

WHY RACIALIZED POVERTY MATTERS – AND THE WAY FORWARD

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People of any race may live in poverty. But it is difficult to deny that poverty is a racialized phenomenon, especially in those societies with significant racial minority populations.

Rates of poverty among Blacks in the United States have fallen in recent years, yet the poverty rate among US Blacks was still two and a half times greater than the poverty of US Whites in 2019 (United States Census Bureau, 2020). In the United Kingdom, persons of Black African/Caribbean/Black British background are about 60 percent more likely to be in the category of ‘persistent low income’ than Whites in the UK, while those of Asian/Asian British background were about twice as likely as Whites to be in that income category (Francis-Devine, 2021). These racial gaps narrow only somewhat when rates of employment among UK racial or ethnic groups are taken into account (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2021). Similar racial discrepancies in poverty are in evidence in multiracial societies such as Brazil (Nitahara, 2019) and Canada (Colour of Poverty, 2019).¹

I imagine that most readers will judge this an intolerable state of affairs – that these racial differences in the prevalence of poverty are unjust and that societies with racialized poverty ought, as a matter of some urgency, attempt to address it. My purposes here are twofold. The first is philosophical. That racial differences in policy represent unjust inequalities is a plausible hypothesis. I shall attempt to offer what I believe to be the most credible *vindication* of this hypothesis, appealing to premises according to which racialized poverty is not intrinsically objectionable as a species of inequality but is instead objectionable because of its links to other historical, social, and political inequalities. My second purpose is to use my vindication of this hypothesis to consider the general shape that anti-poverty policies ought to take in societies with racialized poverty. Central among my concerns will be two facts: first, that racialized poverty is nearly always intergenerational, suggesting that anti-poverty policies must place a strong emphasis on racialized poverty among children; and second, that those suffering from racialized poverty are subject to oscillations of income that contribute to long-term material deprivations. These facts, along with the claims about the ways in which racialized poverty can be an unjust form of inequality, are very far from settling which policies ought to be pursued to address racialized poverty, but they point us in the direction that such policies should aim.

Racialized Poverty: Absolute and Relative

That poverty is often racialized is a morally troubling phenomenon, but it may not be obvious why. Poverty (especially within societies that are affluent on the whole) often offends our sense of equality. For some to have far more than others seems to represent an unjust inequality. But should we be especially concerned when these disparities fall along racial lines? This may turn on how poverty is conceptualized.

Let us first consider absolute poverty. Suppose we define absolute poverty as the condition in which individuals regularly lack the material necessities for the maintenance of life, decent health, and minimal comfort. A person is in absolute poverty, then, when they lack adequate food, shelter, health care, clothing, and so forth. Let us consider two societies, each with approximately the same rate of absolute poverty – say, 10 percent of their overall population lack the income sufficient to acquire adequate food, shelter, health care, clothing, and so on, and so reside below an absolute ‘poverty line.’ Suppose further that:

In society A, absolute poverty is equally racially distributed, such that the percentages of those below the poverty line almost exactly approximates the distribution of racial identities in the society (racial group R1 is approximately 40 percent of the total population and approximately 40 percent of the total below the poverty line, racial group R2 is approximately 20 percent of the total population and approximately 20 percent of the total below the poverty line, etc.).

In society B, absolute poverty is unequally distributed across racial lines, such that the percentages of those below the poverty line significantly diverges from the distribution of racial identities in the society (racial group R1 is approximately 75 percent of the total population and approximately 40 percent of the total below the poverty line, but racial group R2 is approximately 10 percent of the total population and approximately 50 percent of the total below the poverty line).

Do we have reasons, rooted in concerns for equality, for believing that B, in which absolute poverty is evidently racialized, is more unjust or morally objectionable than A? Seemingly not: Absolute poverty is an unfortunate condition for individuals to be in, but it is not any more unfortunate per se to be impoverished and a member of any particular racial group. Being in absolute poverty causes undue suffering and psychological strain, as well as constraining the possibilities for the goals one can meaningfully pursue or achieve. But the misfortunes of absolute poverty are not inherently greater by virtue of being (say) poor and Black rather than poor and White. By these lights, given that the frequency of absolute poverty in these societies is equal, considerations of equality do not appear to provide grounds for favoring A, the society whose poverty is not racialized, over B, the society whose poverty is racialized. (Nor incidentally, do we have reasons to favor B over A.)

