Sarah Seager

Center for Study of Hate

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Academia Through the Lens of White Supremacy and Intersectionality

Hate comes from an animosity and strong opposition of another person, action, belief, or system. This means common acts of violence like racism, homophobia, and misogyny are all manifestations of hate. Ken Stern, from the Bard Center for Study of Hate explains that hate is a part of human nature and that "people may need help in figuring out whom to hate, but the instinct to hate is part of who we are" (Stern). I will explore the role of intersectionality and white supremacy, as they relate to hate, in academia.

Over the last year, I have been involved in research with Michael Martell, an economist, Associate Professor and Chair of Economics at Bard College. Martell has been interviewing LGBTQ+ economists about their experiences in academia as it relates to their LGBTQ+ identity. My role is to transcribe these interviews and pull out the most important themes and ideas across interviews. From this, Martell and I have highlighted the importance of consolidating these answers in the form of reflection and call to action for higher education institutions and the staff and faculty within them. This leads me to this project, where I will explore academia and its manifestations of hate, like white supremacy and homophobia, and its intersections. To allow for specificity, this essay will focus on hate and its manifestations in the United States.

I. Historical Context of White Supremacy and Academia

Labor of the working class built our current economic system and gave people access to the generational wealth they see (or do not see) today. That labor was done primarily by Black enslaved people; the economic system of the United States was built on stolen labor, abuse, and hatred. Agriculture and manual labor were at the core of the United States economy. Not only was the United States economy built off labor by enslaved people, some of the most iconic buildings in the United States were built by enslaved people (it is important to note that not all enslaved people were Black and not all of this labor was done by Black enslaved people). In fact, "two of Washington, DC's most famous buildings, the White House and the United States Capitol, were built in large part by enslaved African Americans" ("Slaves Built the White House and Capitol"), which was confirmed by wage rolls and other documents found that are now held by the National Archives.

The uncompensated labor that enslaved people produced goes unrecognized far too often. In addition to the labor of enslaved people often going unrecognized, there is a severe lack of data collection for labor produced by Black people in the United States. The Bureau of Labor Statistics did not start collecting data on Black people until 1972, which would mean there is just over fifty years of data collection on labor produced by Black people in the United States ("African Americans in the U.S. Labor Force"). The erasure of Black labor has remained for generations. In addition to the lack of data about the Black experience, not having data about a group of people means theories, models, and findings very well could not apply at all to the group(s) left out of data collection and storytelling. This begs the question, if there were not any labor-related data about Black people in the United States until the 1970s, are the models, theories, and other labor-related ideas and implications found from data inaccurate? They could be entirely inaccurate, but it is more likely they are lacking the

important nuance that diversity and intersectionality could add to the conversation to tell more of the story.

As education was expanding and growing for white Southerners, education for Black people was called further into question. Much of the South agreed that Black subordination and focus on labor had to be at the core of the Black educational experience, but there were differing views on how to best approach these values (Dennis). Michael Dennis explains that progressives and their extremist opposites found common ground on self-serving principles with the goal to "educate blacks to meet current economic demands or be prepared to accept the social consequences" (Dennis 118). At this time, the early 1900s, more than one million Black people "fill[ed] jobs in the steel, automobile, shipbuilding, and other heavy industries" (Banerjee and Johnson). If the South was going to invest in the education of Black people to fulfill the economic needs of the time, the consensus was that education would need to highlight manual, industrial and agricultural skills (Dennis 118). While serving the economic needs of the time was important, the extreme racial hierarchy and anti-Black racism that permeated every aspect of life gave Black people very little to no choice or voice in deciding what educational experience they could have or what they could learn.

While education that would meet the economic needs sounded promising at the time, many white Southerners worried about the implications of educating Black Southerners. The goal, at the time, of education for Black people entirely focused on profit and growing the economy, not general learning experiences or recognizing new perspectives. Anti-Black subordination was at the core of what white southerners expected for education. In fact, the importance of anti-Black subordination was prominent among leaders and people with great power in academia. In fact, "in 1900 Paul B. Barringer, then chair of the UVA faculty,

advocated terminating public support for black schools on the grounds that blacks were using education as a 'weapon of political offence'" (Dennis 122). For Barringer, the fear was that education for Black people would remove themselves of their subordinate position and encourage political retaliation and efforts toward equality. Without forced labor and coercion, many white Southerners worried that they would lose their positions of power and the economy would struggle without a growing population of agricultural workers.

