**Book Project Proposal**

**Niki Dickerson vonLockette, October 9, 2014**

**Project Description**

Fifty years after the passage of the Civil Rights Act, a nagging public angst about race, class, and inequality in America continues to unsettle our national conscience. Why do we still have racial tensions and claims of unfairness? Does race still play a role in determining one’s class position in the US? This book addresses these broad questions in a specific way.  It provides a concrete set of metrics to determine if race matters with respect to who makes it in our economy, how, and how much.

A substantial body of evidence demonstrates that race continues to play a role in the allocation of individuals to jobs. The persistence of a racial structure in the US economy is evidenced by unexplained racial wage inequality between equally educated workers, documented discrimination in the market, different returns to education, and job stereotyping (Pager 2003,Turner, Fix and Struyk 1993, Kaufman 2000). This structure is radically different than what existed prior to the Civil Rights Movement, but we have less clarity on how and in what ways it is different. Though significant progress in decreasing racial disparities has occurred, many gains in racial disparities won in the Civil Rights era have eroded or are now eroding. For example, the employment gains of marginal black workers during the 90’s boom are rapidly dissipating, and wealth disparities between blacks and whites have quadrupled since the 1990s. While a far cry from the racialized class
structure of the Jim Crow era, most scholars would agree that race is still not decoupled from class. However, there is less analysis of precisely how and to what extent they are still interconnected.

The central argument of this book is that racial economic inequality is more extensive and more rooted in our opportunity structure than most people think. Surveys of popular attitudes about race show that people believe it is largely a thing of the past, yet we are undeniably still embroiled in racial warfare. Although a wealth of recent empirical data indicates that a structure of racial economic inequality persists, we’ve become convinced class is the predominant stratifying hierarchy. The nature of racial economic inequality is different and more complex than we think it is 45 years after the civil rights movement ended. The civil rights movement changed the laws, but not the underlying structure. We need a more systematic explanation of the character and contours of racial economic inequality today.

This book will examine how the confluence of the stratification systems of race and class on the opportunity structure has changed since the Civil Rights Movement. It will elucidate how and to what extent race and class continue to influence individuals’ economic and labor market chances by looking at three slices of economic and racial inequality: 1) the changes in the contours of US racial economic inequality post-Civil Rights, 2) the changes in the white and black class structure with respect to the overall US class structure, and 3) the extent to which race affects one’s chances in the economy, specifically by looking at how race affects labor market outcomes and to what extent that has changed over time. I will use longitudinal analyses of US census data from 1970 to 2011 to describe these changes to offer the reader a clear and concise insight into the perplexing problem of race and economic opportunity in the 21st century.

Few studies combine race and class, particularly within the broader theoretical frame of stratification. The research streams of racial/ethnic inequality and class stratification operate as intellectual silos, separated by different historical trajectories and methodological differences. This book offers an analysis of economic inequality, integrating components of both race inequality and class stratification theory to construct a framework to understand the quantitative analyses of racial economic inequality presented. Many important theoretical treatises on inequality do not marshal empirical analysis to support their claims. The theoretical framework in the current work is specifically undergirded by an empirical analysis of economic inequality and labor market opportunity. The goal is to bring more clarity through both a theoretical and an analytical lens to the puzzling and often unsettling question: after all this time, how far have we come.

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1. **The Problem of the 21st century—Still?**

The persistence of racial economic inequality since the end of the Civil Rights Era is at the heart of this book. DuBois’ famous quote, “for the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line”, written at the turn of the 20th century still seems relevant in the 21st century. The introduction will lay out how a data-driven, advanced analysis coupled with clarifying translation will help us make sense of this persistent question. First, I will present two graphical illustrations of racial economic inequality that reveal the ongoing relevance of those questions and that motivate this book. I move on to describe what the work to date has told us about these questions and what’s left unanswered. I then introduce the central questions of the book and offer the reader a roadmap to how the book is structured to answer those questions. The chapter walks the reader through the tools, the how and what we're going to find out by describing how the historical overview of the post-Civil Rights Era (chapter 2) and the three empirical chapters (chapters 3-5) flesh out a richer picture of racial economic inequality in the 21st century.

1. **From There to Here: How Did We Get Here?**

The economic inequality illustrated in the introduction didn’t evolve in a vacuum. Most striking is how uneven progress has been. This chapter assesses the changing social, political, economic landscape that shaped racial economic inequality in the post-Civil Rights era. The erratic pattern indicates there is nothing natural or automatic about the direction of change in racial economic inequality and that change (or inertia) is driven by policies and practices in the social, political, and economic spheres. I use the theory of racial formation (Omi and Winant 1994) as a jumping off point to explain these patterns. This chapter also employs the concept of a racial structure (Bonilla-Silva 2013) to describe the inequality we see today.

