries behavior at the ballot box was the supreme hypocrisy. When South Carolina racist James F. Byrnes condemned Eastern European nations for suppressing democracy, DuBois countered correctly that Byrnes “does not understand the term.”<sup>17</sup> Democracy is not simply “majority rule,” but effective state power in the hands of the masses.<sup>18</sup>

The true test of democracy, DuBois argued, was always found in an examination of a nation’s criminal justice and penal systems. For decades, DuBois used his newspaper columns and articles to challenge the white racist notions of Black crime and punishment. In the pages of the *Crisis* in March, 1922, he documented the tragedy of a nineteen-year-old Black man who was convicted of murder in New York City. DuBois argued convincingly that capitalist society, not the young man, was to blame for the murder, since he was the victim of ghetto education, “racist violence” and “police brutality.”<sup>19</sup> In “The Case of Samuel Moore,” written in April, 1922, he outlined the plight of a Black prisoner who had spent 37 of his 48 years behind bars.<sup>20</sup> In 1931 he criticized the complacency of the Negro petty bourgeoisie toward Blacks who were imprisoned, arguing that “the truth is . . . (that) we know perfectly well how often that (poor blacks) are the victims of police discrimination and judicial unfairness and that their poverty and ignorance make them the scapegoats of our present criminal law.”<sup>21</sup> DuBois was perhaps the first American sociologist or political activist to predict the massive prison uprisings of the 1970s and 1980s. In September, 1929, he suggested, “After a time the revolt of thousands of convicts all over the country may bring the attention of the philanthropists to the slavery, degradation and exquisite cruelty of the thing we call punishment for crime.”<sup>22</sup>

The question of the U.S. claim to real democracy must be approached in the light of our

story. Colonial historians have noted that the system of U.S. slavery was established to provide “freedom” and the possibility of democratic government for the white, land-owning freemen of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The enslavement process was an essential guarantee to land-hungry European immigrants that their rights were protected by the state. Prior to the Civil War, white Midwest farmers opposed slavery mainly because they viewed the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 as a threat to their internal freedoms and political democracy. The expansion of “the peculiar institution,” as slavery was called, into the Great Plains and upper Midwestern states would have introduced large numbers of Afro-Americans into the region and simultaneously overturned their “free” economic and political institutions. The great white American democrats, Jefferson and Jackson, owned hundreds of slaves, while political conservatives like Alexander Hamilton agitated against the expansion of slavery. During the Progressive era, Woodrow Wilson’s “New Freedom” expanded racial segregation to all levels of the Federal government. Simultaneously, many of the most antidemocratic and aristocratic elements of Southern politics were the most reliable allies of Black leaders. Southern Bourbon Democrats, the commercial class, and landed gentry that dominated politics after 1877 were among the staunchest defenders of limited Black democratic rights in the face of hostile opposition from the white rural masses. As early as 1889, Julius Dreher, the president of Roanoke College in Virginia, wrote that racial tolerance and Black suffrage were essential to Southern political democracy. “If we treat (the Negro) with anything like the fairness, justice and consideration we claim for ourselves as men, we shall hear less of race antagonism in the future.” Benjamin F. Riley, a Baptist minister and superintendent of the Texas Anti-Saloon League, believed that middle class Black leaders and educators were morally and culturally superior to rural white farmers and sharecroppers. “The Negro,” he wrote in 1910, “has made himself an exception among the people of the earth in the rapidity of his advancement.” White conservatives endorsed Black educator Booker T. Washington and state support for Black industrial and normal schools, and opposed the complete disfranchisement of all Blacks. Despite the biracial politics of populism in the 1890s and integrated unionism in isolated Southern cities, the white working class did not usually accept even minimal rights for Black people.<sup>23</sup>

White opponents of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s almost always relied upon the concept of democratic rights for the white majority. The overtly racist faction within the Democratic Party cultivated close ties with rural farmers, laborers and working class whites. But political conservatives, which included the industrialists and the banking and business

Establishment, usually denounced the extremist tactics of the White Citizens Councils. Most of the upper-class religious institutions, such as the Southern Presbyterians and Methodists, tended not to be the most avid supporters of the Wallaces and Thurmonds. The white working class, in general, viewed integration not within the American democratic tradition, but as an aberration of democracy imposed by liberal elites. The opposition from white workers had an impact upon the direction of the Black movement. From its beginnings until today, the movement has been overwhelmingly petty bourgeois in its leadership and dominant ideology. It has been in essence a united front, representing various factions within the Black community, all oriented toward the goal of greater democracy. In his autobiography, DuBois explained the dominant consciousness of the movement as well as his own early theoretical shortcomings:

I was born in a world which was not simply fundamentally capitalistic, but had no conception of any system except one in which capital was privately owned. What I wanted was the same economic opportunities that white Americans had. Although a student of social progress, I did not know the labor development in the United States. I was bitter at lynching, but not moved by the treatment of white miners in Colorado or Montana. I never sang the songs of Joe Hill, and the terrible strike at Lawrence, Massachusetts, did not stir me, because I knew that factory strikers like these would not let a Negro work beside them or live in the same town.<sup>24</sup>

The left tendency within the movement, from A. Phillip Randolph's National Negro Congress in the 1930s to Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and radical elements within Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in the 1960s, developed a critical perspective on society which recognized the ultimate necessity of socialism. But the dominant coalitions within the movement were simply committed to the pursuit of bourgeois democracy and increased opportunities within the capitalist system. Seldom if ever did the rank and file or leadership pose questions that transcended a limited series of political reforms which could be confined easily to a "capitalist solution to the racial crisis."