In these respects, racial inequalities in absolute poverty do not seem to differ from many other inequalities. Suppose that we could achieve parity in the racialization of absolute poverty in B by *increasing* its frequency among R1 so that it is equal to rate of absolute poverty among R2. I expect that few would infer that such a change represents an improvement from the standpoint of justice. As the infamous ‘levelling down’ objection (Raz, 1986, pp. 227ff) seems to illustrate, that decreasing inequality by making some people worse off (in this case, so that absolute poverty is more equal along racial lines) would often seem to be morally worse than the more inegalitarian status quo hints that inequality as such is not what unsettles us about poverty, and a fortiori, is not what should unsettle us about racialized poverty.

The increase in racial equality with respect to absolute poverty achieved by levelling down would come at a significant moral cost: a larger number of impoverished persons overall. As Larry Temkin (2000, p. 132) has observed, the force of the levelling down objection rests on the apparently plausible slogan that a 'situation *cannot* be worse (or better) than another if there is *no one* for whom it *is* worse (or better).' Levelling down the wealth or income of the affluent to that of the absolutely impoverished is seemingly no better for anyone than the more inegalitarian status quo ante.

The statistics I cited at the outset about racialized poverty are instead concerned with *relative* poverty, that is, with the level of income individuals have as compared to other individuals in their society. As with absolute poverty, we can compare societies with regard to how relative poverty is or is not racialized. Suppose that in societies C and D poverty is defined in terms of some relation to median income (e.g., a household is in poverty if its income is 50 percent or less of the median household income). Suppose further that this relative poverty is racialized much like absolute poverty is racialized in societies A and B. Each has the same rate of relative poverty (say 10 percent), but:

In society C, relative poverty is equally racially distributed, such that the percentages of those below the poverty line almost exactly approximate the distribution of racial identities in the society (racial group R1 is approximately 40 percent of the total population and approximately 40 percent of the total below the poverty line, racial group R2 is approximately 20 percent of the total population and approximately 20 percent of the total below the poverty line, etc.).

In society D, relative poverty is unequally distributed across racial lines, such that the percentages of those below the poverty line significantly diverge from the distribution of racial identities in the society (racial group R1 is approximately 75 percent of the total population and approximately 40 percent of the total below the poverty line, but racial group R2 is approximately 10 percent of the total population and approximately 50 percent of the total below the poverty line).

As with absolute poverty, it is not obvious that we have stronger reasons to oppose the racialized relative poverty of D over the non-racialized relative poverty of C. If relative poverty is an injustice, it is not obvious why D is more unjust than C by virtue of such poverty having a racial cast. Levelling down worries again seem applicable: altering society D by increasing the number of individuals in R2 who live in relative poverty until it equals the proportion of those in R1 who live in relative poverty does not represent an improvement from the standpoint of justice.

The Extrinsic Significance of Racialized Poverty

It might seem then, that whether absolute or relative poverty is at issue, racial inequalities in the distribution of poverty are irrelevant to justice. To forestall misunderstanding, my claim is not that poverty *itself* is irrelevant to justice. A society with sufficient levels of wealth to avoid absolute poverty but nevertheless tolerates it is not functioning to provide those material benefits to which individuals arguably have a claim simply because they are human. And a society with high levels of relative poverty may be one suffused with unfairness, as some individuals are denied their equitable shares of socioeconomic cooperation. Perhaps surprisingly, though, the mere fact that poverty is racialized does not by itself seem to be cause for concern from the standpoint of justice. We may have moral reasons to address poverty, but not reasons rooted in concern for racial inequality.

Does it follow, therefore, that the racial distribution of poverty is of no philosophical concern at all – that we should be concerned to reduce the prevalence of poverty within a society but be otherwise indifferent to differences in its prevalence among racial groups?

