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A CATALYTIC ROLE UNTOLD

COCA-COLA AND THE UNDOING OF APARTHEID

On 11 February 1990, Nelson Mandela left prison a free man after twenty-seven years' incarceration. Weeks later, he began visiting those nations that had supported his African National Congress (ANC) in the long fight against apartheid. Abroad, Mandela worked to shore up additional support for his party's continued quest for a free and fair election in South Africa. In June, Mandela landed in the United States, stopping, among other places, in Atlanta, where he placed a wreath on Martin Luther King Jr.'s tombstone and received honorary degrees from several historically Black colleges. What he did not do in Atlanta (or elsewhere, for that matter) was accept any product or support from Atlanta's most powerful entity, The Coca-Cola Company. This snub did not go unnoticed. 'Mandela aides bar Coke,' one newspaper announced; 'An offer from The Coca-Cola Company to support Mr. Mandela's tour was rejected,' said another; 'Coke products are banned from the luxury chartered jet the ANC entourage are using,' stated one more.[1] The reason for the rebuke: Coke is not an entity 'we can do business with,' a local ANC operative explained.[2] Though Coca-Cola had disinvested from South Africa in 1986, that the beverage was still available there four years later prompted anti-apartheid protestors to boycott the company. Apartheid was waning by 1990, but activists' anti-Coke sentiment was not.

Three years later, just before being elected the first president of a free South Africa, Nelson Mandela again arrived in the United States. This time, he called for Americans to end sanctions against South Africa and to begin reinvesting in the country that he hoped to lead. Stopping again in Atlanta, he not only met openly with Coca-Cola representatives, but he also publicly thanked one in particular for 'quietly help[ing]' end apartheid. Neither events were surprising, since this time Mandela was traveling across America on a Coca-Cola jet, with his trip orchestrated, in large part, by the very company he had once scorned.[3]

This chapter is about what happened to compel this shift, both for Mandela personally and for the larger story of anti-apartheid activism and Coca-Cola that it embodies. To tell this tale, I begin in the 1970s, heady days of activism in both South Africa and the United States. This is a story that is interwoven with that of American activism, both against Coca-Cola and against apartheid. It is similarly entwined with the ascent of a new wave of youth activism in South Africa in tandem with the escalation of South Africa's civil war. In this chapter, I explain the hidden maneuvers and complex restructuring that enabled Coca-Cola's unique form of disinvestment. This singular form of disinvestment allowed Coke to do what no other company managed: keep its products in South Africa while the company positioned itself in opposition to the apartheid state. Coke's unique form of disinvestment, I demonstrate here, prepared the company to thrive anew in whatever order was to follow apartheid both in South Africa and, most importantly, on the African continent writ large.

South Africa and America in the 1970s

The June 1971 cover of *Coca-Cola Southern Africa* featured the newly opened J G Strijdom Tower in Hillbrow, Johannesburg. Named after a key architect of apartheid, the tower was at once an homage to white supremacy and an engineering feat. Rising 269 meters above the street—the seventh tallest structure of its kind worldwide—the Hillbrow tower relayed thousands of phone-calls across the nation simultaneously, fast becoming an iconic landmark on Johannesburg's skyline. Five restaurants filled the top floor, all of which served Coca-Cola products.[4] With its cover spread, the publication pronounced that Coca-Cola stood at the pinnacle of a nation it had called home for nearly fifty years, aligning the beverage with the country's enduring racist regime.

In the early 1970s, the apartheid state's grip on South Africa was firmer than ever. By then, all major resistance parties had been banned, their top leadership killed, imprisoned, banished, or forced into exile. While resistance to apartheid never abated, the next, and final wave of activism would not begin in earnest until 1976. Before then, the state operated with near impunity, suppressing dissent and providing cheap, plentiful labor to thriving white-owned industry both below ground, in the mines, and above ground, in everything from telecommunication to the soft drink business. Indeed, South Africa had become one of Coca-Cola's most successful markets owing to the company's longevity and ample investment there, as well as racist political conditions that enabled it to thrive.[5]

This is the South Africa that E Neville Isdell, Coca-Cola's future CEO, entered in 1971.[6] Born in Ireland but raised from age ten in Zambia, Isdell attended the University of Cape Town, where he participated in low-level anti-apartheid activism, before returning to Zambia after graduation to work for a fledgling Coca-Cola bottler there. In Zambia, Isdell drove trucks, peddling lukewarm Fantas and Cokes in an emergent commercial landscape. In the 1970s, he was appointed to work in Johannesburg where, just as during his university days, he saw South African apartheid firsthand. He recalled the paradoxes of apartheid, visible by way of the Coke business. Despite the state's might, which was plentiful, inspectors would overlook violations in bottling plants, particularly if they related to petty apartheid, or those laws ensuring separation by race in such places as bathrooms and canteens. These laws were skirted by some Coke plants, including those eventually run by Isdell, a precedent set years earlier by J Paul Austin.

Yet, at the same time, Isdell recalls witnessing the state's fury up close. Isdell happened to be riding sales routes in Soweto on 16 June 1976, the start of what came to be known as the Soweto or children's uprising. That day, schoolchildren rose up against the state, seeing shebeens (or beerhalls), libraries, schools, and more as markers of their oppression; these they attacked with their limited means. The state responded with its full strength, teargassing, arresting, and killing children in the most widespread display of violence seen since 1960. After 16 June, nothing would ever be the same in South Africa, as the children's uprising spread. Business as usual changed for Coke that day, too. For the first time, Coca-Cola became a target of anti-apartheid resistance. On 16 June, a Coca-Cola driver was murdered while delivering product. Isdell attended the funeral, itself a space of political activism. While Isdell's presence was cautiously welcomed, that he was the only white man in attendance—and a Coca-Cola employer to boot—made him conspicuous.[7] Though Coca-Cola had long been able to negotiate apartheid while growing customers across all races, by 1976, the tides were turning for the company.

Coca-Cola was likewise becoming the target of activists in America. The rise to prominence of Reverend Leon Sullivan and his calls for Black consumer engagement drew attention to Coca-Cola's operations in the United States, particularly as they related to race. Sullivan was a Baptist minister and activist. Throughout the 1960s in Philadelphia, he called for 'selective patronage' of companies that failed to hire sufficient numbers of Black employees, urging Black consumers to harness the power of their pocketbooks. His activities were noticed by Martin Luther King, Jr. and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC); King brought Sullivan on board to help fashion what became known as Operation Breadbasket, the economic wing of SCLC. The Chicago branch of Operation Breadbasket—its earliest success—was headed by a young seminary student named Jesse Jackson. Under Jackson, Chicago's Operation Breadbasket targeted businesses, including Coca-Cola and Pepsi Cola, that, in its estimation, did not have enough Black employees. As a result of both pressure and planned/executed boycotts, Operation Breadbasket won thousands of jobs and revenue for Black communities in Chicago.[8] Beyond Chicago, Coca-Cola, Pepsi Cola, and other companies under fire from Operation Breadbasket worked to avoid further boycotts. In southern bottling plants, this meant eliminating segregated restrooms and hiring Black bottling representatives, early gestures meant to overcome longstanding racist hiring policies and working conditions.[9]

Reverend Sullivan also played a role in drawing attention to Coca-Cola's operations overseas. In 1971, Sullivan was elected to the Board of Directors of General Motors, at the time the largest employer in South Africa. Witnessing South African apartheid through a corporate lens, Sullivan came to believe that international companies ought to take a stand against apartheid. As such, he issued what he called the Sullivan Principles in 1977 as a blueprint for corporate responsibility and opposition to apartheid. The original principles called for integration of all work and comfort spaces (including restrooms and lunchrooms), equal and fair employment and pay, training programs to encourage Black and other non-white employment and advancement, and active improvements to life outside of work for Blacks and other non-whites.[10]

