

Rhonda M. Williams: Competition, Race, Agency, and Community

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[A version of this paper was presented at the Eastern Economic Association Annual Meeting, February 25, 2001, New York City.]

As the United States approaches the twenty-first century... in an information-based, transnational and managerial economy, it is becoming increasingly apparent that if we do not better negotiate race and ethnicity in our society, we will not adequately solve the problems of economic inequality and discrimination. Racial and/or ethnic divisions and competition shape our efforts to understand and challenge hierarchy and inequity. As long as we ignore those issues, we cannot solve the problems of poverty, unemployment, and crime, nor effect productive job creation and economic justice. Absent a cultural and economic reckoning with racism's legacies, we will fail to revitalize our cities and to recover from the socioeconomic costs of "ending welfare as we knew it." Although masked behind pronouncements of a "color-blind" society, unfinished racial business weakens our national will to provide one another the portfolio of social and economic rights essential to the sustenance of humane community in the post-industrial global economy.

- Nembhard and Williams 1998

Rhonda M. Williams was a consummate scholar, a "sister-scholar," a scholar-activist. Her intellectual legacy is a tribute to her ability to use first rate, rigorous scholarship and analysis to document injustice and support humane community. A political economist, she brought

precision and clarity to labor market analyses and discrimination theory. A story teller and narrator, she had a gift for bringing statistics to life. Her life's work combines economic analysis with race and gender analysis, law, politics, public policy, and cultural studies - relying on alternative inquiries and often heterodox theories. Williams was never apologetic for holding her economic evaluations accountable to her ethical values.

It is impossible to know what Williams would have given us had she been granted more time. She was in the midst of rapid intellectual evolution even as her energy was waning in her last year. This essay develops one interpretation of her intellectual journey. This journey was neither line nor circle, but instead a spiral: Williams came back again to themes she'd previously explored, but never in the same way; her angle of vision was always in motion. Her work over the years provided her with a set of elements that comprised pieces of a large puzzle on which she was working, sometimes in one area, sometimes in another. She never completed it, but she resolutely approached her work on seemingly disparate topics – the relationship between race and culture, discrimination in the labor market, the macro roots of urban unrest, the evolution of legal doctrines concerning racial discrimination, and so on – in a holistic way. She continuously spiraled back and around, revisiting and reflecting previous work, to narrate a story about how competition and agency drive market forces and help to explain inequality and exploitation. She argued that “mainstream economic discussion represses discussion of socioeconomic agency and therefore contributes to the mystification of the processes which have palpably eviscerated so many communities of color” (1993a, 83). She combines observations on gender, race and community in her analysis, which, in her own words (Williams forthcoming), “also are necessary for the development of a fuller account of the workings of labor markets in a capitalist economy where race continues to matter.”

Her intellectual journey moved her from concern for individuals and interactions in labor markets, to meticulous investigations into the complexities and specificities in those markets (particularly of race and gender disaggregations), to macro-structural analyses, globalization, and back to wealth accumulation, community development and empowerment. In the last couple years of her life she began to look for solutions to the problems she had so well delineated - which brought her to issues about agency, wealth creation, workplace control, and local economic democracy. Our interpretation is not meant as a definitive review of Williams' work; it represents our journey through selected works by Williams and her co-authors. In particular, this essay does justice neither to her provocative and pathbreaking work on gender, nor to her empirical work on the labor market. Indeed there are many areas of her work we could choose to emphasize, but choose areas with which we are most familiar and about which we both have had the privilege of talking with her.

Below we trace Williams' career as she moved through analyses of discrimination in the labor market and the dynamics of competition - her empirical work on race and gender inequality; to the changing strategies of corporations and the disproportionate effect on people of color. We then turn to her work on the dual crises of urban communities of color and of policies aimed to

redress racial injustices. This provides the basis for evaluating her emerging work on globalization, wealth inequality and community development. Williams had begun to connect the themes of capitalist competition and economic restructuring to global flows of capital and the consequences for wealth accumulation, with the effects of economic restructuring on embattled communities, and strategies for resistance.

