

ECO395M: Assignment 1

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Part 1

Past

I was born in July of 1997 in West Hartford Connecticut, the first of two boys. I lived there until I was four before my family moved to the suburbs of Boston. My mom liked to say that I’ve been trying to “move out” on my own since then. When I was young, I adored adventure books (and movies) — classics like Gulliver’s Travels and kids spy novels like Alex Rider. My favorite video game was *James Bond 007: Nightfire* on my GameCube (possibly one of the most hilarious consoles of all time). I hated the confines of my quiet suburb and longed to be an international super spy. However, the only step I took towards that goal was keeping a ready supply of pop-tarts in my desk drawer hidden from my mother.

As I grew up, I developed quite strong feelings about institutions and social justice. Now, I might use language found in the Rawlsian canon, although that was certainly not the case in middle and high school. I can’t identify where this grew from exactly. Although I do recall being uncomfortable with my grandparents’ snide and xenophobic comments. In addition, I fell down some strange and wonky rabbit holes on YouTube in the mid-2000s that heavily influenced the books and media I chose to consume in High School, which largely pushed me in the direction of economics as a way to understand systems of inequality and class exploitation. Fortunately, I narrowly missed the Alt-Right recommendations that suck up a lot of people with my background — a process documented well in the NYT podcast *Rabbit Hole*.

At seventeen, I deferred college to become a City Year AmeriCorps volunteer in the South Bronx where I taught math and English to middle school students. I witnessed inequality and community violence that forced reflection about my relatively privileged upbringing. In the classroom where I could exercise control, I often wondered how well-intentioned community and education policy and its practice so drastically failed some of the highest need students. Moreover, I saw how the institutions that exist (e.g. artifacts of red

lining) have subjugated these communities to a life of poverty and limited class mobility. In effect, this is a radicalizing period in my life.

Present

When I think about economics, political struggle, and cultural movements now, I defer to “how would this **practically** affect the students I worked with?” I also see them in the music I listen to. For example, in the words of Mos Def in *Mathematics*

When the average minimum wage is 5.15

You best believe you’ve got to find a new grind to get

cream,

where *cream* refers to the Wu-Tang’s “C.R.E.A.M.” (“Cash Rules Everything Around Me”). A few lines later, Mos Def drops this line:

Bubbling crack, jewel theft and robbery to combat poverty

Our institutions, through class subjugation, drove people like the parents of my former students to selling hard drugs and other risky behavior to get by because they don’t have institutional support. I think about this a lot, and try communicate the importance of institutions and path-dependency within my community.

These experiences, and others that similar, affected what I pursued in college. Throughout my junior and senior year until present, I have been an RA for Dr. Samuel Bowles and Dr. Simon Halliday’s forthcoming intermediate microeconomics textbook *Microeconomics: Competition, Coordination, and Conflict* published by the Oxford University Press. This project has challenged my understanding of microeconomic theory and allowed me to use and further develop my skills in R to articulate and visualize economic models. We spend a lot of time talking about inequality and power within the agent-based models presented. I think this is a powerful change in early teaching models. With Dr. Chris Makler at Stanford, I helped program interactive versions of the graphs of these models. As a continuation of my engagement with pedagogy, I received a fellowship to attend the CORE-Econ workshop at Barnard College to share my skills, collaborate with graduate students, and learn from the CORE contributors. I think the methods presented there and conversations within the examples are powerful for introductory students, especially as they relate to welfare (evidenced by Twitter in recent days).

I’m excited for the tools I’m going to gain in this course. The material you will present will help me better understand the frontiers of the applied literature. And, hopefully it will help me critically engage with the

research on policy.

Future

As I look to the future, I'm largely unsure. For so long I was set on PhD applications but I opted out during this year. I'd like to get out of academia for a bit, ideally do analytics or something data related and spend time engaging with local politics and community organization. Also location matters to me a lot, and I worry about ending up "in the middle of nowhere", etc. In the medium term, I may go back for a PhD, although it would likely be in something econ-tangent like public policy. In 10 years? Oh my... we'll see. You' can're welcome to follow-up if you'd like.

Part 2

Question 1

Data affects real people.

Question 2

Data science is a field that seeks to draw insights from structured and unstructured data. Causal inference significantly overlaps greatly and seeks to identify causal mechanisms using statistical methods.

A data science project might ask something like "given the characteristics of this population and information on diabetes, build a classifier to determine which out-of-sample members of the population are likely to have diabetes." A causal inference question might be "After the implementation of Policy A, we saw a change in XYZ. Identify whether the policy *caused* the change in the observed outcome XYZ."

Question 3

Option 3: "Data science is an inter-disciplinary field that uses scientific methods, processes, algorithms and systems to extract knowledge and insights from many structural and unstructured data."