

State of the Art

Toward an economic sociology of race

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Abstract

Race is central to economic life, but race is not central to economic sociology. We argue that economic sociologists should treat racism as a constitutive, structuring force, analytically co-equal with capitalism, patriarchy and nationalism. Our article has three aims. First, we document how canonical and award-winning works of economic sociology do not discuss race and racism, and do not engage with the contemporary sociology of race. Second, we identify six key insights from the sociology of race and suggest how they could influence economic sociology: the emergence of race out of racism, an understanding of racism as structural, the role of whiteness, the intersections between racism and other systems of oppression, the ideology of colorblind racism and the fundamental connections between racism and capitalism. Third, we conclude by discussing recent research that bridges the two subfields and lays the groundwork for an understanding of ‘racialized markets’ and ‘racialized economies’.

Key words: economic sociology, structural racism, colorblind racism, whiteness, intersectionality, racial capitalism

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1. Introduction

Race is central to economic life, but race is not central to economic sociology. Capitalism was founded on the exploitation of racialized slave labor and the work of colonized peoples, and capitalism owes its continued success to the global color line. Thus, when sociologists discuss the modern capitalist economy, both within the USA and globally, they are necessarily discussing a racialized and colonial institution. Despite the foundational and persistent importance of race in economic life, the modern canon of economic sociology largely ignores race and racism in its analysis of economic systems.

Economic sociology is a well-delineated field, united by coordinating institutions and shared theoretical tools derived from canonical, paradigm-defining works. The American Sociological Association (ASA) Section on Economic Sociology has, since 2000, been the

clearest home for the discipline, alongside its counterparts in Europe like the Economic Sociology newsletter.¹ As part of its coordinating role, the ASA section recognizes outstanding work in the field through a collection of awards, and thus sanctifies what work counts as the ‘best’ in economic sociology. Economic sociologists share a set of founding fathers, primarily from network analysis, the sociology of organizations, institutional theory (Convert and Heilbron, 2007) and core concepts, especially ‘embeddedness’ (Granovetter, 1985; Krippner and Alvarez, 2007). These authors are associated with a collection of canonical texts used in teaching economic sociology classes (Wang, 2012, pp. 1–8). We show that both award-winning recent work and foundational texts and readers used to teach the next generation of economic sociologists downplay or ignore the role of race and racism in structuring economic life, and that race and racism are largely absent from the major intellectual projects of the field.

Our purpose here is not simply to critique economic sociology for its blindspots. We hope that our analysis highlights spaces within economic sociology where matters of racism are neglected in order to illuminate possibilities for ‘bridgework’ (Rodríguez-Muñiz, 2016) with scholarship in the sociology of race. Incorporating insights from the sociology of race into economic sociology may lead to the rejection of existing theories in economic sociology, or demonstrate the value of those theories in new empirical contexts, or lead to the development of entirely new theories. We suspect it will entail a bit of each. Economic sociology and the sociology of race share common theoretical assumptions, including their approach to history and their emphasis on relational modes of analysis, which should facilitate work that makes use of the powerful insights from both traditions. We hope that this article will spark a conversation in economic sociology similar to the ongoing dialog in the sociology of organizations about how to make use of insights in the sociology of race and to center race in the analysis of organizations (Nkomo, 1992; Wooten and Couloute, 2017; Rojas, 2017; Ray, 2019).²

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. First, we discuss the lack of engagement between the sociology of race and economic sociology. We document how race and racism play little to no role in the central texts and major paradigms of economic sociologists, and how award-winning works of economic sociology do not engage with the sociology of race. Second, we introduce six key insights from the sociology of race. In each section, we suggest possible connections between the sociology of race and economic sociology. We root our review of the sociology of race in discussions of the USA, without losing sight of the relationships between global capitalism and both the domestic and global color lines (Christian, 2019). We then draw inspiration from recent trends in the sociology of organizations, especially the rise of the ‘racialized organizations’ perspective, as a model of bridgework that moves beyond studies of racial inequality. We conclude by reviewing examples of recent research across four empirical domains that center race in their analysis of economic life. These examples suggest how economic sociologists might usefully adopt a

1 Accessed at <http://econsoc.mpifg.de/> on December 2, 2019.

2 For the sake of tractability, we limit our focus here to economic sociology. Parallel conversations are ongoing in political science (Henderson, 2013; Blatt, 2018), economics (Charles and Guryan, 2011; Darity *et al.*, 2015), as well as other subfields of sociology, including social movements (Liu, 2018), political sociology (Bracey, 2015) and the sociology of science and technology (Rodríguez-Muñiz, 2016).

‘racialized economies’ and ‘racialized markets’ approach that incorporates insights from both economic sociology and the sociology of race.

2. Current state of race in economic sociology

In order to understand whether literature from the sociology of race might provide productive paths forward for economic sociologists, we first review the core of economic sociology. We approach this analysis in two steps: first, we analyze award-winning and agenda-setting works in economic sociology. Second, we discuss four broad intellectual projects that shape the subfield. These analyses jointly show that race is not a common topic of analysis in economic sociology and that economic sociologists have little engagement with the sociology of race.

As with all subdisciplines within sociology, there is some ambiguity in how to bound such a review. For instance, it could be argued that sociological analyses of racial discrimination in real estate (Hernandez, 2009; Rugh and Massey, 2010) fall at the intersection of stratification and economic sociology. However, for the purposes of this article, we rely on a review of texts that explicitly fall within the subfield, either through their recognition by the ASA section on economic sociology or by their presence in the handbooks used for teaching economic sociology. We reviewed three major edited handbooks in the field (Dobbin, 2004; Smelser and Swedberg, 2005; Granovetter and Swedberg, 2011),³ all of the award-winning books from the ASA section on Economic Sociology, and section membership demographics.⁴ Here, we focus primarily on the handbooks; in later sections, we draw on examples from several award-winning books.

We began our analysis of the role of race and racism in economic sociology by examining three prominent edited volumes that are commonly used in graduate seminars and PhD exam reading lists. Race is not foregrounded in any of the handbooks’ introductory chapters, which serve as helpful overviews of the field. After the introduction, each handbook contains 20–30 essays chosen as illustrative of the field. Across all three, there is no handbook chapter devoted to ‘the economic sociology of race’ or ‘race and economic sociology’ [in contrast, see England and Folbre (2005) on ‘Gender and Economic Sociology’].

Out of the 77 essays on economic sociology, just four treat race as salient to the authors’ analyses of economic life, and only one of these discusses theories of racism. None of these four articles, not any of the 73 others, draws insights from the sociology of race to make their central argument. Schnaiberg’s (2005) chapter on ‘The Economy and the Environment’ draws primarily on discussions of race from environmental sociology, more specifically environmental racism and environmental justice (Schnaiberg, 2005). The remaining three essays that engage with race focus on the ethnic economy but tend to conflate race and ethnicity. For example, in her work on how culture shapes consumption, Zelizer (2004, p. 340) opts to ‘use *ethnic communities* to signal both race and national origin’ (emphasis in original). In contrast, sociologists of race have identified the importance of these distinctions. In particular, sociologists of race have noted how individuals who share an ethnicity can have

3 As Wang (2012) shows, Granovetter and Swedberg’s reader is particularly influential in shaping the content of economic sociology courses.

4 See <http://www.asanet.org/asa-communities/asa-sections/current-sections/economic-sociology/section-economic-sociology-awards-recipient-history> on December 2, 2019.

different racial identities, such as white and black Hispanics on the census (Golash-Boza and Darity, 2008); furthermore, many ethnic identities, such as Italian or Irish, are racialized as white in the contemporary US context. 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.

Another telling signal of the state of the subfield is the co-membership data of ASA's Economic Sociology section. Less than 5% of Economic Sociology Section members are also members of the ASA section on Racial and Ethnic Minorities. The lack of cross-membership is indicative of a relative lack of engagement with the subfield of race; in contrast, more than 20% of Economic Sociology section members are also members of each of the sections on Theory, Collective Behavior and Social Movements, Political Sociology and Culture.