Coca-Cola was reluctant to become a signatory to the Sullivan Principles, despite forceful lobbying by Sullivan himself.[11] The company's initial opposition to the principles, eventually signed by more than 100 United States corporations (including, ultimately, Coke), demonstrates the fine line it first sought to walk in South Africa. Coke's particular position reflected the views of both Coca-Cola Atlanta and Coke in South Africa, but for different reasons. That the Sullivan Principles would put the company in blatant violation of some laws presented problems for Coke South Africa, despite the fact that the company was increasingly taking a stand against apartheid. For those in America, likewise wary of wading into politics as part of a company-wide policy,[12] the stated United States' position of constructive engagement with apartheid South Africa presented a preferable option. Both wanted a way to oppose the apartheid state without going on record as having done so. At the same time, Coke claimed that signing the document would constrain the company and, conversely, that the principles were not far-reaching enough.[13]

Thus, at first, Coca-Cola implemented the Sullivan Principles without officially becoming a signatory to them, a move that, presumably, protected Coca-Cola South Africa from prosecution while keeping with the company's general apolitical ethos.[14] This wobbly position compelled the corporation to find a spokesperson able to translate its stance to a growing public, made up of shareholders, college activists, and others, who had begun calling for businesses to disinvest (end their work in South Africa) and investors to divest (stop investing in businesses who worked in apartheid South Africa).

Into this climate, Coca-Cola Atlanta hired Carl Ware. Born in rural, segregated Georgia, Ware held a BA from Clark University and had completed an internship at the Office of Economic Opportunity at Carnegie Institute of Technology. In 1974, Ware was recruited to Coca-Cola by J Paul Austin, in whose home his sister labored as a domestic worker. Ware joined the office of government affairs, becoming the first African American in this department. In this capacity, he represented Austin (and Coke) at the Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America, an organization founded by Sullivan.[15] For the next five years, Ware held a position in government affairs at Coca-Cola while serving on the Atlanta City Council, where he worked alongside Mayor Maynard Jackson to enact civil rights reforms in the city. In 1979, Ware resigned from the City Council to join Coca-Cola full time, taking over as Vice President of Special Markets for Coca-Cola USA. His charge was to expand African American and Hispanic markets through marketing and advertising.

Ware's first major test came in 1981 when Reverend Jesse Jackson, by then a well-known civil rights activist and head of People United to Save Humanity (PUSH), organized a large-scale boycott of Coca-Cola in the United States. Jackson's efforts were in response to the company's systemic racism in America, though they were informed, in part, by the company's holdout on signing the Sullivan Principles, since Jackson had just visited South Africa in 1979.[16] As Ware recently wrote, 'Coke was an easy target' for PUSH, but, he acknowledged, 'we were vulnerable because there was a lot of truth in what Jesse said.'[17] Though American big businesses were generally wary of calls for affirmative action in those days, Ware recalled, there was a growing recognition that change was coming. In 1981, Roberto Goizueta, Coca-Cola's new chairman, and Don Keough, the company's new president, tasked Ware with opening communication with Jackson. This Ware did in earnest. The result was the Coke PUSH agreement of 10

August 1981, ending the boycott. As part of the agreement, the company promised to put thirty million dollars into Black-owned businesses in the United States and committed itself to hiring Black employees up to its senior management and including its board of directors.[18] The company likewise agreed to appoint Black distributors and suppliers, to forge relationships with Black banks, to advertise in Black-owned newspapers, and to support historically Black colleges in the United States.[19] Some of Coke's promises translated to its international work, to the extent that the company now actively sought to re-examine its work overseas, in particular in apartheid South Africa, a country that was, by then, on the radar of civil rights activists in the United States. By the early 1980s, if not well before, activists working towards racial retribution in the United States were equally positioned against the apartheid state, seeing it for what it was: the last government based primarily on racial segregation. And, by 1980, Coca-Cola's presence in apartheid South Africa was well-known. Witness the fact that William M Kelley Jr., then a Coca-Cola vice president, appeared before the Subcommittee on Africa of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs on 31 July 1980 to discuss Coca-Cola's position in the fraught nation.[20]

Ware's success with PUSH advanced his career, setting him on an upward trajectory. In 1982, he was promoted to Vice President of Urban Affairs and in 1986 to Senior Vice President. In 1991, he was named Deputy Group President for Northeast Europe and Africa, where he served under E Neville Isdell. Then, in 1993, on the eve of Mandela's election, he was appointed head of Coca-Cola's Africa Group. By the time of that appointment, Ware had demonstrated that he was the right man for the right job at the right time. By the early 1980s, in addition to facing the backlash of American civil rights entities paying close attention to the company's race record, universities, businessmen, and activists were all calling for American companies to go beyond signing the Sullivan Principles. The calls now were for the company to disinvest from South Africa entirely. On the ground in South Africa, it was unclear how long the apartheid state would linger and whether its longevity was in the best interest of businesses, in any case. On both sides of the world, the company was facing pressure around race relations. Brought on board because of his ability to negotiate difficult situations, Ware was quickly deployed by Coca-Cola to be its spokesperson for all things race-related, first in the United States and then in South Africa, where he was sent to sort out Coca-Cola's work under the apartheid state. By the time he retired years later, Ware would become the highest-ranking African American employee in the company, assuaging those who claimed the company's racial makeup was inadequate by his very existence.[21] He would also play a central role in navigating and helping end apartheid in South Africa as well as setting up Coca-Cola to thrive anew in post-apartheid Africa. Yet, in the early 1980s, all that lay in the future.

Moving Towards Disinvestment

Eighteen months after the Coca-Cola PUSH agreement saved the company from an embarrassing and troubling Coca-Cola boycott in the United States, Keough and Goizueta called upon Ware to work out a similar solution to another race-related problem, this time in South Africa. The impetus for tasking Ware: a newly received report that the company had commissioned from Consumer Behavior, a market research firm headed by a Black South African, Eric Mafuna, meant to survey operations in South Africa. Titled, 'The Plantation Experience,' the report served not to assuage United States Coke leaders that their work in South Africa could withstand scrutiny, but rather to trouble them. According to the report, Coke's Minute Maid plant in the Northern Transvaal, now Limpopo province, was like an

American plantation, both in terms of management style and 'slave labor' conditions.[22] Predictably, the report arrived like a bomb. 'I remember sitting in Don Keough's office' with Goizueta, Ware recalled. 'They said to me, Carl, we want you to go to South Africa and leave no stone unturned. That was the only instruction I had. No brief.'[23] Ware remembers being told that the duo needed him to determine what the company's 'posture should be' in South Africa, suggesting that they were not willing to be directed by information from the South African office, especially in light of this recent report.[24] With growing global interest in South Africa, the stakes were now too high. What was needed was an American perspective on how the company could chart the troubled waters of late apartheid South Africa. 'I said, OK, I'm willing to do that,' Ware recalled, 'but I need to know how the rest of Africa feels about South Africa' along the way.[25]

On 4 March 1983, Ware embarked on his first trip to Africa, a twenty-two-day journey where he visited Nigeria, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Zambia (all English-speaking nations with old, robust Coke operations), before arriving in South Africa. Traveling through those first nations, Ware felt a heartfelt connection to, as he calls it, 'the motherland,' writing lovingly of being surrounded by familiar-seeming faces in Nigeria, in particular. He was less impressed by the state of Coca-Cola operations, however, finding many to be rudimentary at best and sub-par, at worst. His distaste aside, he asked all Coca-Cola bottlers and employees what to do about South Africa. While he encountered reticence from some bottlers who feared disrupting the South African sugar industry, for the most part, the message seemed clear enough to him. As far as the majority of African Coke operatives were concerned, irrespective of race, Coca-Cola had to play a role in ending apartheid if the company wished to retain any standing on the continent. By the time Ware arrived in South Africa, he had internalized this position. Landing in

South Africa, Ware was termed an 'honorary white,' one of many absurd policies of the apartheid state meant to ensure that foreign Blacks would not be subjected to the daily perils faced by the local majority. For Ware, whose parents had been sharecroppers, arriving in apartheid South Africa, even in 1983, when many petty apartheid restrictions had been lifted, was akin to traveling back in time to the Jim Crow South.[26] Immediately, he was struck by the parallels between South Africa's present and the United States' past. And immediately, he felt charged to play a role in bettering the lives of those around him.

