



## Economics Reimagined: A Discussion on Building a Human Rights Economy – Transcript

Hosted by the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program and The New School's Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy

Thursday, January 19, 2023

### Description

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted 75 years ago by the United Nations, set forth a set of civil, social, and economic rights that inspired the development of human rights' laws around the world. The declaration has been a north star for those working to build an equitable and fair society for all people ever since. But over the intervening decades, our economic agenda and policymaking have often focused on economic growth and business success metrics at the expense of human well-being. This economic framework, which prefers profits over people, has contributed to skyrocketing wealth and income inequality, economic instability, social unrest, and recently the rise of new authoritarian movements. The economic rights from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, however, are reemerging as part of a call for a more moral and equitable economic order.

In this context, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and The New School's Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy recently announced the Partnership for a Human Rights Economy. The partnership will help advance scholarship and economic policymaking toward achieving human rights. In this event — hosted by the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program and The New School's Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy — we learn more about The New School's exciting new partnership with the UN and explore the legacy and lasting influences of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the philosophies and values that have come to shape our economy and the consequences, and how we build a moral and inclusive economy based on human rights.

For more information and resources from this event, visit [as.pn/humanrights](https://as.pn/humanrights).

## Opening Remarks



### Todd Howland

Chief of Branch, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

Todd Howland has more than 25 years of professional experience in the field of human rights. He presently serves as Chief, Right to Development, Sustainable Development, and Economic and Social Rights Branch of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Geneva. He has served as OHCHR representative in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Angola, among other UN posts.

He has authored numerous scholarly articles on human rights, including in *Human Rights Quarterly*, the *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy*, and the *Virginia Journal of International Law*, and he has published extensively on human rights in newspapers and magazines, including the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, and *Revista Semana*.

Howland was director of the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Human Rights in Washington DC. He has also worked at El Rescate, the European Commission, and in Ethiopia for the Carter Center. Howland was a professor of human rights law at Hankuk University in Seoul, South Korea. He holds a law degree and a master's degree from the University of Denver and was a visiting fellow at the Harvard Human Rights Program.

## Speakers



### Rangita de Silva de Alwis

Associate Dean of International Affairs, University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School

Rangita de Silva de Alwis is a globally recognized international women's rights expert. She is the associate dean of international affairs at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School, where she directs the Global Institute for Human Rights and leads the Advancing Inclusive Leadership program. Prof.

Rangita de Silva de Alwis is member-elect to the expert committee on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women for the term 2023-2026 and is also faculty at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

Rangita is a women's human rights scholar and practitioner with over 25 years of experience working globally in over 25 countries with a vast network of academic institutions, government, and non-government entities on women's human rights law and policymaking and institutional reform. She has convened several transnational networks, including the Women's Leadership Network in Muslim Communities, the Asia Cause Lawyer Network in India, and the Gender and Law Expert Group with women academics in China. She has spoken around the world on gender-based law reform and has published widely with the United Nations, the World Bank, and in various leading law journals. In recognition of Rangita's global work in advancing women's rights, she was named the Hillary Rodham Clinton Distinguished Fellow on Gender Equity, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. She received her doctorate in law from Harvard Law School.



### Darrick Hamilton

Henry Cohen Professor of Economics and Urban Policy; Founding Director, Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy, The New School

Darrick Hamilton is a university professor, the Henry Cohen Professor of Economics and Urban Policy, and the founding director of the Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy at The New School. Considered one of the nation's foremost scholars, economists, and public intellectuals, Hamilton's accomplishments include recently being profiled in the New York Times, Mother Jones, and the Wall Street Journal and being featured in POLITICO's 2017 "50 Ideas Shaping American Politics and the People Behind Them" issue. Also, he is a member of the Marguerite Casey Foundation in partnership with the Group Health Foundation's inaugural class of Freedom Scholars.

Hamilton has been involved in crafting policy proposals, such as baby bonds and a federal job guarantee, which have garnered a great deal of media attention and served as inspirations for legislative proposals at the federal, state, and local levels. He has served as a member of the economic committee of the Biden-Sanders Unity Task Force; he has testified before several Senate and House committees, including the Joint Economic Committee on the nation's potential policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic-induced health and economic crises; he was a surrogate and advisor for the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign; and he has advised numerous other leading members of Congress, as well as various 2020 presidential candidates.



### Thea Lee

Deputy Undersecretary for International Affairs, Bureau of International Labor Affairs, U.S. Department of Labor

Thea Lee was named deputy undersecretary for international affairs on May 10, 2021. She has been advocating for workers' rights, both domestically and internationally, for over thirty years. She was president of the Economic Policy Institute, a progressive pro-worker Washington think tank, from January 2018 to

May 2021 and an international trade economist at EPI in the 1990s. From 1997 to 2017, Lee worked at the AFL-CIO, a voluntary federation of 56 national and international labor unions that represent 12.5 million working men and women. At the AFL-CIO, she served as deputy chief of staff, policy director, and chief international economist.

Lee has served on the State Department Advisory Committee on International Economic Policy, the Export-Import Bank Advisory Committee, and on the boards of directors of the National Bureau of Economic Research, the Congressional Progressive Caucus Center, the Center for International Policy, and the Coalition on Human Needs, among others. She served on the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission from 2018 to 2020. In 2022, she was appointed to the Congressional-Executive Committee on China.

Lee holds a master's degree in economics from the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and a bachelor's degree in economics cum laude from Smith College.



### **Jim Wallis**

Founding Director, Center on Faith and Justice, Georgetown University

Jim Wallis is the inaugural holder of the Endowed Chair in Faith and Justice and the founding director of the Center on Faith and Justice at Georgetown University.