We might suppose that racial differences in poverty should be seen in a skeptical light simply because they represent a departure from equal distribution of material resources. In arguing for various conceptions of economic justice, egalitarian philosophers often seem to assume that that the equal distribution of material resources such as wealth should be presumed or treated as a *normative* default. Their claim is not that, as a matter of fact, we should expect societies to operate so that equal distributions of wealth should occur. Rather, for these philosophers, such distributive equality enjoys a special dialectical or argumentative role: those who recommend departures from equal distributions bear the *burden of proof*, such that in the absence of compelling reasons in favour of an unequal distribution, an unequal distribution should be condemned as unjust. On this picture, equality needs no justification, but inequality does (Stark, 2018). If this is true, then the fact that poverty is so often racialized raises moral red flags simply by virtue of instantiating material inequality.

Even assuming that unequal distributions bear the burden of proof, this would not provide a basis for objecting to such poverty being *racialized*. That affluent societies, for example, have significant numbers of impoverished individuals runs afoul of this presumption of equality but does not yet provide us a reason to object to such poverty being disproportionately concentrated in particular races. Fortunately, though, an explanation of why racial inequalities in poverty is unjust does not need to appeal to how they represent deviations from an *ideal* of equality. I share the suspicion, gestured at by Scanlon (2018), that we have a hazier grasp of what an ideal of equality would consist in than we have of various ways in which inequalities can be morally objectionable. Indeed, it may be that a society of equals is simply one lacking any objectionable inequalities, in which case inequality is likely to be the more fundamental analytical notion.

There may therefore be specific inequalities for which a clear case can be made that they are unjust without referencing any larger ideal of equality (Scanlon, 2018). In the first section of this chapter, I showed that racial differences in poverty probably do not matter *intrinsically* to how just a society is. But that does not preclude them mattering *extrinsically*. That poverty is racialized is extrinsically relevant to justice in at least three distinct ways.

First, poverty can interact with other goods, and in particular, can weaken individuals' ability to enjoy goods which they ought to be able to enjoy in (roughly) equal measure. Consider, for example, free physical movement. The rich and the poor may have the same formal right to move about freely, but if a person's poverty precludes them from making use of the modes of transport that allow those in their community to seek work, engage in commerce, or pursue fellowship with others, then the right in question is of far greater value to the rich than to the poor. The value individuals derive from this good should not, as a matter of justice, vary too widely, and it certainly should not depend *de facto* on someone's race. Similarly for a right to be represented by legal counsel in a criminal trial: the rich and the poor may have the same formal right to be so represented, but if a person's poverty precludes them from acquiring the services of such legal counsel, then this good is of little value to the poor. And a person's ability to defend themselves against criminal charges should turn on the propriety of the charges, not on whether the individual is poor, or all the more, *de facto* on their race. Racialized poverty, in this instance, would result in members of some racial groups being unable to enjoy full equality before the law. Such examples illustrate that wealth and income stand in a special sort of relationship to other goods. Even if racial disparities in wealth and income are not themselves

worrisome from the standpoint of justice, they can result in inequalities with respect to other goods, the unequal distribution of which can constitute an injustice.

Second, poverty that falls along racial lines will often have racially odious causes. Racial disparities in poverty can be accidental or could, in principle, be rooted in differences in group attributes.² But in typical cases, racialized poverty is the product of racist policies and practices. The societies that I referenced earlier as having racial stratifications in poverty – the United States, the United Kingdom, Brazil, and Canada – each have specific histories in which racism has played a part. Furthermore, the regions of the world where poverty is most persistent have been subject to colonialism and imperialism rationalized by race science or racist ideology (Berg & Wendt, 2011). Such racism manifested itself in practices and policies – enslavement, unlawful violence, housing discrimination, occupational discrimination, educational discrimination, and so on – that resulted in racialized poverty. Such practices and policies are objectionable, in part, because they subject members of particular racial groups to unequal treatment on the basis of race. They accord those groups lesser rights, standing, or consideration that tracks perceived racial difference. Hence, when economic disadvantage can be ultimately traced to racial injustices, there exists a moral duty to rectify this disadvantage. How exactly this duty is to be conceptualized is a matter of dispute.³ But among those philosophers and political theorists who acknowledge such a moral duty, there is general agreement that the alleviation of racialized poverty is among the conditions for that duty to be fulfilled. Hence, when and to the extent that racialized poverty is due to racism, we thus have equality-based reasons to decry it as unjust and *rectificatory* reasons to reduce or eliminate it.