1. **The Big Picture: An Overview of Racial Economic Inequality**

This chapter gives us a starting point or referent to answer the most nagging of the questions: where do we stand now and how much progress have we made when looking at the economic status of blacks compared to whites? How has this changed over time? Racial economic inequality in the 21st century US is complicated and inconsistent. On the one hand, when we control for education, we see racial wage parity in some cases. But on the other hand, the persistence of the 2:1 employment gap, and a racial wage gap that is highest at the top of the occupational hierarchy complicate the picture. Most analyses look at one or a few indicators (i.e. wages or employment). What’s needed is a comprehensive picture of inequality. The goal is to shift the focus to group inequality from the more common focus on individual achievement. This chapter puts the phenomenon of racial economic inequality in the larger economic context of US households in general by employing multiple indicators of economic inequality. These indicators include household and individual income, wealth, employment, and occupational status. This approach directs specific focus to the angst many are feeling: many American households are struggling, why do blacks merit special attention?

1. **Racial Inequality in the Labor Market**:

The second approach toelucidate the connection between race and economic opportunity employed in the next empirical chapter is to examine the role race plays in determining an individual’s economic position in the labor market and to what extent that role has changed since 1970. Because the route to economic well-being for most people is through the labor market, this chapter will assess whether and to what extent race operates in the labor market, how much, in what ways, and how much its influence has changed. I use a standard wage analysis to assess whether the effect of race on wages changed between 1970 and 2011, and also whether the return to education changed for blacks and whites during that period. Finally, I will employ the decomposition technique, as did Cancio et al (1996), to partition the racial wage gaps into non-discriminatory factors (objective criteria) and discriminatory factors (residual difference reduced to racial status). In light of the analyses, the chapter will revisit extant theories that explain racial labor market inequality: social networks, employer bias, positive discrimination, homophily, and spatial signaling.

1. **De-Coupling Race and Class**

This chapter seeks to determine if there is any overlap between race and class hierarchies by modeling what I call the race-class inequality structure. I build a class framework that incorporates racial inequality by examining the white class structure and the black class structure, race differences within class, and integrating both in the overall US class structure. This approach is driven by a critique of class analyses with respect to race. For example, Horton et al’s (2000) critique that the social science literature on racial inequality tends to focus on either the underclass, or the black middle class, with little clarity about those in-between or a fuller picture of the whole of black working America. By pulling blacks and whites out of the overall class structure to assess their own internal structure, we get a clearer picture of their relative position to the overall class structure and a better sense of how race and class hierarchies overlap or are distinct. To identify a taxonomy that best fits a black and white class structure in pursuit of the goal of assessing the relationship of race vs. class, I will compare three different schemas that have been used to classify individuals and households and determine which most accurately describes the race-class inequality structure.

1. **From Here to the Promised Land**

This concluding chapter will offer strong policy recommendations in light of the previous chapters’ findings to direct the path toward equal opportunity over the next forty years. Bold policy choices can produce equal opportunity. I take as a starting point the policy implications the historical lessons introduced in chapter 2. If we know what policies worked and which ones did not before and have greater clarity on the mechanisms that generate inequality, we can build a policy response that adequately addresses inequality. Policy recommendations will target not just government entities as key actors and stakeholders, but employers and advocacy communities as well. Policy prescriptions include expanding and strengthening successful policies, such as child care and transportation supports that were added in response to critiques of welfare reform, and new ideas such as innovative ways to make the hiring process more formal and more objective by applying an NFL Rooney rule-like requirement originally designed to widen the pool of candidates for head coaching positions in the NFL to jobs in the broader labor market.

**Apparatus**

I anticipate the length of the final manuscript to be approximately 260-270 printed pages (80,000 words, not including reference materials), and to include approximately 20 graphs/charts (2 in both chapters 1 and 2, 4-5 in chapters 3-5, and 3 in the appendix), and will include a reference section and appendices for more detailed tables.

**Market considerations**

This book will be of interest to academic communities most closely associated with the topic: Sociology, Economics, African-American Studies, and Public Policy. However, while this work is in conversation with other scholars writing about economic inequality and race, I am particularly ambitious about aiming it at a broader audience of the curious and the converts. Converts are the people who believe racial inequality is still a problem in the contemporary US, but can’t quite articulate the nature and extent of it and really want to be able to do so. An example of the converts is when I present at meetings or conferences that include practitioners and people approach me and encourage me to make available the work I’ve presented in a more accessible venue than a research journal so they will have concrete data to use in their work in the field.

I am also targeting the curious, a larger group of people ranging from the captive audience of hundreds of undergraduate and graduate students I have taught over the years to the average adult who is curious about “this race thing”. With respect to the first group, I have taught courses on race and the labor market and graduate seminars on diversity and work that satisfy a university curriculum requirement about difference for over 10 years. The second group is exemplified by my physical therapist who when I told her what I taught, told me about her experience taking a similar class when she was an undergrad that so challenged her understanding of race that she brought it up with her family when she went home for the holidays (much to their dismay). The curious and the converts have come forward and told me about dorm room, break room, and dinner table debates provoked by discussions in my class. The goal of this book is to give them something concrete to talk about.