In South Africa, Ware connected with Coca-Cola leadership and supporting personnel on the ground, including Eric Mafuna—author of the plantation report—and Ernest Mchunu, then the highest-ranking Black Coca-Cola manager in the country.[27] From Mafuna and Mchunu, as well as the folks they connected him with, Ware started to get a sense of the magnitude of racial disparity in the country. What he saw moved him profoundly. Later, Mafuna would suggest that Ware had been sent to sweep Coca-Cola's image problems under the rug, but that once Ware saw how the apartheid state functioned first-hand, he could do no less than become an instrument for change.[28] While Ware never states that he was told to ignore operational issues in South Africa, he does say that his experiences in South Africa moved him to try to imagine a way that Coca-Cola could play a part in much-needed change.

The first place Ware looked to affect change was through the Coke business directly. Though there were not, at present, any Black-owned franchises in South Africa (just as there had not been until recently in the United States), Ware learned about two aspiring Black families already working within the Coke system: Richard and Marina Maponya, distributors for Coca-Cola in the nominally independent Bantustan of Bophuthatswana, and the Kunene family, then distributors of the product in the town of

Vosloorus, who will later become important in this story. Ware then toured the Devland Plant in Soweto, the very one that J Paul Austin had integrated and that Isdell had run.[29] He visited both small-scale operations and big plants to get a feel for how the business looked on the ground, all while starting to make connections with some anti-apartheid activists. The result: Ware came to see that while Coca-Cola was in compliance with the Sullivan Principles, broadly conceived, 'mere compliance was not enough.' 'Our business,' he later wrote, 'needed a radical overhaul' if it were to play any role in changing South Africa.[30] Keeping in mind the state of operations elsewhere on the continent while committing himself to working against apartheid, Ware began to scheme a path forward. 'As the largest private-sector employer on the continent of Africa, we knew we would have to demonstrate our abhorrence of the system of apartheid,' he wrote.[31] Still, this had to be done in a way that would not jeopardize the business, either in South Africa or on the continent. Returning to Atlanta, Ware began to create an elegant plan that would meet the complex needs he faced. His scheme would do what seemed to be impossible: allow Coca-Cola to stay in South Africa while still opposing the apartheid state.

The first part of Ware's plan was to steer The Coca-Cola Company to renew its support for the business in South Africa. At a South African bottlers' convention on 1 September 1983 in Monte Carlo, Don Keough did just that. There, the company chairman affirmed Coca-Cola's commitment to what was then Coke's tenth-biggest market and recipient of the company's single largest capital investment (150 million US dollars over three years) anywhere in the world, including the United States. Doing business in 'South Africa and southern and central Africa is a special privilege,' Keough told the assembled bottlers, 'because you are among the most successful Coca-Cola bottlers in the world.'[32] Paying homage to the South

African men who pioneered the business there, folks like Phil Gutsche and Les Forbes, Keough noted that this was not the first time the South African Coke business had faced obstacles. As before, he predicted, the business would prevail, gently prodding the assembled folks to support whatever changes Atlanta would soon send their way. That next month, Roberto Goizueta addressed a group of Johannesburg bottlers, likewise echoing the company's commitment to the country. Goizueta also affirmed the company's position regarding apartheid, which had begun to shift after Ware's trip. 'We are proud of our policy of non-interference in local politics,' he stated, 'while at the same time maintaining our commitment to the Sullivan Principles and to helping Black businessmen.'[33] For the first time, Coke leadership began to speak openly about affirmative action and about having signed the Sullivan Principles, charting a new stance: Now the company would oppose apartheid not by leaving this profitable nation, but by starting to focus on empowering those most wounded by the unjust system.

It seems that Goizueta, and corporate Coke generally, were following the lead set by local Coca-Cola management by becoming more forceful in their opposition to apartheid. Some within Coca-Cola South Africa had begun outwardly pronouncing their opposition to apartheid. In 1984, company executive Hennie Viljoen, also vice president of the Federated Chambers of Industries, helped draft a statement demanding the release of labor leaders who had been arrested. Viljoen also helped draft a letter to Senator Edward Kennedy, supporting the end of apartheid, and met with government operatives to express Coca-Cola's opposition to apartheid. Adrian Botha, another company official, likewise helped compose an anti-apartheid piece that received press attention. And, in 1985, Viljoen went on South African television to demand the release of Mandela.[34] In short, by the mid-1980s Coca-Cola South Africa staked a position against apartheid predicated on the company staying and staying involved in South African politics.

Between 1983 and his second trip to South Africa in 1986, Ware sharpened his plan for Coca-Cola based upon the belief that the best work Coca-Cola could do in South Africa was to keep working in the country. The climate on both sides of the world was not an easy one in which to do this. In 1985, Ware reported: 'In South Africa, we are in a race against both the advocates of violence and the opponents of change. In the U.S., we are in a race against traditional American impatience, the fondness for the quick fix and the dramatic gesture.'[35] In South Africa, then gripped by mass resistance to apartheid first ignited by the children's uprising, Coke's position was tenuous. There, the anti-apartheid movement was opposed to big businesses, particularly multinationals. Ware recalled first meeting Nobel Laureate Desmond Tutu, already a well-known anti-apartheid activist. At their first encounter, Ware was devastated when Tutu scoffed at the notion that the business could do anything useful for the cause except leave the country.[36] Sentiments were similar in the United States. There, American campuses were enflamed, with calls for American universities and pension funds, in particular, to sell their stocks from those companies that did business in South Africa, including Coca-Cola. For Ware, while divestment might serve as a useful moral gesture, it would not actually affect change in South Africa. 'I went all over the country speaking, explaining ... that yes, we are anti-apartheid too. Coke is. But there is a way. There is a business strategy to how you do this. Just to disinvest and pull away from South Africa without leaving some legacy of something in the way of ownership of the soft drink,' would be disastrous, Ware recalled.[37] Ware's position was that Coca-Cola must find a way to stay in South Africa in order to affect change, while somehow depriving the apartheid state of revenues from its business. Just leaving, Ware believed, would cause a market hole soon to be filled by another business. His plan, on the other hand, would allow the company to still make money and still affect change. There was a kind of business hubris to this scheme, wherein the company positioned itself to play a role in ending apartheid, which, the gamble went, would be good on both sides of the Atlantic. The trick was to convince stakeholders on both sides of the world to buy into it.

