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### **Walter Rodney and the Idea of Development-**

In the opening chapter of his “How Europe Underdeveloped Africa”, Rodney sketched a conception of development that went beyond the conventional notion of “economic development”. This conception he termed “social development” and to stress the person-centric nature of this notion he used the expression “human social development”. That development should focus on humans is a value-judgement. Here, Rodney can be construed as suggesting that the descriptive aspect of development cannot be sharply separated from its normative aspect, in effect, collapsing the alleged fact-value dichotomy with attendant implications for the relation between objectivity and subjectivity in (social) science.

In seeking to give an account of the processes of development and under-development, Rodney appealed to the Marxist Theory of History. In particular, Rodney suggested that the social relations of capitalism no longer served to exploit technical knowledge to “optimally” advance the welfare of the vast majority of humanity. The explanation of development articulated by the New-Institutionalist tradition in economics, centred around the work of Douglass North, suggest otherwise since, it emphasizes the role of culture and institutions -appropriately conceived – as well as markets and private property.

This paper examines Rodney’s idea of development in light of recent conceptions due to Amartya Sen that stress the enablement of human freedom. The underlying question here is: what is development about? The second question addressed by the paper is the relevance of the Marxist Theory of History to the explanation of development given the arguments of Institutionalism.

The paper concludes with reflections on the implications of this comparative appraisal for Caribbean Thought and development thinking in particular.