Third, poverty intersects with other social facts so as to contribute to objectionable inequalities, especially in the social and political sphere. Social scientists have used the rise of income inequality over the past several generations to examine how such inequality affects individuals' relationships in those spheres. Unsurprisingly, income and wealth inequality are detrimental to democracy and to the equality of political standing presumed to be essential to democracy. The effects of income inequality also extend to shared political life, inasmuch as economic inequality catalyzes political inequality. Income inequality generally decreases citizens' engagement with democratic processes, reducing their interest in political questions, the frequency with which they participate in political discussions, and the likelihood of voting (Solt, 2008). Persistent economic inequality also increases political polarization by widening the policy preferences among income groups, even to the point that citizens come to oppose democracy itself (Houle, 2018).

Crucially, these effects are not uniform across levels of wealth and income. Rather, economic inequality generates political inequalities wherein the affluent wield disproportionate political clout compared to the impoverished. In societies where poverty is racialized, racialized economic inequality will thus lead to racialized political inequality. No doubt some of this political inequality is due to regrettable opportunities for wealthier individuals to corrupt policymaking processes (by donating to candidates sympathetic to their financial interests, for example) or to influence wider political discourse (by enjoying disproportionate access to prominent media). But much of the political inequality stemming from economic inequality rests on how wealth and poverty act as cultural sorting mechanisms, creating groups that differ in their abilities to express their collective wills in the political sphere. Economic elites have greater opportunity than the poor to identify and act upon their shared interests. As a result, political efforts of the elite are more sustained and coordinated than the political efforts of those with lower levels of income or wealth. Furthermore, economic elites are often adroit at

establishing and exploiting mechanisms that allow for their intergenerational reproduction, so that elite ‘turnover’ results in a predictable set of elites across time (López & Dubrow, 2020).

Hence, my earlier conclusion that racialized poverty is not an inequality that is intrinsically relevant to justice is correct, but overlooks both the context and effects of racialized poverty. Racialized poverty is very likely to be an effect of objectionable racial inequalities that preceded it. It also undermines impoverished persons’ ability to take advantage of goods crucial to their equal standing in society and consolidates power so as to curtail impoverished individuals’ and groups’ efficacy in exerting their political will. Over the long run, poverty thus corrodes the powers of impoverished citizens. And when poverty is itself racialized, it contributes to systemic racial hierarchies among citizens.

Recent decades have witnessed philosophical disputes between egalitarian theorists who understand justice in ‘distributive’ terms – in terms of how much of various goods different parties enjoy – and those who understand justice in ‘relational’ terms – in terms of equal relations among citizens. My discussion of racialized poverty cannot contribute much to settling their theoretical dispute. But adherents of either theoretical stance can find in it evidence conducive to their stance. Racialized poverty can be unjust because it represents an unjust distribution (one arrived at through unjust causes) or because it contributes to unequal relations among citizens. At a practical level, my discussion illustrates how difficult it is to disentangle these two phenomena. By being impoverished, members of marginalized racial groups lack the full value of their political rights and have diminished influence over the political sphere. These reductions in their political status make it harder for them to work, individually or collectively, toward policies that reduce their poverty, which in turn reinforced their marginal political efficacy. Persistent poverty thus operates to strengthen the link between economic and political deprivation.

Racialized Poverty as Intergenerational

The three ways in which racialized poverty is relevant to egalitarian justice also accord well with arguably the most empirically noteworthy feature of racialized poverty, namely, its intergenerational character. In societies with racialized poverty, the racial distribution of poverty is far from random. In other words, in those racial groups suffering disproportionately from poverty, which *specific* individuals within those groups are impoverished is often a matter of whether those individuals’ ancestors were also poor. A 2021 study on race and poverty in the United States found that Black US families are over 16 times more likely than White families to experience three generations of poverty (defined as the bottom fifth of the income distribution). Perhaps most strikingly, Black Americans were found to be 41 percent more likely to be in third-generation poverty than white Americans were to be in poverty, multigenerational or otherwise (Winship et al., 2021). Similar patterns are found among American Indians (Chetty et al., 2020). Studies of ‘social mobility’ in Britain find similar, though less dramatic, patterns with respect to Blacks and Asian-descended populations (Li, 2021).