Besides gaining support from US anti-apartheid activists—which Ware attempted to do by speaking to crowds around the country—Ware's scheme was predicated on wooing South Africans working to end apartheid to embrace Coca-Cola. In reaching out to local anti-apartheid activists, Ware, and Coca-Cola, displayed a level of respect for those South Africans working to end apartheid not typical of big business. Chief among Ware's targets was Desmond Tutu, who had already shown his skepticism for Coca-Cola, but who Ware was desperate to win over. According to Ware, Tutu was set to issue a press release demanding that all US businesses leave the country when Ware asked him to pray with him. Thereupon, Tutu reversed course.[38] While we cannot know what caused Tutu to change his outlook, we do know that he did. When, shortly after their first meeting, Ware proposed that Tutu head a Coca-Cola-endowed charitable fund in South Africa (detailed below), Tutu accepted, opening the door for those working against apartheid from within South Africa to see Coca-Cola as an ally.

Beyond Tutu, Ware worked to convince high-profile anti-apartheid operatives in exile to see Coca-Cola as a friend.[39] At the time, the ANC maintained exile offices in Lusaka, Zambia, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and London, England. Ware was based in London in those days and would regularly meet in secret with local ANC operatives. Speaking of Thabo Mbeki, future deputy president under Mandela and then second president of a free South Africa, himself based in London, Ware recalled that they 'met frequently to discuss the Coca-Cola strategy in South Africa,' and, in particular, how business might help empower Black South Africans. At the time, the ANC subscribed to communist principles that saw big business as anathema to positive social change. Ware introduced Mbeki and others to Coca-Cola's brand of capitalism, which is predicated on the belief that if everyone up and down the value chain succeeds, the business succeeds. They found surprising common ground around how Coke could help empower people through grassroots, small-scale entrepreneurship. According to Ware, his discussions with Mbeki and others helped the ANC reframe its sense of the role that capital could play in a free South Africa. Beyond local meetings in London, Ware also speaks of traveling regularly—if quietly—to meet with other exiled ANC operatives in Lusaka and Dar es Salaam.[40] Given the danger associated with consorting with what was then regarded as a terrorist organization, Ware and Coca-Cola had to keep these visits off the books. Still, these trips helped shift the ANC's position on Coca-Cola just as they affected Coke's sense of its role in South Africa. Yet, no matter how much support Ware could muster for Coke's attempt to stay in South Africa and engage in charitable work from within the movement, it soon became clear that such a position would not be viable on the world stage.

In 1986, Leon Sullivan convened a multinational conference of chief executive officers to discuss the role of companies in ending apartheid that forever shifted the terms of debate. Ware was sent to what became known as the Leeds Conference in Kent, England to represent Coca-Cola. There, business leaders were unequivocally introduced to the full horrors of apartheid, something that Ware had seen firsthand, but that many had not. What became obvious there was that the Sullivan Principles were never going to be enough to affect change on a large enough scale. Indeed, it was becoming increasingly clear that the principles, predicated largely on issues of petty, or small-scale apartheid, had served only to reinforce the apartheid state's stronghold on society. The time for total disinvestment from the country had arrived if companies wanted to maintain their standing.[41] Whether deliberately or not, Ware had been preparing Coca-Cola for this moment. By shifting the plan he already had in the works, he now fashioned a path for the company to technically disinvest from South Africa while still continuing to sell its product in the country. This stance would allow the corporation to oppose the apartheid state for an international audience, while aligning itself with leading members of South Africa's anti-apartheid movement, all while still keeping its products available for South African consumers. It was to be Coca-Cola's own form of disinvestment.

Coca-Cola's Disinvestment

The path to Coca-Cola's full disinvestment began not by starting to leave the country, but by finding ways to stay involved there. Under Ware, Coca-Cola contributed ten million US dollars (roughly twenty-five million rand) to create a charitable fund, named the Equal Opportunity Foundation (EOF).[42] The EOF was set up to be an independent South African nonprofit aimed at helping create a South Africa beyond apartheid. Focused primarily on funding educational and empowerment projects in disadvantaged communities, the EOF's charge was to underwrite initiatives that would enable 'black leadership infrastructure' in a post-apartheid South Africa, while demonstrating The Coca-Cola Company's clear commitment to ending apartheid.[43] The EOF's Board of Directors boasted a who's who of anti-apartheid educators and activists selected by Ware. The board included Alex Boraine, head of the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa (IDASA), Allan Boesak, World Alliance of

Churches' leader and head of the United Democratic Front, the leading resistance body that emerged in the 1980s, Arthur Chaskalson, then director of the Legal Resources Center, Jakes Gerwel, rector of the University of the Western Cape, Ernest Mchunu, president of the Black Management Forum and Coca-Cola's senior Black South African employee, Yusuf Surtee, tailor and trustee of the Black South African business community with strong ties to the anti-apartheid movement, and, as its head, now Archbishop Desmond Tutu.[44] At the time of its initiation, the EOF was the largest privately funded foundation under the control of Black South Africans.[45]

The EOF was in place around the time of Sullivan's Leeds conference, when it became clear, to all multinationals, that the time for full disinvestment from South Africa had arrived. For The Coca-Cola Company, leaving South Africa broke with long-standing precedent, one not even Nazi Germany had prompted the company to invalidate. Ware recalled a momentous meeting he had early in his career with long-time Coca-Cola head and icon Robert Woodruff. At the time, Woodruff cautioned Ware that 'Coca-Cola is not a Democratic company; it is not a Republican company.' The message, as Ware later learned in government relations, was that there was, as he paraphrased it, a 'sort of unwritten law,' that Coca-Cola always stayed neutral, no matter the situation. 'Therein lies I think part of the reason for the great continuing success of The Coca-Cola company wherever we do business,' Ware opined. It also reveals why, as he put it, 'going against the South African government itself in terms of our disinvestment from South Africa,' was such risky, uncomfortable business. In order to enact this move, Coca-Cola needed a carefully worded press release to convey that it was apartheid and not South Africa that it was opposing.[46]

To craft this document, Ware called upon a man of impeccable moral credentials. Ware had recently noted that despite their blossoming friendship, Tutu had never been to the company's offices in Johannesburg. Ware used this opportunity to invite Tutu to the local office, telling him on the way that the company was about to disinvest from South Africa and asking for Tutu's blessing. The result was a press release that went, as Ware tells it, 'back and forth across the Atlantic a dozen times' by fax until its wording pleased both Don Keough and Desmond Tutu, respectively.[47] So it was that on 17 September 1986, The Coca-Cola Company announced that it was poised to disinvest from apartheid South Africa, mere weeks before the United States government passed the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act, initializing American sanctions. Announcing its opposition to apartheid specifically, Coca-Cola gave itself nine months to sell its holdings in South Africa in such a way, as the company told it, as to benefit those most subjugated by the apartheid state. 'Our objective is not solely to disinvest,' Keough was quoted in *The New York Times* the next day: 'Our goal is to structure the transactions in a way that improves the prospects of black South Africans and increases their ability to invest in their country's economy.'[48] Not only was Coca-Cola the first corporation to name politics, instead of failing business conditions, as the reason for its exit, but it was also the first to commit itself to fashioning its exit in such a way that it benefited Black South Africans.[49]

In order to meet the requirements for disinvestment, Coca-Cola had to cease all company-owned operations in South Africa, which had up until then been run by Coca-Cola Export. Before disinvestment, Coca-Cola held a 30% share in Amalgamated Beverages Industries (ABI), one of the biggest distributors of soft drinks in the nation. In recent years, it had lowered its stake from 64% by selling off part of its shares to South African Breweries, arguably in anticipation of just this day.[50] Coca-Cola also had a high corporate stake in a local canning operation. The Coca-Cola Company now had to sell these holdings in order to deprive the apartheid state of any tax revenue generated by them. In 1986, Coca-Cola also owned and ran one of its concentrate plants, which served a large swath of the continent, from inside South Africa. This, too, needed to be attended to in order to meet the demands and spirit of disinvestment.