Furthermore, the Economic Sociology Section has one of the lowest rates of black memberships of any section, with just 1.7% of section members identifying as black compared to 6.5% for ASA as a whole.⁵ This statistic is both striking and troubling, given the history of overlooked scholarship by black sociologists (Morris, 2015). Black scholars have a long intellectual tradition of creating incisive analyses of phenomena across different sectors of the social world, which are attuned to race and racism; observations on the social world from behind the veil of the color line (Du Bois, 1903), or as the outsider within the academy (Collins, 1986) can often push a field blinded by its own privilege (Ladner, 1973). Furthermore, the 16 authors who have received the section's Viviana Zelizer Best Book award include 11 men and 4 women who would be racialized as white in the US context.⁶ These demographics are similar to the demographics of the field's founders; of the top 20 'key authors' identified by Convert and Heilbron (2007, p. 36) in their history of the new economic sociology, 18 are white men and 2 are white women. Disproportionately white membership is not necessarily determinative of a lack of engagement with race literature; however, scholars of standpoint theory and racialized subjectivity have shown that one's social location matters to the scholarship one tends to produce and value by shaping which types of questions and social dynamics one considers relevant and important based on one's lived experience (Du Bois, 1940; Itzigsohn and Brown, 2019; Collins, 2002).

If a field systematically overlooks a particular standpoint in its knowledge production, it risks fieldwide blindspots. When assumptions of relevant features and dynamics about the social world pervade a subfield, the subfield develops a set of particular ontological myopias (Rodríguez-Muñiz, 2016). Indeed, from our analysis of the state of scholarship in economic sociology, it appears that race is presumed peripheral to the sociological study of the economy.

2.1 Economic sociology's four intellectual projects

Economic sociology's contemporary blindspots reflect the priorities of its central intellectual projects. Based on our survey of the field, and on prior theoretical and historical work, we

5 Data accessed at <http://www.asanet.org/research-and-publications/research-sociology/trends-sociology/asa-membership#sections> on December 2, 2019.

6 We made race and gender determinations by consulting authors' webpages; these observed-race determinations are contingent upon us as the observers and as such may not match authors' self-classification (Roth, 2016).

identified four such intellectual projects that we believe collectively constitute the core of economic sociology: Polanyian embeddedness, Granovetterian embeddedness, the Performativity approach and Zelizer's cultural approach. We follow [Krippner and Alvarez \(2007\)](#) in identifying the Granovetterian and Polanyian embeddedness projects as probably the most central and distinctive projects in economic sociology. Additionally, we identify the Zelizerian and Performativity approaches as important complements to the Granovetterian and Polanyian projects. Zelizer's work features prominently in the three major economic sociology handbooks and the ASA section's book award was named after her; the performativity approach is newer and thus less well-represented, but MacKenzie's work on the performativity of finance has received three major awards from the Economic Sociology section which suggests its recognized importance. In this section, we briefly summarize each of these four projects and discuss how race features (or fails to feature) in each project.

Polanyian embeddedness establishes the historical specificity of market society; it emphasizes the role of the state in creating and sustaining the conditions for an apparently autonomous market economy. Polanyi's work sat at the intersection of history, economics and anthropology, but his foundational text *The Great Transformation* ([Polanyi, 1944](#)) focused on the struggle for power within Europe, and especially the history of economic life within Britain. While situating Britain within a field of global imperial struggles and international finance, Polanyi's main account of economic transformation and economic life is surprisingly nationally bounded. The major dynamics are of the rise of certain styles of market fundamentalist thought ([Block and Somers, 2014](#)) and debates over the (fictitious) commodification of land, labor and money. The transatlantic slave trade does not feature in Polanyi's account of the rise of market society, for example, and Africa's role in the text is as an anthropological contrast (showcasing non-market societies), not as an important site or actor in the rise of capitalism.⁷ Race and racism are not central in this account.

While Polanyi's understanding of embeddedness was rooted in discussions of political economy and the role of the state, Granovetterian embeddedness foregrounds the role of 'meso-level' social structure in shaping economic life to overcome the false dichotomies of over- and under-socialized economic actors ([Granovetter, 1985, 2017](#)). Granovetterian understandings of embeddedness are most associated with work on networks of individuals and organizations ([Uzzi, 1996](#)). The foundational texts in this approach ([Granovetter, 1974; Granovetter, 1985](#)) do not discuss race and, notably, Granovetter's sample for his canonical study of job-finding through weak ties was restricted to white men. Beyond the simple absence of attention to race, the embeddedness approach is linked to an argument *against* the primacy or importance of characteristics understood as macro/demographic (i.e. gender and race) in favor of accounts that privilege network location—what [Emirbayer and Goodwin \(1994\)](#) call the 'anti-categorical imperative'. As we will discuss below, contemporary research in the sociology of race argues against treating race as an individual-level demographic characteristic, and for a relational approach that we believe is compatible with insights from Granovetterian economic sociology. Nonetheless, this anti-categorical imperative may help explain why race is not central in accounts of embeddedness.

The performativity approach is the most recently developed strand of economic sociology, emerging in the late 1990s from the work of sociologists of technology Michel Callon

7 In later work, [Polanyi \(1968\)](#) himself studied the slave trade in Africa. Unlike *The Great Transformation*, this work is largely unknown in economic sociology.

and Donald MacKenzie and their collaborators. Callon and MacKenzie both argued that Granovetter's account of economic action was only half-right. Yes, economic action was embedded in local social structure—but economic action was also embedded in what came to be called 'market devices' (Callon *et al.*, 2007), the technologies that make economic action possible. While Granovetter argued that the rational, calculative action of economic theory was largely a fiction, Callon (1998) and MacKenzie (2006) show how this action was an *accomplishment*, that is, they showed how technologies and economic theories (along with various kinds of social and political institutions) made it possible for actors to behave 'as if' *homo economicus*, in some times and places. This insight shares with the Polanyian approach an understanding of markets and market action as the potentially precarious outcome of a set of social and political processes, while foregrounding especially the technological aspects of those processes. Equipped with the right formulas, the right calculator and the right market infrastructure, a financial trader can act much more like economists claim a rational actor should. Although the modern financial industry has strong historical roots in the slave trade (Levy, 2012), and the contemporary financial industry is dominated by white men (Turco, 2010), race and racism do not figure prominently in performativity accounts of the rise or functioning of finance.

In contrast to the previous three approaches, the Zelizerian approach to economic sociology eschews the language of embeddedness in favor of a cultural approach to economic life through concepts like 'connected lives' and 'relational work'. Zelizer's (2010) approach starts from an attempt to overcome two extreme understandings of the relationship between culture and the economy: 'nothing but' (that culture can be understood as simply part of the economy and that all action is economic action) and 'hostile worlds' (that economic life intrudes on non-economic spaces, perverting them). In contrast, Zelizer argues for an approach that emphasizes how culture and economy are deeply imbricated ('connected lives'), and how actors work out the tensions between the dictates of norms and markets through 'relational work'. For example, women and men constantly negotiate norms and taboos surrounding the 'purchase of intimacy' (2005), finding ways to engage in exchanges that appropriately match the medium of exchange and the character of the relationship. While gendered interactions are at the center of many accounts of relational work [both Zelizer's, and later authors like Almeling (2007) and Mears (2015)], race and racism have not featured prominently.

Each of these projects represents an important site of intersection between economic sociology and other subfields and empirical processes: Polanyian with political and historical sociology; Granovetterian with organizations and networks; Performativity with the sociology of science and technology; and Zelizerian with cultural sociology (and, to some extent, the sociology of gender). In contrast, no major intellectual project sits at the intersection of economic sociology and the sociology of race.