He is a globally respected writer, teacher, preacher, and justice advocate who believes the gospel of Jesus must be transformed from its cultural and political captivities and always be “good news” to the poor and oppressed. He is a New York Times bestselling author, widely recognized public theologian, renowned speaker, and regular international commentator on ethics and public life.

He served on President Obama's White House Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and has taught faith and public life courses at Harvard and Georgetown University. He also serves as a senior fellow at Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs.

### **Moderator**



### **Binyamin Appelbaum**

Lead Writer, Economics and Business, The New York Times Editorial Board

Binyamin Appelbaum is the lead writer on economics and business for the New York Times editorial board. He is based in Washington DC.

In 2020, Mr. Appelbaum played a leading role in “The America We Need,” a series of special sections arguing that the coronavirus pandemic laid bare the need for wide-ranging changes to address the inequities of American life.

Mr. Appelbaum's work has often explored the evolution of economic policy and particularly the rise of faith in markets as the solution to a wide range of policy problems. In 2019, he told that story in his first book, “The Economists' Hour: False Prophets, Free Markets and the Fracture of Society.”

Before joining the editorial board in 2019, Mr. Appelbaum worked for a decade as a Washington correspondent for The Times, leading the paper's coverage of the Federal Reserve under Ben Bernanke and Janet Yellen. He also wrote about a wide range of other issues in economic policy, including a 2010 investigation of the tension between economic dependence on the federal government and opposition to public spending; a 2012 series about the decline of federal income taxation; and a series of stories in 2015 and 2016 about the political consequences of regional economic decline.

Mr. Appelbaum is a native of Massachusetts. He holds a degree in history from the University of Pennsylvania and previously worked for the Florida Times-Union, the Charlotte Observer, the Boston Globe, and the Washington Post. In 2008, his work was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Public Service.

## About This Series

Opportunity in America, an event series hosted by the Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program, considers the changing landscape of economic opportunity in the US and implications for individuals, families, and communities across the country. The series highlights the ways in which issues of race, gender, and place exacerbate our economic divides, and ideas and innovations with potential to address these challenges and broaden access to quality opportunity.

We are grateful to Prudential Financial, Walmart, the Surdna Foundation, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, Bloomberg, and the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth for their support of this series.

## Transcript

### **Maureen Conway (00:00:00)**

It's my great pleasure to welcome you to today's conversation, "Economics Reimagined: A Discussion on Building a Human Rights Economy." This conversation is part of the Economic Opportunities Program's ongoing "Opportunity in America" discussion series, in which we discuss issues affecting opportunity across the US, implications for workers, businesses, and communities across the country, and ideas for change. We're very grateful to Prudential Financial, Walmart, the Surdna Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Bloomberg, and the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth for their support of this discussion series.

And we're of course very grateful to our partners at The New School for their partnership on this event and their thought leadership on advancing a more humane and moral economy. And that's what today's conversation is about. How do we put people back at the center of our economic agenda and policy making? This idea is not new. In 1948, so this is the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and this document enshrined all people with a set of civil, social, and economic rights.

And for those of you who may not be aware, the Aspen Institute actually was founded a short time later, not even a year later, and its roots also have this idea of advancing human-centered thinking. It was the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies. And it was around this idea, as former Aspen President J.E. Slater said, "all human activity — political, scientific, economic, intellectual, or artistic — will serve the needs of human beings and enrich and deepen their lives."

This idea that our economic activities be devoted to serving the needs of people has become a novel concept in our economic thinking today. Each day we hear about metrics about our economy that are largely not about people, the latest stock prices, corporate profits, GDP growth, measures of productivity, and so on. At the same time, our economic policies over the last several decades have often steered us towards efficiency, deregulation, corporate subsidies, and emphasizing individual responsibility. Policies aimed directly at helping people, particularly those with moderate or low incomes, when they have been proposed or passed, often are labeled as socialism or too expensive or are just surrounded by fears. And as a consequence, it's become somewhat unique to look at how our economic agenda is affecting or can fully support the wellbeing of people, of communities, and of our natural environment.

This economic discourse is not just a US based phenomena, but really, it has spread across the globe, and it often contributes to inequality, exploitation, and social and economic instability. So how and why did that happen? What have been the consequences? And how can we course correct to build an inclusive economy around human rights so that all people have the opportunity and resources to live dignified lives that promote their wellbeing?

We have a fabulous set of folks here today to address some of these questions, and I'll be introducing them in just a moment. But before we begin, we also, in addition to, have been so thrilled to have a lovely live audience here in the room with us today. We also have quite an audience with us online, I know, and I just want to address a few details for those joining us remotely. You can please send questions, just as you always do. Please use the Q&A button at the bottom of your screen to submit our upvote questions. We'd love for our conversation to be interactive, so we'd love to get to your questions. You can share your perspective as well using the chat function. I know a lot of people joining us also have expertise on these issues. So if you want to share resources and ideas of your own, we'd love to hear from you.

Ask you to respond to our feedback survey. We always love to hear from everybody about how we can do better with our events. So please respond to the feedback survey. You can also email us at EOP.program@AspenInstitute.org. We encourage you to tweet about the conversation. Our hashtag is #talkopportunity. This event is being recorded, will be shared via email, posted on our website. Closed captions are available. If you need them, please click the "CC" button at the bottom of your screen. That's it for my technical announcements. So now on our event.