How did the company accomplish this? First, The Coca-Cola Company and Coca-Cola Export entered into an agreement with a newly created South Africa company called National Beverages Services, or NBS, in order for NBS to take over all of the company's operations in South Africa. The goal was to create as seamless a transition as possible, both operationally and ideologically. NBS was meant to function as Coca-Cola Export once had while ensuring that the company met the needs of disinvestment and United States sanctions.[51] Beyond transferring its operations to NBS, Coca-Cola relocated its Durban concentrate plant to the independent nation of Swaziland (now Eswatini). Three years after it became operational, revenues from concentrate production had doubled the small country's corporate tax revenue. This meant that, as Ware later told a group of Mount Holyoke students, 'There are now, quite literally, schools, hospitals and roads in Swaziland built with this Company's tax payments.'[52] With the concentrate plant no longer generating revenue for South Africa and without any employees in the country, the company concluded in an internal white paper that it had now 'met a traditional definition of disinvestment.' Unlike traditional disinvestment, however, it noted that its disinvestment had not hurt the very people most in need of help: Coca-Cola assessed that no former employees lost their jobs; they had simply gone to work for NBS and other 'locally-owned enterprises.' As such, the white paper concluded, 'the disinvestment process will actually improve the economic prospects of thousands of black South Africans who will be offered the chance of ownership in their country's soft drink industry.'[53] This was the third leg of Ware's disinvestment plan, after contracting with NBS and moving the concentrate plant: focusing on Black empowerment.

Since Coca-Cola was no longer officially operating in South Africa, the company had to rely upon independent bottlers and NBS to fulfill the last—and arguably most essential—part of Ware's plan: Black empowerment. ABI, the largest bottler of Coca-Cola in South Africa, led the way by offering Black employees the chance for equity participation that the white paper mentioned. On offer, 11% of its shares, once owned by Coca-Cola Export, for its employees and small retail dealers.[54] Many took advantage of this offer, most of whom were Black.[55] Beyond stocks, ABI began to offer managerial training, hoping to encourage the promotion of talent in the system.[56] At the same time, Coca-Cola bottlers and NBS began to focus on the growth of small-scale distribution systems that would take Coca-Cola into the informal, densely populated areas of the country. To be sure, such a spread worked well with emergent marketing plans aimed at capturing new, predominantly Black consumers, but it also served to empower thousands of new Black employees. In a speech from December 1988, Ware noted the 'political irony in this... business development,' proudly declaring that NBS's new 'informal distribution program has 10,000 blacks involved already' and a five-year projection of ten times that number. With robust investments in bicycles, motorbikes, and coolers—all of which harken to the spread of Coca-Cola elsewhere—the era immediately after disinvestment saw, ironically, a massive 'grassroots distribution' of Coke product and businesses into disempowered corners of South Africa.[57]

Beyond small-scale empowerment, Coca-Cola—by way of NBS and Ware—focused on several high-profile initiatives. Ware had been struck on his first trip to Africa by the absence of African—which to him meant Black African—management across the system. 'Whether you went to Kenya or Zimbabwe or

Francophone Africa or Nigeria,' he told me, there was a 'dearth of human talent,' that troubled him deeply. It was one of the first problems he sought to fix, starting first in South Africa and first with one man.[58] When Ware initially arrived in South Africa, Ernest Mchunu was already working for Coca-Cola Export; indeed, Mchunu was one of the first Coke employees Ware met. Mchunu had been headhunted from Edgar's Department Store to join Coca-Cola in 1974 as 'Black Marketing Officer,' brought on to consult about the 'Black market,' as it was called. Much of Mchunu's early work laid the groundwork for later Coca-Cola initiatives begun under Ware but, once Coca-Cola had left South Africa, continued under Mchunu, with Ware's endorsement.

Born in the 1930s in Alexandria township outside of Johannesburg, Mchunu was a self-made businessman who rose to play an important role for Coca-Cola in this era. Mchunu's earliest work for Coca-Cola involved helping spread the company's reach, both by capturing new consumers and by expanding points of sale in places like Alex. In Mchunu's early days, Coca-Cola South Africa was trying to fend off market advances from Pepsi-Cola. One way the company did this was school samplings. 'The main purpose' of these, Mchunu wrote in his memoir *Cheeky Native* in language that would undoubtedly horrify Coca-Cola leadership, 'was to "catch them young" so that they grew up addicted to the beverage.' 'This strategy worked extremely well for the company,' he concluded.[59] Mchunu was also an early advocate for promoting Black drivers, jobs that quickly came to be seen as esteemed positions. Both of these initiatives—school sampling and the emergence of Black drivers—helped insulate the company against much of the township unrest that began after the Soweto uprising and the subsequent declaration of a State of Emergency. 'Incredible as it may seem,' Mchunu wrote of Coca-Cola deliveries into the 1980s, 'most students protected our delivery trucks instead of setting them on fire as they did with anything associated with white companies or the government.'[60] Black drivers, in other words, started to give the company a gloss of Blackness. Through his work with distribution and sampling, Mchunu gained an insider view of the Black market and its potential for the company. He presented his findings at the Coca-Cola Southern Africa Bottlers' Convention in 1984 in a paper called 'The Black Market is Still the Great Unknown.' In his talk, the first of its kind given by a Black South African, Mchunu noted that Black traders in Soweto working in informal spaza shops had annual turnover rates above 350,000 physical cases and annual buying power of four million rand.[61] 'We at Coca-Cola must recognize the growing importance in our business of both the black consumer and the black businessman,' Mchunu concluded, 'as this is where our growth and our future lie.'[62] Coca-Cola Export rewarded Mchunu for his insight by promoting him to corporate social responsibility manager for Black markets.

It was in this role that Mchunu was tasked with hosting Ware on Ware's first visit to South Africa in 1983. Mchunu writes of his amazement meeting an African American businessman of such high standing who showed primary interest in the South African struggle from the position of the oppressed. Ware was equally pleased to find an employee of Mchunu's experience and stature in South Africa. The connection they formed would be important for both of them. Over the following years, Ware helped accelerate Mchunu's career: He had Mchunu appointed to Leon Sullivan's watchdog group in South Africa, representing Coca-Cola; he was responsible for Mchunu's appointments to various boards, including that of the EOF; and he enabled Mchunu to visit Coca-Cola Atlanta, among other places. For his part, Mchunu opened doors for Ware, introducing him to both anti-apartheid activists, like those who came to people the EOF board, and Black businessmen poised for empowerment.