In sum, contemporary economic sociology does not treat race or racism as central topics and largely ignores the sociology of race. To be clear, we are not saying that there is absolutely no research by economic sociologists that foregrounds race and racism, or that engages with ideas from the sociology of race. We are excited to note several new streams of research, often located at the intersections of economic sociology with urban or political sociology, that foreground race and racism as central objects of analysis (Robinson, 2016; Henricks and Seamster, 2017; Seamster and Charron-Chénier, 2017; Pacewicz and Robinson, 2019; Sargent, 2019; Wherry *et al.*, 2019). But there is shockingly little, and

what work does exist has not yet been recognized widely by the field, nor incorporated into the main texts used to train economic sociologists.

3. Insights from the sociology of race

Economic sociology can do better. In the following sections, we introduce economic sociologists to six key insights from the sociology of race. While we recognize the importance of an analysis of the interaction between race, racism and the state in economic life (Omi and Winant, 2014), we focus more explicitly on how the sociology of race may bring insights to more meso-level concepts like markets and networks, a comparatively less-developed intersection. The literatures we discuss are large and heterogeneous; like economic sociology, the sociology of race is a dynamic and changing subfield, and there are vibrant debates about how best to define and understand the central objects of study. Rather than attempting to summarize all of these heterogeneous positions, we focus on a subset of authors and claims that we find particularly useful for thinking about the possibility of producing an economic sociology of race, with a focus on concepts from critical race theory.⁸ Necessarily, these decisions imply that our treatment will be partial and not represent the full breadth of conversation in the sociology of race; we encourage readers to treat these summaries as a jumping-off point for deeper engagement rather than definitive accounts. In each section, we provide an overview of relevant literature and suggest how this literature has the potential to link to economic sociology in order to provide a more complete picture of both economic and racial structures.

3.1 Race is a product of racism

Sociologists have long argued that race is a social construction. In particular, recent scholarship shows that *racism* produces race. In this section, we show how racism historically constituted race as a concept and social structure, and the implications of this argument for attempts to tease out the role of racism and race in present-day contexts. Recognizing that race is a product of racism is an antidote to attempts to explain racially unequal outcomes through features of racialized individuals. Race can never be an explanatory factor apart from racism because race is always already a function of racism.

We draw our understanding of social construction from Ian Hacking. Hacking (1999, p. 6) identifies a social constructionist argument as one that holds that the construct ‘need not have existed, or need not be at all as it is’ and that it ‘is not determined by the nature of things; it is not inevitable’. To argue that race is a social construct is to argue that race need not have existed and that race is not an inevitable natural kind. Scholars largely agree that race should be understood as a social construction (Haney-López, 1994; Omi and Winant, 2014; Golash-Boza, 2016). In particular, as science studies scholars have documented, human genetic and biological differences map poorly onto contemporary racial categories (Roberts, 2011; Fujimura *et al.*, 2014; Nelson, 2016), categories which are themselves in constant flux (Saperstein *et al.*, 2013).

Beyond arguing that race is a construct, contemporary scholars have emphasized how race was constructed *by racism*. As Fields and Fields (2012) show, racial categories and meanings emerge out of racism. As they define it, race ‘stands for the conception or the

8 For a primer on critical race theory, see Fleming (2018, pp. 23–48).

doctrine that nature produces humankind in distinct groups, each defined by inborn traits that its members share and that differentiate them from the members of other distinct groups of the same kind but of unequal rank' (Fields and Fields, 2012, p. 16). Racism, as defined by Fields and Fields, 'refers to the theory and the practice of applying a social, civic, or legal double standard based on ancestry, and to the ideology surrounding such a double standard' (Fields and Fields, 2012, p. 17). Racism is a mode of social practice that naturalizes race as a category of difference.

When unequal outcomes emerge as a result of racist social practice, social actors in positions of power then ascribe those differences to race rather than racism. Fields and Fields (2012) name this process 'racecraft' and compare this socially embedded illusion to witchcraft, the false belief that particular outcomes were caused by the evil sorcery of witches. When social scientists point to 'the effect of race' in an explanation, rather than the effect of racism, they engage in racecraft.

Sociologists, historians and philosophers have documented the historical formation of race as a category of thought and a collection of practices of domination in the 17th and 18th centuries.⁹ As Mattson (2014) shows, one of the earliest racial typologies, produced by Frenchman François Bernier in 1684, identified four major races: Europeans, Africans, Asians and Lapps. These typologies shifted over the next three and a half centuries—most Americans would recognize the first three racial categories, but not the last. Racial categories were deployed from the very beginning by enlightenment theorists to justify political and economic inequality. Mills (1997) showcases how early social contract theorists like Locke and Rousseau presumed a racial contract between whites for the purpose of exploiting racial others as a part of the process of entering into society. Liberal theorists defined personhood in racial terms, with racial others denied full access to the political and economic rights.

These academic theories coincided with and justified newly emerging racial hierarchies. Omi and Winant, (2014) foreground the role of states in particular in making and remaking race, tuning and adapting the boundaries of racial categories through racial projects. Robinson (2000) showcases how racial divisions emerged in part as a response to the needs of economic elites to separate and control laborers, with British rule over the Irish (understood as racially different and inferior) in the 16th century serving as a model for later forms of racialization, including most prominently racialized slavery in the USA (Du Bois, 1935).

We cannot disentangle conversations about racial difference from conversations about racism because racism is a necessary condition that makes possible the existence of race (Golash-Boza, 2016). Two implications follow. First, while it may be possible to isolate the effect (or non-effect) of individual prejudice on aspects of racial inequality, such an isolation is not equivalent to understanding the effect of racism. Consider, for example, DiTomaso's (2013, 2015, p. 58) argument that 'in the post-civil rights period, racial inequality is reproduced by whites helping other whites more so than through the discrimination or racism of whites toward non-whites'. While valuable for highlighting the role of seemingly race-neutral acts of favoritism toward friends and family in reproducing racial inequality, DiTomaso's claim is too quick to eliminate racism from the conversation by equating it with acts of individual discrimination. One cannot even talk sensibly of 'whites' and 'non-whites'

9 Scholars somewhat disagree about the precise dating of the emergence of race and racism, and about whether earlier typologies of difference laid the groundwork for race as we know it (Saperstein *et al.*, 2013).

without talking about racism as these very categories are the consequences of historical and contemporary racism. Second, because race emerges out of racism, the study of race is necessarily political. Race is not a natural kind, and there is no innocent or apolitical way to study it. As [Golash-Boza \(2016, p. 130\)](#) writes ‘the study of race *must* be political and politicized because there is no good reason to study race other than working toward the elimination of racial oppression’ (emphasis in original).

3.2 Racism is structural

Sociologists of race show that racism structures societal institutions, resulting in what [Bonilla-Silva \(1997\)](#) calls a racialized social system. Bonilla-Silva conceives of this system as the deeply entrenched accumulation of social relations that support a racial hierarchy in which power and resources are concentrated in white-dominant spaces. Because race is a product of racism, and racism is systematically embedded in social structures, the task of studying race involves the unearthing of the mechanisms that undergird racialized social systems. For economic sociology, this approach foregrounds the importance of understanding how race is inscribed and reinscribed in markets and other economic structures.

In this structural approach to race relations, individual-level prejudices and biases are predictable outcomes of racialized systems rooted in white supremacy (the assumption that white people, and their practices, and norms, are superior to racialized subjects and their practices and norms). The racialized social system perspective argues that conventional accounts of racism are too static, individualistic, and focused on overtly racist behavior and beliefs rather than on the structures that produce racist subjectivities ([Bonilla-Silva, 1997](#); [Jung, 2015](#)). In contrast, the racialized social system perspective analyzes how racism as a structure changes, and especially how those changes have made possible the persistence of racial domination with declining levels of overt bigotry. Racism, in this perspective, is not treated as an aberration but rather as a normal and routine, albeit contested and mutable, part of society.

