

Economic Justice Narrative Practicum

October 17, 2022



Economy

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**Personal
Responsibility**

Bootstraps

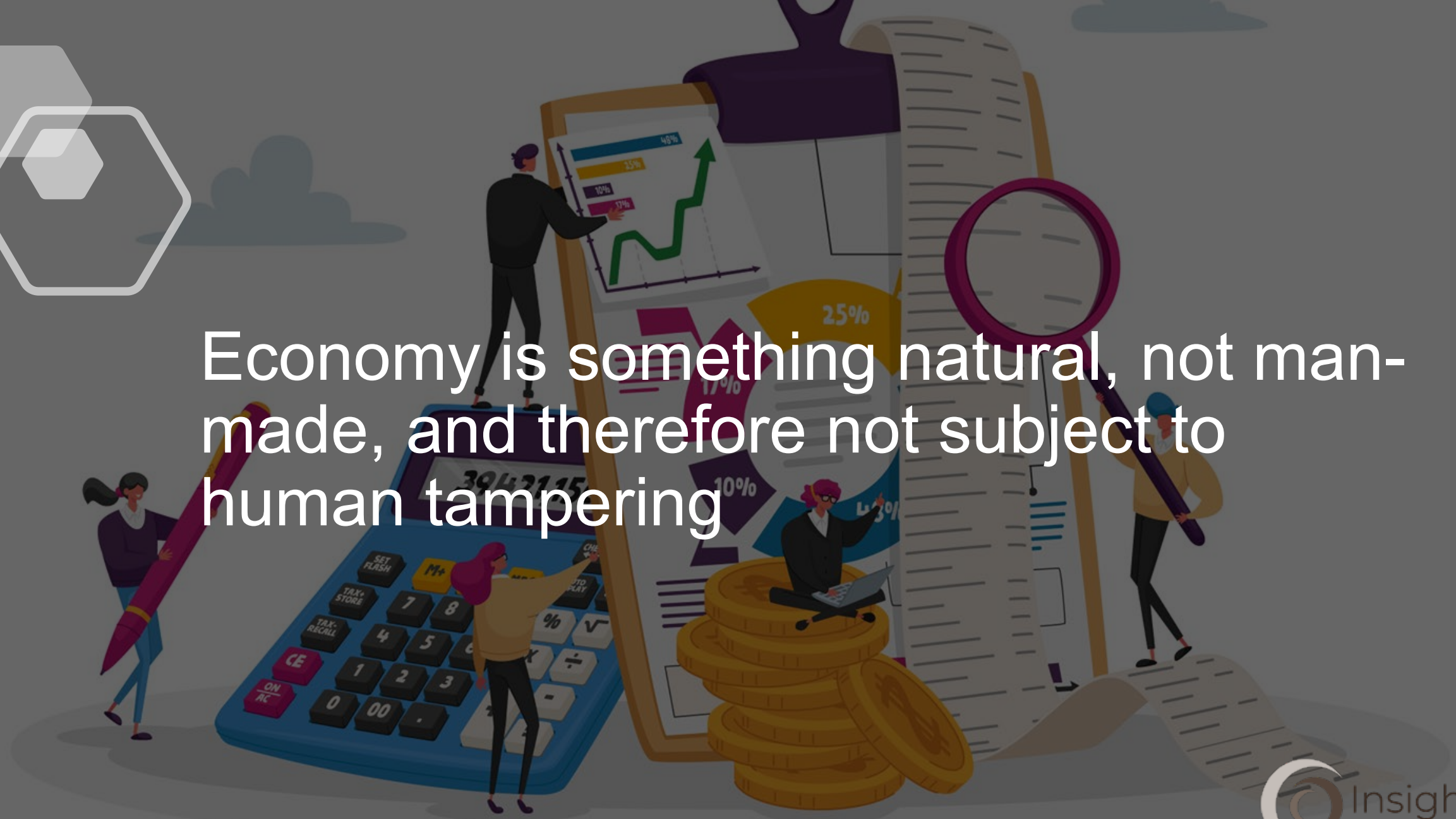
Personhood

+

Anti-Blackness



Economy is something natural, not man-made, and therefore not subject to human tampering



“The economy is nothing more than the sum of our collective actions.”



We often imbue the economy with the characteristics we should reserve for *people*.

Young workers will form **the backbone** of the next economy.

When **the economy struggles**, those who are least secure get crushed.

Educating the media and policy makers about the magnitude of the racial wealth gap and why it is important **for the economy to close it.**



People create and can make deliberate changes to the economy.

The economy isn't an independent entity; it has no agency.

Different groups are endowed with equal abilities, talents and ambitions; observed outcome differentials come from the system, not the people in it.