To be sure, Ware recognized that it is one thing to want to empower Black South Africans. It is quite another to find men and women capable of rising quickly to the business challenges that Coca-Cola would present, particularly at the highest levels of ownership within the system. Mchunu played an important role in identifying those who would be empowered for these roles. First, he introduced Ware to Richard Maponya, perhaps the most famous township-raised entrepreneur in South Africa, known for growing businesses in Soweto despite apartheid-era conditions. By the time Ware arrived, Maponya and his wife owned a Soweto dairy and held Coca-Cola distribution rights in Bophuthatswana. This tangential connection to the Coke business made Maponya attractive to Ware. When Coca-Cola disinvested from South Africa, Maponya assembled a group of Black businessmen to form the company Kilimanjaro Holdings, which then bid successfully to buy a bottling plant in East London. Ware was instrumental in constructing this deal. Later, Kilimanjaro would be taken over by Fortune Holding, the company run in part by the Kunenes, the second Coca-Cola Black empowerment story.[63]

Mchunu was also the first to tell Ware about the Kunenes, often—and to their chagrin—heralded as the quintessential Coca-Cola feel-good story. The Kunene fortune began with the aptly named patriarch, Fortune Kunene, and his wife, both schoolteachers, and their seven children. In 1978, Fortune Kunene introduced soft drinks to their family's side business of running a fresh milk shop in the East Rand township of Vosloorus. In 1983, Kunene moved from retail sales to running three wholesale outlets, later adding alcohol to his inventory. From there, he and his three sons who had joined the business expanded into distribution. 'Unbeknownst to us,' Zanosi Kunene, one of Fortune's sons and eventual chairman of what became known as Fortune Holdings, the Kunenes' growth had, as he told me, 'caught the system's attention.'[64] Kunene recalls meeting Ware in the 1980s and gaining the admiration of the larger Coke universe for having grown such a robust business under such challenging circumstances.

When, in 1989, it looked as though apartheid may in fact end during their lifetime—a day they never thought they would live to see—Zanosi and two of his brothers set their sights on bettering their family via Coca-Cola. They made an appointment to visit Ware in London. There, the Kunenes registered their intent to be considered for a bottling franchise, should one become available. The problem: they had neither capital nor acquisition experience. Ware suggested they return to South Africa and meet with Coca-Cola's auditor at Ernst and Young. Kunene recalls how challenging it was to be township entrepreneurs trying to navigate a South African economy that had largely been closed to them. Initially, Coca-Cola also appeared closed to their aspirations. Kunene bitterly recalled for me the frustration of meeting with Coke only to hear that their aspirations would go unmet, year after year.[65]

While the Kunenes had proven themselves to be smart businessmen, the realities of late apartheid South Africa meant that they did not have access to the sort of capital needed to break into the bottling world. Multiple players in the system—Coke Atlanta, Ware, and existent bottlers in South Africa—would have to come together to help give them their start. Ware set the ball in motion. In the early 1990s, the Kunene brothers were summoned to Atlanta. There, they were told that Coca-Cola had identified a company for them called Coca-Cola Bottling Mpumalanga, or CCBM, near Nelspruit. Dave Cruise of Suncrush—whose family goes all the way back to the earliest days of bottling sparkling water in South Africa—wanted out. At the time, the Kunenes had amassed around two million rand for the purchase, an impressive amount of money for distributors. However, the price for CCBM, as recounted by those involved, was around seventy million rand. For the deal to go through, Coca-Cola took out a loan to back the Kunenes. The company then bought out Cruise and flipped his shares to the Kunenes, making the independent bottler Peninsula Beverages (PenBev) partners with the Kunenes.[66] Both the Kunenes and PenBev leadership recall the partnership as deeply impactful, if at times fraught.

In 1994, Zanosi arrived in Cincinnati to begin a four-month training stint in bottler operation. The Kunene family took over CCBM on 1 January 1995, with Zanosi as assistant general manager. Six months later, Zanosi became managing director.[67] The Kunene enterprise grew. In 1997, the Kunenes acquired Maponya's Kilimanjaro in East London, running it alongside PenBev, who held a minority stake in the enterprise. Then, in 2002, the Kunenes continued to go from strength to strength, merging with Phil Gutsche's South African Bottling Company (Sabco) to become Coca-Cola Fortune, then the second largest bottler of Coca-Cola in Africa. Coca-Cola Fortune later became part of Coca-Cola Beverages Africa (CCBA), now the largest bottler of Coca-Cola in Africa and the eighth largest bottler of Coca-Cola in the world.[68]

Right from the start the Kunenes brought a perspective that dovetailed with what Ernest Mchunu had reported, as well as what the ANC folks had been telling Ware: that for Coca-Cola to grow and play a meaningful role in South Africa, the company needed to focus on expanding its small-scale operations, particularly in high-density—or Black—areas. With the Kunenes on board and Coke being run internally by National Beverages, a new initiative was launched to push beyond white consumers to reach all parts of the South African market. Longtime Cape Town-area bottlers recalled an initial trip into nearby Khayelitsha township at this time. The realities of apartheid were such that they had limited experience with this—or any—township, since these emerging markets were considered to be far less profitable than, for instance, a formal supermarket in an affluent suburb. 'It was quite a day for all of us,' Managing Director of Forbes Investment Holdings Stuart McLeod recalled, 'and in a way it was an introduction to what our lives would be.'[69] That was the start of developing mom-and-pop spaza shops that would forever bring Coke red to South African townships, in the Cape, as elsewhere.

This, then, was the final portion of Coca-Cola's disinvestment: grassroots initiatives meant to provide on-ramps to economic participation for scores of Black South Africans hitherto excluded from the system. A Coca-Cola-produced video of life under disinvestment gives a sense of what this flavor of empowerment looked like. It opens with Dr. Nthato Motlana, chairman of Soweto's famed 'Committee of Ten'—a group formed in the aftermath of the Soweto uprising—then also a board member of Coca-Cola's EOF. '[P]olitical power arises as a consequence of economics,' he pronounced: 'We therefore say to our people, get off your backsides and make money.' The best way to make money, as described in this video: sell Coca-Cola. The video introduces us to a string of small-scale entrepreneurs—mostly women—for whom Coke is their economic lifeline. We meet Eunice Sibiya, Letty Mochwaedi, Simon Mboxwana, Mr. and Mrs. Gulwa, Irene Masiu, and sisters, Lynette and Hellen Masoeu: wholesalers, small-shop owners, and vending trolley operators from Klerksdorp, Bloemfontein, Soweto, and elsewhere. Their stories resonate. They all started small, with one or two crates of Coca-Cola. No matter what else they have on offer—fruits, sweets, or cooked foods—Coke is the item that draws people in, that enables their business to grow. All echo the same sentiment: without Coca-Cola, their business would not be as profitable, not be able to support upwards of ten people each. The film's narrator affirms that there are 'thousands like them,' people for whom 'disinvestment has been a success' at the expense of the South African government, deprived now of Coke-generated tax revenue.[70] Another Coca-Cola video details the rise of one particular empowerment story, Mtshselwa's Transport in Guguletu. We learn that Mr. Mtshelwa began delivering Coke products in the township in 1985, when unrest precluded white drivers from entering Guguletu. His business had since grown, with the bottler's help, to seeing him deliver upwards of 250,000 cases a year. An impending new truck acquisition is sure to drive this number up, we hear.[71] The 1989 edition of Coca-Cola's magazine *Journey* similarly explored the disproportionate impact of the product in disadvantaged portions of South Africa, in this case by looking at the small town of Jouberton, where no fewer than 625 Black entrepreneurs were making a living off of Coca-Cola.[72] While this article, much like the videos before it, casts Coca-Cola in the best possible light, a kernel remains true even under the gloss: a direct by-product of Coca-Cola's disinvestment was sustained expansion into Black consumer spaces, made possible by a sustained mobilizing of a Black workforce. Later, Coca-Cola would make much of the fact that its form of divestment empowered many South Africans, while the forms that other companies took did the opposite.[73]

While Coca-Cola became increasingly available in previously underserved corners of South Africa during the company's disinvestment, Ware attempted to stoke goodwill towards the company from on high. Under Ware's direction, Coca-Cola funded several secret meetings between the exile wing of the ANC and South African politicians and businessmen who, by the late 1980s, had begun to imagine a world beyond apartheid. Meetings of this sort have been increasingly documented by reporters and historians.[74] Until now, however, no one has ever included Coca-Cola on the list of companies involved. The reason: work like this necessarily had to be kept quiet. When

