Embedded in whiteness: how the new economic sociology came to ignore race & racism

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Abstract

Race is central to economic life, but race is not central to economic sociology. We explore how this inattention to race and racism developed. First, we outline a history of the new economic sociology as it emerged in the 1980s and defined itself against dominant trends in economics and sociology through its emphasis on the role of meso-level social orders in shaping economic action. Second, we offer a partial explanation for how economic sociology came to ignore race, highlighting both programmatic and contextual factors. Economic sociology's intellectual agenda emphasized identifying the local social factors that made possible the seemingly rational behavior of elite economic actors. As such, economic sociologists studied primarily white men and white-dominated institutions, but, in line with understandings of race and racism at the time and in keeping with the field's emphasis on networks over category memberships, did not recognize the role of race in these settings. Economic sociologists did not study poverty or racial inequality, and so economic sociology was understood as not being about race. This strategy was capable of succeeding in an academic context where studies of race and racism centered racial attitudes, failed to theorize whiteness, and typically treated race as an individual-level variable. Third, we elaborate on two consistent foci of the subfield – ethnic enclaves and corporate interlocks. The canonical literature on ethnic enclaves conceptualized these spaces as sites for researching social capital, but *not* as sites for studying processes of racialization, leading this literature to largely ignore the role of racism in differences between ethnic enclaves. In contrast, the literature on interlocks ignored race and gender, despite the overwhelming dominance of white men on corporate boards.

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Introduction

The modern global economy is a fundamentally racialized institution. Society's current system of capitalism was made possible through racialized violence: the exploitation of Black slaves, the displacement of racialized indigenous populations from their homes, and extraction of resources from these indigenous racialized populations to benefit the Global North (Melamed 2015, Kelley 2017, Bhattacharyya 2018, Ralph and Singhal 2019). Yet the modern canon of economic sociology ignores the central role of racism both in the formation of this economic structure and in contemporary economic life. Elsewhere, we document the new economic sociology's failures to engage with the sociology of race (Hirschman and Garbes 2019). In this chapter, we ask: how did this systematic neglect of race and racism in the subfield happen, and what are its consequences for the empirical work that economic sociology produces?

To answer this question, we outline a history of the new economic sociology as it distinguished itself in the 1980s. We treat the new economic sociology as a scientific/intellectual movement in the terms of Frickel and Gross (2005: 206): a collective effort "to pursue research programs or projects for thought in the face of resistance from others in the scientific or intellectual community." We analyze the programmatic strategies of economic sociology as a movement in the context of the intellectual opportunity structure that the movement confronted. This analysis suggests how and why economic sociology came to ignore race and why ignoring race did not present a barrier to the movement's success. Economic sociology distinguished itself from both neoclassical economics and older work in sociology and through an intellectual agenda that emphasized the role of local social factors that made possible the rational behavior of elite economic actors (Swedberg 1997). As such, economic sociologists studied primarily white men and white-dominated institutions, but, in line with understandings of race and racism at the time and in keeping with the field's emphasis on networks over category memberships, did not recognize the role of race in these settings. Economic sociologists did not study poverty or racial inequality, and so economic sociology was understood as not being about race. This strategy was capable of succeeding in an academic context where studies of race and racism centered racial attitudes, failed to theorize whiteness, and typically treated race as a variable in service of research about assimilation and the decline (or persistence) of individual-level prejudice.

At the end of the chapter, we consider the consequences of this oversight by exploring two consistent empirical foci of the subfield – ethnic enclaves and corporate interlocks. We demonstrate how each empirical investigation systematically failed to account for race and racism throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The literature on ethnic enclaves conceptualized these empirical spaces as sites for researching social capital, but *not* as a site for studying processes of racialization, leading this literature to largely ignore the role of racism in differences between ethnic enclaves, while the literature on interlocks ignored race and gender despite the overwhelming dominance of white men on corporate boards. New research in both areas shows how foregrounding an analysis of race and racism can enrich our understanding of both sites and their role in contemporary racial capitalism.

The New Economic Sociology

Although sociologists have long analyzed economic life in one way or another, the contemporary subfield of economic sociology emerged only in the 1980s.¹ In this section, we briefly outline the history of the field before reviewing the main theoretical, methodological, and empirical approaches in the new economic sociology. We show how these intellectual strategies reflected economic sociology's programmatic goals of competing with neoclassical economics by offering an alternative account of rational action that foregrounded the role of social structure. These strategies led economic sociology to focus empirically on high-status domains dominated by white men, but not to recognize the role of race and racism in these contexts. If economic sociology could show how the actions of Fortune 500 companies, stock traders, and white-collar job seekers were shaped by social structures, it could make a strong case that economic action was *always* embedded in social life. The intellectual opportunity structure confronting economic sociology (discussed more in the following sections) rewarded this approach, and provided minimal incentives for economic sociology to address race or racial inequality.