Interestingly, the ideas Barringer was concerned about over 100 years ago have re-entered the political landscape and education systems. Today, some conservatives work to ban Critical Race Theory, other forms of teaching about race and racism, and the experiences of other marginalized identities. The Legal Defense Fund, an organization working toward racial equity, explained Critical Race Theory as "an academic and legal framework that denotes that systemic racism is part of American society — from education and housing to employment and healthcare" ("Critical Race Theory FAQ"). Other aspects of Critical Race Theory that have also been targeted by conservatives is investigating racial hierarchies and the historical and current role of legal systems in creating harmful environments for people of color (Fortin). Ultimately, the development of the education system in the United States, especially higher education, is intricately related to white supremacy (Dennis 115) and also has ties to racism in education systems today.

II. White Supremacy, Academia, Economics as a Discipline

At the center of these historical and current concerns is anxiety about the maintenance of status and power for white people: white supremacy. Systemic structures of discrimination occur when discrimination is deeply embedded and supported by ongoing structures and

policies. Let's say "Institution A" was not built with explicitly racist ideals in any capacity, but there are other institutions (companies, colleges, farms, etc) that were built on racist and other discriminatory ideals. While "Institution A" was not directly created with racist founding ideals, it exists in a system and society that was, thus racism seeps into Institution A in the form of policies, biases, and explicit behavior. This analogy can be used to better understand the ways systemic racism and other manifestations of hate are at play in academia and its structures.

Tenure is a great example of this. In higher education institutions tenure was created to preserve academic freedom and allow faculty to create valuable and helpful research, regardless of the ideals of their affiliated institution, while also ensuring job security (Adams). Collaboration and cooperation often plays a role in the tenure process for many higher education institutions in the United States. This includes using social networks as a tool to propel candidates in their experiences in academia. Tenure also exists to ensure there is a breadth of people invested in the long-term wellbeing of the institution. This is where social networks come into play with tenure and publishing. Mark Adams explains that "the use of collegiality in determining tenure may result in discrimination due to the real differences in which men and women, and people of different races, view the world and relate to others, thereby creating difficulties for women and minorities to achieve tenure" (Adams 87). While the tenure process can have explicit forms of discrimination, barriers like collegiality and more subtle forms of discrimination are also common and are rooted in systemic forms of discrimination that have spread throughout society.

There is an added layer of complexity to economics as an academic discipline because the economic systems that are studied through economics are also built on white supremacy.

Even organizations like the International Monetary Fund have been examining their own role in systems of white supremacy. The International Monetary Fund, which strives for international financial stability by advising various countries, investigated their role in race-related missteps and racism in late 2020. The International Monetary Fund found that "only 0.2 percent of those top 7,920 articles cover issues of race, racial inequality, and racism" (Čihák et al.) and "4 percent of economics PhDs awarded in the United States in 2018 went to Black economists" (Čihák et al.). These findings are important in working against anti-Black racism because it calls to the forefront the ways that academia and economics as a discipline does not hold space for Black voices and ideas. The small number of PhDs awarded to Black economists may be for a variety of reasons including a lack of inclusive work environment, lack of representation in faculty and fellow students, or even a lack of early education on economics-related issues and ideas. In economics in particular, decisions around tenure and publishing are made by very small groups of people, often composed of white men. This means the research being done has to appeal to this small group in order to get published and continue in the tenure process.

We also see these ideas present in understanding economics as an academic discipline and the predominant theories and methods of understanding economic systems. Gary Becker, a prominent economist in the Chicago school of economics explored the economics of discrimination. In Becker's framework, he understood that there is a cost to discrimination that affects both employers and employees. For employees, the cost of discrimination is being in an unsafe and undesirable workplace, which might reduce productivity. For employers, the cost of discrimination is that they might be losing profit by not hiring the most productive workers from discriminatory hiring. Becker also believed that this inefficiency and potential

reduced productivity results in firms that discriminate being driven out of the market ("Introduction to the Second Edition"). In theory, this would reduce the amount of discriminating firms in the market, which will reduce the overall amount of discrimination in the workplace.

Frameworks like Becker's can be harmful because they imply that the best way to reduce discrimination is to rely entirely on the market mechanisms to naturally address discrimination. We know that when left to the market, discrimination is still present and is growing in many areas. Knowing that this ideology and thinking is present in economics as a discipline ought to raise more questions about what other theories are circulating and highly regarded that follow a similar approach of allowing systems of hate to continue, even if to a small degree.

Applying Kenneth Stern's understanding of hate as a part of human nature to Becker's framework demonstrates just how dangerous ideas and theories like Becker's can be to anti-racist work. If we recognize that hate is a part of human nature, we also have to recognize that without regulation, hate will easily work its way into markets, hiring processes, academia, and economic theories.