This progression involves an historical as well as a thematic trajectory: labor-market discrimination, for example, preceded the domestic and international political events that led eventually to the Los Angeles uprising in the early 1990s. Williams and Kenison (1996) themselves suggest that examining the labor-market dynamic first provides an anchor for investigations of the rapid globalization of capital, labor, and goods. They observe that “many progressives increasingly draw upon and contribute to the literature that affirms race and gender relations as both constitutive of and reflective of the dynamics of political, economic, and social transformations” (pp.1-2). It is one thing to appreciate the overdetermined character of social relations; another to identify narrative through-lines.

Racial Differentials in the Labor Market

Williams’ work on the labor market reflects her search for a comprehensive approach to the problem of racial discrimination. Here we focus on Williams’ 1996 paper with Kenison, whose narrative portions and empirical concerns capture her principal concerns in her investigations of labor-market discrimination. To this extent, the reactions personalized here as those of Williams also reflect her co-author’s view. To see her distinctive viewpoint, we start with a categorization of economic theories of discrimination: personal, statistical and structural. A market process may be termed discriminatory when it widens racial differences in access to or control of economic resources. Discriminatory economic processes fall into three categories: (a) personal discrimination (bigotry), wherein racial preferences affect economic behaviors; (b) statistical or “rational” discrimination, wherein agents use race or characteristics correlated with race to make valid statistical inferences about the distinct market prospects of different racial groups; and (c) structural discrimination, which arises because of identifiable economic factors associated with the agents or property involved.

The *personal* approach emphasizes the significance of racist acts or intentions by racial perpetrators; the *structural* approach focuses instead on racial differentials in resource flows and/or in the terms and conditions of resource exchanges. The former is often linked to the Chicago-School theory that racial discrimination arises because of some agents’ taste for it. By contrast, radical economic theories of the labor market and labor process link racial inequality to structural phenomena, and especially to segmentation in labor-market outcomes. Rational discrimination is discussed further below.

Williams’ reaction to the personal and structural approaches is complex. On one hand, she agrees that discrimination had personal and structural components; but neither could be

reduced to the other. Discrimination certainly has a personal – that is, willed – component; but to attribute this to an autarchic expression of pre-social tastes is to trivialize the role of agency. Agency is quite important in discrimination, and operates at the level of social relations. Purely structural conceptions of racial discrimination are similarly incomplete. For example, the radical political economic account of pre- and post-War economic dynamics, known as “social structure of accumulation” theory, incorporates a role for Black/white inequality. It does so by arguing that contemporary capitalism involves a “dual” labor market, and workers are sorted into primary- and secondary-sector jobs. Workers in the former sector are privileged and receive wage premia and some guarantees of job stability; those in the latter sector are by contrast fully exposed to the rigors of competition, and enjoy low wages and little or no job security. Black workers are largely allocated to the latter sector. Black economic inequality is thus an embodiment of the injustice of capitalist social relations per se; but equally, the roots of this racial differential are to be found in the capitalist dynamic proper, not in a specifically racial dynamic. Williams and Kenison note that this is unsatisfactory in that “the agents and social relations that denied, shunted, and restricted Black workers remain unspecified” (p. 7).

Williams insists instead on a definition of “discrimination” that incorporates both the role of agency in generating and reproducing racial oppression, and the importance of structural differences, which record the stamp of historical oppression. Williams and Spriggs (1999) also explore the importance of historical differences in the conception of racial discrimination. The thesis here spirals back from her previous work (Williams, 1993a) where Williams makes a similar analysis about the need to include agency - active will and participation on the part of economic players. She argues that dominant narratives (neoclassical economic analysis) “generally lack an account of *agency* and, in particular, fail to situate business and worker behavior within the context of competitive capital accumulation” (p.90). The result is that competition is viewed as a market structure rather than as “an ongoing state of rivalry which inspires strategic responses.” Mainstream analyses “eschew a systematic discussion of the general phenomena of competitive capitalist accumulation, the class specific behavior it generates, and how competition differentiates the conditions workers face” (pp. 90-91). On the demand side, “For profit-conscious capitalists, discrimination facilitates workplace control and cost minimization” (p. 93). Profit-conscious capitalists actively and willfully participate in acts of discrimination and unfair practices as a part of their deliberate behavior to beat out their competitors and make the most profits.