In the mid-20th century, Neil Smelser attempted to extend Talcott Parsons' structural functionalist approach to a fuller analysis of economic life (Parsons and Smelser 1956, Smelser 1963). This "old" economic sociology was largely abandoned over the next 20 years, alongside the parallel tradition of industrial sociology (Granovetter 1990). Building on the agenda-setting research of Harrison White and Mark Granovetter, the new economic sociology distinguished itself from older engagements with economic life by rejecting Parsonian structural functionalism and largely sidestepping debates in Marxist thought. Instead, the new economic sociology focused its attention on engaging with increasingly dominant rational choice arguments associated with neoclassical economics (Swedberg 1990). Over the 1980s and 1990s, a community of scholars, mostly white men affiliated with Harvard or Stony Brook University, developed a coherent set of theoretical, methodological, and empirical approaches that together constituted the subfield. These approaches were well-represented in publications in the discipline's top journals, as well as a new collection of handbooks, readers, and edited volumes. In the year 2000, these scholars officially formed the Economic Sociology section of the ASA. The initial membership of the section overlapped strongly with members of the Organizations, Occupations, and Work section (39% of the 411 members in 2000), with significant overlaps with Sections on Comparative and Historical Sociology, Political Sociology, Sociology of Culture, Political Economy of the World System, and the Theory Section. Notably, less than 5% of the economic sociology section were members of the section on Racial and Ethnic Minorities (a pattern that persists to this day).²

Theoretically, economic sociology was most strongly associated with Granovetter's (1985) concept of "embeddedness" which drew attention to the role of meso-level social orders in shaping economic action as they channeled information, facilitated trust or opportunism, and shaped

¹ In this section we draw heavily on existing secondary sources, especially Swedberg (1990), Swedberg (1997), Convert and Heilbron (2007) and Bandelj (2019) along with our own reading of a variety of influential texts, including edited collections and handbooks as well as articles published in the 1980s two main generalist journals *American Sociological Review* and *American Journal of Sociology* by those identified in Convert and Heilbron (2007) as central to the new economic sociology.

² Data provided by the American Sociological Association. See also Bandelj (2019) and Hirschman and Garbes (2019) for a further discussion of the demographics of economic sociology.

evaluations of status.³ This theoretical argument became particularly associated with studies of social networks, arguably the most distinctive aspect of economic sociology in this period (Bandelj 2019). Embeddedness was also compatible with newly dominant neo-institutional theories of organizational fields (e.g. DiMaggio and Powell 1983) which similarly centered the role of meso-level social orders in shaping economic action, albeit without emphasizing direct interaction or ties (Convert and Heilbron 2007).

Embeddedness stood in stark and explicit contrast to neoclassical economic arguments that posited individuals as atomistic, self-interested actors with complete information and stable preferences. The new economic sociology did not reject the idea of rational economic action, but rather the idea that rational action was the result of atomized individual decision-making (Swedberg 1997). As Bandelj (2019: 495-496) notes, economic sociology's approach focused on contesting the atomism of existing economic accounts by invoking the role of networks in acquiring and interpreting information subject to conditions of bounded rationality rather than challenging the assumption of self-interest or rational calculation *per se*: "the focus remained on rational economic agents, except that they were then seen as firmly influenced by social ties... the network economic sociology in its early years ended up largely compatible with economics in its central assumption of rational action."⁴ Granovetter's economic actor calculated *with* his social network; local social structures made rationality possible (Callon 1998).

Methodologically, economic sociology included diverse approaches from ethnographic studies of financial markets (Baker 1984) to formal models of production markets (White 1981) and statistical analysis of corporate management and decisionmaking (Fligstein 1987). The field was united by shared metaphors (networks, fields) and shared theoretical targets (atomistic understandings of economic life), but was methodologically pluralist.

