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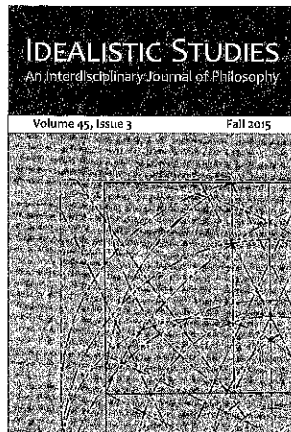
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A Problem with Conceptually Relating Race and Class, Regarding the Question of Choice

Emily S. Lee

1. Introduction

The popular writer Dorothy Allison writes in her book *Skin*, "I have learned with great difficulty that the vast majority of people believe that poverty is a voluntary condition."¹ I was startled by the idea that anyone would think poverty is a voluntary condition. Poverty is such a stressful condition—one worries over how to eat, how to pay rent, how to stay within a budget while providing for all of one's needs, and how to avoid homelessness. If such immediate dangers do not condition one's experiences of poverty, if one just lives on a day-to-day basis in poverty where one at least "gets by," then one's surroundings clearly reveal the lack of resources in the ill-maintained streets exhibiting the decay and disrepair that ultimately present housefronts as limp, sad, and hopeless. Most importantly, feelings of embarrassment accompany poverty; more than with any other condition, I would venture to say, feelings of failure come with poverty. That anyone would think that poverty is a voluntary condition, that people choose to be poor, is a completely confounding conclusion.

Let me weave this thinking about class with the topic of race, for I find the emphasis on choice in regard to class especially strange in juxtaposition with race. The language of choice does not circumscribe race. One does not choose to be a particular race. In limited circumstances regarding passing identities (and maybe even in some cases of sexual orientation),² there may be the possibility of choice, but generally, one does not choose one's race or gender. So, what constitutes the regular association of class, which one chooses, with race, which one does not choose? The two do not simply occupy a list of social problems, because as is well known by now, specific genders and specific races generally correlate with

particular classes. In the United States, white men more frequently occupy the higher income brackets; women and many people of color more frequently occupy the lower income brackets.³ And women of color consistently occupy the lowest income brackets in the United States.⁴

Although we live at a time when we acknowledge the unacceptability of racism (although with the election of Donald Trump, this might appear not to be the case), this is not the case with classism. Generally speaking, we may feel sympathy for the poor, but we also maintain a distance from the poor; we are not encouraged to refrain from disdain for the poor. This paper argues that the close association of a particular race and gender with a particular class serves as a means to exhibit disdain for a race or gender via class. To make this argument, I begin by establishing the neoclassical economic analysis that concludes that poverty results from choice. To demonstrate that race and class are not evoked together simply because they are both social problems, I trace Michel Foucault's analysis that the discourse of class was developed from an earlier discourse of race. In other words, the analytical framework of a social category that encompasses choice originates from the analytical framework of a social category that does not circumscribe choice presently. This paper argues that the close association of a race with a class, in which one automatically generalizes the likelihood of a specific race with a specific class, maligns and harms racialized populations. The close conceptual association of race and class serves as an avenue to show disdain for specific races.

2. Mobility of Class: The Incentive System in Neoclassical Economics

Let me begin by offering an explanation of why Allison concludes that "the vast majority of people believe" poverty is a voluntary condition. In the United States today, any discussion of class and the poor falls within the narrow domain of economic analysis and labor motivation. Michael Katz, a leading poverty theorist in the 1980s and '90s, explains that the United States' particular history has resulted in such a narrowing of the analytical domain of poverty. Katz bemoans this situation; analysis of the poor could include two other domains: the "categorization of the poor . . . and the limits of social obligation."⁵ Poverty analysis might benefit from prolonged discussion about the criteria for categorizing the poor and society's normative responsibilities. Instead, in the United States, to address class one must address the "impact of [poverty] relief (welfare) on work motivation" (UP 4; see also 43).

Capitalist societies—societies that adhere to neoclassical economic theory—vehemently advance the notion that individuals choose their income status. Individuals choose their income status by expressing their desire

for a certain amount of financial reward by performing a corresponding amount of work. The freedom of individuals to choose their income status functions not only as a descriptive feature of the economy but also as a prescriptive condition that must be upheld for the well-being of the economy. Neoclassical economic theory holds that efficient, strong economies rely on the existence of this individual choice. Efficiency in production hinges upon a system that proportionately rewards work. As the economist Scott Gordon points out, "economic goods must be produced in order to be distributed, and if their production requires human activities that will not be undertaken unless rewarded, it follows that the best distribution may not be an equal one."⁶ The economy must proportionately reward work to ensure that goods are produced. As such, individuals choose their income status.

The premise that one chooses one's income (and hence a vital part of one's socio-economic class) plays such a central motif in neoclassical economic theory that economists claim the necessity of a trade-off between efficiency and equity. A trade-off between efficiency and equity must exist because, as Gordon indicates, the production of goods only occurs with the use of an incentive system. Of course, for a working economy, the production of goods is of paramount importance. Neoclassical economists claim that an incentive system must precisely *not* be equitable insofar as it must correspond to quantities of work. A working incentive system must reward work that contributes to production. Capitalist societies demand such an incentive system on the assumption that people will not work unless rewarded, or will work only minimally unless proportionately rewarded. The incentive system is intricately tied to the distribution system. More precisely, the incentive system *is* the distribution system. In other words, the distribution of the goods produced by a society intimately reflects the desire for the produced goods, as exhibited in each person's willingness to work to afford those products. Because this incentive system is the distribution system, efficiency requires the sacrifice of equity. After all, without efficiency the economy does not produce goods and cannot maintain jobs; without efficiency, the goods to equitably distribute do not even exist.