Williams and Kenison therefore define discrimination as follows:

Race-gender discrimination arises when race and gender identified agents act collectively to secure employment, occupational/industrial niches, higher wages, and/or to avoid prolonged spells in the reserve army of the unemployed ... [R]ace and gender solidarity historically has increased white male workers’ competitive advantage vis-a-vis Blacks, Hispanics, Asians, and white women (pp. 9-10).

This perspective challenges the assumption of “Black and white, unite and fight” which is

embodied in the SSA approach. Specifically, these authors' assertion above can be contrasted with Michael Reich's "divide and conquer" conception of the effects of discrimination, according to which the effects of racial division are to reduce both Black and white workers' wages and employment (Reich 1981).

These authors' views lead them to some econometric specifications of labor-market outcomes, focusing on 1970 data. They challenge the idea that discrimination against racial minorities (and women) operates solely through the payment of lower wages, as in single-equation neoclassical approaches. The econometric result that wage levels vary inversely across industries according to the proportion of Black employees is unsatisfactory, both because it is open-ended and because it permits no test of the importance of racially-motivated agency. Even the finding that race "matters" in single-equation models settles little: those committed to the "taste for discrimination" view can deduce that employers are systematically prone to personal discrimination; those interested in the efficiency-wage model can deduce that Blacks are more likely to be employed in lower-wage industries because of their higher rates of turnover; and so on. The authors go on to a specification suggested by Mason (1991), wherein industrial wage differentials are not a function of industry racial composition; instead, industry racial proportions are determined *ex post* as a function of wage differentials and other factors. This recursive approach suggests that tastes and effort-wage mechanisms, if they exist, are independent of race; rather, racial discrimination takes the form of a racial sorting device that slots minorities into lower-wage industries.

The authors go on to find this result too to be inconclusive. For it isn't clear whether racial sorting is explicit. For example, Bulow and Summers (1986) argue that minorities are over-represented in competitive sectors because minority workers have higher turnover rates than whites. Hence, higher wages would be necessary to induce a given quantum of labor effort from minority than from white workers; so more whites than minorities are hired in industries in which effort-wages must be paid. This argument is circular on purely formal terms. Williams and Kenison also note that there is no firm evidence suggesting that separation rates differ systematically by race. They go on to suggest a refinement of Mason's model, in which racial composition may affect industry wage differentials and, at the same time, wage differentials may generate differences in racial composition by industry. Their empirical results are hardly conclusive, but at the same time are consistent with their view that both dynamics of racial separation matter.

How is it that capitalism represents a relentlessly competitive process and yet racial differentials emerge systematically? Williams and Kenison, building on Williams' prior work (1993b), present an alternative account of racial discrimination. They argue that capitalism is an inherently competitive process. In the competition between capitals, firms with state-of-the-art technologies set the competitive pace; other firms that want to stay in competition with them can survive only by paying workers less. Discrimination then emerges in Williams and Kenison's above sense in that whites operate overtly and covertly, and consciously and un-self-consciously,

to pay lower wages in industries with high proportions of Black workers, to shunt Black workers into lower-productivity industries, and to shunt Black workers into the lower-productivity firms within any given industry.