Empirically, economic sociology studies covered a wide range of topics including labor markets (Granovetter 1974), production markets (White 1981), financial markets (Baker 1984), ethnic enclaves (Portes & Jensen 1989) and large American corporations understood as a field or network (Fligstein 1987, Mizuchi 1989). Each of these sites offered economic sociologists an opportunity to demonstrate the importance of networks or fields as mechanisms which could explain variation in the decisions made by economic actors, variations which would not be explicable by an atomistic approach.

This combination of theory, methodology, and empirics came with an at times implicit, at times explicit, rejection of the importance of the personal traits of individuals in explaining economic action. Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994: 1414-1415) dubbed this tendency "the anticategorical imperative", which asserts that "one can never simply appeal to such attributes as class membership or class consciousness, political party affiliation, age, gender, social status, religious

³ By the mid-2000s, a Polanyian approach to political economy and a "markets and morals" perspective joined the Granovetterian tradition as constituting the dominant traditions in the subfield (Krippner and Alvarez 2007, Fourcade and Healy 2007). Because of its dominance in the foundational 1980s-1990s, we focus primarily on the Granovetterian approach here.

⁴ A significant exception to this pattern was Zelizer's historical-cultural approach (e.g. Zelizer 1989). This tradition increased in importance in the field in the 2000s, associated with the markets & morals movement, but was somewhat marginal in the initial years as demonstrated by Convert and Heilbron's (2007: 42-43) citation analysis.

beliefs, ethnicity, sexual orientation, psychological predispositions, and so on, in order to explain why people behave the way they do." While the anticategorical imperative and associated network theorizing is, in some sense, deeply compatible with structural and even poststructural theories of race and gender (Seeley 2014), this imperative clashed sharply with the dominant understanding of race and racism as individual-level phenomena in the 1980s.

In practice, economic sociologists often studied domains in which traditional categorical variation was minimal: doctors in the 1950s (Burt 1987), American corporate executives in the mid-20th century (Useem and Karabel 1986, Fligstein 1987), or bond traders in the 1980s (Baker 1984). That is, economic sociologists studied variation in the actions of elite white men, variation which thus necessarily could not be explained by a simplistic appeal to categorical traits but could be explained by heterogeneous social networks or field-level dynamics. This focus was consistent with economic sociology's goal of showing how even the most rational actors were influenced by social forces, that social structures were necessary to accomplish rationality. In contrast, work on the economic actions of poor Black women would likely not have accomplished these goals as rationality has long been understood in classed, raced, and gendered terms with rich white men presumed maximally rational and with the behavior of others explicable through "culture" (Espeland 1998, Pearson 2000, Rodríguez-Muñiz 2015).⁵

By exploring primarily contexts dominated by white men without calling attention to their race or gender, economic sociology built a theoretical edifice on top of findings specific to one (dominant) group of actors and organizations.⁶ The meaningful variation addressed by these models was, "why do some elite white men make decision X while others make decision Y?" While there were some calls to apply network ideas to the study of racial inequality (Granovetter 1974), the work that took up this call (e.g. Smith 2005) never entered into the canon of the field and was absent from major readers and handbooks that constitute its core texts (Hirschman and Garbes 2019).⁷ Further, even these applications did not reconsider network theory itself with concepts of race and gender in mind. A later paper on the role of social capital in promotions exemplifies the result of this program. In earlier work, Burt (1992) found that networks rich in "structural holes" (ties bridging

⁵ Howard Aldrich's career presents an interesting case for understanding these dynamics and an example of "paths not taken". In the 1970s, Aldrich conducted several studies focused on racial inequality in business ownership in cities as a potential cause of racial inequality in labor markets (e.g. Aldrich 1973, Aldrich & Reiss 1976). This line of research was not incorporated into economic sociology when the subfield was institutionalized in the 1980s-1990s, and Aldrich himself moved on to other topics, including entrepreneurship (Aldrich, personal communication on file with the authors). Interestingly, entrepreneurship studies, much like economic sociology with which it partially overlaps, has focused heavily on the most prestigious, high-status forms of entrepreneurship such venture-capital funded technology start-ups (Aldrich & Ruef 2018).

⁶ Research on ethnic enclaves is a notable exception which we discuss below.