Out of reverence for this incentive system, neoclassical economic theory opposes welfare policies. Welfare policies attempt to promote equity, but, it is argued, they are not efficient because rewarding individuals who do not work dampens all individuals' incentive to work and to earn a wage.⁷ Of course, this has been contested through sociological empirical tests, but neoclassical economists hold firmly to this belief in theory.⁸ Katz who "finds no evidence that welfare benefits have discouraged work," and refers to Robert Kuttner, who "by comparing the relation between social policies and economic growth in several countries . . . demonstrates that

'policy approaches which improve equality can also improve efficiency'" (UP 174).⁹

The only acceptable forms of welfare policy, according to neoclassical economic analysis, are lump-sum taxes. Lump-sum taxes only work when they surprise all the citizens of the society. When citizens expect the levying of a tax, economists predict that people attempt to avoid the tax. Hence, in order for this tax to work, it must surprise the members of society.¹⁰ The impossibility of such taxes in our present political system is far too obvious to require further articulation.

Instilling exorbitant wills to work, fostering the discipline of work, and exalting the value of work—such encouragement to work forms the basis of neoclassical economic theory. Not surprisingly, the United States glorifies the ideology of "pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps" in "the land of opportunities." Such an ideology consistently adheres to neoclassical economic theory and the inherent encouragement of the will to work. As a point of pride, the United States' history highlights individuals who rose from rags to riches—supposedly simply through the proper work ethic. The United States dotes upon such individuals as exemplars of the American dream. Such stories depend upon the conviction that class is a status one can change—that class is mobile. Of course, unheralded stories of failure accompany stories of success. And because class is mobile, failures to avoid poverty through social mobility are considered the responsibility of the individual. Hence we reach Dorothy Allison's conclusion, "I have learned with great difficulty that the vast majority of people believe that poverty is a voluntary condition." Because failures result from one's choices, poverty must come from choice. Neoclassical economics cannot conclude otherwise.

Interestingly, Katz points out that the neoclassical idea of economic mobility centers around individual mobility, and disregards or cannot conceptualize the idea of group mobility. Obviously the notion of group mobility has not captured much cultural attention in the United States (UP 65).¹¹ More importantly, such a focus on individual mobility not only neglects group mobility but undermines it: "individual mobility, as so often before in American history, undercuts group solidarity" (*ibid.*).¹²

With an individual incentive system as the distribution system, within the United States, and capitalist societies in general, it is widely believed that one can change one's class. One need only work hard enough to rise in class status. In other words, neoclassical economic theory relies upon the idea that in capitalist societies, class is mobile, hence one's occupation of a certain class can be considered praiseworthy or blameworthy.

3. Michel Foucault and the Transformation of Race Discourse into Class Discourse

This central tenet about class in the United States—that occupation of a specific class arises from choice—distinguishes class from race and gender because race and gender are not chosen. But Foucault asserts that the discourse of class arose from a preexisting discourse about race.¹³ In other words, class and race are not two independent categories that just happen to coincide sociologically. Rather, the two form predictable patterns of intertwinement precisely because, genealogically or conceptually, the former arose from the latter. The general association of a specific class with a specific race or gender is not simply accidental but perhaps systemic.¹⁴ Let me highlight the direction of this conceptual linkage: from a category considered outside of one's choice toward a category deemed within one's choice. I first present Foucault's analysis and then ponder the ramifications for the correlation of race and class with this distinction about choice in mind.

Foucault posits that in the nineteenth century, "the great theme and theory of social war . . . tends to erase every trace of racial conflict in order to define itself as class struggle" (SMD 80). Foucault explains that the idea of distinct and separate populations within a state was originally delineated along racial lines. Chloe Taylor writes,

The earliest versions of race war discourse were the first historical discourses of political resistance to sovereign power. . . . Early race war discourses, like genealogies, are counter-histories, and the histories that they are countering are universalizing and teleological Early race war discourses unearthed the voices of those silenced by history and prophesized a different future.¹⁵

Foucault refers specifically to a discourse between the Normans and the Saxons, where the Saxons challenged the rule of the Normans (SMD 87–114). The Normans put forward a unitary narrative of a single population as a means to legitimize their rule, whereas the Saxons challenged the idea of a united population and insisted on a division among the people (SMD 110). As Ladelle McWhorter writes, "laws are not instruments of peace They are Norman weapons deployed against the Saxons."¹⁶ She continues, a few pages later:

The truth of the English state is not that it is the government of a great nation but that it is the government of two nations, one of which is privileged by virtue of the laws of that state and the other of which is denigrated and impoverished by those very same laws. (DP 82–3)

The sovereign appropriated this discourse put forward by people on the margins of society, and in the process "this discourse . . . [was]

displaced, translated, or converted into a revolutionary discourse, at the time when the notion of race struggle was about to be replaced by that of class struggle" (SMD 80).¹⁷ The sovereign utilized the conceptual framework of a racial divide, reinscribed it as a class divide, and erased all signs of this reinscription.

Interestingly, Foucault attributes this reinscription of racial analysis into class analysis to Marx. Foucault writes, "It should not be forgotten that toward the end of his life, Marx told Engels in a letter written in 1882 that 'You know very well where we found our idea of class struggle; we found it in the work of the French historians who talked about the race struggle'" (SMD 79). Here, Foucault does not accurately quote Marx; moreover, the letter is not addressed to Engels but instead to Joseph Weydemeyer and dates about thirty years earlier.¹⁸ The editors of Foucault's lectures, Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana, locate a similar quote where Marx recommends reading a body of earlier literature, the same literature that Foucault refers to for his analysis of race conflict.¹⁹ With some pause for the tenuous status of this body of work, let me explain Foucault's elaboration of this particular conclusion on the reinscription of racial analysis into class analysis.

