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Berkeley Talks transcript: Why racial equity belongs in the study of economics

By **Public Affairs**, UC Berkeley | JULY 24, 2020

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Suresh Naidu: Okay. I'll get us started. Thanks everyone for showing up. Thanks a lot to our panelists for agreeing to do this. Just as a few words of background, my name is Suresh Naidu, the co-organizer of Economist for Inclusive Prosperity, which is a project Gabriel Zucman and Dani Rodrik and I started kind of trying to explore what economics looks like after neo-liberalism and what kind of a more inclusive, more egalitarian kind of economics looks like.

And this is kind of our attempt to sort of help economics grapple with its current moment by acknowledging that economics doesn't necessarily already have all the answers and doesn't already have the necessary conceptual toolkit. So, there's lots to say about this, and lots of people here that have thought about it more than me, and so I'm just going to hand it off to someone who's thought about it a lot, Sandy Darity, who is going to be moderating the panel. So, take it away, Sandy.

Sandy Darity: Thank you, and thank you to you Suresh and to Dani for organizing this event. I think it's very, very important for us as economists to learn from the other disciplines. We've had an imperializing tendency towards the other disciplines, and in the process I think we have failed to really recognize many of the important contributions that have been delivered from other disciplines using their perspective rather than the perspective that we normally bring to these issues.

In particular, I'm struck by the fact that an important tool that I've used in much of my research, the Blinder-Oaxaca decomposition, really I believe was preceded by the Blau and Duncan decomposition in sociology, but I think frequently we have not been aware of that.

And similarly, when we talk about unobserved heterogeneity, it sometimes becomes a blockade for really understanding the phenomenon of discrimination. Or when we talk about the identification problem, it constitutes a blockade to thinking about some factors as being fundamental causes of

phenomena rather than interactive causes of phenomena.

So, as a consequence, I think it's really going to be valuable for us to hear from the scholars who are going to join us today. We have four speakers — after they make their respective presentations, we will take questions from the floor, so to speak, and have an opportunity for the speakers to respond to those questions as well as engage with one another.

And our first speaker is going to be Daina Ramey Berry, who is the Oliver H. Radkey Regents Professor of History at the University of Texas at Austin. Her superb book *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh*, recovers the humanity of persons, Black persons specifically, whose lives were comprehensively commodified.

There are two additional dimensions of her book that I think merit deep attention. First, the extended commodification of Black bodies after life ends into death; and second, the significance of the effects of markets, markets in human beings on U.S. economic development. Her most recent book is *A Black Women's History of the United States*, co-authored with Kali Nicole Gross.

And I'm hopeful, time permitting, that she'll have an opportunity to tell us what we can learn from that book also. Our second speaker is Arjumand Siddiqi, who is an epidemiologist at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto. She is also the Canada Research Chair in Population Health Equity.

She has had brilliant insights about differences in social and policy structures across countries and how they affect not only health outcomes for the general population, but also the health disparities between ethnic and racial groups within those populations.

She also has recently published a critique of Case and Deaton's perspective on deaths of despair, and in the interest of full disclosure, I'm actually a co-author on that article. But she has a strong commitment to understanding the full play of what public health scholars refer to as the social determinants of health in contrast with genetic or behavioral or cultural factors.

Our third speaker is going to be Mario Luis Small, who is a deeply accomplished sociologist, urban sociologist at the interface between thinking about neighborhoods and communities as well as social networks. He is the Grafstein Family Professor of Sociology at Harvard.

And one of the things that's particularly impressive about his research productivity is that two of his books — *Villa Victoria* and *Unanticipated Gains* — both have received the C. Wright Mills Award. I think recently in some of his work, he's been most notably engaged in a nuanced reintroduction of cultural considerations in the analysis of race and sociology.

And then our final speaker is Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, one of my colleagues at Duke, also a deeply accomplished sociologist. Remarkably, he has recently served as president of the American Sociological Association and the Southern Sociological Society simultaneously. I think that's unprecedented.

He is the author of *Racism Without Racists*, among a number of books, but I want to mention *Racism Without Racists* because it's now in its fourth edition. And it explores the difference between people's attitudes about race that's expressed in short answer surveys versus in-depth interviews.

And what he demonstrates in that book is that if you rely upon short answer surveys to try to gauge variations in people's attitudes on questions concerning race, you're going to miss the boat because they're self-censored increasingly. And so, what you really want to do is engage them in long-term interviews, and in that environment you get much better information about what their beliefs really are. So, may we start. Daina Berry, please.

Daina Ramey Berry: All right, thank you so much for having me. I'm going to start off my brief remarks to just talk a little bit about what the work looks like from an historians perspective. And as Dr. Darity said, my research is on enslaved people. And I was an economics major during undergrad, I don't know if Dr. Darity knew that, but I was a major in economics until my last year in undergrad, and I took an African American history class and decided that's what I wanted to change and do my work on.