Today's conversation is a conversation in three parts. We'll start with some opening remarks from Todd Howland at the United Nations, who I'll introduce in a moment. We'll then transition to a brief conversation between Binyamin Applebaum of the New York Times and Darrick Hamilton, founding director of the Institute on Race, Power, and Political Economy at The New School, to set the stage for the conversation. And then we will have our panel discussion, and we'll of course welcome questions from all of you.

Now let me introduce our first speaker. I'm so happy to introduce Todd Howland, Chief, Right to Development, Sustainable Development, and Economic and Social Rights Branch of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, OHCHR, in Geneva. That is a title. Todd has served as OHCHR representative in Columbia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola, among other UN posts. He has authored numerous scholarly articles on human rights. He has over 25 years of experience in human rights, and has held positions with Robert F. Kennedy Center for Human Rights, the European Commission, the Carter Center, Harvard, and much more. Importantly, Todd's just a brilliant person to hear from, and I'm so thrilled, Todd, that you are here to frame our discussion and provide some opening remarks. Thank you very much.

### **Todd Howland (00:06:13)**

Well, thank you very much, Maureen, and thanks to the Aspen Institute for organizing this event. It's very, very timely. I wanted to start with the reference that Maureen made to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. At this time, 75 years ago, they were honing in on completing the draft of the declaration. And at that time, the idea was to bring in all different countries and try to reflect a set of values that would be considered the bare minimum to be respected by all political and economic systems. And that is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

But what happened? For some reason, the economy and economic policies became a type of a human rights free zone. How did we get there? Well, first, I think there's a bit of revisionist history that we need to unpack. One, we often hear that the West was in favor of civil political rights, and the East was in favor of economic, social, and cultural rights. This isn't true. To a large degree, the inclusion of economic, social, and culture rights can be attributed to Latin Americans, specifically Hernan Santa Cruz, the Chilean, who was the representative in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Second, there's this idea that economic, social, and culture rights are somehow second generation rights, that the first generation rights, in terms of the more important ones, are political and the second

generation, economic, social, and cultural. This also isn't based in fact. If we were to look at in 1919, the International Labor Organization was founded, and it remains today. It actually predates the UN and then became part of the UN. So in fact, it predates the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. And that organization is what? An organization that promotes and protects economic, social, and cultural rights. But this idea that that economic, social, and cultural rights are second class citizens has stuck.

There's a huge amount of work that relates to what we consider economic rights, whether that's health, education, access to medicines. But often, it's approached not from a rights perspective. Both the poverty, in terms of anti-poverty work, often isn't approached from a human rights perspective, as well. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that the ... let's say the end of the Keynesian economic thought, or the dominance of Keynesian economic thought, that actually did find as normal the intervention of government in the economy. With the rise of neoclassical economics that assumes the best possible result is created by the market, and its ideological backers question any intervention by government in the economy, we've created a situation that has excluded intentionally looking at human rights and specifically economic, social, and cultural rights in terms of something normal. It should be a normal part of all government policies.

What's the impact on the right to help? What's the impact on the right to education? What's the impact on social security? By certain policies, whether those are tax, macroeconomics, microeconomic policies. This would be normal if you treated economic, social, and culture rights as part of the rule of law. But something happened. And what happened was an economic school of thought, neoclassical economics, trumped economic, social, and culture rights, which should be considered part of the rule of law of a country because these countries have voluntarily entered into these treaties. The former high Commissioner for Human Rights, Madame Bachelet, and I were speaking a couple years ago. She's the former president of Chile. And she said, "Todd, our biggest challenge is we need to have the popular understanding of human rights. We need to recapture it because too many people limit their understanding of human rights to something that happens somewhere else, something that relates to other people, and it needs to be about themselves. And economic rights are something that everyone, the level of education you have, the level of access to healthcare, it's something that affects people, but people don't necessarily see it as a right."

And so for her, it was very important that we began to do more work in this area at the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and today, almost in all of our hundred in-country presences, we're doing work on terms of analyzing budgets for their impact on rights. We're looking at the implications of austerity policies and the lack of fiscal space coming out of agreements with international financial institutions. We're looking at the impact of corruption and illegal financial flows in terms of their impact on human rights, and specifically economic rights. Our new high commissioner, Commissioner Volker, has indicated that the future of human rights is with finance ministers because for so long, this area of work has not been considered important, but it affects everyone's lives, and it affects their wellbeing.

I think to end this orientation, I wanted to ... or framing, I wanted to say that a lot of people in the US might say, "Well, yes, but the US hasn't ratified the covenant on economic, social, and cultural rights, so we're not a state party, so it's not relevant here." I would like to make sure that you're aware of that the US has signed and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. In Article 5 of that convention, it speaks about the right to work, the freedom of choice of employment, favorable conditions of work, equal pay for equal work, just and favorable remuneration, the right to form and join trade unions, the right to housing, the right to public health, medical care, social security, social services, the right to education training, and the right to participation in cultural activities.

It is overdue for the US to treat economic, social, and cultural rights as the part of rule of law that needs to be applied at the local, state, and national government levels. It is up to you, the activists and policymakers in the US, to turn this obligation into a reality. Thank you very much for the opportunity to frame this discussion, and I look forward to hearing what the participants have to say.

### **Maureen Conway (00:13:39)**

Thank you so much, Todd. That was terrific. Now, it's my pleasure to welcome and introduce our next speaker as they come to the stage. I welcome Darrick Hamilton. Darrick Hamilton is Henry Cohen Professor of Economics and Urban Policy, and founding director of the Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy at The New School. He's one of our nation's leading economists and thought leaders on addressing inequity and poverty, and is just a brilliant thought partner. And I am so pleased that we're partnering with Darrick and his team at The New School on today's event.