Williams returns to these themes in the working paper she produced for the Preamble Center (Williams 2000). Using 1980s and early 1990s data on African American, Latino and white men and women she finds similar trends in employment and income, and some plateauing of trends. For example, all women made wage gains in the 1980s, although white women registered the greatest gains. Latino employment grew rapidly, however Latino workers were disproportionately represented in the low-wage manufacturing workforce. Black men were the most heavily concentrated in the low-wage labor force in both the manufacturing and service sectors, when employed; and were the only group to increase their percentages of low wage workers in the service sector. As a whole “Wage inequality increased because wage growth slowed or reversed for many U.S. workers, particularly those who are young, without a college education, and/or are Black and Latino” (p.4). She laments that even in what are being called the “best of times” greater income inequality was being generated.

Race and Gender Dimensions

Williams’ work also highlights race and gender dimensions of economic restructuring, clarifying the complex interactions which have come to characterize what some want to call the “new economy.” In “Beyond Bad Luck” (1990) she explores the racial dimensions of deindustrialization and walks us through the history of political-economic changes in the 1970s and 1980s. She moves us (in her own words) “beyond the marshy terrain of ‘bad luck’ to the rocky ground of the politics of employment.”

In “The Changing Contours of Discrimination: Race, Gender, and Structural Economic Change” (1994, with M.V. Lee Badgett) she focuses on the “race and gender consequences of economic transformation” clarifying who benefited and who did not, in what period, how and why. We begin to understand that African American men and women’s economic fortunes did not always move in the same direction or with the same consequences. White men and women also had different labor market experiences. Badgett and Williams document that in the 1980s income inequality increased. Black men lost ground relative to white men, occupational segregation increased, and employment inequality soared. Women’s wages began to rise relative to men’s in the 1980s mostly because of the decline in men’s earnings. Women’s labor market experiences varied by race. White women, for example, increased their presence in law and medicine while Black women increased their concentration in social work and teaching (occupations white women vacated). Female Black-white earnings gaps increased in the 1980s after converging toward equality in the 1970s (also see Williams 2000).

In her tribute to African American women economists who came before her (Williams forthcoming), she discusses the richness adding gender to the analysis of racial labor market discrimination brings.

Because they simultaneously consider racial differences between women and the significance of gender in studies of African American workers, these economists also advance an analysis unlike those developed by most of their white feminist peers and liberal brother-economists. In comparison to the small post-Civil Rights era brotherhood of Black men economists, these sister-economists led the way in making the case to scholars and activists alike that a consideration of gender is a must for those seeking a fuller understanding of the economic conditions confronting African American communities. ... Their writings display a remarkable dedication to the practice of taking seriously how institutionalized racism and race privilege have shaped and continue to shape the working lives of women in the United States (p. 2).

Badgett and Williams argue that such understandings require an analysis of underlying interactions between social and economic forces. Some aspects reflect social and noneconomic attitudes and behaviors which may still have economic effects and outcomes. This deep level of analysis and the use of interdisciplinary and extra-disciplinary analysis are a part of Williams' contribution to increasing the richness of political economy and continuing to press the envelope and force us to recognize and analyze increasing complexities in our world and in the interactions that help characterize the world in which we live. Williams contends, for example, in "Race in Political Economy: Major Contemporary Themes" (1999):

A new generation of Marxist and institutionalist economists has begun a dialogue with postmodern theories of subject formation. To date, political economists have eschewed a serious consideration of the social construction of discriminating subjects. Most have neither generated accounts that penetrate racialized and gendered self-understandings nor examined how such understandings inform the meaning of class interests and political possibilities. Yet these accounts are a necessary component of a fuller theory of political economy.

Further analysis, a fuller theory, and the search for solutions will now be different because of the intelligence that comes from race and gender disaggregations and the richness the additional complexities bring.

Social Crises in Communities of Color, Political Turn in Communities of Discourse

The argument about the link between racial inequality and capitalist competition is limited in two ways that matter for our purposes. First, it is domestic in its orientation: it implicitly frames labor extraction as a process involving interactions between domestic firms and a domestic labor

force. Second, it is aspatial: it does not refer to the organization of laboring and domestic activities in space, and hence does not take into account the importance of residential segregation.

