**SSRC Time Capsule: Darrick Hamilton  
Recorded on April 20, 2020**

**EDITED**

**SSRC:**

You chose a graph from the Chicago Department of Public Health. Why did you choose this and what would future researchers need to know about this image?

**Darrick Hamilton:**

The graph displays clear and dramatic mortality differences by race in Chicago. The fact that something presumably random like a pandemic, however catastrophic it may be, can be so linked to one's racial identity and mortality is highly problematic.

To better understand political economy, stratification economics teaches us that race is not something that is just an afterthought that needs to be addressed, but a pillar in the relationship of economic and political consolidation. This is made plain by the racially disparate physical and economic impacts of Covid-19. Indeed, there is a call for academics to really understand why identity matters and how, from a policy perspective, we can have a more moral, just, fair economy.

In the Chicago context, being Black is associated with a 300 percent greater mortality than other Chicago residents. We know that Chicago is not unique; I'd like to emphasize that this is not an anomaly. This is what's going on across the country. Nationally, we know that Blacks make up about 14 percent of the US population (or less), yet about a third of all Covid-19 related mortalities.

Why is the Black mortality rate 300 percent higher? Because they are a population that lacks liquid wealth. They are a population that has inadequate health insurance coverage. They are a population whose employment is more precarious. And they're a population that lives with more comorbidities. And those comorbidities are the result of lack of finance, inadequate living conditions, as well as environmental degradation.

As the medical community is occupied, rightly, with addressing Covid-19, there are everyday vulnerabilities that people have that aren't being addressed. In fact, what is vivid in this Covid-19 pandemic is the everyday despair—economic vulnerabilities and health vulnerabilities that people live with—whether or not we are experiencing a pandemic.

By placing this graph in a time capsule, I would hope that future iterations of our society would realize that [these racial mortality disparities are] preventable; that there are steps we could have put in place so as to not make a population so vulnerable, a population identified by something as cursory as their race.

A positive upshot is when we see all of this calamity, perhaps people will take note of the latent vulnerabilities that happen on an everyday basis. Covid-19 has made it clear that even the most affluent among us are vulnerable. Indeed, a prime minister— royalty—is subject to the coronavirus. But when this subsides, and we're in that future iteration, hopefully we would see that no one should live with this despair and vulnerability, regardless of whether or not we are in an economic crisis.

**SSRC:**

The SSRC seeks to mobilize social science for the public good. How do you see the link between research and policy?

**DH:**

[Many academics] don't want to go beyond the confines of the specificity of what they can say assuredly. And that's unfortunate because we are a privileged group and the purpose of tenure is to give us not only authority, but agency, to really affect change. There's a need for a call to arms for us to apply our scholarship. There's no impediment to drawing a link between research and policy beyond the fact that we don't do it. We *choose* not to.

Then understanding policy from an academic standpoint is very useful, because with the academic background, we can understand power and relationships better. And if we understand power and relationships *as fundamental*, then, to some extent, the policy initiatives become obvious.

A policy like an anti-racist economic bill of rights would not only make us better prepared for the next pandemic, or the next climate-related catastrophe, but would address some of these everyday vulnerabilities that people should not live with.

*This conversation was conducted with Alondra Nelson. It has been edited for length and clarity.*