But I've always wanted to try to find a way to blend the work that I had done as an undergrad in economics. So, when I started doing this work on *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh*, my goal, maybe it was naive, but my goal was to allow the economists that are doing work on slavery, very big work on slavery, to have a more cohesive conversation with historians.

And one of the things that I was trying to do initially is I was trying to walk in the space that I thought economists do, and I was trying to find out whether or not I could show statistical significance in my findings. And as I was doing that and trying to search for that in the ways I was looking at how enslaved people are priced from the beginning, before they're even conceived.

So, enslaved mothers were looked at for the fecundity to see what their value of their future laborers would cost, to see whether or not if they had given birth to children, did those children survive to age 5? Were they healthy? And if so, that particular woman received a higher valuation during pregnancy than other women. And so, I was doing research on that and trying to look at ways to bridge this gap between the two fields, and to make sure that my argument would be palatable in both spaces.

And what I learned in the process was that enslaved people spoke very loudly to me when I was looking at these records, and I was using datasets that Stanley Engerman and Robert Fogel created. I'd also created my own dataset. I've been doing research in Southern archives for about seven or eight years, and had this large data set of about 80,000 individuals — enslaved people's values, their prices, their monetary values and their appraised values.

But I realized as I was doing this work that enslaved people themselves had so much more to say about valuation and the values on their bodies. And that was really interesting to me, and I thought, "Okay. Well, if I write this book that talks about it from the perspective, enslaved people participating in their thoughts about the value of their bodies, how will that change the way we talk about this in both economic and historical circles?"

So, I don't know how it's fully been received in economic circles. I have a very good economic historian friend who said to me, "That is not the book I would have wrote," when I finished it, because there's a lot of testimony, there's a lot of stories of enslaved people saying, "Oh, I'm not worth \$500, I'm worth \$200," or, "I'm not 40 years old, I'm 20 years old."

So, this is an economic product that's put in a market space that has the ability to argue, to emote, to reject, to resist, and that is a very, very different "product." And one of the things that I've found, it's a human product, right?

And when I was doing the research for the book, I saw that the work that I've used from a number of economic historians did not acknowledge at all the humanity of enslaved people, and I thought, even if you're not writing about them as human beings, but you're putting them in formulas and they now become a person named John, now becomes an X with an exponential power and there's a formula to figure out how much that particular woman is worth or that particular man is worth, it doesn't take much.

And I think you'll have more historians engaging this work if you acknowledge that this was a family, and this person lived on this particular plantation, and they were worth this much, and this is what they felt about their documentation or how they responded to that particular moment of sale. And that was really what the book, the purpose of the book for me. But what I found later, and I think Dr. Darity mentioned this, was that the valuation of enslaved bodies went beyond preconception, but also to the postmortem space.

And that there was an illegal trade in cadavers of enslaved people and whites and free Blacks, but I was mostly interested in the enslaved cadavers — their bodies were sold to medical schools, and so they still made money off of their bodies after they had passed away. Some of them the values were much lower, anywhere from \$5 to \$30.

So, the market rate wasn't as much, they're valued more when they're living because they're producing more, right? They're producing more and bringing more financial resources to the families that they're enslaved by, but in the afterworld, "Okay, I'm going to dispose of this body. If I can make some money off of the disposal, I'll make \$30, and that's it."

There were some cases where enslaved people were valued at the moment right before they were hanged, and then the surviving relatives of the plantar family or the enslavers would receive compensation for the valuation of that enslaved person. So, there's a lot of spaces where we talk about slavery and enslaved people, and we talk about them in monetary ways, but the humanity is often missing and they're objectified — they're treated like a backpack or a book on a shelf.

And I just feel like if economists and historians can come together and have conversations about the deep meanings that you guys find when you create formulas, you can take us to places that we can't go, but we can also bring you to records that might inform what you're seeing and how you analyze

this work and make it for a much deeper conversation.

So, I will leave it at that. I don't know if I've done my five minutes, I'm trying to stay on it. If I have a little more time, I could say a few more things. I'm good? All right, thank you. I'm looking forward to the conversation.

Sandy Darity: Thank you. Arjumand, you're on mute. Okay, you're off now.

Arjumand Siddiqi: Great. Thanks everyone. I feel like I should put out a disclaimer that says some of my best friends are economists before I start my talk. So, as Sandy mentioned, I'm a social epidemiologist, and our discipline is really quite related to medicine and to the study of distributions of disease from a sort of clinical perspective.

And so, as social epidemiology kind of evolved, we were starting to find our empirical legs around how to use population surveys and different kinds of data than the clinical data our discipline tends to use, how to use different statistical methods.

And in the early 2000s when I was doing my Ph.D., I remember sort of looking enviously from Boston over to Cambridge at the economics department because it was considered so rigorous of all the disciplines related to our field.