⁷ The history of the uptake of Granovetter's *Getting a Job* (1974; 1994) offers an interesting window into this dynamic. In both the original 1974 edition and especially in the expanded 1995 edition, Granovetter suggested how ideas learned from studying how white professional men's networks shaped their job opportunities might be used to make sense of racial inequality and particularly urban Black men's difficulty finding jobs. What's notable for our purposes here is that understanding racial inequality is seen primarily as a potential application, not a core topic of the field, and that most secondary discussions of *Getting a Job* ignore its discussions of racial inequality (Granovetter, personal communication on file with authors).

otherwise unconnected groups) were beneficial to men employee's promotion outcomes. Analyzing data for women, though, posed a challenge to the theory as networks rich in structural holes seemed to have the opposite effect, harming promotion chances. As Burt (1998) put it: "Women here pose a puzzle." Theories built on the behavior of white men were unable to explain the actions, successes, and setbacks of others – who thus became a theoretical puzzle. Although Burt's paper is titled "The Gender of Social Capital", the argument eschews any specificity to the category of gender, collapsing the argument to one of generic legitimacy and arguing that anyone deemed illegitimate in a setting is better served by borrowing social capital from a mentor or advocate rather than developing their own network.

Beyond treating white men as the theoretical default, these analyses implicitly took for granted the set of actors in these positions of power. That is, by centering their research on variation in behavior *among* the elite, economic sociology in this period waved away the question of why the elite was composed the way it was, and why it was so exclusionary. This research program was aimed at overturning core principles of economics and it assumed that studying elite white men was the best case for so doing – that is, if you can show the institutional and network forces governing their decisions, then you have shown how even those believed to be the most rational are in some sense embedded. The focus helped to legitimate the new economic sociology as an intellectual project that countered both the atomism of economics and the structural functionalism predominant in the old economic sociology. But the approach also reinforced the sense that economic life is "about" the decisions of powerful white men, understood as the pinnacle of rationality.

Sociology of Race

As the preceding section demonstrates, the new economic sociology emerged as a subfield dedicated to challenging neoclassical approaches in economics and structural functionalism in sociology through a strong theoretical focus on field- and network-level processes. Its empirical studies, with the notable exception of work on ethnic enclaves, tended to focus on the actions of and ties between elite white men without acknowledging their racial position. This section outlines the concurrent development of the sociology of race to illuminate part of the intellectual opportunity structure that enabled economic sociology to succeed without centering race. As we will demonstrate below, throughout the 1980s, sociological scholarship on race featured in prestigious mainstream journals tended to focus on individual-level attitudes, avoided invoking whiteness as a salient factor of analysis, and tended to collapse categories of race and ethnicity.

To understand how race was conceptualized as the new economic sociology emerged, it is useful to first briefly trace the contours of dominant race scholarship in the early 20th century. As McKee (1993) notes in his history of the sociological perspective on race, while claims of the biological inferiority of nonwhite races fell out of favor for sociologists in the 1920s, the argument of cultural inferiority remained prevalent among race scholars, and assimilation became a measure of the success of nonwhite people. This perspective, advanced by Robert E. Park's influential Chicago School, was not without its critics: some European sociologists deemed American scholarship on race to be both ahistorical and parochial (McKee 1993:12); others argued that there was an erroneous tendency to assume gradual progress away from racism as society became more "modern" (Lyman 1972; Blauner 1972). Nevertheless, the assimilationist perspective gained

prominence in mainstream journals while alternative accounts of race and racism that took more seriously the agency of nonwhite subjects were consistently marginalized (Morris 2007).

The assimilationist perspective remained dominant throughout the 1960s, underestimating the agency of nonwhite social actors and overestimating the power of white social actors in the years leading up to the Civil Rights Era. The positive view of assimilationism, rooted in an argument of cultural inferiority, obscures the roots of slavery and genocide in favor of an ahistorical conceptualization of group difference (Steinberg 1971). Such analyses conflated the situations of Black Americans and white ethnics, pointing to the relatively higher economic and educational success of the latter in order to “create ethnic heroes and racial villains” (Steinberg 1971: 263).

As McKee notes, this systematic white perspective of white superiority that left assimilation to be the only reasonably good outcome of “the Negro Problem” limited the ability of dominant race theorists to understand the Civil Rights Movement. In the 1970s, the sociology of race had to contend with the failure to anticipate this large-scale, successful social movement, and that then current perspectives on race relations were insufficient in explaining the Black-led movement. While reckoning with this failure brought about more scholarship challenging assimilationism and the culture of poverty, no clear alternative paradigm emerged in mainstream journals until the late 1980s and 1990s, when prominent scholars published influential scholarship on race and racism as embedded within state projects (Omi and Winant 1986) and as central to the logics of meso-level social structures (Bonilla-Silva 1997).

