


A New Afrikan Socialist Analysis of Racialized Capitalism

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Abstract: *Kalimara is an activist and professor with fifty gusty years of Black Liberation work. He is the former National Chair & Secretary of the New Afrikan Peoples' Organization (NAPO) and co-founder of the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement. In this interview, Kalimara outlines the varied perspectives of Black people in America on capitalism, explains the effects of capitalism on Black people in America, and explains the ideology of capitalism from a New Afrikan socialist perspective. Kalimara's interview serves as an introduction to racialized capitalism in America and provides references for further exploration of the failures of capitalism from a historical perspective.*

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This interview is part of the series for PJSE's special issue 'Has capitalism destroyed Caste and Race; does capitalism equalize or perpetuate age-old inequalities?'

Akil Bakari: *What is the Black perspective on Capitalism?*

Kwame-Osagyefo Kalimara: It is vital to state that New Afrikan communities in the United States empire, as well as in other spaces globally, are not monolithic. We do not have a shared definition nor analysis on how it functions as an economic system with pros and cons in relation to us as a people. Even economists, political economists, sociologists, and historians have differing views on its origins, development and global positionality. Universally we, I believe, can suggest that capitalism, as an economic system, is based on the private ownership of resources (i.e. land, water, etc.), the means of production and the profit resulting from its distribution. What is essential to this definition is "private" ownership, not collective or communal. Afrikan people prior to enslavement had no knowledge of "ownership of land" and its resources because it all belonged to the "community." The European peoples introduced private and individual ownership and "capitalism" to Afrikans. Afrikans uniformly according to Afrikan and diasporic Afrikan scholarship practiced a "communal" relationship to the earth and her resources. Dr. Chancellor Williams' *Destruction of Black Civilization - Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.* is an excellent book for examining pre- and post-enslavement and colonial Afrika and her relationship with non-Afrikan peoples.

I support New Afrikan Ujamaa, which is a form of Afrikan socialism. The goal of Afrikan socialism is a shared (collective) economy. It is based on family systems and structures. Because of European intervention, traditional Afrikan systems have been corrupted. In a traditional socialist economy, there is some private ownership of property and resources. The goal of socialism as an economic system is the reduction of disparities in wealth. Forces of the New Afrikan Independence Movement generally support some form of socialism and are anti-capitalist. Universally, this movement finds capitalism as oppressive and exploitive and is not and cannot be beneficial to the masses (the poor and middle classes), irrespective of race, gender, and other oppressions.

Black Marxists argue, as do the New Afrikan socialists, that capitalism and racism have a unique relationship requiring them to be fought seamlessly. The New Afrikan People's Organization and the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement articulate that only through an intersectional lens, approach and practice the contradictions of all forms of oppression and exploitation (capitalism, imperialism, patriarchy, etc.) can be defeated. The best resource for the study of Black Marxism is Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*.

The New Afrikan masses support "capitalism" because we have been taught to believe that it will and can benefit them. We are led to believe that with hard work and discipline anyone can achieve wealth. Wealth is a measure of net worth (i.e. savings, investments, real estate, and cash, minus any debts). Wealthy persons are able to maintain their station in life without having to work (e.g. the Walmart Family, the Rockefeller Family, etc.). The lottery games are vehicles which create hope that "you can become a millionaire." Capitalism is individualistic and it negates any idea of an envisioned economy which is beneficial to the masses, where there is no poverty. All activists generally agree that poverty is a product of capitalism.

Black capitalism is a political movement which builds wealth by business ownership and development by "Black" individuals and Black corporations. Its origin began during slavery with the existence of "free Negroes" during the colonial period of the United States. They were never a large population, but they enjoyed many of the same rights as the free "white" population. Some of these "free Negroes" were indentured and once their debt was paid, they were able to own land, vote and pay taxes. In the 18th century, new laws were created to limit their ability to vote and hold positions of power. According to Trinidad scholar Eric Williams in the book, *Capitalism and Slavery*, racism, slavery, and capitalism are intertwined. He argues:

"Slavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery ... The reason was economic, not racial ... The features of the man, his hair, color and dentifrice, his "subhuman" characteristics so widely pleaded, were only the later rationalizations to justify a simple economic fact: that the colonies needed labor and resorted to Negro [sic] labor because it was cheapest and best." He further suggests that the fundamental pillar of capital accumulation was the enslavement of Afrikan people (11 million according to conservative estimates) to work on the plantations of the Caribbean Islands and North, Central and South America.