And then, I had this moment of pretty big dissonance when in the mid 2000s, I encountered a paper by three economists whose main argument was that Black/white differences in hypertension could be attributed to genetic selection for genes associated with salt retention.

And the narrative was that this genetic selection occurred during this transatlantic slave because of the survival advantage conferred by salt retention, and that it occurred during cheap-looking tests for salty skin done by slave traders to further determine what Blacks would be able to the demands of plantation work.

And this economist team also suggested that this salt retention hypothesis was really the best way to explain the Black/white life-expectancy gap as well. It's been a lot of years, and I actually had trouble finding the paper online now, but I just remember thinking that the evolutionary geneticists just probably were passing out at the notion that genetic selection would occur at that pace.

Something that occurs over thousands of years was essentially being proposed to happen over one or 200. The human genome scientist who had carefully explained to us by then that race was not a genetic construct, there was no genetic basis for race, and just thinking to myself, “Surely, there is a geneticist amongst the authors,” or, “Surely, some of the genetics work on race has been cited,” and it hadn’t, and it was just really difficult to understand how a hypothesis that had no premise could receive so much traction.

The paper also was a little bit alarming because it hadn’t cited any of the work from social epidemiology on racial inequalities in hypertension. And I’m not just sort of suggesting that my field is the field that should be cited, but we really are the central field on racial health inequalities. And there are people who have specialized their whole careers on racial disparities and hypertension, none of them were cited.

And if they had been, you might find a very different story about Black/white differences in hypertension and in life expectancy. So the body of literature in our field that’s been built up is both based on what we know race is not, as well as what we know race is. And the idea is that we’ve built up sort of a conceptual and theoretical basis, but also a lot of empirical tests of the propositions that have been made.

And what the field has found is that racial inequalities in health manifest through processes of structural or institutional racism, as well as what is often called everyday discrimination. So Black people are systematically denied access to material resources and are subjected to chronically stressful experiences of daily life, and those things together put them at a higher risk of a wide range of illnesses and death.

So, social epidemiologists would and have told a very different story about Black/white inequalities and hypertension and life expectancy. Lately, my colleagues and I have been working on the noted rise in white mortality in the U.S., what’s been called the deaths of despair phenomenon, the paper that Sandy mentioned earlier. There are a lot of teams working on this, including economists Anne Case and Angus Deaton, and you’d better believe we take their work very seriously.

We have carefully looked at their hypotheses, we have carefully cited them and so on. And in some ways I think I live in fear of making facile arguments simply because I've been both careless or dismissive of work from other disciplines. And I'm increasingly of the mind that maybe this fear is a good way to approach scientific inquiry, and I'm increasingly weary when I read work that sort of doesn't cite anyone else outside their own discipline, especially when it's topics that are not central to their discipline and their expertise.

So, back to that deaths of despair work. So, in that piece we propose that status threat, group status threat, the sense from whites that they are losing relative status compared to Black and brown people is accounting for the rise in white mortality. And we use, in this paper, both theoretical and empirical findings from social psychology and from political science to suggest that at the population level we can actually measure, or proxy status threat by measuring the rise in the vote share going to Republicans in any given county.

So, our model essentially tested whether rise in Republican vote share at the county level as a proxy of status threat could predict the rise in white mortality accounting for about 17 social and economic indicators, fixed effects and so on that might also be involved in the processes. So, we received quite a bit of pushback on this paper in two ways, and the first was that it was just a bridge too far to equate Republican vote share with status threat.

And the other was that because of our statistical model — again, 18 variables, county time, et cetera, fixed effects — because the model did not account for unobserved confounding, that we couldn't interpret the association as being causal.

So, the fundamental problem I see with this argument is not that it suggests there might be an alternative explanation, I totally concur that there might be, but it's the idea that an unknown alternative explanation that no one is proposing, it's just the idea that there might be an alternative explanation is given equal weight to a model that tests basically everything we know about how the world works. And so, I worry a lot that this notion of unobserved confounding is actually overtaking or being weighted equally with the preponderance of evidence that we have, and I'm not sure that that's a great way to go.

You also see it, as Sandy mentioned, in models where there are residuals and accounting for race-based differences and the implication given the preponderance of the evidence would be that these are discrimination effects. And yet, there's a reticence to think about that or at least to weight it equally with the idea that there's some unobserved confounding, there's this sort of unobserved confounding boogeyman out there that we think live by too closely.

A final anecdote about our field, and I think what it says about economics. So, I had a graduate student who wanted to work on racial differences in the distribution of birth weight. And in fact, she wanted to look at whether Canada and the U.S. have different inequalities in the distribution of birth weight. And the idea was that if we compare countries in their inequalities, we might start to point to some of the societal factors that are modifying inequalities, that are mitigating them or exacerbating them.