For example, in an ethnography of a Chicago court, [Van Cleve \(2016\)](#) documents how a racialized social system reinforces and reproduces racial inequality through higher rates of incarceration of nonwhite defendants and the dehumanization of these defendants and their loved ones. The courtroom procedures reveal how white prosecutors justify their roles as arbiters of punishment by drawing a distinction between their morality and the immorality of the (majority nonwhite) defendants. Wielding a colorblind rhetoric of morality, these prosecutors buttress the court system’s racial inequities. Van Cleve shows that their individual actions not only replay racist ideologies but also inform the outcome of courtroom exchanges.

While much of the theoretical work on racialized systems foregrounds how individuals enact racialized subjectivities, a growing literature at the nexus of race and organizations develops an analytical framework wherein organizations themselves are seen as ‘raced’ ([Wooten, 2006](#)) or ‘racialized’ ([Ray, 2019](#)), a perspective we discuss more below. For instance, Victor Ray conceptualizes US military organizations as historically segregated spaces, contrary to scholars who point to the military’s intentional racial integration initiatives and large proportion of people of color as evidence of a racially inclusive space ([Moynihan, 1965](#); [Butler and Moskos, 1996](#)). Ray complicates that notion of racial integration through qualitative interviews with veterans of wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Ray’s respondents reveal that supervising officers minimize complaints of racial harassment, and

soldiers are disincentivized by their superiors to report such behavior (Ray, 2018). Even in this organization with an integrationist approach and large presence of nonwhite employees, racial hierarchies remain through systematic willful ignorance of individual-level discrimination through organizational policy.

The insight that racism is structural would change how economic sociologists conceptualize race within economic systems. For instance, while scholarship on the ethnic economy provides a needed focus within economic sociology on racialized immigrant groups (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 2004; Light, 2005), it does not account for racism faced by such groups. Light's account of the ethnic economy claims that while racial discrimination in lending practices exists, it is of minor importance as compared to the role of the 'strictly economic' measure of creditworthiness. Yet scholarship on discrimination in real estate has shown how wealth disparities have been shaped by housing segregation and unfair lending practices (Hernandez, 2009; Rugh and Massey, 2010). The wider view of racially unequal wealth accumulation, informed by continued post-civil rights housing segregation and racist lending practices, demonstrates that creditworthiness, while on its surface purely economic, is racialized and produces racially unequal outcomes by design (Seamster and Charron-Chénier, 2017).

In contrast to defining racism by acts or beliefs by individuals or groups of individuals, the racialized social system approach shows that individual- and group-level racial prejudice is the normal outcome of the larger system in which the individual is embedded. Studies of racialized organizations also highlight how organizational-level policies and procedures create and sustain racial hierarchy, independent of (or in conjunction with) the motives or prejudices of the individuals enacting those procedures. Together, these studies point to possibilities for understanding economic exchanges as embedded within racialized social systems and racial inequities in exchange as a normal outcome of these systems.

3.3 Whiteness

Whiteness and white supremacy have been key social constructions in creating racism and then creating racial categories within modern social systems (Du Bois, 1920; Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Du Bois (1920) called attention to this ideology of whiteness, calling it an invention of the 19th and 20th centuries that 'leads to curious acts', from dispositional pity or hatred toward the so-called darker races, to acts of suppression and violence. More recent scholarship has drawn attention to the 'white racial frame', a worldview embedded with persistent racial stereotypes, racist ideologies and narratives about nonwhite individuals (Feagin, 2013). First developed in the 17th century when European elites ascribed hierarchical differences to human beings by biological markers, the white racial frame operates four centuries later in both unspoken assumptions and everyday practices that perpetuate racial inequality. Attention to this persistent frame challenges studies of racial inequality to name the actors of discrimination rather than understanding continuing racial inequity as a passive process of reproduction.

Part of the ideological power of whiteness rests on how whiteness itself so often goes unmarked; race is always treated as being 'about' nonwhites, while white racial identity is obscured (Lewis, 2004). Sociologists studying whiteness explore the cultural schemas of whiteness, i.e. white racial attitudes, even (and especially) in instances in which white respondents do not recognize themselves as racial actors. Studying whiteness reminds us

that, in a racialized social system, race is always present, including in situations where only white people are involved.

Whiteness scholars also demonstrate how trenchantly held white racial logics are for those socialized as white in American society, due in part to an epistemological commitment to 'not see' their own role in racial matters (Mills, 1997). Even when the white racial frame is challenged, individuals perform epistemic maneuvers in their reasoning to obscure continued benefits through racial privilege (Mueller, 2017).

White racial ideology moves beyond individual sense-making and serves to 'naturalize the status quo' of racial inequalities (Lewis, 2004, p. 632). Thus, sociological research on whiteness links cultural schema to its power and material impact on social outcomes such as educational inequality. For instance, when Lynn, a white, politically liberal respondent was asked about her views on busing as a means to integrate schools, she indicated that she opposed intercity school busing, yet wholeheartedly supports school integration in the abstract. However, scholars and activists find that busing policy is one of the only ways to effectively integrate schools, due to trenchant residential segregation (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Far from an isolated decision-making process, white respondents consistently state their political position as not racist, yet resist measures that would address racial inequities, citing choice as a remedy to school and residential segregation.

These white racial attitudes pervade mainstream institutional logics, obscuring racism by naturalizing white-dominant norms as the default within institutional contexts. *White Logic, White Methods*, an edited collection of essays critiquing mainstream social scientific research, argues that mainstream sociology commonly assumes whiteness as a default, and treats race as a fixed variable rather than a social construction (Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva, 2008). The collected essays reveal the white logics behind taken-for-granted categorizations that social scientists use to interpret the world.

From group dispositions to institutional norms, whiteness as a construct shaped the foundation of the USA and shapes its current racial order. Given the pervasiveness of whiteness, it is worth considering how white-dominant perspectives are reinscribed in economic markets. For example, critical race theorist Sumi Cho (2008) draws on and critiques Granovetter's (1985) understanding of structural embeddedness in the context of explanations of racial inequality in construction and labor markets. Cho notes that Granovetter's pioneering studies of embeddedness in labor markets drew on a sample that was 99% white, and yet Granovetter originally dismissed race as an important mediating or complicating factor. Drawing on more recent research on discrimination in labor markets, neighborhood segregation and racial homophily in friend and work networks, Cho advocates for a perspective of *embedded whiteness*. This perspective argues that existing embeddedness research itself remains 'undersocialized' by failing to consider how racial structures shape the content and meaning of network ties. While embeddedness in *horizontal* relationships produces trusts *among white actors*, embeddedness in hierarchical relations may produce malfeasance between white and nonwhite actors, as when influential, white-owned construction firms abuse smaller, less well-connected minority-owned firms (Cho, 2008, p. 25).

3.4 Intersectionality

While studies of whiteness emphasize how race must be understood as being about more than just racial minorities, studies of intersectionality showcase how race and racism must be understood in relation to other systems of oppression. Inspired by work in critical race

theory (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) and black feminist theory (Collins, 1986, 2002), intersectional arguments foreground the overlapping systems of dominations which constitute our social world.

Scholars of intersectionality have offered many different definitions of the term (Cho *et al.*, 2013; Collins, 2015). Intersectionality has been understood as a methodological imperative, an empirical hypothesis about interaction effects and a form of activist praxis. Intersectionality argues that we must analyze the intersections of capitalism, patriarchy, racism, heterosexism and colonialism/empire rather than the intersections of class, gender, race, sexuality and nationality (especially understood as benign cultural differences). Identities here are understood as effects of oppressions (as race is produced by racism, so too is class produced by capitalism, etc.) or at least constrained and shaped by oppressions.