And we're also delighted to have Binyamin Applebaum to moderate today's conversation. He is Lead Writer on Economics and Business for the New York Times Editorial Board. He recently helped lead a series of special reports arguing that the Coronavirus pandemic laid bare the need for wide-ranging changes to address the inequities of American life. Before joining the editorial board in 2019, he covered the Federal Reserve and wrote about economic policy. His work has explored the evolution of economic policy, including the rise of faith in markets as a solution to a wide range of policy problems. And he told that story in his book, which is, I think, really a lot of why I wanted him to come moderate this conversation because I loved this book, the Economists' Hour: False Prophets, Free Markets, and The Fracture of Society. Highly recommend. He's just a great guide for today's conversation. So thank you for being here with us today, and let me turn it over to the two of you.

### **Binyamin Appelbaum (00:15:13)**

Great. Thank you very much for having ... Just to put a frame around today's conversation, in the 1930s, and again in the 1970s, we entered periods of crisis and profound uncertainty about the relationship between the government and the economy, existing models of how the government should manage and engage with the economy were upended, people sought new models, new paradigms. And I think that we are, again, in that kind of moment. We have seen the flaws in the way that we do business as a society, and we are searching for new answers and new approaches, and we have the opportunity to revive worthwhile ideas from the past, and to actuate them to make them real this time around.

So to me, this is a tremendously exciting moment and an important conversation to be having about how we create a new paradigm for the government's involvement in the economy, a new sense of what government should be doing, needs to be doing, in order to ensure broad prosperity and equality of both opportunity and moving us closer to outcomes for all of the participants in our economy. And I'm really excited to be here today with Professor Hamilton to talk about that. And I guess the place I'd like to begin is, well, maybe you could just tell us a little bit about your work and what you see as the problem.

### **Darrick Hamilton (00:16:43)**

I'm going to begin with gratitude. Gratitude for this forum, gratitude to The Aspen Institute, gratitude to the UN, and gratitude to you, and say that thus far, the framing that this has a strong historical foundation should be emphasized, that we're not talking about something new and radical, but rather there's precedence. And a lot of the comments that came up earlier is a precedent, a historical precedence that led to us coming to a framework of economic rights. It was a framework of despair. Coming out of World War II, a near fascist takeover of the world, that was a context of despair.

So to answer the question, who am I? So, I'm Darrick Hamilton. I'm an economist. I'm a proud economist who doesn't think of issues of race, gender as periphery, but takes them as a core foremost, right up front. I'd say what else about myself? It's always tough to talk about oneself. The work is personal. The work is personal. My background is such that everybody's parents works hard and want what's best for

their children. But I lost my parents at an early age. And I dare say that the rhetoric of work hard, study hard, and provide a good future for your children is what took their life. I believe that the accumulation of stress, of trying to do and create for me to go on and get a PhD, it led to a tragic outcome.

So I also understand the confluence of race in my life. I had the benefit of privilege at a young age to attend an elite high school, Brooklyn Friends School, grounded in a Quaker ethic, which probably has something to do with my interests and values. But on the other hand, in that environment, I can see that the experiences of the children I went to school with in terms of resources was very different than the children that I grew up with in my neighborhood. Not the values, the ridicule that they gave to each other, the aspirations. They were very similar. But the resources were what was a big difference.

So, last thing I'll say about this, which is really relevant to the conversation, it's important for us to understand that every academic endeavor, every so-called scientific endeavor, every policy endeavor starts with a set of norms, starts with a set of values, it leads us to ask questions, it leads us to define purpose, and it becomes problematic if we're not self-aware of that, and if we're not honest with that value that leads us to the endeavor in the first place.

### **Binyamin Appelbaum (00:19:55)**

So neoliberalism, which really started to seize the imagination of policymakers in the 1970s, was a very clear representative, a very clear set of values. It said basically, we are going to assert the primacy of the individual in a free market. You need to get out there and make of yourself what you can, and that is the best way to raise all boats. And that was the model that we lived under for several decades. It emerged as a response to real problems, but in turn, it has created real problems that now require solutions. Where did we go wrong? What was wrong with that model?

### **Darrick Hamilton (00:20:33)**

It was devoid of an analysis of power. So the onus of social mobility, the onus of inequality grounded in self-fulfillment of the individual, is devoid of an understanding of resource and power by which certain individuals begin a transaction, and certain individuals don't. Without that analysis, then the outcomes become self-fulfilling. And that's the point of this project. The point of this project is to lead to more fair interactions, more just interactions, and then the other aspect, more productive interactions, that you will empower people who otherwise wouldn't have the resources to have that power to do big productive things, not just for themselves, but for society.

### **Binyamin Appelbaum (00:21:26)**

And you talked a little bit about resources before, but if everybody gets out there on that playing field, but some of them are coming from a place of having those resources and others not, you end up with problems, right?

### **Darrick Hamilton (00:21:37)**

Yeah, right. Again, it becomes self-fulfilling, it becomes tautological. It reinforces an existing trend in an amplified way. And then here's the problem with it. It has a rhetoric that's dishonest, that doesn't recognize that trend. So the rhetoric and the reality are not connected, but yet, we end up in a society that's trending in a way towards more and more inequality, despair, and something that's not humanistic or good for everyone.

**Binyamin Appelbaum (00:22:12)**

So we're here today to talk about a human rights economy as a solution to that problem or a replacement for that model. What does that look like? How are you working to achieve that? What are you doing with the UN to achieve that?