And I spoke to an economist colleague of mine, who's a lovely person, and he said, "I'm a little worried that we're not going to get very far in terms of a causal association if we pursue this line of questioning, that you'll really only be able to say associational things. Why don't we look at how prenatal care affects racial inequalities in birth weight?" Which is a fine question, I'm not disparaging the role of prenatal care. But imagine the difference in the size of the question and the focus of the question between something that talks about how societies produce, fundamentally produce, inequalities down to something that deals with a fairly circumscribed issue.

And so, my worry is that this chase after causal inference precludes us from looking at a lot of really important questions. I'm not suggesting we go down the road of looking at those questions and imply causality when it isn't there, but I do think that we can pursue those questions and say something about what the causal inference issues are and how to push ourselves, but not to completely ignore what I think are really, really important questions for society. And I'll leave it there.

Sandy Darity: Thank you. Mario, please.

Mario Luis Small: Thank you very much. This has been very interesting so far. So, I'll tell you that the main reason that I'm here is probably because a couple of months ago I published a paper along with Devah Pager and the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* titled "Sociological Perspectives on

Race Discrimination,” and the point of the paper was to make a case for six ideas in our field, sociology, that economists haven’t, but probably should, take seriously. So, what I’m going to do is give you three of these ideas and then after of course the last talk just open it up.

So, everybody here knows better than I do that traditionally economics, kind of two standard models are the taste discrimination and the statistical discrimination model when people study race discrimination, and I don’t have to tell you what those models are. But one thing I will say is that from our perspective, there are a couple of quite important problems with those models.

And I guess you could sum them up with the idea that a model or a set of models that studies discrimination by focusing on the potentially racially motivated actions of an actor making decisions today, will probably understate a lot of the ways discrimination actually happens and has consequences for even the things that economists care about.

And this is the case for at least three reasons, the first I’ll say is that it ignores the possibility of institutional discrimination. And I’m going to use that term in a very narrow sense to refer to differential treatment by race that is either perpetrated by an organization or qualified into law.

And I am not using the term structural racism or institutional racism, or a lot of stuff that other sociologists have used and a lot of people in the media have used because there’s sort of ambiguity in some of these uses of the terms, and they don’t always mean what we were meaning, what we’re referring to, but just very narrow the idea that differential treatment by race can be perpetrated by the organizations recorded according to law.

And so, to give you a very simple example, sort of take an organization in which nobody, as Becker would say, nobody wants to pay a price to not associate with people of a different race, so nobody has a taste for discrimination. And in addition, nobody is willing to make statistical inferences about the behavior or likely performance of an employee on the basis of the employees group, so nobody statistically discriminates.

Now, let’s assume that that firm, as many do, hires new employees on the basis of referrals, that they have an incentive system. For example, depending on the level at which you’re hired, for entry-level employees, you’ll get a hundred if you refer somebody and they get hired. Now, let’s assume

we also know sociologists have shown that there's racial homophily.

I think in economics, this is called a sort of mating-by-race and friendship formation, but basically the idea that people tend to have friends of the same race. Now, if this firm is racially homogeneous, what's going to happen is all of the people who come in applying for jobs are going to be other people of the same race because of the pattern in the world, and we could see the strong incentives made for people to be hired on the basis of the people you already have.

In this model, no employer has to have a taste for discrimination or to discriminate, and yet a highly qualified person of a different race from outside the firm is going to have a very small chance of getting a job there. That's a form of discrimination that we believe deserves attention.

The second point I'll make is that, again, the reason it's a bad idea to just focus, or yeah, just a bad idea to only limit the story of discrimination to only the actions of our contemporary actor is that a lot of forms of historical discrimination, particularly forms that have been codified into law or become institutional parts of how organizations operate, continue to have effects today.

And therefore, even if today everybody stopped being discriminatory either by race or statistically or whatever the case may be, we'd still have a lot of reason to study historic discrimination to understand the present. I won't go too much into this other than to say that a very clear example of this is redlining that many of you are familiar with. There have really been quite a few papers, including a couple by economists in recent years, showing that redlining practices back in the 30s can be shown to have likely had a causal impact on long-term homeownership rates among African Americans and segregation detectable even today.

And so, there have been papers that, for example, have looked at the boundary line for redlining and units on either side of it, they've looked at federal policies that had cutoffs for the size of the town and looked at towns slightly older and slightly bigger and smaller than that through multiple indication strategies, such as quite a bit of evidence that it matters.

The last point I'll make is that, again, a different reason to not limit the study of the discrimination to sort of statistical and taste-based discrimination is that perception of discrimination matters, a lot. And what I'll say when I'm saying this is that I am not saying that perception is an effective substitute

for actual discrimination, and I'm also not saying that we should not continue having a healthy skepticism for what people say over what they do, but what I am saying is that there are many contexts in which the perception that an employer or a doctor or take your pick, has or will or has had discriminated, this can affect your behavior in ways that matter for where you apply for jobs, how far you go in school and sort of what your health outcomes are, that we can not capture, again, by focusing on the employer or the banker as a prototypical racial or potentially racially motivated actor.