I told Ware that I had been unsuccessful in my attempt to find contemporaneous documentation about these meetings, he laid it bare: 'You won't, because we never publicized it.' Yet, now that apartheid is no more, Ware was able to state 'unabashedly' and with no small amount of pride that Coca-Cola did, under his direction, funnel funds to anti-apartheid work, including meetings that preceded the end of apartheid. Ware was particularly proud that he funded ANC members to attend the famed Dakar, Senegal meeting that took place in July 1987 between the ANC and the Institute for Democratic Alternatives in South Africa (IDASA), a group made up of mostly Afrikaners dedicated to forging a path towards democracy.[75] This meeting was significant because it demonstrated IDASA's willingness to meet with a banned organization, despite being roundly condemned by the South Africa government and facing the backlash of right-wing organizations for doing so. In retrospect, this meeting set South Africa on a path towards its eventual negotiated settlement. Dozens more meetings would take place along the way.[76] Though it was not publicized, that Coke helped enable the first one did much to enhance the company's credibility on the African stage, where Coke's involvement was an open secret. At the same time, Ware made sure to augment anti-apartheid goodwill within South Africa in smaller, and similarly quiet, ways. When Winnie Mandela's home in Soweto was demolished, he arranged for it to be refurbished at Coca-Cola's expense. Coca-Cola helped fund the anti-apartheid play *Sarafina!* and get it to Broadway. Coke funded at least one peaceful demonstration by Soweto's Committee of Ten, and more.[77]

Though largely without documentation, these activities and more were corroborated by interviews with E Neville Isdell, Rute Moyo, and Zanosi Kunene. All of this activity was off the books, meaning that while we know about it now, most people did not then. Thus it was that despite all that Coke had tried to do to make disinvestment work for most South Africans, while feeding its bottom line, the company faced backlash at the time.[78]

After Disinvestment

The most targeted criticism of Coke's particular form of disinvestment was that it was, in fact, nothing but a sham. An early proponent of this point of view was Jesse Jackson—that old thorn in the company's side—who saw the EOF (whose creation was entwined with disinvestment) as no more than a ploy to enhance the company's standing.[79] Others likewise imagined Coca-Cola's sale to NBS as little more than window-dressing meant to make it look as though the company had left the country when, in fact, it had not. In his autobiography, Mchunu casts disinvestment in just this light, calling it 'obviously a lie' that was evidence of 'the company's stroke of genius.'[80] Later, Pepsi-Cola would pick up this line as it attempted to re-enter the South African market after apartheid ended. Pepsi made much of the fact that between it and its nemesis, only one had been available for purchase during the dark days of apartheid.[81] Ware himself seems to gesture to the flimsiness of NBS's independence at a 1992 talk he gave to South African bottlers in Bermuda titled 'We Shall Return,' gesturing to the imagined day, post-apartheid, when Coca-Cola could again operate officially inside South Africa. There, Ware stated that there were many Coke folks in the audience that could not be acknowledged as such.[82] To be sure, Coca-Cola's form of disinvestment was unique. Certainly, there was never a time when consumers could not purchase Cokes in South Africa. If anything, as documented above, the company only expanded its reach during disinvestment.

Criticism of Coca-Cola's particular form of disinvestment also surfaced close to its corporate home. At the time, Tandi Gcabashe, daughter of Chief Albert Luthuli—former president of the ANC and the first African to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize—was living in exile in Atlanta. Gcabashe was Director of the Southern Peace Education Program of the American Friends Service Committee and head of The Coke Campaign, whose very purpose was to agitate against Coca-Cola's form of disinvestment. Under the slogan 'Coke sweetens apartheid,' The Coke Campaign called for consumer boycotts of the beverage. According to the campaign, Coca-Cola's form of disinvestment was disingenuous. 'The object of disinvestment is not to change the color of people who finance apartheid,' the campaign pronounced 'but to end all financial support for apartheid. Total disinvestment must mean the cessation of all economic operations and connections, including license, trademarks, factories, suppliers and distributors.'[83] According to The Coke Campaign, all Coke had done was create a flimsy middle class. Moreover, that the beverage was still available in South Africa meant that the company was not truly disentangled from the apartheid state. We saw the result of the campaign's work in the opening to this chapter: when Nelson Mandela first arrived in Atlanta, neither the corporation nor any local ANC politicians were willing to engage with Coca-Cola.

Coca-Cola responded to The Coke Campaign with a glossy brochure meant to counter many of its concerns with the company's position, bolstered by support from Tutu, Boesak, and others. In particular, Coke took aim at the idea that Coca-Cola served only to create a 'token' middle class that could be 'easily manipulated,' as the campaign had charged. Calling such a claim 'patronizing and insulting,' the brochure cut to the crux of external opposition to Coca-Cola in South Africa at the time. At stake was the question of who gets to decide what is best for disadvantaged South Africans, well-meaning activists far away from South Africa or struggle leaders on the ground?[84] Clearly, there was a disconnect between the two.

That much of Coca-Cola's work against apartheid was kept quiet while the company only seemed to expand its reach during the late apartheid era, coupled with enduring notions that the West must know what is best for Africans, meant that by 1990, prevailing anti-apartheid sentiment outside South Africa saw Coca-Cola as part of the problem. Ware tried to work against this image problem by appealing to his friend, Tutu. In a letter dated 10 April 1989, Tutu endorses Coca-Cola's struggle credentials, presumably in response to Ware's request to do so. After congratulating Ware on becoming a grandparent for the first time—calling it a 'gooey' experience—Tutu gets serious. 'I am sorry to hear that Coca Cola is running into some trouble over its alleged dishonesty about the manner of its disinvestment from South Africa and that it is being accused of aiding and abetting the apartheid regime,' he states, noting unequivocally that '[n]othing could be further from the truth.' Against the claims that the EOF was itself a front, Tutu weighs in that he feels 'honoured' to serve on the board that is helping perform important empowerment work. Moreover, he notes that he and other board members were satisfied with the way in which Coke disinvested, closing by saying that Ware could use this letter in any way that he saw fit.[85]

What Ware did with this letter is open to question. When pressed, Ware suggested that other nations in Africa 'just knew' about his Coke-led anti-apartheid work. Eventually, that knowledge made its way to anti-apartheid stalwarts who had been banned or imprisoned during this time. Winnie Mandela herself, Ware told me, alerted her husband to Coke's goodwill in his absence.[86] Recall that on his first trip to America, Mandela scorned Coca-Cola, but on his second trip he embraced the company. Clearly, something happened between 1990 and 1993 to change, if not the entire universe of anti-apartheid operatives' view of Coca-Cola, then at least that of its figurehead, Nelson

Mandela. In 1993, when Mandela again arrived in the United States, Coca-Cola took charge of moving Mandela between New York City, Washington, Los Angeles, and Atlanta at the African National Congress's request.[87]

Coca-Cola did more than just provide access to its jet. In Atlanta, Coke arranged for Mandela to visit Clark University, Ware's alma mater, and to meet company chairman Roberto Goizueta. The company also facilitated Mandela's stay at the Ritz Carlton, making sure that Mandela—who everyone was told to call President Mandela—was amply comfortable. The television would be set to CNN or NBC, the room should be stocked with fresh fruit, a chair should be stationed outside the room for a security detail, and a waiter should arrive each morning to take Mandela's breakfast order in person, rather than by telephone, employees were told.[88] Preparations for imagined news conferences were equally thorough. If pressed, internal memos explained, Coke was to say that it was but one of several companies aiding Mandela on his trip.[89] 'Senior management of The Coca-Cola Company regularly meet with world leaders visiting the city as part of our ongoing business process,' another internal memo suggested as a talking point.[90] Yes, all acknowledged, Coca-Cola would be considering re-entry into South Africa, once sanctions were lifted. And, yes, the company did plan to use time on its plane flights to press Mandela on threats to its business in South Africa—enduring violence in townships, an excise tax against soft drinks, and the ANC's recent statements about compelling responsible behavior by businesses.[91] In the end, Coca-Cola's hospitality worked. By the time he left America, Mandela had welcomed Coca-Cola into his inner circle.