In the interim decades of the 1970s and 1980s, then, as the new economic sociology emerged, mainstream sociological scholarship on race remained in transition from theories of assimilation to seeking a new way to conceptualize race. Race as a theoretical concept in mainstream sociology was still largely subsumed under ethnicity, class, and nation-based theories prior to the 1990s (Winant 2000). While scholars self-consciously shifted away from explicit “culture of poverty” arguments, which had been stigmatized in sociological circles by the 1970s for unduly pathologizing Black communities (Rodríguez-Muñiz 2015), their influence remained. William Julius Wilson’s influential book, *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978), only slightly shifted away from the “culture of poverty” argument by studiously avoiding the term culture throughout (Diamond 2009). Nevertheless, the book gained great traction in mainstream sociological scholarship, and by 2011 was cited in nearly 800 empirical articles (Wilson 2011). Its argument, that class was becoming more salient than racial discrimination in understanding Black disadvantage, set off a series of debates over whether or not race was becoming a less significant factor in shaping social life. More broadly, with its empirical focus on Black and other nonwhite communities, mainstream scholarship in this era marked nonwhite social conditions as the location salient to understandings of race. Much as the sociology focused on poverty has tended to focus on the poor to the exclusion of considering the context of the lives of the nonpoor (Rodríguez-Muñiz 2015), this focus on race only when related to discussions of nonwhite disadvantage marks nonwhite communities as raced while leaving all-white contexts comparatively shielded from interrogation.

In a review of mainstream sociological scholarship on race and ethnicity Jack Niemonen analyzed 677 articles from the *American Journal of Sociology*, the *American Sociological Review*, and *Social Forces* published between January 1969 to December 1995 “that

dealt with any aspect of racial and ethnic relations, or introduced race or ethnicity as (potentially) significant variables in other analyses” (Niemonen 1997: 16). Niemonen found the majority of these articles were quantitative in methodological approach, and issues of race and ethnicity were most frequently engaged when discussing other subfields like the sociology of stratification and work. Further, many articles that engaged with the concept of race operationalized definitions that reflected Census Bureau categories without critical reflection of the processes that created such categories (see also Hartmann 2003). For the purposes of tracking the state of the scholarship on race during the emergence of the new economic sociology, we narrowed the 677 articles identified by Niemonen to focus on 110 articles from AJS and ASR between 1980 and 1989. Of these, ninety-two employ primarily quantitative methods; at least thirty-five pieces engage race as a variable; sixteen pieces focus on racial attitudes and other individual social psychological metrics. By contrast, in only five, structural racism serves as a key factor in the analysis. Apart from research focused on white racial attitudes towards Black or nonwhite populations, only one article focused on the race of white people - i.e., the understanding of white people as a racialized collective (Lewis 2004) - as a salient factor of analysis: Barkan's (1984) study of anti-civil rights legal systems in the south as white institutions. There are eight articles within this analysis that also fall within the subfield of economic sociology; all eight concern the topics of ethnic enclaves and immigrant entrepreneurship. As we review later in this chapter, none of these pieces of economic sociology engage the role of racism, nor do they differentiate between race and ethnicity as concepts.

In summary, the predominant scholarship on race and ethnicity that appeared in top general sociology journals at the time tended to: (1) operationalize race as a variable, (2) focus on racial attitudes rather than the structures that produce racial inequity, (3) mark race as a salient factor only when discussing marginalized groups, (4) subsume race under different subfields, and (5) collapse definitions of race and ethnicity. As discussed in the previous section, economic sociology sought to define itself in part through the anti-categorical imperative: the emphasis on the importance on network location rather than individual identity ascription (Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994). As such, the operationalization of race as a variable ascribed to individuals and perpetuated through individual-level attitudes ran counter to the dominant approaches of economic sociologists at the time. Furthermore, the collapse of race and ethnicity as concepts during this time in mainstream sociological journals was inflected in the formative pieces of economic sociology at this time that were later canonized.

While the intellectual opportunity structure did not oblige or even encourage economic sociologists to incorporate insights from the sociology of race in the 1980s, that structure would change over the next few decades as scholarship on structural racism became more dominant from the 1990s onward. However, by the time this shift occurred, the new economic sociology was already concretized as a legitimate subfield with its own canon that did not consider race as a relevant structuring force in its analysis (Hirschman and Garbes 2019). We now see opportunities for economic sociology to reconstitute itself by incorporating more recent structural accounts of race, which are far more compatible with economic sociology's theoretical and methodological approaches.