**Derrick Hamilton (00:22:24)**

Right. So the first question we should ask, what is the purpose of an economy, which is exactly what we're talking about. From my set of values and norms, an economy should provide for structures and resources so that people can be their best selves, can contribute in a dynamic way that not only benefits themselves, but also society at large. I think that's a purpose of an economy. So then, one might say, well, what are some necessary ingredients for that type of economy? And we have polars in our society from ideological realms of those that believe in a more command economy where government is directing resources, to more of a market based economy, which, by the way, is also related to ... Market is a political construction, but a notion where people trade more freely.

Regardless of your ideological perspective, I think at baseline what is true is that any type of transaction where one party has resources in the other one doesn't, that's not really a transaction. The person without resources is at the whim of the other person's charitable inclination or will of exploitation because they have resources to coerce and co-opt them. So the answer to that is, I think at a baseline, there are a set of enabling goods and services. Without them, people cannot engage in an authentic way to have agency.

And let's make that cogent. Healthcare, income, a job, capital. If you want to build wealth, the most critical ingredient is capital itself. To get into an asset like a home, to get into using your ingenuity of a great idea to create a business, one needs capital. So capital becomes a key ingredient. So I can dissect these more and talk about more specific reasons of why something like this is an economic right, but the general framework is an attribute without which you really don't have choice or agency in your life.

And then one more thing about healthcare, because I mentioned that. When somebody is sick, at their most vulnerable point, when they're sick, one thing we should not be thinking about is the stigma and burden of finance at that point. Not only is it immoral, it is counterproductive, because at that point you'd be willing to do anything in order to ... almost anything, maybe I'm exaggerating. But again, it is that vulnerability by which we don't really get a humanistic choice or true agency, and that's what a human rights economy is about. It's providing people with the tools so that they can properly engage and be self-determining.

**Binyamin Appelbaum (00:25:29)**

Great. We're going to unpack and expand on all of this, but Maureen is going to come up and add some people to our conversation first.

**Maureen Conway (00:25:35)**

Yeah, thank you for that great start. And I'd like to welcome the other panelists to the stage now. I'll briefly introduce them. We have more information about them, but just to keep the conversation going, I'll just do a quick names to faces. So Rangita de Silva de Alwis, welcome, is the Associate Dean of International Affairs at the University of Pennsylvania, Carey Law School, faculty at the Harvard Kennedy

School of Government, and Member Elect to the UN Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Thea Lee is Deputy Under Secretary for International Affairs at the Bureau of International Labor Affairs at the US Department of Labor. And Jim Wallis is founding director at the Center on Faith and Justice at Georgetown University. So I'm thrilled to have all of them here with us today. Thank you so much for joining us. And Binyamin, let me turn it back over to you.

**Binyamin Appelbaum (00:26:34)**

Thank you. So I'm going to ask each of you to introduce yourself in the context of answering a question. And the question is, a defining characteristic of the neoliberal economy is that in pretending to treat everyone the same, we end up disadvantaging groups that begin at a disadvantage. Those inequalities are exacerbated, they grow larger over time, and indeed the system feeds on those inequalities. So Rangita, if I can start with you, talk a little bit about the ways in which the system has been problematic for women in which law and economics has disadvantaged women.

**Rangita de Silva de Alwis (00:27:09)**

Thank you. I'm going to begin with something that you shared with us: the origin story of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. As we all know, Eleanor Roosevelt was the architect of that hallowed document. And what we still do not know in a more universal manner is that Hansa Mehta of India was the delegate of India, the representative to the declaration's drafting. And it was she who really created a new narrative in the founding principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It starts with that 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and in rights.' So the original document that was drafted by Eleanor Roosevelt said, "All men are born equal in dignity and in rights." And it was the Global South representative from India who changed this rather sexist language and changed the pronouns to say 'all human beings.'

So that really brings us to the larger conversation that we've been having throughout the day on American exceptionalism. And I want to start with Louis Henkin, who is known broadly as the father of modern international law and was a vulnerable professor at Columbia Law School, who really captured and conceptualized the essence of American exceptionalism when he said, "In the Cathedral of Human Rights, the United States is more like a flying buttress than a pillar in that cathedral, choosing to stand outside the international structure; supporting the international human rights system, but nevertheless without being willing to subject its own conduct to the scrutiny of the system." So I think that really best conceptualizes the values of the United States.

Having said that, I do want to remind us that then Senator Biden, now President Biden, was one of the main forces behind the campaign to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. And it is important for me to remind ourselves about our non-ratification. We are strange bedfellows with Iran in the non-ratification. There are six states that are yet to ratify this near universally ratified international convention. And at the moment, when we are having this discussion against the backdrop of a feminist-led, a women-led revolution in Iran, it is important for us to remind ourselves that the United States and Iran are strange bedfellows in the non-ratification.

So President Biden, in his campaign, promised to ratify the CEDAW, and he has said when he was Senator that, "time is a wasting." And then Secretary of State Madeline Albright has said, "It is past time to ratify the CEDAW." So what I would like us to begin this conversation is to say, remember the international human rights framework and remember the power of the ratification of these conventions and treaties.

And at this moment in time, the world is in crisis, but there is also a public reckoning, a global public reckoning that has brought us to a greater understanding of the role that racism, sexism, and colonization have played together in confluence in the crisis that we are facing. And what I have always called the confluence of The Five C's, colonization, conflict, COVID, corruption and climate crisis, have come together to have a disproportionate impact on women here in the United States and around the world.