For scholars of intersectionality, identities are understood as sites of coalition-formation for liberatory (or oppressive) social movements (Crenshaw, 1991; Carastathis, 2013). Intersectionality recognizes that every identity category already contains a complex coalition of different individuals, e.g. that not all women have the same interests. Simultaneously, intersectionality recognizes the power and importance of forming coalitions across identity categories, for example, looking at the formation of ‘women of color’ as a strategy for intersectional organizing that recognizes shared interests while attempting to preserve an awareness of the differences between the experiences of Native, black, Asian and Latinx women (Luna, 2016). Intersectional analyses attend to the complexities of identities as outcomes of the complex relationships between different forms of oppression.

Crenshaw’s (1989) foundational work on the experience of black women attempting to pursue claims of discrimination under American antidiscrimination law illustrates the insights of the intersectional approach. Crenshaw documents how the law was not capable of recognizing that black women’s negative treatment could not be reduced to racism or sexism, but rather reflected a specific combination of both. Black women’s claims were routinely rejected by courts in light of evidence that employers hired black men or white women, and thus that racism or sexism was not operative. Crenshaw argued that analyzing the experiences of black women showcased limitations in existing antiracist and feminist politics and theorizing which tended to center the experiences and needs of black men and white women.

Intersectionality has significant methodological implications for scholars of race, gender, and, we argue, economic sociology. Choo and Ferree (2010, pp. 129–131) identify three related methodological orientations derived from intersectionality: centering the perspectives of multiply marginalized individuals (as in Crenshaw’s focus on black women litigants), recognizing the analytical interaction between forms of oppression (e.g. the experiences of black women are not simply the sum of the experiences of black men and white women), and refusing to give analytical primacy to one form of oppression (that is, treating racism, sexism and capitalism as interactive in each domain).

Similarly, McCall (2005) identifies three modes of intersectional research on inequality, which she categorizes as anticategorical, intracategorical and intercategorical. Anticategorical research focuses on the artificiality of existing categories and argues for the deconstruction of those categories. Intracategorical research highlights variation within existing categories, focusing on those in marginalized positions to showcase how existing understandings of a category are too narrow, following feminist theoretical dictates that foreground what can be learned by viewing the center from the margins. Finally,

intercategorical research ‘requires that scholars provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions’ (McCall, 2005, p. 1774). McCall’s (2005, p. 1790) own intercategorical research highlights how the ‘effect’ of race on wages may vary based on gender, on class, and on labor market institutions, among other things.

McCall’s argument is useful for identifying missed opportunities in economic sociology. For example, in the 2014 Zelizer Book Award Winner *Flawed System, Flawed Self*, Sharone (2013) draws on interviews with unemployed job-seekers to understand how they experience the market in the USA and Israel. As reviews note, Sharone, in his argument that national-level institutional context is the main determinant of job-seeking experiences, overlooks salient gender-based differences within each country and fails ‘to recognize the multidimensionality of culture and how culture and class interact with institutional context to shape experiences’ (Harrison, 2014). Beyond failing to examine gender, Sharone also overlooks how nationally specific racialized meanings, practices and categorizations shape one’s experience of the national institutional context, and thus misses an opportunity to analyze the intersection of raced, gendered and national contexts in shaping labor market outcomes.

As McCall’s work shows, intersectional approaches have gained significant traction in inequality research but these insights have yet to be applied widely in economic sociology. Intersectionality approaches ought to be well suited to research on organizations, markets and political economy. While inequality research has historically foregrounded individuals and demographic groups, economic sociologists are comfortable analyzing larger structural processes from states to organizational fields to global value chains. This focus fits nicely with intersectionality’s attention to overlapping systems of oppression. Intersectional approaches to these topics would ask questions like, how do racism, sexism and capitalism simultaneously shape the functioning of markets? How are economic fields simultaneously racialized and gendered?

3.5 Colorblind racism

Because racism and race are mutable properties of social systems rather than essential properties of individuals, sociologists of race attend to how racialized social systems and the ideologies that uphold them may take new forms in response to economic or cultural changes. In the contemporary period, sociologists of race have identified how racialized social systems continue to perpetuate racial inequalities after the end of overt discrimination characterizing the Jim Crow era.

Despite the end of legally sanctioned racial segregation and discrimination in the USA through civil rights legislation, racial practices continue to exclude and discriminate against nonwhite individuals through more covert mechanisms often embedded in institutional operations (Bonilla-Silva, 2017, p. 476). Continued inequality in the contemporary racial order is supported by a new colorblind racist ideology. Colorblind racism is a set of beliefs that insists upon not acknowledging racial difference in the interest of treating all individuals equally. Colorblind ideology naturalizes unequal outcomes arising from racially unequal historical legacies and contributes to the maintenance of racial inequality in the present.

Colorblind racism is supported in part by a discourse of abstract liberalism: the use of liberal ideals—such as individual choice, egalitarianism and universalism—to explain race relations in a colorblind manner (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Abstract liberalism asserts that

existing outcomes should be understood as following from individuals' free choices and capabilities absent incontrovertible evidence of contemporary, immediate, egregious discrimination. This philosophy combines a normative commitment to the idea that individual merit *should* determine one's success in life with a belief that individual merit *in fact* determines most outcomes in actually existing contemporary society. For instance, the frame of abstract liberalism is commonly used to push back against affirmative action, arguing that, under liberal principles of choice and egalitarianism, all individuals should be treated equally in considerations for admission to educational institution. However, when this abstract principle is applied to the racially unequal conditions of actually existing society, it ignores the severe underrepresentation of people of color in high-paying and high-prestige jobs and educational institutions.

Abstract liberalism facilitates colorblind racism through the cultivation of an epistemology of white ignorance (Mueller, 2017), or the continued position of not knowing or seeing racism in everyday practice. In recent work on colorblind racism, Mueller conceives of colorblindness as an epistemological framework that is upheld by white people's privileged position on the dominant side of the color line and upheld by structural white supremacy. In analyzing white undergraduate students' assessments of their own familial wealth by generation, Mueller demonstrates that students, even when faced with a contradiction between their ideals of abstract liberalism and actually existing racial inequality, engage in epistemic maneuvers to maintain their colorblind view of their own wealth. For example, Mueller reports how a student named Felicia reported in her reflection her grandfather's use of a veteran's loan to buy his first home for him and his family (Mueller, 2017, p. 227). Felicia then engaged in an analysis of a racially unequal past, discussing how veterans' loans were given to white individuals in the military, the segregated neighborhoods with good schools made accessible by such loans in her own family, and her parents' subsequent wealth accumulation. However, she disconnected this past from her own family's present success, reflecting that her success is due to more than wealth, and that her family, having been immigrants, went through similar struggles as other immigrants.

This rupture between the past and present in racial histories represents a willfully conditioned ignorance against racial explanations for continued racial inequality. This refusal to recognize the advantages white privilege affords, *as a direct result* of racial discrimination, maintains racialized social systems that systematically disadvantage people of color *over time* and across different iterations of the color line.

As Mueller demonstrates in particular, wealth accumulation's racial history is often obscured from view through the frame of abstract liberalism. An economic sociology attuned to this insight would examine how economic policies rely on colorblind language to characterize racist practices. In particular, abstract liberalism is likely related to other liberal ideologies, including neoliberalism (Mudge, 2008) and market fundamentalism (Somers and Block, 2005), although these connections are only beginning to be explored. Hohle's (2017) work offers one clear example of work linking colorblind racism and neoliberalism in the USA. Hohle shows how elite Southern white men redefined public as black, and private as white, and thus enable neoliberalism to serve as an entire language for creating colorblind racist policies, from tax cuts and the privatization of public goods to lionizing wealthy white men as 'job creators'. Similarly, Jackson (2017) argues in ongoing research that late 20th century American politics can best be made sense of by understanding the transformation of conservative politics through the alliance of the 'libertarian right' and the 'racist right', who

found common cause as libertarians accepted the emergence of racial segregation as a consequence of increased individual freedom, while racists believed that (colorblind) libertarian arguments were their most effective tool for pushing back against state-led attempts to promote integration.