So, I'll just leave it at that. And I'll say, if you're interested in more of this, I'll refer you to the JEP Paper. But the bottom line is I appreciate, actually, I find quite interesting a lot of what economists have done in this. I think the issue is expanding beyond what's been done as opposed to remaining tied to these two very traditional ways of looking at discrimination. Thank you.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva: Okay, it's my turn. So, economists begin with this notion of the free market invisible hand, and we need to be clear that the hand has a color — it's a white hand, let me say white male hand. I will not address the gender components of the market, I'll leave that to others, so I will only talk about the racialized aspects of the market. Yeah?

And like Daina, I also will say that I was a major in sociology and economics, and that was the main thing I ended up choosing sociology, in part because of the foundation of economics is assumptions about the rational actor making decisions on a cost benefit basis in something called efficient market. And we all know that the homo sapiens — they're a complex animal shaped by multiple social forces and group divisions.

I do believe, I mean that my masters and my old magazine remains with me, so economic factors account for a lot of what happens in life, but cannot explain everything because the material component of life cannot be defined in these narrow economics way in which many of you sort of structure your analysis. So, the white homo economicus, for example, as we have learned, cares about access to parks, control of neighborhoods and schools, and their culture.

They are willing to fight tooth and nail to keep certain status in place. They like to feel good about themselves because Blacks, as Mara will argue a long time ago, have served as the symbolic index for whites, they can always say, "At least I am not Black." And that element of feeling good about

yourself is important in life. So, whites are so invested in whiteness that many are willing to die for it as Jonathan Metzl outlined in his recent book.

So, this is the stuff of history. Yeah? We have modernity, and modernity was not just driven by capitalism because in capitalism, as Eric Williams, Cedric Robinson and many others have argued, you cannot undo the connection between slavery, genocide, land theft and the economic model production.

In the case of the U.S., we had slavery, we had genocide, we had land theft, we had and we still have colonialism. As a Puerto Rican, I know that this person doesn't represent my interests, and two days ago we learned he was wondering about selling Puerto Rico. And of course, workers of color have allowed capitalism or capitalist to extract separate super profits from us.

So, that means that the society structure and culture were racialized on the get go, and I suggest not only produce systemic racism, but that system remains. So what is systemic racism? It used to be so easy: It's the bad guys. It's the new bad guys, it's the rotten apple theory of life. This people having a taste for discrimination.

The trick is understanding that systemic racism ultimately cannot exist without the actions and inactions of the green apples, that is most whites participate consciously or unconsciously in the systemic racism stuff. And lately, literally two months ago, everybody seems to be talking about systemic racism, but I think most folks talking about it don't know what they're talking about.

So, for example they say, "Police departments have systemic racism," I mean, merely with the caveat, but most police officers are not racist, therefore reversing or reverting to the theory of life of the bad apples. In truth, the way that we select officers, the training, the culture, all these things shape the actions and beliefs of the officer.

So, even the "good ones," and I put that in quotation marks, carry out race-based policing. And I wanted to give you a liminal example. So, this is a young African American college student who was brutalized in Atlanta recently by six police officers, and you can see only one of the officers was white.

So some of you may be thinking, “But can Black people enforce white supremacy?” And since slavery, many Blacks have been selected to participate in the enforcement of white supremacy. And although, historically, the main people in charge of enforcing boundaries happen to wear the white uniform, and not only white police officers, but regular white folks, in truth, that’s the way that the system works.

And thankfully, because we humans, our subjectivity is shaped by multiple factors, there is always a space, a possibility for change. So, what we need is a historically specific view of racism that allows us to also understand that the systems share basic features. Whether they’re wearing Panama, Puerto Rico, Haiti, or the U.S., all the systems share basic features.

But we need to be specific about how racism is structured in a particular society. In a society, you can have regional variations, if you think about the U.S., the South, North, West, and we need to be also time specific. Don’t assume that there is one racism throughout history — racism can change.

The rules and regulations of the slavery regime were different than Jim Crow, and they are different from what we have today that I’ve called in my work, the new racism. Secondly, the systemic racism forms a structure. Systemic, collective practice, behaviors and culture that reproduce disadvantage for some and advantages for others.

And here comes the hardest part, which is understanding that this system, as material foundation, it remains in place like capitalism, patriarchy, because systemic racism, because folks benefit from it. Again, I already showed or suggested that there are fractures in the white communities of possibilities for change, but we need to understand the big implication which is that racial domination depends on nice, good white people who participate in various ways and to different degrees in maintaining the racial order of things.

Borrowing the work from Marx and Poulantzas, the whites are personifications of systemic racism. So, they receive mostly in passive or neutral ways what David Roediger called “the wages of whiteness.” They follow the dominant racial script. So, contemporary whites, they live in white neighborhoods, they have only white friends, white schools, white ideas, white everything. Yeah? They even eat white bread. That’s a joke.