Lastly, Black Capitalism is not monolithic. It has two categories, one focuses on success as a group, while the other focuses on success as an individual.

Theron Wilkerson: *Has capitalism conceptually redesigned slavery?*

Kwame-Osagyefo Kalimara: The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 ended legal slavery in the countries controlled by the British Empire (with the exception of India). The French abolished slavery in 1848. The United States Empire ended slavery vis-à-vis the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1865. The U.S. Amendment's exception grants the enslavement of persons as punishment for a crime. The end of slavery left large numbers of the New Afrikan population to survive in sectors of the capitalist economy where cheap labor needed them. Sharecropping was one of the many. It is agricultural work where landowners allowed a tenant to use their land in return for a "share" of the crops produced. Within its history, there were different types of agreements between tenants and landowners.

Convict leasing was a system created and used primarily in the U.S. South from 1844 until 1928. State prisons contracted with private parties and corporations to provide labor to service plantations. It was the establishment of aggressive enforcement of "Black Codes" laws which criminalized any behavior in which the government determined illegal. These laws were created after the American Civil War, intending to restrict New Afrikan freedom and limit opportunities to work. Convict labor made large profits for states. In the state of Alabama, for example, its total annual revenue increased from 10% in 1846 to almost 73% by 1889. *African-American History* by Darlene Clark Hine, William C. Hine, and Stanley Harrold is an excellent source that covers all the way to the Prison Industrial Complex which is the modern development of the convict labor system. The Prison Industrial Complex is the relationship which prisons have with probation service, the police, the courts, and the corporations that profit from transporting, feeding and exploiting prisoners. It is reported in April 2019, by Prison Policy.org., that "more than half of the \$80 billion spent annually on incarceration by government agencies is used to pay the thousands of vendors that serve the criminal legal system."

Akil Bakari: *Has capitalism leveled race inequalities in some spheres?*

Kwame-Osagyefo Kalimara: I argue that capitalism has not leveled race inequalities or inequalities in general. On December 15, 2017, in Washington, D.C., Professor Philip Alston, United Nations Special Rapporteur, made a statement 'on extreme poverty and human rights' in the United States. Below I have elected to site significant portions of the statement because it is current and it is an external assessment addressing the breath of U.S. capitalist practice, and lastly, it makes my case in great detail.

"The United States is one of the world's richest, most powerful and technologically innovative countries; but neither its wealth nor its power nor its technology is being harnessed to address the situation in which 40 million people continue to live in poverty."
"I heard how thousands of poor people get minor infraction notices which seem to be intentionally designed to quickly explode into unpayable debt, incarceration, and the replenishment of municipal coffers, I saw sewage-filled yards in states where governments don't consider sanitation facilities to be their responsibility, I saw people who had lost all of their teeth because adult dental care is not covered by the vast majority of programs

available to the very poor, I heard about soaring death rates and family and community destruction wrought by prescription and other drug addiction, and I met with people in the South of Puerto Rico living next to a mountain of completely unprotected coal ash which rains down upon them bringing illness, disability, and death."