If an authentic biracial American democracy does not exist, how was it to be constructed? DuBois' thinking on this third question constitutes a series of social, cultural, political and economic prerequisites. First, democracy must of course be antiracist. It should also be committed to an antisexist society which knows no discrimination based on gender; patriarchy as a system of male authority and sexual exploitation has no place in the "new democracy."<sup>25</sup> Democracy should be committed to the permanent eradication of poverty and unemployment.<sup>26</sup> A state apparatus must guarantee the right of every minority to express "unpopular opinions," and must insure civil liberties for all.<sup>27</sup> Educationally, the democratic state must commit itself to programs which "break down social distinctions" within the general population. Social engineering of this kind would involve increased support for national minorities' cultural,

educational and social institutions.<sup>28</sup> Economically, democratic rule would be extended into the process of production. For DuBois, writing in 1943, this meant, “the workers in control of industry,” and the abolition of ownership of the central means of production from the white ruling class.<sup>29</sup> DuBois had acquired such contempt for the existing political institutions that he eventually concluded that a new state apparatus needed to be constructed. In 1943 he suggested that local assemblies should be created across the nation with “actual popular participation;” these assemblies could evolve as the nucleus of the new democratic state.<sup>30</sup> The central popular forces needed to accomplish this ambitious agenda would emerge from a “great alliance between the darker people the world over, between (white) disadvantaged groups . . . and between the working classes everywhere.” This united front of the exploited would “keep down privileges” and transform human society.<sup>31</sup>

DuBois was attracted to socialism early in his intellectual life, but unlike many radicals at the turn of the twentieth century, he never succumbed to a mechanistic or economic deterministic view of society. He believed that capitalism and racism were inextricably tied together, and that the Great Depression was a major but not the last of capitalism’s periodic crises. He concluded that neither corporate leaders nor white racists would be able to resolve the myriad problems inherent within their economic and social systems. But he also insisted that the triumph of socialism, and the eventual destruction of white racism, were not determined or fixed by material conditions. At the outset of World War II, for example, DuBois warned his readers that “we have no right to assume that the collapse of Europe will automatically free Asia and Africa.”<sup>32</sup> An antiracist, socialist democracy had to be fought for by progressives. Colonialism and underdevelopment would collapse only when the oppressed constructed a majoritarian political offensive against the forces of racism and capitalism. DuBois’ fourth observation, then, was that socialism had to become that central vision for the Black liberation movement.

Socialism today must be placed openly and honestly on the public agenda by all American progressives. Without hesitation, we must explain that a basic social transformation within America’s social and economic structures would involve radical changes that would be viewed as clearly undemocratic by millions of people. The state would assume the ownership of major corporations, and their direction would be left in the hands of those best qualified to make decisions at the point of production, the working class. Socialism would mean the expropriation of wealth from the capitalist class, and the guarantee of employment, decent housing, education and health care to all citizens. It would restrict the “democratic” rights of

Do we agree?

Those who discriminate against Afro-Americans, Chicanos, women, and gays—rights that white Americans are reaffirming in recent referenda. Socialism would mean the expansion of social services for those in need. Elements of democratic political traditions in America's recent past, from Populism to LaFollette's Progressivism, might contain examples for public education on socialism. But socialism cannot be achieved simply through coalitions of "democratic movements" or united fronts with progressives of various competing interests. Our primary task as American socialists is to make the case for equality within society—a principle that cannot be achieved without the total reconstruction of American civil society. We should assume what Antonio Gramsci often called the "long view" of socialist transformation. Democratic socialism can and must become the "common sense" of the working class, the brown and Black populations, and critical elements of the petty bourgeoisie. Through our efforts to compete with bourgeois ideologists in existing cultural and intellectual institutions and simultaneously in coalition with liberal petty bourgeois social forces, socialists will have the opportunity to establish their "legitimacy" to govern in both civil and political societies. Throughout this long historical process, coalitions must occur within the Democratic Party, and with reformist progressive groups like NOW, the NAACP and the National Association of Neighborhoods. But unless we place the necessity of socialism as the solution in the struggle for human equality, the battle for socialism will again be lost for another generation. An "invisible socialist movement" of the kind once characterized by Michael Harrington is actually no movement at all.