And lastly, they keep trucking along as if racism was a prerogative of the races. They input signs in their yard saying, “We believe black lives matter,” but we live in a totally segregated neighborhood. So, final out words. If racism is systemic, then as Mario was articulating, it cannot be just a taste or a matter of statistical discrimination. It’s not an individual phenomenon, but a collective practice.

And I think that you also need to understand that the actors, and that’s the reason why I moved from economics sociology because economics focus on the individual actor, sociology is more likely to see sort of collective behavior. So, actors belong to groups and experience life in group-structured condition. So, many of our explanation, for example, for the status of people of color, and I’m doing what William Ryan called eons ago, “blaming the victims,” and by doing so they ignore the system. For example, they claim that Blacks don’t do well in life because of their culture.

So, Oscar Lewis wrote one of his first books on Puerto Rico, Puerto Ricans, *La Vida*, claiming that the reason why poor Puerto Ricans here in the world, actually why Puerto Ricans here in the world, he defines us, the population, was because we have the culture of poverty.

And that argument, the culture of poverty, is like Freddy Krueger. You think you have killed the culture of poverty and it comes back with a new attire. Or the claim, “You’re not doing well because of female-headed households,” or, “It’s class,” or as Daina was talking about, it is “They have salt in their bodies.”

And a lot of people were using that little graph as evidence because presumably it shows a slave master tasting a Black person to see if they are salty. Alternatively, and we don’t know what this person had in mind, but we’ve got to think that person was a pervert. And there’s a lot of work showing that slavery included the abuse, sexual and otherwise, of both women and men.

So, it is anything but racism. I think it’s time for us to take racism seriously — analytically, politically and morally — as many folks are doing right now in the mean streets, to cite Piti Thomas, of America. So, that’s it for me.

Suresh Naidu: Thanks.

Sandy Darity: Suresh, it’s in your hands now.

Suresh Naidu: Yeah, so thanks to all of our panelists, that was really interesting. So, now we'd like to take questions from everyone. So, if you want to raise your hand, and I will do my best to keep up, we don't have the questions function here so it's going to be a bit of a ... So I'm clear I won't see everyone, but if you want to use the raise hand function in the tab and I can take questions and call on you. Peter.

Peter: Yeah. I just want to say thank you all so much for these really excellent presentations. And Mario, my students and I read your paper, and I think that we as economists certainly have to broaden our perspective. My own view is that we tend to rely a lot on models, and so the call to action really is to think about new models of discrimination as a way of trying to instantiate some of these ideas into the profession.

And then the second piece, too, is whenever we write models, they need to be historically accurate, right? Like for some reason, it's like we write models with really terrible assumptions that have no basis in history, for example, that discrimination happens on the margin, when in fact you had signs saying "No Blacks," regardless of your socioeconomic status.

So, thank you all for organizing this panel, thank you for your work. I look forward to continuing to read and to engage with your work, and I certainly hope that the ideas here really permeate our profession in a foundational way.

Suresh Naidu: Great. Okay. Does anyone want to respond, or I can keep taking questions? Felix.

Felix: Hey, everybody. Thank you everybody who is participating for your thoughtful words and for organizing. I guess I wanted to ask a little bit ... I'm a Ph.D. student who does research on race and my training is in economics, my degree is in public policy. I have, as I think some people have mentioned, I've faced pushback, right?

I think when you think about who is in economics, I've had the experience of people being in that room who think differently about these things and don't sort of take the standard economic view as given and are looking at these other disciplines, thinking about those things.

Those things are not received well, right, which is I think why you don't see them published or sort of like being sort of the output that you see off the field, and some things that are on their face ridiculous, end up being received better because of sort of power.

I guess my question is, number one, is economics just weird or particularly, say I'm white and it's power structure or some other thing that makes us very susceptible to things, are these kinds of things in ways that you guys might not be in the disciplines that you sit in or do you guys have strategies that have allowed you to do this kind of courageous work that challenges power in important ways and still sort of make it out on the other side?

I am currently going through situations where projects are facing a lot of pushback and, I think, trying to be killed, not because of any sort of deeper reason besides the fact that people don't want to hear these kinds of conversations. So I'm just trying, from researcher to another, how do you make it through this? Thank you guys for all your work.

Daina Ramey Berry: Can I respond? I really appreciate the question — it's something that we struggle with in the historical profession, as well. I've seen it even as scholars that are writing about gender and women enslavement. Many of the original historians, some of the first generation of historians, particularly Black women historians, were told that no one cares about the experience of enslaved women, although Caribbean scholars had been writing about it for decades, these 10 or 15 years before U.S. historians started writing about gender enslavement.

So, one of the ways to push back against that, because we see there's a politics I've heard today of citations, I've heard that with all the speakers, there's also who controls the editorial boards who are seeing work as being acceptable, right? And I think the more we continue to push and publish and present at conferences, if we're allowed to those spaces, the more we stand up and say this work and show how important it is, the more we'll be received.