The notion that the economy should be a means to facilitate our journey in life is deeply powerful

Small Group Work



**Work Hard
and Play by
The Rules**



Major Findings

Personhood is deeply tied to work/having a job.

Deep racial resentment undergirds our economic policy.

Personal responsibility frame is strong, particularly around economics.



The main cognitive hurdle we face is a core American cultural model:

- Having a job is moral and confers personhood, and taking/giving handouts is the opposite
- Handout is seen as the opposite of having a job, creates dependency





Personhood and Jobs

- This model is very close to a central value of Conservatism, but it extends beyond the standard rhetoric and has a deep and resonant “truth” for *most* Americans, including Black Americans of various socioeconomic groups.
- Much of its power comes from its tight connection to people’s sense of what it means to be a Person.
- Not working means not having agency, being diminished as a person, and/or less moral.



The Salience of the Moral Jobs/ Immoral Handouts Model

- Feeds into a “blame the victim” pattern of thinking
- Obscures the structural perspective. This is an intensely individualized perspective.
- Creates active resistance to structural explanations and solutions on moral grounds.
- “Scales up” to the level of Community. One surprising finding is how widely shared the idea of a Culture of Poverty

“You don’t want to just give people handouts and then have them waste it and then still be in the same position”

(19-year old liberal Afro-Latina)

“If you have the goal in life to succeed, you’ve got to go after it. Nothing’s going to be handed to you, now more than ever. Everybody’s looking for some sort of handout these days.”

(25-year old White conservative man)





The Salience of the Moral Jobs/ Immoral Handouts Model

Provides an effective rationale for racism and stereotypes

White people regularly bring up Black entitlement and demands for “something for nothing.” At its most pernicious, the model effectively shifts the burden of racism onto Black people themselves by implying that the dehumanization of racism is itself self-inflicted.

“Giving things away free tends to draw in opportunists alongside the genuinely needy.”

(38-year old liberal White man)

“We should help the needy, but the more we give – it makes less incentive for them to better themselves.”

(40-year old conservative White man}

“The newer generations (and I belong to this category so I see it first hand) expect everything to be given to them. They want to share in everyone else's wealth without contributing. Should we hand over money for nothing, no.”

(29-year old moderate White woman

Deep racial resentment permeates American subconscious

- Anti-black sentiment
- Black people are subhuman
- Triggers notions of who is deserving, who is not



“We talking about minority neighborhoods? How do you overcome a culture that glorifies victimization, oppression, and non-education?”

(46-year old conservative White woman)

“The Black men, they have this reverse racism - they think slavery, they’re full of hate all the time and everything . . . A lot of them walk around with that mentality, and it carries over to the their family and stuff. It might be harder for them to get going.” (34-year old conservative White man)



“I do feel like giving poor people welfare is not a good idea. It does make people lazy. I feel if there is a good work program to get people started they can start being a part of the middle class.”

(52-year old liberal Black woman)

“I definitely believe in equal opportunity, but don't want the government (and my taxes) to force equal outcomes.”

(72-year old moderate White woman)

Personal Responsibility

- Notion of “build yourself by your bootstraps” is very strong
- “It’s your fault you are poor” – no systems analysis, particularly for white Americans



Narrative that underpins most IDA programs . . .

Assets for Independence (AFI) Statute

. . . the establishment of demonstration projects designed to determine—(1) the social, civic, psychological, and economic effects of providing to individuals and **families with limited means an incentive to accumulate assets** by saving a portion of their earned income; (2) the extent to which an asset-based policy that promotes saving for postsecondary education, homeownership, and microenterprise development may be used to enable individuals and families with limited means to **increase their economic self-sufficiency**; and (3) the extent to which an asset-based policy **stabilizes and improves families and the community** in which the families live.

Emergency Withdrawals under AFI

“Emergency withdrawals are **never matched** and **must be reimbursed** within a year to maintain eligibility for match funds. It is considered best practice for participants to sign an Emergency Withdrawal form, **stating the purpose** for the withdrawals and agreeing to pay back funds within the year.”

Allowable reasons for these limited case withdrawals:

- To prevent eviction or foreclosure
- To cover necessary living expenses in the event of job loss
- To cover medical expenses for savers or family members

Small Group Work

- Who are our people?
- What does society believe about my people?
- What truth is missing/What do I know to be true?
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A photograph of a family of three. On the left is a man with dark hair, wearing a grey shirt, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. In the center is a young girl with her hair in a bun, wearing a denim vest over a pink shirt, smiling broadly. On the right is a woman with dark hair, wearing a black top, also smiling. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor public space. The text "How Can We Begin to Create New Counter-narratives?" is overlaid in white, outlined font across the lower half of the image.

How Can We Begin to Create
New Counter-narratives ?