And the United States is facing this similar crisis, and the time is right for the United States to ratify the CEDAW, the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. And I say this because there are lots of American exceptionalist arguments that have a rallying cry for the United States to ratify the convention based on foreign policy agenda. But I argue that it is most important for domestic policy, that here in the United States, the moment is non-negotiable for us to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, at a time when the Black Lives Matter movement and the Me Too movement have created a public reckoning that is both national and global.

So my hope today is that this conversation will join the global public conversation for the United States ratification of the CEDAW and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. And the United States is alone in the non-ratification of that powerful convention.

**Binyamin Appelbaum (00:33:00)**

And we're going to come back to solutions and talk more about that aspect of it. But staying focused on the problems for now, Thea, your work as an economist focuses on workers, and some of the effects of trade and the economic ideology around free trade has negatively affected workers. Could you talk a little bit about that and about how the system has worked for workers and where they find themselves?

**Thea Lee (00:33:22)**

I'd be happy to. And thank you so much to Aspen and New School for the invitation to be here. It's wonderful to be on this extraordinary panel with these folks. So I'm trained as an economist at Smith College and the University of Michigan, and I feel like I've spent my whole career fighting the power of economists to subvert the policy debate, especially around trade policy. And I think the point that Darrick, and Binyamin, you raised earlier, about the policies exacerbating inequalities is really the thing that I have focused in on, and particularly with workers.

And my work has been both at the AFL-CIO, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations, where I spent about 20 years, working both internationally and domestically, but representing American workers. And now I'm at the US Labor Department, where I head up the International Labor Affairs Bureau and I spend all my time thinking about some of the most vulnerable workers in the world: workers in Bangladesh or China or Myanmar, who don't have basic rights, sometimes don't have democratic rights, they don't have any kind of ability to raise their voice.

But one of the reasons I'm so excited about today's conversation is that I think this intersection of what the economics profession or neoliberalism taught us in the 1990s, which I spent part of that time at the AFL-CIO and part at the Economic Policy Institute, where I was both an economist and then later president, but that the 1990s, the heyday of globalization with the North American Free Trade Agreement and China's joining of the World Trade Organization, was a time when the dominant narrative was so powerful, that free trade is good for everybody all the time. Anybody who doesn't believe that is an idiot or a sellout, a labor hack.

I always think if I was going to sell out, I wouldn't sell out to labor, I'd sell out to business. And when I would leave a debate with one of the people I was talking to who represented the other side, I'm like, "You drive a nicer car than I do. So definitely not doing it for those benefits." But the idea that as we craft rules for the global economy, who do we think about? Who is at the center of that conversation?

And so my frustration in the 1990s was that it was always about multinational corporations. And the idea was, "Whatever's good for the mobility and the profit and the power of global capital is going to end up being good for everybody else eventually." And it didn't turn out that way. And I think that's one of the reasons we ended up with Donald Trump as president in 2016, 2017, because there was a sellout of American workers in the industrial sectors, where we took good jobs for American workers and we turned them into bad jobs overseas. And that was the idea.

And at the same time, what you're doing is you're undermining the American middle class, you're undermining our sense of community, which is, I think, very important to us. And then it's not even like you're giving a big birthday present and a big gift to the workers in the developing countries, because those workers were treated abominably. And that's part of what I do now, is to still try to think through, what are the tools ... ? And we'll talk about that later. I know we'll get to the good news about it. But how are those workers so disempowered, so weak?

And if you think about bargaining power ... And I think this is the point, Darrick, you were making earlier about asymmetry of power, asymmetry of information, that that's bad in the United States; workers tend to have less power than their bosses. But when you think about it in the global economy, it is magnified a million fold of workers who don't have the right to vote, they don't sometimes have any basic education, and you're asking them to go up against a global corporation and bargain for better wages, for healthcare, for safety goggles, for a bathroom break, for decent treatment, for pregnant women. So all of those things.

But it is about the balancing of rights. And I would say that for many decades we paid too little attention, and I think we had a very primitive understanding of what is efficiency in the global economy. So in the name of efficiency, we put in place policies that were all about building power for one group, multinational corporations, and undermining power for others. And it had consequences that were bad, both in the United States and in the developing world.

### **Binyamin Appelbaum (00:38:16)**

That's a great introduction. Darrick, the apostles of neoliberalism insisted that they were colorblind and that they were creating a world that would be colorblind and good for people of all colors. What was wrong with that?

### **Darrick Hamilton (00:38:32)**

It's ahistorical, right? It has no notion of how, using the word of Thea, power came to be distributed in the first place. So starting from some point in time saying, "Okay, we're going to have laissez-faire colorblind markets and just have the winner prevail." Well, that's ahistorical and ignores all the exploitative and extracting ways in which distribution came in the first place.

### **Binyamin Appelbaum (00:39:01)**

And Darrick, I want to come back to that in a moment. But Jim, let me bring you into the conversation. We've been talking basically about various ways in which our economy has failed to live up to what you

might call our morality, the precepts that we talk about on Sundays or Saturdays or Fridays, or whenever we go to pray. Why has that happened? Why do the religious values that we and that many of our political leaders espouse, particularly around poverty, around treating others as we would like to be treated, why have those not been part of our economic philosophy and policy, as well?

**Jim Wallis (00:39:42)**

Well, I'm already enjoying being on this panel, so I'm glad I came. And it was your letter, Maureen, that struck me, this sentence, "We will consider what a human rights economy grounded in morality and dignity would look like and the necessary actions to build it." Well, we're a long way away from that. So how do we deal with that?

I like the kind of labor hack you are. I've probably been called a values hack in a similar way. To build a moral economy would be to ground economics in the best of what we say are our shared moral values. I would even say to your question, our best sacred values in a pluralistic context. And I'm even talking to the new CEOs of small businesses who want to build what they call a sacred economy. It's an interesting conversation.