These limitations were being overcome in Williams' reflections in the 1990s on contemporary events in the realm of social policy, of social dynamics, and the abandonment of policy commitment. In "Accumulation as Evisceration" (Williams 1993a), Williams shifts her emphasis from the economic situation of African Americans *per se* and toward low-income workers *per se*. She begins by interrogating the causes of the rise in poverty rates and income inequality in the 1980s. She concludes on the basis of Rebecca Blank's research that earnings for low-wage household heads became less responsive to economic growth. In effect, a structural shift was generating a separation between the upper- and lower-wage segments of the workforce. She goes on to argue that this separation involves the wage levels achieved by workers with low education levels, including disproportionate numbers of African Americans, women, and Latinos. These educational gaps form part of the explanation of declining relative wage, but are unable to account for most of the declines observed in the wake of deindustrialization and technological shifts. She notes that increasing levels of discrimination against these workers may account for the remaining change in the wage gap; but while this argument is supported by numerous matched-pair tests, it is resisted by economists.

She makes a key move by framing the circumstances of the African American workforce *both* in terms of ongoing discrimination (her earlier theme) *and* in terms of the circumstances of workers in the lower end of the income/wage spectrum. She then makes another move by arguing for a macro-structural narrative that takes account of worker and capitalist agency. Previously she restricted her attention to "[c]ompetition *between* sectors" (1993a, 91); in this essay Williams broadens her scope to capitalists' efforts to restore their profits through an assault on the living standard of working people generally. The reduction of barriers to the movement of capital and of goods across borders has heightened the global competition for markets. She notes that this general assault is consistent with deepening intra-working class differences (like those she has analyzed), in that capitalists will take net income where they find it. In this sense, discrimination need not be fueled by racial animus and consistent with profitability; it can be fueled by the drive for profits while preying on social relations of racial domination.

How far this assault by capitalists on workers' living standards goes depends, in turn, on workers' agency – their willingness and capacity to fight back. The challenge for workers is especially severe now because workers' alliances will have to be built up across ethnic divides that have been exploited by workers who until recently have led a privileged life within the working class. She notes that anti-union corporate agency has weakened worker organization and "workers lack the political clout to wrest wage increases from capital" (Williams 1993a, 92). She suggests that "A reclamation of agency would also fill the gaps in the literature seeking to explain the worsening labor-market conditions of young Black males" (p.92). Competition and agency weave in and out of her analyses.

In “If You’re Black, Get Back; ...” (Williams 2000), she delves deeper into the details of this uneven struggle between capital and labor. She shows that the circumstances of white women with education have separated from that of other women, that Latinos have increased their share of the labor force, and that Black men have lost heavily in this competitive process.

Legal Discourse

This assault on workers is accompanied by a legal discourse that supports a capitalist, neoclassical analysis of competition and fairness. There has been an erosion of the terms of social-scientific and of legal discourse concerning racial discrimination. We first consider legal discourse. The terms of legal enforcement under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 were broad-based. These terms are readily illustrated by the guidelines established in March 1994 by the federal agencies responsible for punishing credit-market discrimination. The unified policy statement of these agencies identifies three types of discrimination (Marsden 1994): (1) overt discrimination -- refusing to initiate a transaction with a person of color; (2) disparate treatment -- screening minorities more harshly than whites in application processes, or subjecting minority applications to different application processes; (3) disparate impact -- conducting commercial practices that disproportionately harm a racial minority without being justified by a legitimate business need.

The first two elements of this list emphasize discrimination as intentional behavior. The third element refers instead to situations in which procedures that are racially neutral on their face lead to ex-post racial disparities unrelated to economic fundamentals. These legal categories have approximate equivalents in the economic categories of personal and structural discrimination. Overt discrimination and disparate treatment are the expressions of personal discrimination; disparate impact involves an increase in the degree of structural discrimination. Statistical discrimination has no precise legal correlate.