The possible common ground between the Black movement—in both its integrationist and Black nationalist tendencies—and predominantly white progressive movements, is the principle of equality. By equality I do not mean "equal opportunity" as defined by the Urban League and the Federal bureaucracy, as a means toward integrating minorities and women into the hierarchies of the state and civil society. Equality implies a theory of justice which assumes that all parties within the state should have free access to the state apparatus, can reform existing economic and social institutions, and can enact laws that promote a more humane society. A society committed to equality would require a political system that would promote affirmative action and racial quotas as a means toward a more equitable socioeconomic status Blacks and women. As Julius K. Nyerere observes, "the basis of socialism is a belief in the oneness of man and the common historical destiny of mankind. Its basis, in other words, is human equality." Despite Tanzania's ongoing political problems and Nyerere's other contradictions, his observation is central to our own situation. "Without an acceptance of

man equality there can be no socialism.” Similarly, as we establish a dialogue with various sectors of society around the principle of equality, we will be able to provide the foundation essential for transforming capitalism, the economic system that rests upon inequality.<sup>33</sup>

From the perspective of Black history and experience, the practice of bourgeois democracy in America has consistently worked in favor of special propertied interests and against the promise of equality. In *The Education of Black People*, DuBois complained that democracy viewed as a commitment to human equality and emancipation has never existed for Black people or other minorities. “In theory we know” [the real meaning of democracy] “by heart: all men are created equal and should have equal voice in their own government,” he wrote in 1938. Democracy should mean “the opening of opportunity to the disinherited to contribute to civilization and the happiness of men.” DuBois believed that the quest for equality was central to all related struggles in abolishing *de jure* and *de facto* segregation and obtaining political suffrage. “Given a chance for the majority of mankind to be educated, healthy and free to act,” he noted, “it may well turn out that human equality is not so wild a dream as many seem to hope.”<sup>34</sup>

DuBois’ fifth point was more of a prediction than an assessment of contemporary socioeconomic problems. DuBois recognized that the actual practice of socialism in other countries, especially in the Soviet Union, left much to be desired. Even after reading Soviet party leader Khrushchev’s revelations of Stalin’s crimes against his people, however, DuBois still could write in 1957 that the Soviet Union was closer to his ideal of democracy than his native land had ever been.<sup>35</sup> During the Cold War, and perhaps even during World War II, DuBois concluded that the road toward democracy and an antiracist society must also lead toward socialism. One could not struggle decisively against racism and remain a proponent of capitalism. From this perspective, DuBois recognized that America would eventually and inevitably come to a basic decision—either it would move toward worker self-management, antiracism and a new democratic state apparatus, or it would lapse into authoritarianism, racial barbarism and militarization of the work force. Speaking in 1951, DuBois declared, “Either in some way or to some degree, we must socialize our economy, restore the New Deal and inaugurate the welfare state, or we descend into military fascism which will kill all dreams of democracy, or the abolition of poverty and ignorance, or of peace instead of war.”<sup>36</sup>

### III

DuBois’ theoretical conclusions, taken from a rich lifetime of research and struggle, form the

Basic point of view for *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*. The study of Black social stratification and political economy departs from an appreciation of the contours of Black history. Yet where we stand in the past largely determines our understanding of what a people have been, and what they intend to become. Beneath history, and all social science research, exists explicitly or implicitly a philosophy or world view that tends to explain or to justify phenomena. All history conceals an *a priori* superstructure which promotes the interests of certain social classes at the expense of others. Thus intellectual work becomes a kind of cultural propaganda that serves the ideals or aims of certain racial and class groups within particular historical epochs. The absence of a clearly articulated ideology, so often the hallmark of objectivists in the liberal academic tradition, neither minimizes nor obscures the political function of all intellectual work. Intellectuals are the vanguard or ideological proponents of both well-entrenched and nascent social orders. It is their task to explain what has been, to justify or to overturn what now exists, and to chart what must become tomorrow.

All social transformations begin with a criticism of existing social forces, the material and ideological components which comprise social reality. The liberation of historically oppressed and underdeveloped peoples takes as its point of departure a revolutionary critique of the integral social classes which constitute that national minority or nation. For Black America, that means an assessment of the evolution of the Black petty bourgeoisie, the Black entrepreneurs, a general overview of the impact of capitalist development upon Black educational and social institutions, and the relations between Black women and men under the system of exploitation. Criticism leading to political praxis must include evaluations of the ambiguous legacy of the Black church within Black society and the pattern of police brutality, lynchings, convict labor and imprisonment of Black workers by the state and racist elements within white civil society. Finally, this criticism must address the questions of ultimate power within a biracial "democracy," and what forces now exist that will become part of the new hegemony within a nonracist, nonsexist socialist society in America. This book will hopefully establish a necessary discourse among activists and intellectuals alike, who are now and will in the future determine the course of that struggle to transform the United States.