That racialized poverty is very often intergenerational foregrounds how poverty in general is strongly predicted by poverty status during childhood. Simply put, impoverished children are far more likely to become impoverished adults, while adult poverty among those who grow up in comparative economic affluence is rare. The explanation for this relationship rests on many factors. For instance, adult poverty is strongly correlated with adult levels of educational attainment, which in turn are strongly correlated with one’s parents’ level of educational attainment. Hence, less educated parents are likely to be poor and their children

more likely to be poor due in part to lesser educational attainment (Serafino & Tonkin, 2014). Other features of childhood poverty that impact later adult poverty include parental substance abuse, residential instability, and characteristics of a child's neighborhood (e.g., prevalence of crime, unemployment; Ratcliffe, 2015). Childhood poverty also contributes to adult poverty insofar as it tends to lead more frequently to chronic illness and higher levels of mortality (Wise, 2016). Recent years have seen an explosion of research into the relationship between childhood poverty and neurological development. Some of the early findings in this literature suggest that childhood poverty can have detrimental impacts on the developing brain that could in turn contribute to adult poverty. Poverty appears to be responsible for stresses on children's brains that hamper the development of their capacities for memory, reasoning, language processing, and impulse control (Blair & Raver, 2016).

The intergenerational character of racialized poverty highlights how the injustices associated with it are not bounded by individuals' lifetimes. Parents belonging to impoverished racial groups are likely to struggle to mitigate the adverse effects of poverty on their children and lack the socio-political efficacy to alter the wider societal conditions that contribute to their children being impoverished. Their children, in turn, are likely to inherit a similar quandary: unable to overcome racialized economic inequality, they too are less able to act as full and capable citizens, and they are stymied in their ability to form effective political coalitions with others to counteract the poverty they share.

Addressing Racialized Poverty: Targeted Opportunity Versus Intergenerational Security

To this point, our focus has fallen on understanding the nature and scale of the injustices related to racialized poverty. Space constraints bar a thorough discussion here of different policy alternatives for addressing racialized poverty. Nevertheless, the moral analysis of racialized poverty advanced so far suggests the general direction that such policies ought to go, as well as casting light on the justifiability of some specific policy options.

It is not obvious that nations such as the United States have had a specific set of policies that take the racial dimensions of poverty as a locus of attention. To the extent that they have, their approach might be described as *targeted opportunity*. Such policies direct economic benefits to particular individuals or communities in the expectation that these benefits will be leveraged into opportunities that ameliorate poverty. Race-based affirmative action in university admissions or hiring is one such example: it increases the likelihood that members of specific racial groups reach higher levels of educational attainment and are hired into prestigious professions or jobs. Another example of targeted opportunity are programs to offer mortgage lending terms to buyers from racial minority groups.

My analysis of racialized poverty suggests that targeted opportunity approaches are not adequate to the scale or the nature of the injustice of racialized poverty. For one, they typically direct their benefits at adults. And while addressing racialized poverty among adults will likely lead to reductions in racialized poverty over the long run – as we saw earlier, parental poverty tends to predict adult poverty – it leaves the extant poverty of children untouched. Second, targeted opportunity is too narrow to meaningfully address racialized poverty at a population level. The approach directs its benefits to the best-off of the worst-off, that is, those members of racialized groups who are relatively advantaged in comparison with their racial peers. For instance, the use of race-based affirmative action in university admissions or in hiring directs benefits only to a subset of those in the designated racial groups, namely, those with adequate educational qualifications and/or the personal ambition to qualify for university admission or

for desirable jobs. Similarly, offering impoverished racial groups favorable lending terms for home mortgages directs benefits to those within the groups with good credit records, stable employment histories, and no criminal background. As such, targeted opportunity increases the likelihood that some members of racial groups where poverty is prevalent will enter the middle class but does little to address poverty en masse and virtually nothing to address the most disadvantaged within impoverished racial groups.