A Racialized Markets Perspective

The new economic sociology emerged in the 1980s at a time of transition for the sociology of race. In years since, the sociology of race has taken a turn towards a more structural conceptualization of race, racism and racial inequality that is more compatible with the theoretical and methodological interests that unite economic sociology as a subfield.⁸ Two notable works have helped shape the sociology of race's theoretical turn towards the structural: in 1986, *Racial Formation in the United States*, and in 2003, *Racism without Racists*.

In their 1986 book, Michael Omi and Howard Winant develop a theory of racial formation, which they define as “the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed” (109). Racial formation theory focuses on how macro-level racial projects, often carried out by the state, shape individual racial attitudes, and in turn, racist acts serve to reinforce and strengthen these projects. For economic sociology, the racial formation process foregrounds the history of how race developed meaning over time, rather than looking at race as a category to ascribe to an individual.

In *Racism without Racists*, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2003) theorizes how racial ideologies are inscribed into institutions, creating racialized social systems. Bonilla-Silva argues that racial inequality can continue without overtly racist ideologies due to these racialized social systems. Because racism is systematically embedded in social structures rather than located in individual attitudes, the task of studying race involves the unearthing of the mechanisms that undergird racialized social systems. Although existing scholarship has primarily emphasized the role of the state, this same approach suggests the importance of understanding how race is inscribed and reinscribed in markets and other meso-level economic structures (fields, networks), which in turn implies the possibility of fruitful bridgework between economic sociology and the sociology of race (Hirschman and Garbes 2019).

The concluding two sections below will consider two empirical foci: ethnic enclaves and corporate interlocks. In the case of ethnic enclaves, the literature engaged with ideas within race scholarship which collapsed race and ethnicity. In the case of corporate interlocks, there was a systematic lack of engagement with the concept of race. We argue that current dominant paradigms in the sociology of race—in particular, conceptualizations of colonial legacies and whiteness as structuring forces of continued racism and racial inequality—are compatible with these two empirical foci.

Example: Ethnic enclaves and racial formation

A central empirical focus within the new economic sociology is the analysis of ethnic enclaves. Research on the topic gained mainstream prominence in sociology in the 1980s; there were eight articles published between 1980 and 1989 on ethnic enclaves within the *American Journal of Sociology* and the *American Sociological Review* alone. Wilson and Portes amend dual labor market theory to define the existence of a third market, that of immigrant enterprises where migrants of predominantly the same origin work (Wilson and Portes 1980). Later pieces bring specificity and further test why ethnic enclaves emerge and how they function. Notable among the conversations is whether ethnic groups choose to create their own enclaves by their own preference

⁸ For a more elaborate engagement with the soc of race's potential contributions, see Hirschman and Garbes 2019

or cultural particularities or due primarily to exclusion and disadvantage (Sanders and Nee 1996; Light 1984; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). In addition, research found that economic opportunities in these ethnic enclaves are gendered (Portes and Jensen 1989) and that the benefits of enclaves vary for employers vs employees (Sanders and Nee 1987).

The paradigmatic example of ethnic enclaves during this decade was the case of Cuban émigrés in Miami which was used to demonstrate the existence of an enclave economy apart from the existing notion of a dual primary and secondary labor market (Wilson and Portes 1980). This ethnic group was later compared with Black Americans as a racial group to understand differences in solidarities and economic outcomes. Portes and Sensenbrenner (1993), for instance, engage the notion of the bounded solidarity of ethnic groups by comparing Black and Cuban solidarity. By way of an entry point, Portes and Sensenbrenner discuss Miami's 1989 riots over the police shooting of two Black cyclists by a policeman born in Colombia. Colombians in Miami, as well as the larger Latinx community, reacted to the backlash from the shooting by donating a total \$150,000 for his legal bills. However, calling this bounded solidarity without considering the racism, and particularly the antiblackness, baked into this group-based support, is a striking oversight in the article. The role of racism is also absent from a later analysis of the differences between Black and Cuban businesses in Miami, citing lower levels of dependence on and engagement with the primary labor market as a main factor in the relative success of the Cuban American enclave in Miami (Wilson and Martin 1982).

In the decades since, sociologists of race have identified the importance of the distinction between race and ethnicity. In particular, sociologists of race have noted how dominant narratives of American life obscure that ethnic groups can be differently racialized, which shapes the durability of discrimination against particular immigrant groups (Steinberg 2001). Furthermore, individuals who share an ethnicity can have different racial identities, such as white and Black Hispanics (Golash-Boza and Darity 2008). By collapsing race into ethnicity, discussions of ethnic economies in economic sociology downplay or ignore historical and contemporary forms of structural racism that impact how both immigrant and non-immigrant communities are conceptualized in the American racial order.