3.6 Racial capitalism

While it may be possible to imagine a capitalist system that was not imbricated with racism, actually existing capitalism and racism were co-constituted. Scholarship on racial capitalism links the foundation of the current US economic system to racist ideologies, which facilitated the dispossession of indigenous land to the hands of European settlers (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014) and a consequent use of slave labor on the seized lands for an economic surplus (Baptist, 2016). An extensive body of scholarship in the new history of capitalism demonstrates how racialized slavery was central to the Atlantic economies and the development of modern capitalist organizations (Beckert and Rockman, 2016; Rosenthal, 2018). Slavery is inextricably linked to the foundation and growth of USA's financial system, and enslaved black subjects were a financial commodity in the system of capitalism. More broadly, scholars of racial capitalism argue that racism enabled and continues to enable capitalist development, even though racism has its own history that is not reducible to the history of capitalism (Bhattacharyya, 2018).

Sociologist Cox (1948) coined the term racial capitalism to describe how the social construction of race and white supremacy made possible economic growth through the dehumanization of black and brown bodies. Robinson (2000) built on the term in *Black Marxism* to trouble the Marxist assumption that capitalism marks a negation of feudalism. Instead, Robinson pinpointed the beginnings of both racialist ideologies and capitalist modes of production within European feudal societies, in part as the outgrowth of international competition. In order to grow their own nation-states, the small, well-networked, merchant elite who conducted international trade began to draw from more vulnerable ethnic groups as migrant labor. English merchants, for instance, relied on Irish labor for infrastructure-building and domestic labor. As European modes of capitalism developed unevenly across nation-states, the bourgeois classes needed to find a way to convince the proletariat within their own nations to destroy competing nations' infrastructures by force. Some nations, like Germany, relied on *Herrenvolk*, an ideology of Aryan supremacy, to foster support from the proletariat based on a racialized national pride. This racialism, or the naturalization of social hierarchies through racial categories, normalized the dehumanizing practices of slavery and genocide that allowed the economic system of capitalism to flourish and outgrow a declining feudalism.

Black Marxism notes the contributions of W.E.B. Du Bois to this black radical critique of racial capitalism. In Itzigsohn and Brown's (2019) reading of *Black Reconstruction*, Du Bois 'more fully puts the Southern slave economy in its transnational context'. Du Bois linked the enslaved black people of the American South to a global proletariat, tracing their place in a global supply chain as a commodity. From the bourgeoisie planters' standpoint, it was in their economic interest to maintain slaves as a labor force. Black slaves came to comprise a fifth of the nation, and 'the black workers of America bent at the bottom of a growing pyramid of commerce and industry' (Du Bois, 1935, p. 2). The US economic system grew with exploitation of slave labor and the low-wage white proletariat. The depiction of blacks as inferior to whites kept worker movements disconnected along a color line. Du Bois

highlights that these racial divisions between workers continued after the abolition of slavery in the USA, and ultimately led to the failure to secure civil rights for black freedmen in the Reconstruction era (Du Bois, 1935). Robinson and Du Bois's works exemplify analyses of capitalism as infused with racial and racist ideologies. Insights from racial capitalism place the US economy in a larger global system of worker exploitation.

Thinking through these insights from racial capitalism can help economic sociology to understand how ideological underpinnings of white supremacy allow capitalist modes of production to flourish, both by naturalizing the exploitation of nonwhite races and inhibiting worker solidarity through racialized national pride. Ruef's (2014) *Between Slavery and Capitalism*, recipient of the 2015 Zelizer Book Award, analyzes the role of the institution of slavery in the development of capitalism. Ruef is one of the only contemporary sociologists studying American slavery, and his work is an important step in understanding the shift from slave plantations to a freed labor force. Ruef's analysis of the post-emancipation shifts in the economy of the American South focuses on the economic uncertainties faced by freedpeople, white workers, and plantation owners and how this uncertainty shaped the changes in social structure.

Ruef skillfully demonstrates through Works Progress Administration interviews that freedpeople faced uncertainty around which work they would accept and for what wages they would accept it, and he argues that their demands for better labor conditions helped to bring about the end of plantation life. He identifies uncertainty as the main mechanism that shaped the behavior of social actors following emancipation. He argues that black freedpeople, white workers and white planters were all driven by categorical uncertainty, given that the post-emancipation landscape had no clear precedent. For instance, Ruef demonstrates that black freedpeople post-emancipation faced uncertainty as they came to be valued differently than black slaves in the antebellum era. Given that slaves are kept over their lifetime, planters valued adolescents for their presumably longer utility and women for their ability to birth more slaves. Post-emancipation, when white planters faced new uncertainty in valuing black labor, they began to prize occupational skill (in place of youth and fertility) as a result of newly introduced labor contracts which were bounded in time.

However, by focusing on how the case fits into a framework of categorical uncertainty within economic markets, Ruef's analysis of how white planters viewed black labor underestimates the role of white supremacist ideologies in facilitating the dehumanization of black bodies as exploitable labor. The abolition of slavery was not just a threat to the once certain economic order; it was a threat to the existing racial order. Ultimately, a commitment to maintaining this racial order shaped the behaviors of white planters, who frequently resisted honoring labor contracts, and who at times did not compensate black workers as stated in contracts. Ruef's analysis neglects the entanglement of white supremacist ideology with the economy, ignoring that racism's roots work with and are as durable as material forces (Morris, 2000).

Extant scholarship on the reconstruction-era black radical tradition, by contrast, could have enriched the account by considering the ideological wages of whiteness that shaped white planters' and white workers' responses to uncertainty. Du Bois's (1935) *Black Reconstruction*, for instance, provides a compelling model for analyzing the subjectivity of white workers in hindering class solidarity in favor of the promise of relative social mobility through their own whiteness. An analysis that included the impact of the color line on lived experience would recognize the role of white supremacy as a necessary ideological

underpinning of post-emancipation economic development, and the modern US economic system more broadly.

Following slave emancipation in the USA, American officials did not dismantle the existing system of capitalism and reconstruct it from the root. Instead, American businessmen 'innovated' ways to extend this form of capitalism without legal slavery, through business practices that continued to exploit the working class and ideological work that continued to pit white workers against black workers and racialized immigrant labor. An economic sociology attuned to these insights would analyze how processes of commodification and financialization (Rockman, 2014) are justified in racial ideologies and enable the persistence of racial inequality in a nation that has adopted legal measures prohibiting racial discrimination.

4. Learning from the conversation on racialized organizations

In this section, we show how recent research in the sociology of organizations has successfully incorporated insights from the sociology of race to move beyond documenting organizational racial inequality toward a racialized organizations framework. In the final section, we will suggest some avenues by which economic sociology might follow a parallel path through a research agenda on racialized markets and racialized economies.

Organizational scholars have produced a long and successful line of research on the role of organizations in the production and reproduction racial inequality. Public schools as institutions reproduce disadvantage of black and Hispanic students (Roscigno, 2000). Job segregation along racial lines has been upheld through mechanisms of social closure and the devaluation of racialized and gendered occupations (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). Racial discrimination by employers toward nonwhite applicants continues to limit job market prospects for black and Latinx workers (Pager *et al.*, 2009) and lowers earnings potentials of nonwhite workers in higher prestige occupations (Grodsky and Pager, 2001). Merit-based rewards are often biased toward white men, negatively impacting the earnings of people of color (Castilla, 2008).

While valuable, this line of research remains limited by its treatment of race as a stable demographic variable. Such an approach can limit our understanding of racism as a dynamic, historical force (Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva, 2008). In 1992, Stella Nkomo urged sociologists of organizations to move beyond this conception to understand the racial relations that make up the organizational form. While the above research points to important mechanisms that maintain inequality along racial lines, it falls short of Nkomo's call to analyze race as an ideological, power-laden construct rooted in Eurocentric ideals of whiteness as the universal.