And I think the Black women's history is a really, in particular, is a really growing field of scholarship, but that's why the work mostly of Black women, but not all, is really pushing against scholars who said that this work didn't matter. So, I would just encourage you to continue to publish, find spaces that will accept your work and stay in the game, don't give up.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva: I have something. I think that we need to understand the structure of the academy. We work in HWCUs, most of us, Historically White Colleges and Universities, and we have to be honest about the fact that until the other day, these places were all white. They opened the door for a few of us, and that's it, and they have been trying to slowly push that door back and close it and keep a select few in the house.

And I think that although I do, and I have other students and I have to get them in the middle level arguments about how to solve by, how to maneuver, how to publish, how to do everything in a white-oriented discipline, I am a person who believes in collective action.

If the problems are systemic, we need systemic solutions. That means that we, the people, need to do a second round of rebellions. And I think that the academy has been a little bit slow in responding to the streets. So, we are here literally because people put their bodies out there in the 1960s.

And I think that people are putting their bodies again out there, and it is incumbent upon all of us to force the changes that people are pushing in the streets into the academy. Do not allow this moment to pass without all of us forcing change, structural change, systemic change.

Don't allow them to tell you, "Oh, well, we'll hire one more person of color," because the game of hiding one and losing two, losing two and getting one, you'll never win with that. So, we need systemic big-time change at this historical juncture.

Sandy Darity: I would like to interject something which is, I think that one of the critical issues for folks who are inclined to think outside of a very narrow box in terms of economics and outside of the traditional ideological boundaries, is that you have to be very careful about determining which Ph.D. program you go to, and you have to do an analysis of the types of interest, work, orientation, degree of open-mindedness of the faculty in a specific department.

And so, don't simply be drawn to the highest cache department that accepts you, but also look for a department in which there will really be an opportunity for you to pursue the kind of work that's of interest to you.

Mario Luis Small: Just a small point to add to these points, I think the question is extremely important. I agree with what's been said before, I think they're all excellent points. I would add one more, which is when you're thinking about the problems you're working on and the kinds of papers you're writing, there's an extent to which you may want to say, "I want to bring a different perspective to this question that hasn't been brought before," and some of the pushback that you'll feel will probably come from people who are just not used to that perspective or sort of won't even know how to evaluate it.

A different take on that is to say, "Look, here are eight things we've always done. My perspective can show you what's wrong with two or three of them." In other words, identify the holes in your existing paradigms, of which there are many, and intervene that way.

I think, especially if you're starting out, if you don't have a lot of influence, if you do want to have an influence on the mainstream, I think beginning with the clear problems that, and we've heard several of them today, the clear problems that existing perspectives have on a problem you think is important is that wedge that fair-minded people who are perhaps less open would still find palatable and might give you an in.

Suresh Naidu: Martha. Marty.

Marty: Hey, Suresh. Suresh, there's an Aaron Coleman who's posted in chat and he has a question and had a question before I do, but doesn't know how to raise his hand, so why don't you take Aaron first and then come back to me.

Suresh Naidu: Got it. So, Aaron asks, "What do scholars of racial capitalism have to contribute to the field of economics? Cedric Robinson's theory of racial capitalism influenced the work of stratification economics." How do I ask the question? So yeah, on racial capitalism and its relationship to stratification economics, I almost think Eduardo and Sandy should tee off on this.

Sandy Darity: I'm not going to tee off too hard because I'm not really sure what people typically mean by racial capitalism, and I'd love to hear a definition of that before I proceeded to try to link it to stratification economics. But I am going to post the link to a couple of discussions of

stratification economics that I've contributed to, one short, one long, and I hope that's helpful to people.

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva: Yeah. For me, the issue is this idea of the pure capitalist system that many of us taking Economics 101 were sort of forced to believe that capitalism is the system larger than actors. And this understanding that what happened 500 years ago — the genocide, slavery, et cetera — left an imprint in the system, and that actually, the capitalist order could not have developed and could not continue without racism.

That's what I mean by heralding the importance of the discussion on racialized capitalism. And Sandy, as you probably know, there is a burgeoning discussion out there of returning to the Cedric Robinson's arguments and trying to tease out a better definition, et cetera.

We may not be still there, but I think that the instinct of connecting race and capitalism as twin components of a social order are important, because the alternative in economics and I say in sociology too, is assuming that capitalism is this pure system of rational actors, particularly the notion of the bourgeoisie as the super rational actors who might use racism as an ideology, with their violin music, an ideology used by the bourgeoisie to divide workers assuming that capitalists are not racialized actors, which makes no sense to me.

Sandy Darity: Yeah. I think one of the things that has always disturbed me about this notion of racial capitalism is I'm not sure that there's been any other type of capitalism at the beginning because of the centrality of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery to capitalist economic development at its beginnings.