By contrast, more recent immigrant entrepreneurship literature shows us ways to complicate the relationship between race and ethnicity, as well as to understand racism as a factor shaping economic life. Nazareno (2018) considers larger geopolitical forces in her study of how some Filipino American women have agentially pursued entrepreneurship in healthcare over the past forty years. Nazareno illuminates the macrolevel economic forces that bring particular middle-class, well-educated Filipinas to the United States, including U.S. colonial presence in the Philippines which Americanized healthcare training and thereby created laborers that were more easily imported into the United States context. Some Filipina healthcare workers, once arrived, entered into long term care industry in response to governmental deinstitutionalization that created a gap in health services to marginalized communities of color. Nazareno demonstrates that the government shifts blame to these entrepreneurs, blaming them when the gap left behind by deinstitutionalization is not adequately filled. The study provides a complex understanding of the creation of a racialized and classed group of immigrant entrepreneurs shaped by the logics of racist foreign and domestic economic policy. This conceptualization is compatible with racial formation theory's emphasis on the state's role in shaping racial projects.

In another instance of bridgework, Nopper (2010) brings Bonilla-Silva's concept of colorblind racism to bear on economic sociology to unsettle an oft-cited concept in the ethnic enclave literature: the disadvantage thesis. This concept contends that some ethnic groups, due to exclusion from dominant American markets, become entrepreneurs in ethnic enclaves as a response to disadvantage. Using the case of Korean American entrepreneurs in New York and Los Angeles, Nopper draws from literature on colorblindness to analyze discourse about Korean American entrepreneurial bankers within ethnic enclaves. Nopper interviews institutional members of both smaller Korean banks and larger, national level mainstream banks. When asked about why Korean immigrants enter entrepreneurial trades, answers conform to the disadvantage thesis, noting the exclusion from the labor market as a push factor. In the process, however, Nopper demonstrates that respondents naturalize group characteristics, claiming that Koreans have particular dispositions that determine how they ultimately mitigate their disadvantage.

Nopper uses the concept of colorblind racism to analyze interviewees' framing. In respondent descriptions of labor market exclusion, racism is absent from the explanations for this exclusion, citing reasons of language and education. In marking the mentality of hard work as particularly Asian or Korean, the discourse promotes a race-specific cultural trope that upholds a model minority myth that ultimately reinforces racial stereotypes. In bringing in the concept of colorblind racism as a frame to understand existing dominant explanations for the emergence of particular immigrant entrepreneurs, the work connects racial attitudes and discourse that reinforce cultural tropes about Asian immigrant groups to the naturalization of racialized social systems.

Example: Large American Corporations, Interlocks, and Whiteness

While early research in economic sociology on ethnic enclaves conflated race and ethnicity and downplayed racism, most areas of economic sociology simply ignored race. This oversight often occurred in studies investigating white-dominated contexts. Research on large American corporations exemplifies this trend and showcases how economic sociology's oversight of race manifested in one of its central research programs.

Publicly-traded corporations are required to have a board of directors; an "interlock" describes a situation where the same individual sits on two boards of directors. There is a long history of interest in interlocking directorates stretching back to corporate governance theorists Berle and Means (1932) and through debates in the mid-20th century between power elite theorists, like Domhoff and Mills, and pluralists like Dahl (see Mizruchi 2004 for a review). In the 1970s and 1980s economic sociologists took up the study of interlocks, both to continue addressing questions inspired by this debate over corporate governance and the political power of large business (such as Mintz and Schwartz [1981] on financial hegemony, and Mizruchi [1989] on how interlocks shaped corporate political donations), but also because interlocks represented an ideal site to study the role of meso-level social orders in economic life (see Mizruchi 1996 for a detailed summary of interlocks research in this era). In an era before Facebook and Twitter, interlocks became the "model system" (Guggenheim and Krause 2012) for studies of social networks.⁹ The complete

⁹ And indeed, research on social networks in this era explicitly informed the design of internet networks from Google's PageRank (which draws heavily on network measures of status and whose patent explicitly cites work by network sociologists) to Facebook's friend recommendation algorithms (Healy 2015).

interlock network was both observable in a way that few networks were in this period, and connected to obviously important economic and political action.