Finally, targeted opportunity has a rather mixed record in alleviating racialized poverty. Rather than providing individuals with income or wealth directly, such programs often catalyze capital investment. Race-based affirmative action aims to enhance its beneficiaries' skills or *human* capital. Mortgage lending programs aim to enable participants to accumulate wealth in *physical* capital. But it does not appear that such capital 'investments' go all that far in reducing economic equality among racial groups or even in augmenting the incomes of marginalized racial groups. For instance, controlling for education levels, Black Americans continue to have lower household incomes than White Americans at all levels of educational attainment. Black homeowners have their homes appraised for strikingly lower values than White homeowners, all other things being equal. One study found that, in the average US metropolitan area, homes in neighborhoods where the share of the population is at least 50 percent Black are valued at roughly half the price of homes in neighborhoods with no Black residents (Perry, Rothwell & Harshbarger, 2018).

In place of targeted opportunity, I propose that policies to address racialized poverty should operate on an *intergenerational security* model. On this model, anti-poverty policies aim at ensuring stability with respect to income and other goods that counteract poverty, particularly racialized poverty among children. Furthermore, such policies should be progressive and universal in their reach, providing benefits to all the needy but increasing value as incomes decrease. Unlike the targeted opportunity approach to racialized poverty, this model does not seek to facilitate the exodus of a fortunate subset of the racialized poor from 'the ghetto,' so to speak. Rather, it aims to eliminate the 'ghetto' conditions that so readily make racialized poverty possible.

Obviously, an effective anti-poverty program must raise incomes. Yet a central goal of the intergenerational security model is to address a feature of contemporary poverty that is especially prominent within racial groups with disproportionate poverty, namely, *income volatility*. Employment precarity, unpredictable aggregate work hours, and other economic trends have made oscillations in household income more common than in the past. We often underestimate the degree to which economic security hinges as much on the reliability of income as on its sheer size. A simple thought experiment to illustrate the point: Imagine two families, each of which has a total income across a decade of \$500,000. Family A reaches that income by earning \$50,000 in each of those years, whereas family B reaches that income by earning \$100,000 in the odd-numbered years but nothing in the even-numbered years. Which family is better off or enjoys the higher degree of economic security? Almost certainly, family A. Though A and B have the same level of income over this duration, A will be better able to secure those goods that stand as bulwarks against deprivation. A will be better able to pay its rent or mortgage and will thus have greater residential security than B. A will be better situated to withstand sudden cost shocks, such as costly household repairs or medical expenses, by being more likely to be able to borrow against its future income. A will in general be better able to plan for its future and less likely to be compelled to draw upon savings.

Unsurprisingly, poorer households, especially those suffering from racialized poverty, are more prone to income volatility than more affluent households. Black and Hispanic households in the United States, for example are more likely to experience income volatility than

white households, and the income volatility swings they face are usually greater in magnitude (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2017). These racial patterns will interact with the factors I cited earlier as grounds for judging racialized poverty as unjust: those with unstable incomes will be less likely to establish ties within the communities where they live and so less likely to be able to work in concert with others on shared political aims.

These conclusions imply that income stability should have a more prominent place in our policies to address racialized poverty than they presently have. Such policies may include traditional income replacement measures, such as unemployment insurance, food or housing vouchers, and so forth. But they may also include policies designed to prevent significant income loss in the first place. These would include income guarantees or job guarantees. Note that though such programs could have a positive impact on racialized poverty, they need not be crafted in a racially tailored way. Given the strong association between race and poverty in many societies, any serious universal anti-poverty policy will be de facto race sensitive even if not de jure concerned with racialized disparities in poverty.