- By most indicators, the US is one of the world's wealthiest countries. It spends more on national defense than China, Saudi Arabia, Russia, United Kingdom, India, France, and Japan combined.
- US health care expenditures per capita are double the OECD average and much higher than in all other countries. But there are many fewer doctors and hospital beds per person than the OECD average.
- US infant mortality rates in 2013 were the highest in the developed world.
- Americans can expect to live shorter and sicker lives, compared to people living in any other rich democracy, and the "health gap" between the U.S. and its peer countries continues to grow.
- U.S. inequality levels are far higher than those in most European countries.
- Neglected tropical diseases, including Zika, are increasingly common in the USA. It has been estimated that 12 million Americans live with a neglected parasitic infection. A 2017 report documents the prevalence of hookworm in Lowndes County, Alabama.
- The US has the highest prevalence of obesity in the developed world.
- In terms of access to water and sanitation, the US ranks 36th in the world.
- America has the highest incarceration rate in the world, ahead of Turkmenistan, El Salvador, Cuba, Thailand, and the Russian Federation. Its rate is nearly 5 times the OECD average.
- The youth poverty rate in the United States is the highest across the OECD with one-quarter of youth living in poverty compared to less than 14% across the OECD.
- The Stanford Center on Inequality and Poverty ranks the most well-off countries in terms of labor markets, poverty, safety net, wealth inequality, and economic mobility. The US comes in last of the top 10 most well-off countries and 18th amongst the top 21.
- In the OECD the US ranks 35th out of 37 in terms of poverty and inequality.
- According to the World Income Inequality Database, the US has the highest Gini rate (measuring inequality) of all Western Countries
- The Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality characterizes the US as "a clear and constant outlier in the child poverty league." US child poverty rates are the highest amongst the six richest countries – Canada, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Sweden and Norway.
- About 55.7% of the U.S. voting-age population cast ballots in the 2016 presidential election. In the OECD, the U.S. placed 28th in voter turnout, compared with an OECD average of 75%. Registered voters represent a much smaller share of potential voters in the U.S. than just about any other OECD country. Only about 64% of the U.S. voting-age population (and 70% of voting-age citizens) was registered in 2016, compared with 91% in Canada (2015) and the UK (2016), 96% in Sweden (2014), and nearly 99% in Japan (2014).

“The face of poverty in America is not only Black, or Hispanic, but also White, Asian, and many other colors. Nor is it confined to a particular age group. Automation and robotization are already throwing many middle-aged workers out of jobs in which they once believed themselves to be secure. In the economy of the twenty-first century, only a tiny percentage of the population is immune from the possibility that they could fall into poverty as a result of bad breaks beyond their own control. The American Dream is rapidly becoming the American Illusion as the US since the US now has the lowest rate of social mobility of any of the rich countries.”

“Demonization of the poor can take many forms. It has been internalized by many poor people who proudly resist applying for benefits to which they are entitled and struggle valiantly to survive against the odds. Racism is a constant dimension and I regret that in a report that seeks to cover so much ground there is no room to delve much more deeply into the phenomenon. Racial disparities, already great, are being entrenched and exacerbated in many contexts. In Alabama, I saw various houses in rural areas that were surrounded by cesspools of sewage that flowed out of broken or non-existent septic systems. The State Health Department had no idea of how many households exist in these conditions, despite the grave health consequences. Nor did they have any plan to find out or devise a plan to do something about it. But since the great majority of White folks live in the cities, which are well served by government built and maintained sewerage systems, and most of the rural folks in areas like Lowndes County, are Black, the problem doesn’t appear on the political or governmental radar screen.”

Theron Wilkerson: *Did it offer subversion possibilities?*

Kwame-Osagyefo Kalimara: Capitalism offering subversion possibilities on its face is a contradiction. If the goal of subversion is to create a revolution and change the economic, social and political landscape of America, capitalism is anti-theoretical. To the revolutionary, seeing "critical mass" is where the paradigm shifts begin. Only when the material contradictions create shifts in consciousness will subversion occur.

Akil Bakari: *Tell us about the creation of Black wealth.*

Kwame-Osagyefo Kalimara: It is the work of Dr. Claud Anderson, *Black Labor: White Wealth and Poweromics*, which outlines how Black wealth can be coordinated and developed. He sees Black capitalism as a form of “Social entrepreneurship” which is designed around providing services and goods that benefit the black community.