The state takes up the race war discourse and translates it to use upon its own population. But, instead of merely distinguishing two population groups, the state recognizes a "superior race" and a "subrace" within its borders (RRF 752). The state justifies this division within its very borders with the claim that it is to prevent the endemic biological decay of its own members of society. Foucault writes,

It is the splitting of a single race into a superrace and a subrace. . . . It will become the discourse of a battle that has to be waged not between races, but by a race that is portrayed as the one true race, the race that holds power and is entitled to define the norm, and against those who deviate from that norm, against those who pose a threat to the biological heritage. (SMD 61)²⁰

Explicating Foucault, Taylor writes,

In sum, race war discourse has been inverted by the late 19th century, and it is those at the center who wield the discourse against those at the margins, reintroducing the language of race, superimposing it upon class and other forms of social deviance, except now the language of race means something else: race no longer refers to different but qualitatively neutral cultures, but to hierarchically ranked biological groups. (RRF 752)

To clarify, Foucault locates three transitions: (1) the race discourse changes from being about two races to being about a single race;²¹ (2) the understanding of race changes from a cultural and nonhierarchical sense to a biological and hierarchical sense (RRF 750, 752); (3) and

the mechanism of power develops from relying solely on sovereign power to utilizing normalizing and institutional power—or, in other words, biopower and its regulating and disciplining mechanisms. These transitions, according to Foucault, mark a conceptual shift from a race war discourse to a racist discourse.²² Race war discourse forwarded by populations on the margins of society circumscribes the political discourse between two culturally different population groups. Racist discourse arises from the state's professed endeavor to preserve life; it focuses on the biological level.²³ Foucault explains, "I think that racism is born at the point when the theme of racial purity replaces that of race struggle, and when counterhistory begins to be converted into a biological racism" (SMD 81).²⁴ Foucault parodies this discourse: "We have to defend society against all the biological threats posed by the other race, the subrace, the counterrace, that we are, despite ourselves, bringing into existence" (SMD 61–2). This junction between race war discourse and racist discourse marks the state's introduction of biopower and the tactic of normalization—all under the auspices of protecting life. The transition of the discourse from cultural to biological threats is pivotal, since "in the biopower system . . . killing or the imperative to kill is acceptable only if it results not in a victory over political adversaries, but in the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species or race" (SMD 256). In other words, through the biological enforcement of racial difference or purity the state establishes "a relationship between my life and the death of the other that is not a military or warlike relationship of confrontation" (SMD 255). Tracing the consequences of this view, Foucault continues, "the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal)" is then perceived as "something that will make life in general healthier" (ibid). By "killing," Foucault does not mean direct murder, but all the ways in which a state exposes people to death or indirectly murders them by letting them die. In this way, Foucault highlights the importance of the state becoming racist; society exercises the power of normalization and fulfills its duty of protecting life through racism.²⁵ Biopower functions through racism.²⁶

Foucault has been criticized for this understanding of racism. Clearly, present understandings of race hold that race functions as a social construction and that the biological differences of racial differences are insignificant. But Taylor clarifies that although race war discourse started with an understanding of race as culturally based, in the transformation to racist discourse, Foucault holds that race started to function on the level of biology (RRF 750–2). Second, Foucault's use of the term "race" does not solely refer to race; he uses the term more

broadly to refer to any feature relegated as an "abnormality." Taylor explains:

Foucault's use of the term "racism" in these pages may seem metaphorical rather than literal: prejudice against any abnormal group or carrier of "stigmata" (for instance non-heterosexuals, non-able-bodied people). . . . Now race had come to be about skin-color, bodies and morphologies, and not about customs or languages. A black person raised in a white society would still be black, and the problem with blacks, this racist discourse claimed, was not that they were conquerors but that they were anatomically and hence mentally and culturally inferior. (RRF 749-50)²⁷

These "abnormalities" include poverty. The abnormalities that Foucault references with the term "racism" include "the misfits, many of whom are simply poor, [who] are now deemed a sub-race" (RRF 752). Third, McWhorter criticizes Foucault for not giving an accurate historical account of the period of transition from race war discourse to racist discourse (DP 91-3). I am not so interested in the details of Foucault scholarship in this paper. I do find it worth noting that although Foucault marks a difference between race war discourse and racist discourse, the two together capture a wide spectrum of understandings about race and racism today, both the colonial and the so-called post-colonial expressions. But for my present concerns, I am interested in the relation between race discourse and class discourse.

Foucault posits that the strategy and conceptual framework of dividing a society internally and using the mechanism of normalization to let one group die occurred along the lines of race prior to those of class. Marx's conceptual framework of a society with a divided population, including a subclass of economic participants (workers with only their labor to sell, workers so abundant and replaceable that society can let them die), Foucault insists, derives from an earlier analysis of race. Recall that Foucault uses the word "racism" to refer to those who experience difficulty in participating in the capitalist system. McWhorter explains that

people who fail chronically in the capitalist economic system are biological failures as well, and charity and social welfare programs only prolong their misery and give them more opportunity to reproduce their kind and inflict themselves as burdens on the productive members of society. (DP 86)

Whether one finds the details of Foucault's position convincing or not, he establishes a genealogical connection between the analysis of race and class. The analysis of race serves as the conceptual framework for class.