So how do we do that? This isn't old. Adam Smith in the Wealth of Nations, the famous book, and his moral sentiments before that, said this: "Without morality, the market will fail and crumble." He said that. We don't normally quote him on that one. Joseph Schumpeter, an Austrian economist, a deep defender of capitalism, said, "Without ethics, the market will eat itself up." We've seen both of those now.

I love what you said in the opening, Maureen: how do you put people back in the economy? How do you put people back in the economics discussion? How are people the measure? So let me talk about a worker, that Thea did, and a woman, as Rangita did. Here's the story.

I walked into a Burger King about four in the afternoon one day. I saw three kids at a table with their books and papers and pencils and homework out. They were doing their homework, three kids on their own. Then I watched this woman, who was a worker there, keep going back and forth at the table between orders of Whoppers and fries and chicken nuggets. She kept going back to help her kids with their homework. I ended up thinking of her and calling her Burger King Mom. Burger King Mom, who's balancing time with kids and homework, balancing also what to pay for: pay for doctor bills or boots for her kids or clothing or groceries.

Burger King Mom ought to be a measure. A measure. A moral measure of what we call the economy. How does this all affect the Burger King moms? And those essential workers, we might call them now, who we still don't pay essential wages for, are overwhelmingly out there while we're all watching our screens during COVID. They're out there keeping life going for us. Overwhelmingly black and brown. And many, many women are in that group, and they're the hardest workers in America.

So how are they the measure? So let me ... In terms of one example ... In the Economic Recovery Act of 2021, Biden and the others put in this thing called the Child Tax Credit, CTC. I hope you all know about that. It reduced child poverty by 46%. It made it regular, monthly. 46%. The data shows people use the money for groceries, school supplies, doctor bills, housing, rent. And as the dean of McCourt likes to say, "What overcomes poverty? Cash." Cash, okay?

But it got dropped by those members, whether they're professed Christians or not. Blocked. Not just dropped, but blocked. A lot of us are pushing, pushing, pushing across the religious spectrum; it got blocked. Which means poverty is a result of policy choices. Policy choices. Choices that cut taxes for the wealthy and corporations and don't include a CTC for low income people.

We lost in the fall on this. I'll say we're coming back and we're going to say, "You can't renew these tax credits for the rich unless you do a child tax credit." That's going to be our moral grounding. And all the press this morning again about the debt ceiling, debt limit, you know, it's headed for that confrontation. And the Republicans are saying, "Without great cuts to spending, we're not going to support raising the debt ceiling."

Well, are they going to call for not cutting taxes for the wealthy for the sake of the debt? Or are they going to cut social spending for Burger King Mom? When they say spending, you know what they mean. It's not for their wealthy donors to help with the debt by paying more taxes, it's for her. So I'm going to, in a bit, get into the particular sacred texts, if you will, that are often ignored by those who pledge allegiance to them, and how those sacred texts could change our measure.

### **Binyamin Appelbaum (00:45:58)**

So the idea that poverty is the result of policy choices is ... Darrick, I think I've heard you say that in those exact words. I suspect the rest of you would agree with that sentiment, as well. Jim, you've described budgets as moral documents, which is a similar sort of principle. And I now want to move the conversation to a discussion of what it would look like if we made our budgets more moral, what it would look like if we made the policy choice to deal with poverty, to incorporate human rights into our economic framework. What does that world look like? Rangita, maybe we can start with you.

### **Rangita de Silva de Alwis (00:46:33)**

Yes. So human rights matter in the world of work. The US is yet to ratify ILO190. But when we talk about rights, are we really including women's rights in the world of work, in that panoply of rights? So the ILO190 recognizes the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment, including gender-based violence and harassment; recognizing that violence and harassment against women is a violation of human rights.

Now, how do we define rights and how do we define violence against women? The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women makes clear, and we've been talking about the power dynamic, that violence against women occurs in an unequal powered relationship, whether it is in the world of work or in the intimate sphere. So that unequal power dynamic, that inequality of power, is the structural and the systemic cause of violence against women. And then when we look at women, even the term women is not a monolithic. we are defined by our intersectional identities, and gender is only one axis of difference. And the Convention on the Elimination of the Discrimination Against Women in its preamble emphasizes that the eradication of apartheid, all forms of racism and racial discrimination and colonialism are essential to the full enjoyment of the rights of women. So the fact that this is inextricably interlinked to both the ways in which gender is connected to our different identities as human beings.

So having said that, what I would like to do is to now look at the ways, and this is something that I think you had asked me earlier in the afternoon to do, is to look at the way in which law itself can be complicit in the subordination of women and in human rights violations. And this is something that we talked earlier in the day about the rule of law. You talked, Todd, about the rule of law. But the rule of law, it itself rules women out. So in 17 economies, there is husband obedience norms enshrined in the legal system. And I knew that, when I've gone through all of the laws on husband obedience laws, that these laws existed. What came as a surprise to me was that there were in-law obedience laws. So women in 17 economies have to get the permission of their husbands and their in-laws to start a business, to open a bank account, and to engage in the economy.

So these are barriers to a human rights economy. In 27 economies, men are legally defined as heads of household, and men are the owners of marital property and women cannot inherit equally with men. These are barriers to a human rights economy, the unequal participation of women in the economy. In hundred economies of the world, women have unequal access to many categories of jobs. So just in Russia, because I am loath to mention names, but Russia is an exception, 40 categories of jobs are closed to women. So women cannot access 40 categories of jobs in Russia.