Black Capitalism, though, since the 1990s is found in the entertainment arena. Celebrity is the carrot which blinds many from seeing the ills of capitalism and the need to challenge the system and work toward ending capitalism. Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan or any Black person of wealth see no benefit in surrendering their “privilege. Giving charity does not change the material conditions of the masses.

So, Mississippi is really entrenched on maintaining order the way it always has been and during slavery. Mississippi has had four constitutions and the fifth one, the constitution of 1890, is the one we're operating on now. It's the one that disenfranchised Black people. It prescribed for segregation and prescribed for Black inadequate education and we're operating under that today. Voting Rights Act of 1965... but here's what Mississippi did. Let's say it came into law sometime between April and August. Here's what Mississippi did in January of 1966 when the legislature came into session. They immediately redistricted not just Jackson but the whole state of Mississippi. While Blacks may have been 40% of the voting age population then and you could vote, but you're not going to be able to elect the person of your choice. That was the spirit this redistricting was done in. And it took probably near fifteen years and nine trips to the Mississippi Supreme Court to get a kind of system where people could elect the person of their choice. So that's how Mississippi no has more. But that fighting is still going on. The legislature of Mississippi now has near probably over 40% of the voting age population are Black. So, the fight in the next two years is going to be around legislative redistricting because for a number of years it's been republican senate or conservative senate, legislature, government, but most state officers are conservative. They set these policies. They make these rules for how life is going to be. I sit on the school board for Jackson Public Schools. Because somebody voted for Kenny Stokes, who's the council person of ward 3, he recommended me to the mayor of Jackson that everybody, the majority of the people, the overwhelming majority of people voted for, and that's how I got to where I am. But now, it was a clever negotiation but because Jackson Public School got in a position for state takeover, the state board of education is nine people. Three appointed by the governor, three appointed by the lieutenant governor, and three appointed by the speaker of the house. That's the state board of education. The state board of education oversees the Mississippi Department of Education.

And now the Department of Education's chief is appointed by the governor and approved by the state board. So, the policies of education are really conservative policies. And they are designed probably to promote conservative interests. And what are some conservative interest? Some are fewer taxes for wealthy people and corporations. Just like nationally, it's a lady that has made a public outcry that wealthy people over 10 million a year need to be taxed at the 70% rate, and people are furious about it! They're calling her a peanut in a major Mississippi newspaper, and this is a young intelligent woman that came up with that. If you're making ten million dollars in a year, why wouldn't you want to be taxed in a system that allows you to make that much? This is your fair share back into the system. This redistricting has to do with who's going to get taxed and how taxes are going to get paid, and what taxes are going to be used for, so less tax means bridges and roads are in disrepair and poor people can't bear the responsibility, the burden of being taxed. Who's in a better position to be taxed than the people that have it? And they assumedly have made what they have made by roads and bridges being in good repair, and they get the best use out of it. This redistricting in Mississippi in 2021 is going to play a key part in how Mississippi is going to look in 2030. 2021 is going to determine what's going to happen in 2030.

How Europe Underdeveloped Africa by Walter Rodney and *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America* by Manning Marable are two books which give analyses on how capitalism as an economic system has not raised the quality of living for Afrika and her diaspora.

Theron Wilkerson: *What is “Black Wall Street”?*

Kwame-Osagyefo Kalimara: Black Wall Street refers to the Greenwood, Tulsa, Oklahoma community which possessed numerous New Afrikan businesses in the early 1900s. It was the Tulsa race riot of 1921 which destroyed the “historic freedom colony” built by the freedmen after the American Civil War. European Americans massacred according to “white” official reports, ‘26 black residents, injuring hundreds more,’ all within several hours.

Greenwood was one of the most commercially successful and affluent black communities in America. There were grocery stores, banks, libraries, and much more. They did not need anything from the "white" community. Jim Crow laws, which are designed to prevent New Afrikans from achieving economic mobility and social status, contributed to its success by forcing them to spend their money within their own community. Attorneys, real estate agents, dentists, entrepreneurs, and doctors all lived in the community. Greenwood also owned churches, Christian youth services, and other religious organizations.