4. The Ramifications of the Connection between Discourses of Race and Class

Let me return to the beginning of this paper, to my shock that anyone would think that poverty is a voluntary condition. Foucault appears to be referencing Marxist theories of class, yet the premise that class is a result of choice lies solidly within neoclassical economic theory. Marxist and neoclassical economic theories are believed to be at odds with each other. Let me list at least two immediately relevant senses in which the two theories speak past each other. First, neoclassical economic theory focuses on the individual, whereas Marxist economic theory addresses population groups. Second, neoclassical economics emphasizes human beings' choices and especially the choice of a class level, including poverty. Marxist economic theory explains the contrary position: human beings, especially the proletariat, ultimately have no choice in their economic level. Hence, on first look, it appears as if Foucault's genealogical point refers only to Marxist economic theory because Foucault's analysis of the normative mechanism functions on the level of the group. As Mary Beth Mader writes, "a key feature of this new bio-political technology of the norm is its massifying property. It necessarily operates on the aggregate, collective and general level of a state, and not on the individual level."²⁸

Yet, Foucault's brief references to the connection between economics and biopower in *The History of Sexuality* show a subscription to the principle of efficiency in neoclassical economics. The central tenet of neoclassical economics, the principle of efficiency, with its incentive system as the distribution system, relies upon and exemplifies disciplinary forms of power. Biopower functions through two poles. The first of the two poles, disciplinary power, "centered on the body as a machine; its disciplining . . . the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility . . . an anatomo-politics of the human body."²⁹ This first pole in Foucault's analysis centers on individual bodies. The second pole, the regulatory forms of power, highlights a "biopolitics of the populations" (HS 139). The principle of efficiency utilizes individual internalization of the responsibility for mobility. Neoclassical economic analysis aligns only too conveniently with disciplinary power because it emphasizes one's self-surveillance and self-discipline (HS 26, 134).³⁰ In other words, if we follow Foucault's description of biopower, the emphasis on the principle of efficiency and the incentive system as the distribution system does not really demonstrate a moment of choice. Rather, the principle of efficiency epitomizes a moment of biopower at its most effective in that it hides its own mechanisms; it successfully leads us to believe that we are exercising choices in our decisions to work. Insofar as we recognize that biopower functions through the principle of efficiency, this challenges

the idea that neoclassical economics functions only on the individual level and upholds the possibility of choice. In other words, insofar as we understand that biopower functions through the principle of efficiency, this diminishes the differences between neoclassical economics and Marxist economic theory.

Perhaps the most significant similarity between Marxist and neoclassical economic theory is the acknowledgement of a relation between race and class. Neoclassical economists ultimately argue that race does not matter in one's economic status—that racist practices make companies ultimately inefficient at competing in the marketplace. As a result, racist practices disappear because of competition.³¹ Marxist economics acknowledges the role of race—that the bourgeoisie utilizes racism to prevent the working classes from forming class-consciousness. But even Marxist economists argue that racism will ultimately disappear and class-consciousness will arise.³² Both neoclassical economics and Marxist economics treat the power exerted by racism as a temporary phenomenon that can be eliminated through either the market or through class struggle.

So how should one understand these conceptual connections, especially in regards to the consistent association of particular races with particular classes? I am concerned about the close association between particular races and particular classes because of the significant distinction between the two: one is purportedly chosen while the other is purportedly beyond our choice. Does this association between particular races and particular classes indicate that both are actually beyond our choice? In other words, perhaps this close link indicates that we actually do not have choices about our class level (as Marxist economic theory forwards) and that the neoclassical economic theory's emphasis on choice is actually disingenuous. If one is born a particular race, one is likely to live a particular class.³³ Considering the ever-instantiated and ever-growing differences in wealth between races, I cannot help but acknowledge the truth of this position.

Or, does this close link between race and class indicate that both are within our choice? Now, we could not possibly choose the race we are born into. But, I contend, the close link between race and class opens the possibility of being held responsible for the race we are born into. Choice and responsibility are separate, but they overlap. Art Massara argues that Kant held human beings responsible for the color of their skin.³⁴ What does it mean to be responsible for one's skin color or one's race? Members of minority races often relay the feeling that every act—whether personal or by other members of one's race—represents their entire race. Recall Frantz Fanon's expression of always feeling triply responsible "for [his] body, for [his] race, for [his] ancestors."³⁵ Such unwanted and unforeseen representative roles weigh as heavy burdens.

Linda Martín Alcoff argues that such representative roles are unavoidable for racialized identities.³⁶ If one is not responsible for one's race, as the tenets of moral and legal structures claim, why the persistence of such undesired representative functions?

If neither of these options appear palatable, then why the persistent association of particular races with particular classes, especially considering the important difference about choice? In other words, what would the suspicious mind suspect about this persistent conceptual association? Accepting the role of choice and the possibility of class mobility, such a correlation between race and class (and gender, I would add—though I cannot fully explore this here) promotes the belief that people of specific races just do not possess the proper work incentive or work ethic. If one chooses one's income and hence class, then white men ought to be applauded for achieving disproportionately high income levels and women of color must account for disproportionately continuing to occupy lower class levels. These people of color must *want* to be poor.