With this as background, consider Williams’ explorations into the changing legal interpretation of discrimination. Williams and Spriggs (1999) explore the ways that “color-blind jurisprudence and human capital theory are deeply complementary narratives of white economic supremacy.” The authors argue that concepts that informed the treatment of racial difference in the 19th Century are again shaping legal doctrine. A public/private distinction is made which delimits the realm within which legal remedies can be considered. The private use of assets such as labor and/or capital, regardless of owner or employee race, is within the purview of the owner. The legal doctrine of symmetric practices appears to replace the notion of outcome equality. In effect, efforts to overturn structural discrimination no longer receive legal sanction. The sole effective standard is that of race-blind procedures. This means that history does not matter. Intent and agency play no role.

For orthodox economists, white racial identity is a non-starter. In a competitive world, whites are race-less entrepreneurs, heroically dismantling irrational wage and price differentials. Past discrimination - presumably more robust due to its

legal foundations - injured Blacks, but apparently neither helped whites in any cumulative manner nor substantively altered their capacities to critically assess Black ability. Today's white market agents are color-blind by assumption.

In the halls of the highest courts, color-blindness also reigns. By denying both the past intentionality of white supremacist social relations and present-day institutional discrimination, the Supreme Court makes invisible both historic white privilege and the accrued socioeconomic benefits thereof (Williams and Spriggs 1999, 18-19).

This shrunken legal interpretation is given heavy support by recent developments in the social science literature on culture. Earlier Williams (1987) wrote of this new "variant of human capital theory":

The operative hypothesis can be simply stated: Some cultures produce children (and therefore future workers) who are more efficient in the acquisition and deployment of human capital. Blacks and whites equally endowed with human capital that is not culture specific nonetheless differ in cultural attributes, and those differences may explain continued racial differences in labor market outcomes. (1987, 39)

Globalization

Williams's reflections on the deepening social crisis in U.S. cities brought her face-to-face with the shifting face of corporate strategies in the age of globalization. The apparatus of economic exploitation cannot now be regarded, as perhaps in the 1960s and 1970s, as oriented toward domestic labor. The frame is now global. Either cutting-edge or older technologies are put in place virtually anywhere in the world. Further, the capitalist classes and managers involved in overseeing these production processes are accountable to no one, and are not exclusively white. The color factor may operate in other spaces and places – for example, designation as *indio* carries a significant social liability in much of Latin America – but is not the only divisive factor. Societies that provide few civil rights for women, and in which women are bound into narrowly defined social roles, may provide venues for the exploitation of low-wage female labor. Ethnic divisions may also be exploitable in this way. Complicating this situation is heightened migration of labor, both within national borders (for example, from southern Mexico to the northern *maquiladora* areas) and across national borders. The migration brings to recipient nations such as the U.S. not just exploitable labor but new classes of managers. In the Los Angeles garment industry, for example, many subcontractors are Korean and most workers are Latino, especially Central American.

Hence the wage hierarchy generated under competitive conditions, the basic insight of the competitive-capitalism/discrimination approach, opens up to a broader frame than Black-white

labor-market differentials. The logic is the same, at one level: difference is used as the basis of structural wedges in wages, working conditions, and opportunities for promotion. But these logics are different in their historical context and in the shallow character of their historical roots. Korean shopkeepers may not exploit African Americans as workers, in the way that Korean subcontractors exploit Central American women in garment factories; and their presence in predominantly Black neighborhoods as operators of middle-man minority franchises may be relatively recent. But they are also participating in a longer sequence of such interventions in neighborhoods whose residents have historically lacked adequate capital. In Los Angeles, Jewish shopkeepers were replaced by Chinese shopkeepers, and now by Koreans. The historical frame operates as the defining context for specific acts of exploitation in production.