III. White supremacy and intersectionality

Anti-Black racism is not the only factor that feeds into hate and its manifestations, which is where intersectionality becomes a key component to the conversation. Intersectionality investigates the ways different ideas that people hold simultaneously overlap and cause different experiences. For example, Black women face both racism and misogyny together, while a white woman also experiences misogyny, they do not experience racism.

The combination of racism and misogyny alter both experiences to create an entirely new experience for Black women. This logic can be applied to socioeconomic class, sexuality, ability, and other identities (Crenshaw 140). Historically feminism has primarily addressed the concerns of middle-class, white women, leaving women of poor and Black backgrounds out of many aspects of feminist activism. The idea of intersectionality was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Understanding the impacts of intersectionality and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender can help us to create better targeted policies for addressing these manifestations of hate.

IV. A call to action against anti-Black white supremacy in academia and higher education institutions

Bowden and Buie challenge those who are willing to seriously work against anti-Black racism within their academic institution to follow the call to action delivered by Black in Engineering, which is a coalition and group of faculty from various parts of the United States (Bowden and Buie 760). This call to action suggests people take time to listen to the Black people speaking up and to assume that each institution has been a part of a racist act and microaggressions (Bowden and Buie).

Accountability is another step in this call to action that asks people to hold themselves and the institution they are affiliated with accountable. They explain that this might include making “a bold, public statement that puts your reputation on the line” (Bowden and Buie 760). Accountability also takes into consideration who is expected to do emotional labor.

Black in Engineering recognizes that many positions of power are not held by Black people and people of other marginalized identities, so the role of leadership is important. The

call to action suggests people investigate how leaders are able to take their positions and if these systems need to change to ensure marginalized voices are in these conversations (Bowden and Buie). While it is important that Black voices are heard, we must also recognize the invisible labor of having to be the voice against anti-Black racism as a Black person. This means senior leaders that are not Black need to have learned from and listened to Black people over time to ensure excess emotional labor is not forced upon and expected from marginalized people and is appropriately compensated. Emotional labor done by marginalized people is important to progress when it is appropriately compensated and acknowledged/listened to.

Investment is a large part of the call to action. Instead of only making a public statement, it is essential that research done by Black people and people of other marginalized communities is funded (Bowden and Buie). This includes filling positions that pay at least a living wage and supporting students as they advance through higher education. Bowden and Bowie suggest universities, in conjunction with the call to action, "do not implement changes that do not cost you anything — an unwillingness to spend money communicates that you do not value the work" (Bowden and Buie). Anti-racist work becomes increasingly more meaningful the more white people are willing to risk.

V. Black in Engineering's call to action: how can intersectionality shed light on LGBTQ+ concerns in academia?

When looking at holistic steps toward equity, anti-racist work ought to be at the core of the work because most, if not all, systems of inequality are rooted in white supremacy or

are at the very least deeply connected to systems of anti-Black racism and white supremacy. We can look at this through the lens of intersecting identities and experiences of Black men.

Blackness is often associated with hypermasculinity, regardless of gender. bell hooks understands this idea as being apart of various systems that perpetuate these hypermasculine ideals: “within neo-colonial white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, the black male body continues to be perceived as the embodiment of bestial, violent, penis-as-weapon hypermasculine assertion” (hooks 131). Throughout society, we see femininity looked down upon in both women and men. Interestingly, Black women are often masculinized based on their Blackness, which distances them from the femininity expected of women. This expectation of femininity for women is centered around the ideals for white women, which all women, regardless of race are expected to uphold. This is exacerbated for Black men, women, and gender non-conforming people because of the intersectionality of Blackness and gender norms that fold into sexuality. This intersectionality enforces compounding experiences to create an entirely new experience of identity. For example, Black women hold both the Black identity and the identity of womanhood. These experiences are the sum of both the Black experience and womanhood. This logic can also be applied to other identity combinations.

VI. Conclusion

Institutions of higher education have a duty to ensure equal access to quality education. Pursuits of higher education should not be dictated by authority figures to sustain economic growth, but rather to encourage critical thought, introspection, and encourage diverse groups of people to share their experiences in various settings. To do this, colleges, universities, and other academia settings must promote diversity and open-mindedness while providing resources to marginalized groups to ensure equitable access. For example,

encouraging students from poor and low-income backgrounds to attend costly institutions may not be wise, but encouraging the same students to attend college/university with adequate financial support and mentorship is essential.

Another avenue universities and colleges ought to take is implementing hate studies into curriculums. Allowing and encouraging students to discuss topics of hate and explore their implications removes some of the taboo about hate and hate-based actions, while providing spaces for interdisciplinary conversations and actions against hate on campuses and in surrounding areas.

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