At this point, to explain the correlation between gender, race, and class, essentialist conclusions surface. Essentialist analyses posit the inherent caring nature of women, which relegates women to the home or to nurture-giving professions. Essentialist analyses speculate on the inherent laziness and lack of talents or intellectual ability of people of color that keep people of color in lower income brackets, and hence lower classes. The various theories that ascribe a culture of poverty in which it is putatively the practices, beliefs, values, and aspirations of poor people that mire them in poverty, are clearly essentialist.³⁷ Such seductive conclusions have "slipped easily, unreflectively, into a language of family, race and culture rather than inequality, power, and exploitation" (UP 8). As a result, poverty analyses have focused on the behavior and values among those who lack will and ability (UP 18–22, 29).³⁸ Because of this essentialist analysis that draws from the consistent correlation of specific races and specific genders with poverty, we have such figures as "welfare mothers" or "black teenage mothers." In other words, the persistent correlation of race, gender, and class—of a mobile feature with unchangeable features—does not benefit minority subjects. The consistent association of particular races with particular classes—not only in sociological terms but also conceptual terms—invites such essentialisms.

Michael Omi and Howard Winant write, "A racial project can be defined as *racist* if and only if it *creates or reproduces structures of domination based on essentialist categories*."³⁹ The essentialist beliefs propagated by the conceptual association of race and class clearly promote structures of domination and racism. Such essentialist beliefs perpetuate the idea that people of color are poor because of their behavior and

choices—freeing the state from responsibility because the state is not at fault; the state need not concern itself with the plight of people of color facing systemic poverty and racism.

We live in a time when expressions of racism are unacceptable—although with the Trump presidency, overt expressions of racism have become more common. But classism does not enjoy such careful treatment. As a society, we are invited to feel sympathy for the poor, but we are not discouraged from feeling disdain for the poor. A major reason for this disdain centers around the understanding that class results from one's choices. Yes, we feel for the plight of the poor, but we also regard the poor as uncouth, as distasteful. We question their sanitary habits and intellectual ability. The poor are to be avoided. The conceptual association of a particular race with a particular class sets the scene for translating racism into classism so that racism can find expression within this more "acceptable" venue of classist essentialisms.

5. Toward a Conclusion: The Fiction of Mobility

Let me now address the question of whether class is truly changeable or mobile. In recent years, especially with the rise of the working poor, class mobility has become a hotly contested topic in the United States. According to Charles Mills, who has argued that mobility is largely a fiction, the statistics present a damning picture of the United States.⁴⁰ Joe Pinsker summarizes a recent PEW report by Bruce Stokes⁴¹ in the following way:

the amount of money one makes can be roughly predicted by how much money one's parents made, and that only gets truer as one moves along the earnings spectrum. When dollar amounts are used . . . the numbers are jarring: Children born to 90th-percentile earners are typically on track to make three times more than the children of 10th-percentile earners.⁴²

One has more economic opportunities for mobility in a few European countries.⁴³ Considering the statistics I cited earlier in this paper that show a correlation between specific races, genders, and classes, if mobility is fictional, then the class separation between races is likely to persist or maybe even worsen.

Because the promise of mobility forms the centerpiece of neoclassical economics, and because the distribution system functions as the incentive system, the U.S. government justifies exercising extremely frugal welfare policies. However, let's consider two ways in which mobility does not function as a simple translation of work and effort for money and goods.

First, the idea that one can change one's class reinforces the idea of holding one accountable for one's class. However, Elizabeth Minnich's

work *Transforming Knowledge* explains that, historically, class has not simply been tied to individual efforts. Minnich writes,

Historically, the change of a hitherto male-dominated profession to one defined as "women's work" marks the point at which power, status, and money decrease, as when teaching became "women's work." Conversely, pay and status increased when health care became "professionalized" as men took over.⁴⁴

The relevance of Minnich's observations requires determining how the principle of efficiency applies in regard to professions. The principle of efficiency puts forward the idea that one must exercise the proper work ethic (and perhaps talent and intellect) and work hard as a student to enter specific professions with their associated incomes. Well-known complications include claims about maintaining standards to guard the quality of schools (standards that historically blocked the entrance of members from certain races), and the number of years of education specific professions require (with no regard to who can afford to spend so many years in school). Such structural prohibitions already illustrate the idea that individual motivation for work does not primarily factor into the economy. Yet the principle of efficiency insists on the ultimate, simple belief that one need only work hard to enter a profession. Minnich's observation indicates that such a simple formula for mobility does not hold true. Minnich's claim is that when a profession becomes dominated by women, the profession undergoes a decrease in salary and prestige. (I would hypothesize that something similar happens when certain fields become dominated by non-white people.) If the dominance of a specific gender (or race) triggers a change in the perception of the profession's prestige and pay level, then obviously our economy does not solely rely on the incentive system as the straightforward distribution system. This history implies that class is not simply mobile, but is somehow integrally linked to race and gender.

Under such circumstances, the essentialist notion that women possess nurturing dispositions as evidenced by the predominance of women in certain professions, such as teaching and nursing, is suspicious. Following Minnich's analysis, the notion that the profession of school teacher requires or benefits from nurturing dispositions arose only after women dominated this field. As she shows, when men dominated this field, nurturing natures were not associated with teaching.⁴⁵ Neither a gender nor a race adheres to a specific class; rather, class adheres distinctly to a gender and a race. This challenges the key tenet of neoclassical accounts of class mobility.