In contrast, recent research has explicitly taken up this task, asking how organizations are themselves racialized entities, how organizations enact and experience racial inequality within an organizational field, and how race and racism shape and are in turn shaped by institutional processes (Rojas, 2017; Wooten and Couloute, 2017; Ray, 2019). These theoretical advances build on emergent research that considers how white supremacy and patriarchy intersect as processes that impact the lived experiences of people of color in the workplace through inequality regimes (Acker, 2006). For instance, the racialization of tasks in organizations shapes what work within the organization is implicitly tied to racialized and gendered bodies, thereby affecting racial dynamics within the organization (Wingfield

and Alston, 2014). This strand of divergent research also takes a critical eye to diversity initiatives that take race as a static variable, finding that particular initiatives such as diversity trainings are costly and ineffective at promoting racial inclusion in the workplace (Kalev *et al.*, 2006), and more broadly that corporate diversity programs can obscure the need for an accompanying change in underlying organizational culture that has been structured with a logic of white normativity (Berrey, 2015).

The emergent research articulated in Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations answers Nkomo's call to move beyond race as a static variable by considering organizations as racial structures, contrary to the dominant approach of considering organizations as race-neutral spaces. Within this framework of racialized organizations, whiteness serves as a credential and unequal distribution of resources is legitimated through this racial logic. Drawing on critical race theory, Ray extends the framework of the racialized social system (Bonilla-Silva, 1997) to consider how intersectional systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989) and whiteness as property (Harris, 1993) operate on the organizational level.

As we endeavor to bridge the divide between the sociology of race and economic sociology, this turn to racialized organizations provides a useful model. An economic sociology of race should not simply focus on racial inequality as a dependent variable but should treat markets and economies as racial structures, constituted by and constitutive of race and racism.

5. Toward an economic sociology of race

Although there is not yet a systematic dialogue between economic sociology and the sociology of race, nor a satisfying theoretical synthesis, there is an encouraging uptick of recent and in-progress work that draws on insights from both subfields. In this section, we document examples of how scholars have begun to bring these insights together in four empirical domains that span the breadth of economic sociology. Some of these works explicitly engage both economic sociology and the sociology of race; in other cases, we offer our own readings of how the reviewed research implicitly connects ideas from the two subfields. Together, these works offer the empirical and theoretical starting points for building a more synthetic treatment of 'racialized markets' and 'racialized economies'.¹⁰

5.1 Labor markets

Labor market research has long been central to both economic sociology and the sociology of race. This research has historically focused on documenting the extent of workplace racial segregation and the pervasiveness of racial discrimination in employment in the USA, as well as uncovering the mechanisms through which segregation and discrimination are enacted. This research shows how segregation decreased in the 15 years following the passage of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 but has largely remained constant (and high) since 1980 (Tomaskovic-Devey *et al.*, 2006) and arguably has increased, due to the entrance of new, more racially segregated firms (Ferguson and Koning, 2018). This chronology roughly maps onto the emergence of robust affirmative action hiring programs in the late 1960s and 1970s, and their rollback in the 1980s (Kelly and Dobbin, 1998). Similarly, scholars have

10 We propose but do not yet define these terms in the hopes that they will serve as a springboard for future empirical and theoretical work.

also long documented the persistence of high levels of racial discrimination in hiring. In a meta-analysis of audit studies, [Quillian *et al.*, \(2017\)](#) document no change in employers' preference for white applicants over black and Latinx applicants since the 1970s.

Two theoretical approaches have helped to make sense of these trends. First, scholars inspired by [Granovetter's \(1974\)](#) foundational work on the role of networks in the job search process have explored how network hiring has acted as a mechanism for workplace segregation and hiring discrimination ([DiTomaso, 2015](#)). Put simply: if hiring happens through networks and networks are racially segregated then hiring will, in turn, reinforce racial segregation. [Waldinger and Lichter \(2003\)](#) document this process across different industries in Los Angeles. More recently, [Silva \(2018\)](#) expands on this line of work to show that referrals carry different weight depending on who is doing the referring. Silva shows that white applicants benefit from same-race referrals while black applicants do not; black applicants only benefit from referrals from *white* employees and even then only when the potential employer is relatively less prejudiced. This research documents that white applicants are doubly advantaged: on average, white applicants are more likely to have a relevant network tie, and a referral from that tie is more likely to carry weight with employers.

Second, scholars have emphasized that jobs become racially typed within a given geographic and historical context. Rather than focusing on the hiring dynamics of individual workers, these scholars explore how certain classes of work become racialized—typically, 'dirty jobs' being associated with nonwhite workers. For example, [Glenn \(1992\)](#) traces the racialized and gendered history of 'reproductive labor', including childcare and nursing. Glenn documents how, over the last hundred years, reproductive labor moved from the household to more institutionalized settings (e.g. hospitals and daycare centers), while largely maintaining institutionalized race and gender hierarchies: 'In both household and institutional settings, white professional and managerial men are the group most insulated from dirty work and contact with those who do it. White women are frequently the mediators who have to negotiate between white male superiors and racial-ethnic subordinates. Thus race and gender dynamics are played out in a three-way relationship involving white men, white women, and women of color' ([Glenn, 1992](#), p. 34). This intersectional approach to the race and gender of reproductive labor showcases how labor markets are constructed on top of racial and gender divisions and also how those markets reinscribe those divisions. While the state has traditionally been the focus of research on racial formation ([Omi and Winant, 2014](#)), Glenn's work shows that the racialized and gendered division of labor also makes race and gender (and, of course, class).

Bringing these two approaches together, [López-Sanders \(2019\)](#) shows how one factory in a New Immigrant destination in the American South undertook an active project of replacing white and black factory workers with undocumented Latino men. Perceiving immigrant workers as both cheaper and more docile, factory managers reduced the quality of existing jobs to induce existing workers to quit (making clean jobs dirtier), while hiring bilingual supervisors to begin training a new Spanish-speaking workforce. López-Sanders identifies the centrality of labor market brokers in facilitating this transformation. Factory managers relied on these agencies in the initial recruitment of immigrant labor, displacing some of the most overt hiring discrimination onto the brokers. López-Sander's work reminds us that brokers—not just pre-existing social networks—are central to the racialization of employment, and that displacement may be an active process, not simply an

unintended consequence of market mechanisms or network hiring. More generally, her research shows how race, gender, class and nativity together shape responses to global economic transformations and, in so doing, alter local patches of racial segregation.

5.2 Finance and real estate

Much as scholars of labor market have long-tracked racial workplace segregation and discrimination, scholars of real estate and finance have documented extensive residential segregation underpinned by discriminatory practices by actors ranging from real estate agents to bank loan officers to government-sponsored insurance underwriters (Rugh and Massey, 2010, 2014; Massey *et al.*, 2016; Korver-Glenn, 2018). Beyond documenting the extensive and persistent character of racial segregation, researchers have begun to draw on theories from the sociology of race and economic sociology to identify *how* the real estate market produces racial inequality.

In her study of the real estate market in Houston, Korver-Glenn (2018) shows how the structure of compensation for real estate agents interacts with racially homogenous networks to advantage white agents. Real estate agents are compensated based on a percentage of the final home sale (typically 3% of the sale price to the buyer's agent and 3% to the seller's). Agents find most of their listings through referrals, repeat business and their own social network. These seemingly race-neutral features of the market interact with the intense racial wealth gap and highly homogeneous social networks to produce substantial disparities in the opportunities available to white, black and Latinx real estate agents. Nonwhite real estate agents are excluded from the most valuable listings. At the same time, for fear of losing referrals or repeat business, white agents catered to the explicitly racist whims of their wealthy white customers: 'white real estate agents told me they had white sellers who did not want to sell to black buyers, for example, because they assumed this would mean a decrease in property value for their white neighbors. One white real estate agent had a client who refused to sell his home to a Middle Eastern buyer because he did not want to "support terrorists"' (Korver-Glenn, 2018, p. 638). Korver-Glenn also speculates that the absence of competition among white agents for nonwhite business (due to the perception by white agents that such clients were too difficult or poor to be worth serving) created a gap in the industry which was exploited by predatory lenders seeking targets for deceptive subprime loans [as documented by Massey *et al.* (2016), among others].