The challenge before me is to create excitement and interest, and to induce willingness to think about something that makes many of us uncomfortable, but unsettled enough about to want to wrestle with it. This topic is so universal that readers from varied backgrounds are likely to be curious. People are used to polemics and opinions. This book will add to broader conversations an accessible conceptual framework to understand how race is tied to economic opportunity buttressed by hard core economic facts to give them a concrete picture of the very problem we struggle with. In this effort, this book must be accessible. My interest in policymakers and advocacy/community groups and has forced me to learn how to distill what’s useful from quantitative analyses to help answer larger questions we all care about. I have found Jane Miller’s approach in her books *Writing about Multivariate Analyses* incredibly helpful in making my presentations and writing to broader audiences more relevant; I will relegate detailed analytic tables to separate appendices and a website.

**Reviews**: Specialists in the field of stratification or race/ethnic inequality would be the most suitable reviewers for this work. Names and contact info for suggested reviewers are below:

Camille Charles (ccharles@pop.upenn.edu, University of Pennsylvania)

Doug Massey (dmassey@princeton.edu, Princeton University)

Kim Weeden (kw74@cornell.edu, Cornell University)

Alford Young (ayoun@umich.edu, University of Michigan)

**Status of the work**: Most of the data are compiled for the analysis, which tends to be the most time-consuming component. I am on sabbatical leave this semester and hope to have the bulk of the analyses and two chapters written by the end of this semester and final draft of the manuscript ready for review by the end of next year.

**Competition**:

This book is intended to join and broaden the conversation with important books that have contributed to our understanding of racial inequality.

*Racism without Racists* (Bonilla-Silva 2014) provides an important theoretical framework for the notion of the racial structure and uses survey and interview data to trace the outlines of the colorblind ideology. Bonilla-Silva uncovers the framework for colorblind ideology by interviewing white college students. The interviews are designed to assess white racial attitudes towards racial inequality. The racial attitudes that emerged revealed the contours of colorblind ideology whose central notion is that individuals are treated fairly with respect to their race/ethnicity and that the playing field with respect to opportunity is reasonably level. Accordingly, black claims of racial injustice are considered unfounded; the interviews revealed a consistent pattern of resentment toward such claims. Although the book describes the economic structure of racial inequality, it does not directly analyze it as I plan to do in the current book. The analyses planned for the current book will complement the theoretical framework offered in Bonilla-Silva’s work by offering an empirical picture of the racial structure he describes.

*Racism without racists: color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in America.*Eduardo Bonilla-Silva. (Rowman & Littlefield 2014)

Similarly, a more dated book that is still assigned and read as a key authority on the race/class question, *the Declining Significance of Race* (Wilson 2012), outlines a controversial theory subsuming race inequality under class inequality. It is one of the few books that directly addresses the issue of race and class. Wilson proposes a relationship between the two and most importantly a shift in the relative importance of the two in the postindustrial economic restructuring and immediate gains of civil rights movement. The book offers little empirical evidence, and its chief claims need to be revisited with direct empirical analysis of the race-class structure it describes. The book’s theories and conclusions need to be revisited since the changes he described particularly benefitting middle class blacks have been reversed in the post-civil rights backlash (e.g. the retreat from affirmative action) I describe in chapter 2. *The declining significance of race: Blacks and changing American institutions.* William J. Wilson. (University of Chicago 2012).

In *American Non-Dilemma* (2013), Nancy diTomaso’s interviews with white workers about work, opportunity and perceptions of racial inequality are quite revealing and dovetail with the questions of the current work about how race affects economic opportunity. Her interviews reveal an important piece of the race—class structure—white workers’ job opportunities and careers were obtained via social networks. At the same time, their perceptions of why blacks’ were worse off in the labor market was that they weren’t working hard enough. Going beyond perceptions, my book will offer the much-needed data analysis of the labor market opportunity with respect to race to determine exactly how much race actually matters to an individual’s economic opportunity. *The American Non-Dilemma: racial inequality without racism.* Nancy DiTomaso (Russell Sage 2013).

In *Complex Inequality* McCall analyzes changes in gender, race, and class wage inequality in the wake of post-industrial economic restructuring. She examines changing levels of and correlates of wage inequality across local labor markets to identify group-specific patterns of wage inequality. She finds that the levels and the sources of wage inequality across varies across social groups and local labor markets. Mccall’s analysis encompasses gender, race, and class inequality, in contradistinction to the detailed focus on untangling the interconnectedness of the race-class structure proposed here. She focuses singularly on *measuring* wage inequality, while I’m more interested in more carefully defining the contours of race-class inequality to illuminate the structure itself. Complex Inequality: Gender, Class and Race in the New Economy. Leslie  McCall (Routledge 2001).

*Categorically Unequal* (Massey 2007) comes closest to the current work in that it is a broad examination of stratification systems from a macro perspective, and it includes race and class inequality as part of the story. It offers a compelling theory of social psychological and institutional mechanisms that produce stratification. However, the breadth of this book encompassing class, race, ethnicity, and gender is in direct contrast to the deeper exploration of the dialectic between race and class than the one chapter devoted to racial inequality in Massey’s book. While Massey’s book marshals a substantial amount of data to support his theories, the current book provides a direct empirical analysis to answer the questions at hand. *Categorically unequal: the American stratification system*. Douglas Massey. (Russell Sage 2007).