Second, neoclassical analysis of class and mobility does not acknowledge the notion of cultural capital within class. Julie Bettie refers to Pierre Bourdieu's work to explain the knowledge of a class as cultural

capital, which includes “class-based knowledge, skills, linguistic and cultural competencies, and a worldview that is passed on via family; it [knowledge of class] is related more to educational attainment than to occupation.”⁴⁶ Here, Bourdieu does not refer to the financial benefits of upper-class membership. Rather, he posits the existence of ineffable but ineluctable benefits from simply being born into a family whose lineage once held upper-class status even if the finances are no longer available, as is evident in one’s embodiment and in one’s access to particular social networks. Interestingly, such capital does not automatically accrue simply from earning the finances. But without such cultural capital, without understanding certain expectations, opportunities, and possible negotiations, class mobility remains a challenge. A memoir by Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt called *The Pact*, powerfully illustrates this point by showing how a lack of awareness of certain cultural practices complicates and problematizes their endeavor to escape poverty.⁴⁷ Although it celebrates their success, I find the book incredibly informative about the relevance of class as cultural capital. The cultural capital of class challenges neoclassical economics’ insistence that the distribution system functions as an incentive system and that one’s work ethic determines one’s financial status.

Recognizing that class mobility does not directly and solely culminate from work and effort, let me consider again the conceptual—not the sociological and hence coincidental—association of a race with a class and the essentialisms their persistent association generates. I am especially concerned about these predictable associations because I believe these associations promote—without validating—perhaps the most damaging essentialisms we can make about racialized populations. Perhaps even more than the ascription of criminality to a population group, the entrenchment of such a group within a particular class is especially damaging. If we follow Foucault and the analytical framework for understanding that class originated from race, the association of race and class is not simply sociological, but conceptual. As such, the association is systematic. At the very least, the predictability of these associations should indicate something wrong with the tenets of neoclassical economics’ position on the principle of efficiency and whether choice really exists in regard to class and class mobility. But in the worst-case scenario, the predictability of these associations and the essentialisms such a conflation of race and class generates hide a means to hold racialized people responsible for their race. The essentialism of relegating people of color to poverty because their race as a group is supposedly lazy, unintelligent, uncreative, or unlucky in some sort of Darwinian survival-of-the-fittest narrative is a means to express racism through classism. As such, this essentialism is the most dangerous

essentialism possible. As McWhorter writes, we now believe “the idea that individuals and entire nations are appropriately eliminated through economic competition . . . instead of oppression and injustice” (DP 87).

NOTES

I would like to thank Iona Man-Cheong, Mario Sáenz, Marjorie Jolles, Falguni Sheth, Paul Taylor, and Linda Martín Alcoff. Of course, any conceptual mistakes are all my fault.

1. Dorothy Allison, *Skin: Talking about Sex, Class, and Literature* (Ithaca: Firebrand, 1994), p. 15.
2. For example, Gloria Anzaldúa writes that she “made the choice to be queer” (Gloria Anzaldúa, “Movimientos de rebeldía y las culturas que traicionan,” in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* [San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987], p. 19).
3. Admittedly, the numeric determination of poverty has been much contested. So, I may be accused of presenting only what might be dubbed as the “liberal count of poverty.” But considering that even conservatives have the habit of associating single black mothers with poverty, there must be some agreement that poverty is more pervasive among women and people of color, specifically African Americans. For some statistics, see Mandi Woodruff, “The Income Gap Between Blacks and Whites Has Only Gotten Worse Since the 1960s,” *Business Insider*, <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-income-gap-between-blacks-and-whites-2013-8> (accessed June 6, 2017). Woodruff writes, “Since the 1960s, the difference in household income between black and white households ballooned from \$19,000 to \$27,000, meaning black households on average earn just 59% as much as their white neighbors.” In the case of gender, the most commonly mentioned figure of the gender gap debate is that an American woman only earns 79 cents for every dollar made by a typical American man. Some people deny that a real difference in wages exist, but see Bourree Lam’s defense, “What Gender Pay-Gap Statistics Aren’t Capturing,” *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2016/07/paygap-discrimination/492965/> (accessed June 6, 2017).
4. Recent Census Bureau statistics show that Black and hispanic women have consistently occupied the lower income brackets (see Bernadette D. Proctor, Jessica L. Semega, and Melissa A. Kollar, “Income and Poverty in the United States: 2015: Current Population Reports,” United States Census Bureau, <https://census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2016/demo/p60-256.pdf> [accessed December 1, 2017]; and Carmen DeNavas-Walt, Bernadette D. Proctor, and Jessica C. Smith, “Current Population Reports, P60-239: Income, Poverty and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2010,” United States Census Bureau,