Globalization and Community

Her most recent work, “If your Black Get Back; If You’re Brown, Stick Around; If you’re White, Hang Tight...” (Williams 2000), Williams combines modern economic history (of the restructuring) with detailed analysis of the labor market experiences of African Americans, Latinos and whites over the past thirty years. And again documents the falling fortunes of African American men in particular, but in the context of globalization and its effects on women and men, Latinos, Blacks and whites. “Beyond Bad Luck” (Williams 1990), “Accumulation as Evisceration” (Williams 1993a), and “If You’re Black, ...” (Williams 2000) all trace the history of capitalist competition and accumulation and the consequences for communities of color - locating declining wages, rising wage inequality and increasing racial inequality “within the context of dynamic and ruthlessly competitive capital accumulation” (1993a, 93). In “If You’re Black...” she was able to accomplish the most detailed level of disaggregation yet in her work (across gender, racial and ethnic lines) to demonstrate the historical and institutional dynamics of changes in corporate strategy and in the economy. She highlights the complexities of how things can be getting better, at least in some areas, and worse or more unequal in other aspects. Williams delineates how competition in the new global economy changed the U.S. wage and working conditions and reinforced race and gender discrimination.

The role of competition again plays a major part in this story. Firms keep moving outward and changing locale without a care to what they leave in their wake and no loyalty to people or place.

Because I am particularly interested in the racial-ethnic dimensions of economic change during this time, the essay will focus on comparing and contrasting - at a very aggregate level - employment and earnings outcomes for Black, Latino, and white workers. In order to establish an historical framework within which to discuss these monumental changes, the next section continues the task of documenting the changing economic landscape. It explains why and how private corporations shifted their strategies for conducting business and organizing employment from the early 1970s to the mid-1990s; it also connects this decline

to the fortunes of working individuals and families. This discussion also explores the importance of public policies as strategies that can help individuals, families and communities subjected to the worst outcomes of the capitalist market economy (pp. 4-5).

“If You’re Black, Get Back; ...” is a document which shows her strengths as both an economist, historian, and a teacher. The intent of this paper was to help activist and grass roots advocates understand the global economy and the workings of the U.S. labor market in that context. The intent was also to think about solutions, not individual solutions but public, community and global solutions. Williams continually challenges us, especially, to learn from and understand the past in order to be proactive and make change in the future. Capitalists are not the only ones who can use agency.

Wealth and Community

Williams’ analysis of the multiple character of racial/gender oppression and discrimination was by no means an endpoint. Indeed, most of the workers subject to this discrimination disproportionately live in lower-income communities with high proportions of residents of color.

In addition, these communities have not simply provided the spatial tableau for playing out deindustrialization processes; they have also been the sites of space-based and race-based inequities in credit and capital flows. The small businesses there are more likely to be undercapitalized, and to have inadequate working capital and lines of credit. Housing stock there is less likely to be owner-occupied; its value is less than in predominantly white communities; it turns over less often; and when bought, it is often financed at worse terms than elsewhere.

In consequence, the same communities whose workers are most likely to suffer from discrimination in the labor market, in Williams’ sense of this term, are especially likely to face discrimination in the credit and capital markets as well. Dymski’s study of the affect of racial difference on housing-credit market outcomes in nineteen cities finds that African Americans are invariably at a statistically significant disadvantage (Dymski 2000), even after controlling for several factors linked to creditworthiness. Latino applicants and, less frequently, Asian Americans and Native Americans are often at a statistical disadvantage. In these equations, minority and/or low-income neighborhoods are also frequently at a statistical disadvantage. This is not the place to work out the credit-market analogy for Williams’ vision of discrimination under capitalist competition. There can be little doubt, however, that credit-market processes are inherently spatial, due to the spatially-specific character of housing and of many business assets. Recent work on the spatial character of urban accumulation processes (Dymski 2001) suggests that inner-city areas that no longer are connected to the matrix of industrial complex, and whose workers are either not needed by this complex or are hired only at low wages, run systematic trade deficits with the rest of the world. This implies that these areas can avoid asset depreciation – that is, decumulation – only if they can attract large investment inflows. This is unlikely,

systematically, so wealth accumulation in areas with heavily minority and lower-income populations will be stymied or even reversed by the very logic of its incorporation into the capitalist process – unless growth can be generated from within.