Korver-Glenn's work also shows how technical aspects of the real estate industry disadvantage nonwhite neighborhoods and their residents. In Houston, the technical infrastructure for home listings required agents to place a listing into one of 98 pre-defined market areas. Most of these areas were, in turn, racially homogeneous. But white, black and Latinx neighborhoods were defined with different levels of granularity: '50 of these 70 market areas were majority-white—a disproportionately high number given that only 31 percent of the population within the encompassing area is white' (Korver-Glenn, 2018, p. 641). White market areas were subdivided by class, while black market areas were homogenized. These practices, combined with a lack of standardization in appraisal industry practices and appraiser norms of only comparing houses from neighborhoods with similar racial demographics, in turn supported higher appraisals for houses in white neighborhoods, and lower appraisals for houses in black and Latinx neighborhoods (Howell and Korver-Glenn, 2018). Though Korver-Glenn does not theorize in these explicit terms, we read her research as

bringing together ideas about networks, market devices, intersectionality and colorblind racism into a thorough analysis of the racialized real estate market.

5.3 Immigrant entrepreneurship

Literature on entrepreneurship within economic sociology has long attuned itself to ethnic differences in entrepreneurial activity. Recent work engages with the topic of immigrant entrepreneurship through theories of intersectionality and colorblind racism (Nopper, 2010), complicating existing conceptions of immigrant entrepreneurs by highlighting intraethnic class distinctions, racial stereotyping and colonial legacies as factors that shape the conditions of immigrant entrepreneurship.

Hoang (2015) brings an intersectional lens to the ethnic enclave literature, challenging the focus on race as a stable category. In her study of Vietnamese American nail salons in predominantly Mexican and African American neighborhoods, she analyzes owner–client, owner–worker and worker–client relationships, and how these three sets of interactions comprise a *triangular system of labor relations*. In this complex racialized system, English-speaking Vietnamese business owners located their stores in Mexican or African American neighborhoods and employed Vietnamese immigrants with limited English proficiency. Owners situated themselves as superior to their workers because they were more linguistically and culturally proficient than their immigrant labor; they also situated themselves as superior to their clients as they drew on broader white-dominant conceptions of black and brown bodies as marginal, characterizing them as either difficult or docile. Furthermore, owners took advantage of the linguistic gulf between workers and clients. Workers offered clients routinized services; owners, proficient in English, were able to provide clients more personalized and valuable services. These practices enabled the upward mobility of the owners and their families, while limiting mobility for their workers. By analyzing intrethnic and interracial power relations simultaneously, Hoang's ethnography challenges the notion of ethnic enclaves as evenly beneficial to an entire ethnic group. It shows, by contrast, the class-based exploitation reproduced in the owner–worker relationship and the reproduction of racial hierarchy in the owner–client relationship.

Recent scholarship also considers the racialized logic of larger market forces that profoundly shape the entry and subsequent experience of racialized immigrant entrepreneurs into a particular industry. Nazareno (2018) considers larger geopolitical forces in her study of how some Filipino American women have agentially pursued entrepreneurship in healthcare over the past 40 years. Nazareno illuminates the macro-level economic forces that bring particular middle-class, well-educated Filipinas to the USA, including US colonial presence in the Philippines which Americanized healthcare training and thereby created laborers that were more easily imported into the US context. Some Filipina healthcare workers, once arrived, entered into the 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 subsequently shifted responsibility on to these entrepreneurs, blaming them when the gap left behind by deinstitutionalization was not adequately filled. The study provides a racial capitalism-inflected complement to Polanyian economic sociologists' treatment of the return of market fundamentalism and the attempt by states to avoid appearing responsible for negative economic outcomes created by policy choices (Krippner, 2011).

5.4 Digital platforms

Over the past decade, digital platforms have emerged that mediate market relationships, both in the conditions by which job candidates must interact with employers, and in the ways service-providers and clients screen and rank one another. Recent work has highlighted the racialized, classed and gendered implications of these new technologies.

Employers increasingly use existing digital platforms such as Facebook to recruit job candidates. [Ajunwa \(2018\)](#) argues that this reliance on digital platforms, which she terms *platform authoritarianism*, restricts the amount and type of potential candidates that ultimately apply to positions within the organization. Advertising algorithms predict age, gender and ethnic affiliation based on, e.g. Facebook usage patterns. As a result, the screening, while automated, ends up recreating human biases in targeting and recruitment. Much like labor market brokers charged with recruiting Latino immigrants ([López-Sanders, 2019](#)), this targeted marketing filters out some potential candidates out while simultaneously displacing responsibility away from employers. Economic sociologists attuned to the sociology of race will connect this demonstration of unequal targeting of candidates to the reproduction of existing racial bias in hiring processes.

Beyond the use of digital platforms in the recruitment process, digital platforms that bring together workers and clientele introduce screening systems that have been shown to reinforce racial hierarchies ([Schor and Attwood-Charles, 2017](#)). First, the screening process in the selection of jobs allows workers to act on racist preferences: Taskrabbit workers in Chicago are less likely to accept tasks in poor neighborhoods, and when they do, they charge more on average ([Thebault-Spieker et al., 2015](#)); Airbnb hosts were 16% more likely to reject potential guests with stereotypical African-American names ([Edelman et al., 2017](#)). Clientele use the screening process in racist ways, as well: nonwhite Airbnb hosts get significantly lower ratings ([Cansoy and Schor, 2016](#)); experimental studies found that product sales and lending on sites like *eBay* and *Prosper* fare significantly better when the product is modeled with a white hand versus a black hand ([Doleac and Stein, 2013](#), [Ayres et al., 2015](#)).

This racial bias extends to the ranking systems within digital platforms, as when non-white drivers are rated lower when they do not conform to particular white middle-class norms and signifiers within their cars ([Rogers, 2015](#)). As [Noble \(2018\)](#) notes, these ranking systems do not just disadvantage those ranked lower; they can disadvantage those not ranked at all. One of her respondents, the owner of a small black hair salon, had relied on a word of mouth referral system, especially with the students in the university town that came and went in a matter of years. The arrival of Yelp inhibited this process as new arrivals began to ask Yelp rather than their peers for referrals; furthermore, even when these users search for ‘black hair salons’, results for bigger white-appealing hair salons edge out this salon in the result due to their existing clientele’s higher tendency to use the rating system, and the investment they make in paying for ads on Yelp.

The way that digital platforms restructure market relationships is key to a sociological understanding of the changing economy and the implications of sociotechnical tools in transforming markets. As economic sociologists increasingly take up the study of these emerging platforms, the above insights will facilitate the corresponding analysis of how sociotechnical mechanisms reify the racial order in both the institution of biased algorithms in the labor market and the information flows that allow for racial bias in the screening and rating processes of the digital economy.

6. Conclusion

Economic sociologists should treat racism as a constitutive, structuring force, analytically co-equal with capitalism, patriarchy and nationalism. We have outlined six insights from the sociology of race that, combined with the analytical tools of economic sociology, provide generative frameworks for thinking through markets and economies as racialized. In some cases, this research might require overhauling existing theoretical frameworks and rethinking existing accounts of economic life; in others, it might involve their creative extension and recombination to address important problems that had previously been omitted from economic sociology's purview. While such insights have not been systematically engaged within the subfield, the research projects discussed above serve as promising examples of the analytical power of bringing such insights on race and racism to bear on economic life.

Race is central to economic life, but race is not *yet* central to economic sociology. Let's change that.

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