- http://www.census.gov/prod/2011pubs/p60-239.pdf [accessed August 29, 2013]). According to these reports, Asian Americans buck this trend by outearning white Americans. Elsewhere, I criticize this finding of the 2010 report for failing to distinguish between the earnings of Asian American men and Asian American women, and for employing a faulty methodology that does not take into consideration differences in the costs of living of the clustered locations where Asian Americans live compared to where white Americans live (see Emily S. Lee, "The Ambiguous Practices of the Inauthentic Asian American Woman," *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 29:1 [2014], pp. 146–63).
5. Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), p. 4; see also p. 166; henceforth UP, followed by page number.
 6. Scott Gordon, *Welfare, Justice, and Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 37.
 7. See Nicholas Barr, *The Economics of the Welfare State* (Oxford: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1993), pp. 78, 174.
 8. See *ibid.*, p. 174.
 9. Katz is quoting from Robert Kuttner, *The Economic Illusion: False Choice between Prosperity and Social Justice* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), p. 8.
 10. For a discussion of the effects of lump-sum taxes, and some of the problems with implementing them, see Assar Lindbeck, "Overshooting, Reform and Retreat of the Welfare State," *De Economist* 142:1 (1994), pp. 1–19, esp. 8.
 11. Katz explains that, "by focusing on individuals and individual initiatives, Frank Davis argued, the ideology of free enterprise neglected the group oppression of black people, which called for collective action" (UP 63).
 12. Determining how the premises of neoclassical economics need to change to accommodate the notion of group mobility would be an interesting endeavor.
 13. See, for example, Michel Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–76*, trans. David Macey, ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 1997), esp. pp. 65–86; henceforth SMD, followed by page number. Foucault is not alone in making this sort of claim. For example, Axel Honneth argues that racism explains classism. In the more recent language of recognition and redistribution, Honneth argues that the concerns with recognition of race must precede class concerns with redistribution. He explains that the redistribution concerns in "bourgeois-capitalist society [are] an institutionalized recognition order" (Axel Honneth, "Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser," in Axel Honneth and Nancy Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition?: A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, trans. Joel Golb, James Ingram, and Christiane Wilke [New York: Verso, 2003], p. 138; see also p. 136).
 14. Foucault only discusses the genealogical correlation between race and class. I suspect a similar relation between gender and class, but I lack the space here to elaborate my argument for this, and so I focus just on Foucault's case for the link between race and class.
 15. Chloe Taylor, "Race and Racism in Foucault's Collège de France Lectures," *Philosophy Compass* 6:11 (2011), p. 751; henceforth RRF, followed by page number.
 16. Ladelle McWhorter, "Decapitating Power," *Foucault Studies* 12:1 (2011), p. 80; henceforth DP, followed by page number.
 17. Consider also Foucault's claim that "the history of the revolutionary project and of revolutionary practice is . . . indissociable from the appearance of the counterhistory of races and of the role played in the West by clashes between races" (SMD 79). He makes similar or related claims at SMD 83 and 101.
 18. See Karl Marx to Joseph Weydemeyer, March 5, 1852, in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Correspondence (1843–1895)*, trans. Dona Torr, ed. Vladimir Viktorovich and Dona Torr (Moscow: Progress, 1965), p. 68.
 19. Bertani and Fontana note that Marx wrote the following to Weydemeyer: "Finally, in your place I should in general remark to the democratic gentlemen that they would do better first to acquaint themselves with bourgeois literature before they presume to yap at the opponents of it. For instance, these gentlemen should study the historical works of Thierry, Guizot, John Wade, and others in order to enlighten themselves as to the past 'history of classes'" (SMD 85n. 6).
 20. In further elaborating "medico-normalizing techniques" and counterhistory, Foucault writes, "whereas the discourse of races, of the struggle between races, was a weapon to be used against the historico-political discourse of Roman sovereignty, the discourse of race (in the singular) was a way of turning that weapon against those who had forged it, of using it to preserve the sovereignty of the State" (SMD 81); see also SMD 70.
 21. Although the Saxons initiated this discourse, they were different only in culture. Ann Laura Stoler criticizes Foucault on this position in her book *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 73–4.
 22. McWhorter clarifies that although race war discourse is distinguishable from racist discourse, the two are related. She writes, "Different as they are, however, racism in the West develops in part on the basis of race war discourse, Foucault maintains; racist rhetoric amounts to a political inversion of the older discourse" (DP 85).
 23. See Mary Beth Mader, "Modern Living and Vital Race: Foucault and the Sciences of Life," *Foucault Studies* 12:1 (2011), pp. 97–112.
 24. Taylor writes, "This is no longer a politico-historical discourse, the kind of discourse that Foucault found laudable and comparable to genealogy; rather, it is a biological discourse that, in his previous lecture course, he had described as 'racism against the abnormal'. . . but is rather a discourse about human types, human physiology, biological ends, survival of the fittest and degeneration" (RRF 752).
 25. Foucault writes, "If the power of normalization wished to exercise the old sovereign right to kill, it must become racist. And if, conversely, a power of