This brings us to the need for autonomous community-based development generated from within. And this, in turn, brings us to the final links Williams was building: situating capitalist competition in the context of expanding globalization, which has been creating serious and complicated negative consequences for labor, and in particular stifling wealth creation and eviscerating earnings capacities in communities of color.

Beyond the analysis of the crisis, the problem of solutions always beckoned. Solutions must begin with the agency of the oppressed. Williams' "Accumulation as Evisceration" piece (1993a) connects culture and community which leads us into agency - as not only a great part of the problem (the story that explains discrimination - capitalist agency as a part of capitalist competition), but as a part of the answer (the agency and action of the oppressed and discriminated against can lead to solutions). If the structure of economic interconnections per se blocks accumulation processes within the community, then what people there have remaining to them is their agency – in this case, their capacity to fight back, to self-organize and create their own economic institutions.

This poses special challenges, of course. Because oppression is shared, solutions that share our gains and reinforce the impetus to work collectively are preferred. Solutions, to a great extent, require more than just labor market interventions. Solutions require a vision toward democratic restructuring in the workplace, the design of new democratic economic structures of production and accumulation in communities, and new paradigms of cooperation over competition. Such an analysis brought Williams and Nembhard into collaboration: Williams' analysis and insights provided a background, impetus, and context for Nembhard's forays into solutions involving alternative economic development strategies, democratic and cooperative ownership, and economic structures to promote caring and just community. An understanding of capitalist competition, macro-structural conditions, and the various and dynamic roles of economic agency are necessary for rebuilding communities and understanding how to best fashion new economic structures and relationships. Williams was on the verge of such articulations as the collaboration between herself and Nembhard blossomed. In a funding proposal they articulate:

Racism encourages us to abandon or punish significant portions of our sister and brother citizens. Notions of biological inferiority and sexist cultural pathology construct many people of color and poor women of all ethnic groups as superfluous to our social and economic reproduction. Too many of us imagine them only as problems to be solved; and see only the symptoms not the causes of their human suffering. Thus as a nation, we are less able to imagine equitable and life-enhancing policy decisions that would foster the creation of a more productive and efficient economic community - one that better serves all its members.

(Nembhard and Williams 1998)

The Williams and Nembhard collaboration began with a call for scholars to join together to explore racism's economic history, and the facilitation of a national dialogue about inequality, as an important step in the process of moving toward policies that sustain economic justice. They expanded the analysis to include wealth inequality not just income inequality, and community level solutions in the face of global economies and new managerial emphases. Agency, economic agency in particular, to effect democratic control over production and wealth accumulation are necessary on the part of the oppressed to overcome economic discrimination. They convened a meeting of progressive economists committed to issues of racial justice. They chose the topic of wealth inequality and called for presentations of cutting edge research on wealth creation and accumulation in communities of color for this historic meeting, as a way to continue to deepen the analysis of inequality and discrimination, and to move toward solutions.

This also brought Williams and Nembhard closer to the context of community, as a response to globalization and as a location for resistance. The forces of globalization require the discriminated against to reassert some level of local empowerment and use location and cultural solidarity as a base for developing economic power. The lack of wealth in communities of color and the scandalous level of wealth inequality between groups further highlight the dilemma and suggest areas for intervention. Alternative strategies for asset and wealth accumulation, for control over resources and production must be found to combat economic discrimination. Williams' work clearly shows that the current system will not deliver; it will not end discrimination on its own.

Williams' work leaves us with a challenge - how to sustain humane community in the post-industrial global economy of the 21st century. She gave us many hints about how to accomplish this. She left us many students whom she trained who will continue to think about and investigate these things. She gave us good analysis, hope, strength and example to continue the fight. Williams' work is a beacon, for those of us interested in economic justice, to follow - out of the darkness, the muck and the mire of capitalist competition, economic hierarchy, and discrimination.

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