These features made the interlock network attractive to economic sociologists in the 1980s-1990s, but they did not determine which aspects of that network merited attention – or inattention. Research in the sociology of race has long argued that part of the ideological power of whiteness rests on how whiteness is typically unmarked; race is treated as something only nonwhite people (or organizations) possess (Lewis 2004). For example, "Historically Black Colleges and Universities" (HBCUs) and "Black banks" are marked, while white-dominated institutions are "just" colleges or "just" banks (Wooten and Couloute 2017, Ray 2019). Research on the managers of large American corporations, including interlock research, functioned similarly. The overwhelming whiteness of corporate Boards of Directors went largely unremarked. For some scholars, this oversight can be partially explained by their disinterest in characteristics of individuals (the anti-categorical imperative, applied). For example, Mintz and Schwartz (1981) and Mizruchi (1989) treat interlocks solely as a feature of organizations and ignore the race (and gender, age, etc.) of the individuals constituting the bridge between the organizations. For others, less focused on interlocks and more focused on the backgrounds of the managers, this oversight is more glaring. For example, Useem & Karabel (1986) examine the class and educational backgrounds of top corporate managers and find that some top corporate managers have elite educational credentials but not elite class backgrounds. The race and gender of these managers is never mentioned. Similarly, Fligstein (1987) studies the career trajectories of top managers between 1919 and 1979 and documents the increasing success of managers with backgrounds in finance (as opposed to sales or manufacturing), but does not note their race or gender.

Much as studies of the role of social networks and social capital in hiring and promotion tended to start with the experiences of white men and assume them to be universal, or the experience of others to be a puzzle to be explained (Burt 1998), studies of large American organizations and interlock networks focused on white dominated organizations and networks formed by white individuals spanning those organizations. This research led to a variety of studies on variations in elite firm behavior such as Davis' (1991) work on how the interlock network shapes which firms adopt "poison pill" anti-takeover defenses. These studies were influential in debates in political sociology (on the unity of the corporate class), and in organizational sociology (on neo-institutional theory and processes of isomorphism), as well as defining one of the dominant topics of economic sociology. At the same time, this work fundamentally failed to offer an explanation of how these came to be white dominated spaces in the first place, or even an acknowledgment of that dominance.

More recent research has at least begun to track the race of corporate directors and in so doing offers the potential for bringing to bear insights from the sociology of race. Perhaps most usefully, Chu and Davis (2016) explicitly document the race of the most connected directors and note the presence of several very central Black directors sitting on multiple boards. Chu and Davis (2016: 750) caution, however, that the declining importance of corporate boards and the decreasing level of connection between firms implies that the "interlock network no longer tells us much about who holds power in U.S. society." Read in dialogue with theories of the credential value of whiteness (Ray 2019), Chu and Davis's work suggests not an increase in racial equality but a shifting of power from the visible boards of publicly-held firms to more occult corridors.

Conclusion

Contemporary economic sociology emerged in the 1980s as a field dominated by the contention that economic activity was embedded in network ties. Economic sociologists by and large ignored race as a structuring force in economic life. At the time of the field's emergence, mainstream scholarship on race tended, in contrast, to focus on individual-level social processes such as racial attitudes and racial categories, without contending with the embeddedness of structural racism in social systems.

However, the structural turn in the sociology of race offers an opportunity to bring insights on race and racism to research in economic sociology. Racial formation theory conceptualizes race-making as a historical process legitimated and carried out by the state; racial hierarchies are upheld not through individual attitudes alone, but rather through racialized social systems that condition both individual racial attitudes and unequal material conditions among racial groups.

This structural turn opens up analytic possibilities for understanding economic life as racialized. Ethnic enclave literature within economic sociology has conflated race with ethnicity in its analysis and focused on racial and ethnic groups as categories; a structural account of race and racism allows for a deeper understanding of the role of macrolevel forces like the legacies of colonialism in shaping the creation of particular racialized immigrant entrepreneurs, and considers the role of whiteness in shaping and perpetuating ideologies about nonwhite business owners. Literature on corporate interlocks has ignored race altogether, overlooking the race of the network members under study. With an understanding of social systems as racialized, however, whiteness can be identified as, in addition to an individual racial category, a credentialing tool that allocates where power is held.

Economic sociologists cannot relegate race outside the purview of their analysis. As contemporary sociologists of race have shown, racism is embedded in our institutions, and by extension, has structured our economic lives.

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