- sovereignty, or in other words, a power that has the right of life and death, wishes to work with the instruments, mechanisms, and technology of normalization, it too must become racist. When I say 'killing,' I obviously do not mean simply murder as such, but also every form of indirect murder: the fact of exposing someone to death, increasing the risk of death for some people, or, quite simply, political death, expulsion, rejection, and so on" (SMD 256). A few pages later, he writes, "The juxtaposition of—or the way biopower functions through the old sovereign power of life and death implies the workings, the introduction and activation, of racism. And it is, I think, here that we find the actual roots of racism" (SMD 258). Later, the editors explain the point in the following terms: "As for racism, this was a theme that appeared and was dealt with in the seminars and lectures on psychiatry, punishment, the abnormal, and all the knowledges and practices associated with the medical theory of 'degeneracy,' the forensic theory of eugenicism and social Darwinism, and the penal theory of 'social defense,' which in the 19th century developed techniques for identifying, isolating, and normalizing 'dangerous' individuals: the early dawn of ethnic cleansings and labor camps. . . . A new racism was born when 'knowledge of heredity' . . . was combined with the psychiatric theory of degeneracy" (SMD 285–6).
26. For instance, Foucault writes, "We are dealing with a mechanism that allows biopower to work" (SMD 258). Taylor puts the point in the following terms: "the biopolitical state will inevitably be racist since it is racism that gives this state the power to kill" (RRF 752).
 27. See also Mader, "Modern Living and Vital Race," p. 108.
 28. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
 29. Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, vol. 1 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1990), p. 139; henceforth HS, followed by page number.
 30. Note that Ann Laura Stoler finds Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power in *The History of Sexuality* problematic because he concentrates his analysis of power there solely on the lens of sexuality. Foucault does not apply the notion of disciplinary power to race; rather, race illustrates his analysis of sexuality. Stoler writes that "Foucault's analysis of the discourses of sexuality entailed racism as a tactic within it" (*Race and the Education of Desire*, p. 196).
 31. Michael Omi and Howard Winant contest this view in *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 25.
 32. See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "Class," chap. 2 of *Racial Formation in the United States*, pp. 24–35, esp. 30.
 33. See Andy Campbell, "The Vast Wealth Gap Between Black and White America Would Take Centuries to Close: Report," *The Huffington Post*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/racial-wealth-gap-america_us_57a9e4ede4b0b770b1a44ba9 (accessed June 6, 2017); Laura Shin, "The Racial Wealth Gap: Why a Typical White Household has 16 Times the Wealth of a Black One," *Forbes*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/laurashin/2015/03/26/the-racial-wealth-gap-why-a-typical-white-household-has-16-times-the-wealth-of-a-black-one> (accessed June 6, 2017); Jordan Weissmann, "The Wealth Gap Between Blacks and Whites Is Even More Enormous (and Shameful) Than You Think," *Slate*, http://www.slate.com/blogs/moneybox/2014/12/15/the_black_white_wealth_gap_it_s_bigger_than_you_even_think.html.
 34. See Art Massara, "Stain Removal: On Race and Ethics," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 33:4 (2007), pp. 509–10.
 35. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove, 1967), p. 112.
 36. See Linda Martín Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20:1 (1991), pp. 5–32.
 37. Steve Martinot points out a particularly interesting essentialism that occurred in only two historical moments: "In 1820 (as in 1990), black crime was not seen as a result of discrimination or impoverishment, but of racial malignancy. That is, it had an absoluteness and generality that only emerges from the prior and general criminalization of a group" (Steve Martinot, *The Rule of Racialization: Class, Identity, Governance* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003], p. 106).
 38. Katz vehemently argues against the idea of a culture of poverty. See his eleven criticisms in UP 41–3, which I will not adumbrate fully here. Let me just note two of the more interesting arguments he raises. First, he claims that the culture of poverty argument conflates cause and effect. Second, he contends that the culture of poverty argument is ethnocentric, for it "takes one set of standards—usually white, middle-class American—and applies them to the evaluation of other groups. In the process it defines differences as pathologies" (UP 42).
 39. Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, p. 71.
 40. Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 37–9.
 41. See Bruce Stokes, "Global Publics: Economic Conditions are Bad, But Positive Sentiment Rebounding in Europe, Japan, U.S.," *Pew Research Center Economy Report*, Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2015/07/Pew-Research-Center-Economy-Report-FINAL-July-23-20151.pdf> (accessed June 6, 2017).
 42. Joe Pinsker, "America is Even Less Socially Mobile than Most Economists Thought," *The Atlantic*, <https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/07/america-social-mobility-parents-income/399311/> (accessed June 6, 2017). See also Jim Tankersley, "Economic Mobility Hasn't Changed in a Half-Century in America, Economists Declare," *The Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/economic-mobility-hasnt-changed-in-a-half-century-in-america-economists-declare/2014/01/22/e845db4a-83a2-11e3-8099-9181471f7aaf_story.html (accessed June 6, 2017). A study by Bhash Mazumder argued that mobility declined as inequality increased in the 1980s (Jonathan Davis and

Bhashkar Mazumder, "The Decline in Intergenerational Mobility after 1980" [Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago Working Papers Conference, Chicago, December 21, 2016]. This study challenges a previous study by Raj Chetty et al., "The Fading American Dream: Trends in Absolute Income Mobility since 1940," (National Bureau of Economic Research Working Papers Conference, Cambridge, December 5, 2016) that concludes mobility has not changed significantly since the 1970s. Tankersley concludes, nevertheless, that "mobility is stuck at a low rate, at least compared to other wealthy nations: It is much harder for a poor child born in America to climb into the rare air of the country's highest earners than it is for a similar child in, for example, Canada or Denmark" (Tankersley, "Economic Mobility Hasn't Changed in a Half-Century in America, Economists Declare"). Martinot writes that because of the change within capitalism to an oligopolistic system with its associated increase in costs of owning the means of production, class mobility is structurally less likely. He posits this as the reason for the union strikes against large-scale industry in the 1890s (Martinot, *The Rule of Racialization*, p. 88).

43. See, for example, Bloomberg, "The Great Gatsby Curve: Declining Mobility," <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/infographics/the-great-gatsby-curve-explained.html> (accessed December 1, 2017). According to these statistics, France, Germany, and Sweden all have higher rates of upward class mobility.
44. Elizabeth Kamarck Minnich, *Transforming Knowledge* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), pp. 126–7. To the list of professions that Minnich provides here, we can add legal secretaries. Honneth also points to "the fact that even the social demarcation of professions—indeed, the shape of the social division of labor as a whole—is a result of the cultural valuation of specific capacities for achievement. Today it is becoming especially clear that the social construction of professional fields is shot through with prejudices about the limits of women's capabilities. An examination of the relevant research quickly shows that the undervaluing of predominately female professions is not due to the actual content of the work. Rather, it is the other way around: every professionalized activity automatically falls in the social status hierarchy as soon as it is primarily practiced by women, while there is a gain in status if the gender reversal goes the other way" (Honneth, "Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser," p. 153).
45. Minnich, *Transforming Knowledge*, p. 126.
46. Julie Bettie, "Women without Class: Chicas, Cholas, Trash, and the Presence/Absence of Class Identity," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 26:1 (2000), p. 3n. 1. See also Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).
47. Sampson Davis, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt, *The Pact: Three Young Men Make a Promise and Fulfill a Dream* (New York: Riverhead, 2002).

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