But I also don't think that racialism or racism is confined to capitalism either. And so, I've never been fully certain of the utility of the concept of racial capitalism, but yeah, that's ... I'm idiosyncratic on many counts.

Suresh Naidu: Marty.

Marty: Thank you, Suresh. And Suresh, thank you to you and Gabe and others for putting this together, this has been great. Thank you. I was formulating my question when Sandy made his comment about finding yourself a department where you can thrive. And because I find myself

often, in talking with graduate students, such as Suresh when he was a graduate student, trying to help people find a path where they can make a difference.

And remembering, one of my vivid memories from my undergraduate days was a professor who sort of hid who he truly was because he figured once he got tenure, then he could reveal who he truly was, and then of course he didn't get tenure and he had a nervous breakdown.

And so, trying to help graduate students, and I'm looking for advice here, help graduate students find their way to make a difference in the world, but at the same time knowing that if they go into the academic world in order to have a difference for a lifetime, they have to get tenure somewhere, and that the tenuring, that as much as we may want to affect change, we can't smack all of our colleagues upside the head as fast as we might like to and have that impact on the tenuring system.

So, what do we say? And I don't want them all to say, "I really should just study sociology because I want economics to change in a way so that it can make a difference in a way that it should." Okay, that's sort of the dilemma. Sandy.

Sandy Darity: No, I agree. It's a struggle I always have with students who think that they should go to other fields because economics is so laden with resistance to the kind of work they want to do. But I hope that they will join in anticipation of it some point really turning the corner in what happens in the economics profession.

Marty: Yeah.

Suresh Naidu: I also think it starts in undergrad, like it's not even at the Ph.D. level, it's just like tons of people. It sounds as soon as my undergrads that take Intro Econ and they think, "This doesn't speak to me at all," and switch out into sociology.

Marty: Yeah. I worry about the principles classes that still are teaching the homo economic rational man operating in efficient markets and it's like, "Dude."

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva: One quick point: Sociology is not salvation either, so they may switch to sociology and then keep switching that out. They may now pick anthropology, and then after anthropology, God knows where.

Dani Rodrik: I can come in here. I just want to maybe prompt Mario a little bit more because I thought that what he said provided a bit of a hopeful strategy. I mean, I think for graduate students, I think you don't have to solve everything and append the field from your doctoral studies on. I think what you want to do is be true to your own values, pursue the research agenda and interest that you have. But you have chosen a discipline, and it's very difficult for as a graduate student to do something that's going to be perceived as undermining the foundational methods and norms of the discipline.

And I think what I heard Mario was saying is that, "Well, there is a strategy or you can find anomalies or you can find new results that seem inconsistent with the maintained working hypothesis of the discipline and start making inroads in that way." And I think economists like surprises. Economists like paradoxes.

I think that there is some path there that I want to encourage all the graduate students who are actually listening to this that there might be ways, but it was mostly to call Mario again to expand for us.

Mario Luis Small: Yeah, I appreciate that. I was going to actually say a couple of things. The first is consistent with that point. I mean, the useful thing is that a lot of the traditional models in economics about many of the things we're discussing are in fact either wrong or insufficient. In other words, there's a lot of space in which to actually make a contribution.

The second thing I would say is that, it's actually a follow-up to a point I think Sandy made at the beginning. You hinted about the fact that economists, I think you said, tend to colonize other disciplines or something like that or subject matters. I think that's true for many areas, but I actually think that's an opening.

For example, in the economics of education there's a lot of economists, I should say, who write in the space of education. But at this point it's actually quite hard to get away with being an economist writing in education and ignore all of the work by psychologists who work in the field, sociologists who work in the field and so on.

One of the areas I started out with in the study of urban poverty and inequality, economists have started in that area as well. Raj and others have ... Nathaniel Hendren and others have done a lot of papers recently on neighborhood effects and the role of neighborhood poverty in your life chances, which is a traditional sociological field.

And I've noticed way more openness. I've talked that team quite a bit, and probably more than a similar team would have talked to economists 20 years ago, and to me that seems like another sort of wedge point where a different kind of perspective can come in to mainstream thinking.

So, I think Dani is right — the first thing to do is sort of figure out what you want to do with yourself, what are your actual values, what you actually care about, and if you end up caring about, I'm just going to use the phrase mainstream economics, and I know that probably means something different to all of you, but if you care about sort of making an inroads in that, there are a couple of spaces, both topic areas and again finding issues that the field hasn't addressed where you can make an inroads and establish any kind of influence that Martha was talking about and get tenure.

Suresh Naidu: So, we advertised to 5:30 p.m. and I wish we had more time to continue this conversation. We were thinking about whether we should have another one and it seems like we should, and so we'll try to organize that as well. I just want to thank our speakers, our panelists and Sandy for moderating. Thanks everyone. And look forward to continuing this conversation on the internet, I guess. See you, everyone.

Sandy Darity: Thank you.

Mario Luis Small: Thank you.

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