What, though, of the specifically *intergenerational* dimension of racialized poverty? Some policy experts have argued that a successful and defensibly egalitarian anti-poverty approach must target both income and wealth within generations but also the intergenerational wealth transfers that allow racialized poverty, along with its detrimental political effects, to remain entrenched (William & Mullen, 2020). There is little doubt that *inheritances* play a substantive part in racializing poverty. White households are five times more likely to be recipients of large inheritances than are Black households, and the average value of White family inheritances is four times that of Black family inheritances.⁴ Inheritance raises intricate questions concerning racialized poverty. The measures I have already highlighted to increase and stabilize income are likely to increase the probability that members of marginalized racial groups will be able to accumulate sufficient wealth to bequeath substantial sums to their descendants. That is in itself likely to reduce racialized poverty. But here concerns about racial inequality loom large: might there also be a case, based on the racialized nature of poverty, for considering reforms to inheritance law that diminish the capacity of racially favored groups to bequeath large amounts to *their* descendants?

Daniel Halliday (2018) has recently offered a forceful egalitarian argument against unrestricted inheritance, an argument with clear implications concerning racialized poverty. A strong right to bequeath one's property to one's descendants encourages a kind of economic segregation wherein life opportunities are substantively shaped by one's status as an inheritor of parental wealth. Given the differences among racial groups in inheritable wealth, this economic segregation will turn out to be racial as well. This alone should raise questions about an unlimited right of inheritance. But Halliday advances additional considerations that imply that inheritance law should be of special concern in connection with racialized poverty. The intergenerational transfer of wealth, he argues, allows its recipients to enjoy not only greater economic capital, but certain highly valuable forms of social capital as well. Economic wealth allows recipients to acquire valuable knowledge, opportunities, and behavioral dispositions that in turn bolster their wealth and social standing. They also acquire social capital in the form of elite tastes and patterns of socialization.

In the terms I proposed in the third section, Halliday shows that inheritances function as an instrument of elite replication. But this tool is not available to those without the wealth to make large bequests to their children, which in many multiracial societies includes members of groups in which racialized poverty is prevalent. Inheritance thus helps to make possible the divergences in political power and status that I suggested were among the principal unjust consequences of racialized poverty. Of course, it is not obvious what the policy implications

of this are, aside from unrestricted rights of bequest being contributors to racial injustice. It would not, for instance, be prudent to reduce or eliminate the right to bequest if we are concerned for the alleviation of racialized poverty. Doing so would hamper (say) Whites' ability to engage in elite replication, but also hamper members of other groups in their efforts to create the intergenerational stores of wealth that I have argued are critical to reducing racialized poverty. Here Halliday's endorsement of the Rignano scheme seems apt: a Rignano scheme taxes inheritances at greater rates each time they are rolled over from generation to generation. Over time, such a policy might allow those in racialized poverty to benefit from inheritance while limiting the ability of advantaged racial groups to make use of inheritance to reinforce their own elite socio-political status.

Conclusion

Racialized poverty has proven to be a stubborn problem. A clearer grasp of what is morally troubling about it in turn clarifies the kinds of policy approaches that are adequate to the problem, both morally and causally. I have argued here the moral urgency of racialized poverty is as much political as economic – that racialized poverty is both effect and cause of unjust and long-standing racial inequalities that create racial hierarchies in effective citizenship. The policies we adopt to address racialized poverty must therefore be aimed at a long-term transformation of these hierarchies.

Notes

- 1 Poverty has an apparently racial dimension on a global scale as well. Although many of the nations whose rates of poverty are decreasing the fastest are in south Asia or in predominantly Black sub-Saharan Africa, 85 percent of the world's poor still live in those two regions (World Bank, 2019). I restrict my focus here to poverty within societies, but much of what I say holds true of racial differences in poverty at a global scale.
- 2 Note that such differences need not rest on anything 'deep,' that is, on anything rooted in supposed racial essences. We should be profoundly skeptical of any assertion that racial differences in wealth or income are 'natural,' inevitable, or irremediable. Nevertheless, racial groups have their own histories and develop their own cultures that can in turn impact their levels of wealth or income (due to intergenerational occupational tendencies, for example). It is therefore *in principle* possible for disparate racial patterns of wealth or income to be unrelated to racism. But the weight of historical evidence suggests otherwise, and in my estimation, those who assert that such disparate racial patterns are *not* the product of racism bear the burden of proof to show that they are causally divorced from racism.
- 3 Táiwò (2021) provides a useful overview of these disputes.
- 4 See Weller et al. (2021) for an overview of this research.

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