

SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

READING GUIDE #6

RACIAL INEQUALITY IN AMERICA

WHEN doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

READING

Anderson, E. (2010). Racial segregation and material inequality in the United States. In *The imperative of integration* (pp. 23–43). Princeton University Press.
Coates, T.-A. (2014, June). The case for reparations. *The Atlantic*, 54–71.

QUESTIONS

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. What evidence does Elizabeth Anderson present to justify the existence of extreme

inequalities and segregation between white and black Americans?

2. How does Anderson justify her claim that “the most straightforward causal connection between segregation and inequality is spatial” (p. 27)? That is...
 - A. Why do segregated black and white neighborhoods have differential access to certain goods (like employment, retail and commercial services, and health-related goods and professional services)?
 - B. How does that differential access create the extreme inequalities mentioned in question 1 above?

3. Anderson’s “relational theory of inequality” (p. 25) recognizing that inequalities are not necessarily unjust. The injustice is determined by how those inequalities came about, which she believes is, in large part, due to segregation. However, segregation is not necessarily unjust either. Again, we need to determine whether segregation has unjust origins.

While Anderson primarily hints at why she thinks segregation is unjust, Ta-Nehisi Coates is not so coy.

What is Coates’ argument that the origins of segregation are fundamentally unjust, and so rendering the resulting inequalities as also unjust? (Coates may be more story-teller than philosopher in this article, but I trust that the main

points of his overall argument should be relatively clear by the end.)

4. This analysis of segregation is one part of Coates’ argument that the United States owes black American’s reparations.

In general, what does it mean for *A* to owe *B* reparations, and how is such a claim justified? How does Coates’ example of Clyde Ross and the Contract Buyers League illustrate this idea?

5. What is Coates’ argument that the United States owes black Americans some form of reparation? What does Coates suggest that those reparations should involve?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.