Thus it was that on 10 May 1994, Carl Ware and his wife Mary were invited to Pretoria, South Africa to witness Mandela's inauguration as the first democratically elected president of a free South Africa. Two days later they were summoned to a private meeting with President Mandela at his office in the Union Buildings. There, they were met by ANC old-timers, including Jakes Gerwel, who had left the EOF board to join Mandela as his chief of staff. The purpose of their meeting was to discuss Coca-Cola's plans to re-enter South Africa. Ware had just been appointed head of Coca-Cola Africa, so whatever he discussed was within his discretionary power. Ware explained how Coke was in the process of helping launch the first Black-owned franchise under the Kunenes and how the company was committed to, as Ware later wrote, 'dramatically increase investments in microbusinesses such as spazas, kiosks, taxi ranks, and wholesalers, thereby creating thousands of jobs and hundreds of new business owners in townships throughout the country.'[92] According to Ware, Mandela nodded his approval.

Shortly thereafter, Coca-Cola formally re-entered South Africa. 'On behalf of The Coca-Cola Company,' Carl Ware said on the occasion, 'it's good to be back home in South Africa.' Ware focused not on re-entry as such, but rather on the ways in which Coca-Cola planned to 'adapt, change, and lead,' seeking to be no less than 'an example for how to do business responsibly in a democratic South Africa.' 'Black empowerment,' he made clear, was not 'an obligation,' but rather 'a tremendous business opportunity,' echoing Coca-Cola's long-standing belief in the possibility to do good and do good business at the same time. 'Atlanta does not know best,' Ware humbly concluded. Instead, he anticipated productive dialogue on how best to change the South African business and, indeed, that of Africa generally. 'I believe we are on the threshold of an historic opportunity,' Ware pushed further: 'I say this because never before has such a unique synergy existed to move Africa and South Africa to another plateau of leadership and growth.'[93] Here, then, was the true endgame: not just getting Coca-Cola back into South Africa, but also finding a pad from which to launch a renewed expansion into Africa north of the Limpopo River. Ware's anti-apartheid work had become known. 'It was out there,' he told me. 'There was not a place in Africa, not a statehouse or president or a prime minister or a minister of finance or a commerce minister who didn't know about our work in South Africa.' As a result, as Ware led the way as head of Coca-Cola Africa on a post-apartheid continent, he was 'always received with welcome, wide-open arms everywhere I went.'[94] In the buoyant days after apartheid ended, extant Coca-Cola bottlers were themselves keen on expansion, seeing the end of South Africa's status as a pariah state as a business opportunity. The time was ripe for a new investment in not just South Africa, but also Africa generally.

Conclusion

On 28 July 1993, Nelson Mandela wrote a letter to Carl Ware expressing how he felt about both Ware and Coca-Cola. 'It is always a difficult task to find words adequate enough to express the depth of our indebtedness to somebody as special in our life as you have become, Carl,' he began. 'When the history of our struggle is properly reviewed in the near future, only then will the world be privy to fully understand your catalytic role in that struggle. We in the ANC know of countless contributions made to innumerable individuals and organizations in our country through your direct intervention. This you did, not only in your capacity as one of the decision makers within Coca Cola, but also in your own right as a conscientious human being of African descent.'[95] Ware, unsurprisingly, cherishes this letter, along with a photograph of himself and Mandela, both evidence of his role in history-making.

Not all who have lived into the post-apartheid era feel as positively about Coca-Cola. In 2016, I spoke to Tandi Gcabashe, now back at home in Durban. Despite having lived to see the end of apartheid, she continues to view Coca-Cola with derision, naming the company's form of disinvestment as a 'trick' that served to divide struggle activists. She said Coca-Cola understood this tension, so common in boycott debates, and had manipulated it in order to polarize opposition. Yes, she acknowledged, Boesak, Tutu, and Winnie Mandela had all 'bought into' Coke's position, but they had been wrong, in her estimation. She approached Nelson Mandela at Namibian independence in 1990, she told me, in order to tell him about her experience leading the boycott in exile. In her memory, he listened to her and, despite having flown into Namibia on a Coca-Cola jet, refused to return on one.[96] Perhaps this was the reason he later scoffed at Coca-Cola during his first trip to America. Yet, whatever impact Gcabashe had was not enough. In the end, Coca-Cola was able to woo Mandela, with its history of struggle credentials and its promise of post-apartheid economic growth. In her heart, Gcabashe told me, she still boycotts Coke.[97] As we will later see, she is not alone in this stance.

The story told in this chapter illustrates the tension between exiled activists and those who stayed, as well as, though to a lesser extent, the tensions between those who were imprisoned and those who were not. In addition, the tale here helps explain how the ANC accepted the idea of capital as a means for liberation, laying bare the ANC's expediency and helping us better understand why the party shifted so dramatically from communist to free market principles once empowered.[98] This story reveals, again, the power of Africans on the ground to bend Coca-Cola to their needs, something that was difficult—if not impossible—for external observers to appreciate. Finally, this narrative forces us to think about the role of sanctions and disinvestment in helping end apartheid, debates that are far from reconciled.

The story of Coca-Cola's role in the end of apartheid also stands as a rare example of The Coca-Cola Company openly taking a political stance. When I asked Ware why it is that Coke took on the fight against apartheid in quite the way it did, he offered what I have since heard to be the company line: apartheid, a system of patently unjust racism, was so deeply anachronistic and so obviously painful that it demanded the company work against it purely on moral grounds. Sure, South Africa was a hugely important market for Coca-Cola, but there was more than that. Here, Coke folks generally gesture to the company's history of working towards racial equity, seen, for instance, in a particularly beloved story of how Robert Woodruff hosted MLK's Nobel Peace Prize dinner.[99] In Ware's reckoning of his own life, it is clear that his participation as a proxy for Coke in the anti-apartheid struggle—at whatever level—was ethically motivated. 'There were human dynamics' and 'there were philosophical beliefs' that drove him to help end apartheid in any way that he could, he told me. But he never ignored the fact that his actions were likewise driven by his position as an employee of Coca-Cola. Thus, 'there was also an enlightened self-interest' in how he and the company, under his direction, operated. Ware and Coke understood full well just how important South Africa in the 1980s was. 'You could lose South Africa,' he said, 'and lose the world.'[100] In the end, Ware and the larger company believed that how Coca-Cola behaved in late apartheid South Africa, how it met the challenge both internally and globally, would determine its future, perhaps in the entire world. Closer to the point at hand, Ware and Coke understood that how Coca-Cola negotiated apartheid would determine if and how the company could thrive anew in a now fully post-colonial continent. As the door closed on the apartheid regime, as Ware ascended to the head of Coca-Cola Africa, it was this terrain—that of Africa, north of the Limpopo—that now held the company's attention afresh.