But the good news is that during a time of COVID, during a time of Building Back Better, many countries, many economies used gender equality norms to not only build back better as part of their stimulus packages. And I'm going to just, if I have this opportunity, just look at Gabon as an example. In 2021 and 2022, Gabon went through its entire legal system through a gender lens and equalized opportunities for women's participation in the economy by allowing, giving women equal opportunity to open a bank account without the permission of the husband, outlawed the provision in the legal system that called for husband obedience, and also provided a new revision in the law that now sees men and women as heads of household.

So these were factors in stimulating the economy. So we have to look at building back better through those gender lenses of how all of our stimulus packages not only need to provide for economic incentives for women to engage in the participation in the economy, but looking at the structural and systemic barriers that held women back.

### **Binyamin Appelbaum (00:51:47)**

So that's very interesting.

### **Rangita de Silva de Alwis (00:51:47)**

Sorry, I'm going to end with this final point. When I was relating this Gabon case study to my students, I asked them, "Just think of probably the critical reason behind these reforms." Could you guess why? So Gabon is the first West African country that is headed by a woman prime minister. So women's leadership is a catalyst for a human rights economy.

### **Binyamin Appelbaum (00:52:15)**

Yeah, so I think it's easy or relatively easy to understand the role of human rights when people are being discriminated against by law. And then we can say, "Okay, we need to remove that from the law." But in other contexts where discrimination is not explicitly in the law, the role of rights I think requires a little bit more explication, a little bit more of an argument for it as a useful tool. So in the context of workers' rights, is it useful in terms of improving the lot of workers in the United States or in other countries, is it useful to conceptualize some new rights that we haven't articulated, do enshrine rights that we have but are not in the law, is that a useful way forward? And if not, then how do we move forward?

### **Thea Lee (00:52:59)**

Thank you for that question. Well, we have the International Labor organization that does talk about what are the universal workers' rights and the fundamental declaration on rights and principles at work from 1998 outlines what the core workers' rights are. And those are not in everybody's law. They're not in the United States law uniformly. They are in some cases, not in others. But having that international standard is actually incredibly valuable because otherwise we end up having the debate about, well, if the United States says to another country, you need to allow workers to organize unions, and they say,

heck with you, we're not the United States. Who are you to tell us? But if we can appeal to an international consensus, then I think it is very valuable. And the ILO, as many of you know, is the only UN agency that is tripartite in structure that has not just governments, but workers and employers represented on the governing body.

And so the core labor rights are freedom of association. That's the right to form a union of your own choosing without interference from your government or your boss, the right to bargain collectively. And then prohibitions against child labor, forced labor and discrimination in employment. And that has been the core of what we've done in the United States with a labor movement, with environmentalists about trying to insert enforceable labor rights into our trade agreements. And that has been a way of invoking the international consensus around workers human rights, and then being able to give it some more enforceability because the ILO with all of its moral authority does not have enforcement mechanisms that are very useful.

But trade agreements, and this I think goes to economics, it's basically harnessing the power of globalization and market access to incentivize sovereign governments to change their behavior and also to incentivize corporations to change their behavior because corporations don't violate workers' rights for the fun of it. And they generally don't go to violate workers' rights to sell in that market. They violate workers' rights to save money, to be in a competitive global economy, and then they try to sell in the wealthy markets of the world, the European Union and the United States and so on. And so if those markets can also have conversation, which is a big part of what I do now about consensus around conditioning market access, on respect for workers' rights, that can be a game changer.

### **Binyamin Appelbaum (00:55:42)**

Darrick, if you had in economy, if in the United States tomorrow we guaranteed a right to housing, we guaranteed a right to education, to healthcare, we provided a basic set of resources to every American, is that sufficient to address these patterns of historic inequity?

### **Darrick Hamilton (00:56:00)**

It may not be sufficient. It's necessary. I think the angle of the question is spot on in that there needs to be some restorative justice as well. And I've obviously been talking about that. And there's where reparations comes in. Reparations not only provides resources in a direct way to those that might have been harmed to rectify an injustice in the past, but it also has that truth and reconciliation aspect that impacts our politics. So the narratives about inequality grounded in Black people being deficient or some other population deficient in some way, a new narrative that grounds inequality in what it actually is grounded in, which is resource deprivation, benefits not only that population, but all people because poor people in general will not be subject to those inaccurate narratives that ground the trend of poverty into some deficient attribute.

But more broadly, such far this conversation we've talked about individuals, and that's where we should begin. Begin with the question around individuals and indignity providing for people to flourish. But the macroeconomic aspects of what we're talking about, the industrial policy aspects of shifting resource in a strategic way towards people and places have profound benefits that we've yet to discuss in detail, which is building our public infrastructure, building our public infrastructure in a way that is not captured by a private entity that can monopolize it and charge certain prices and restrict access for a motive of generating profit, not necessarily social benefit. It's anti-fascist.

Fascism is predicated on despair. So the extent to which we have a more thriving society than the lure and the pull towards some of those attributes politically go away. It's an automatic stabilizer. So as the economy swing through business cycle, the downturn will be less dramatic and less painful. The

recovery will be quicker. We have the automatic infrastructure in place to deal with these swings. And then last thing I'll say really quick is that all of us talking about economics have essentially been having a conversation about politics as well. And the political aspect about will and power to implement what we're talking about goes back to the question that you asked me before that I gave a answer to, but it was incomplete because it excluded the notion of property rights and whiteness, the realization that one's identity has transactional value is critical in our notions when thinking about some narrative of colorblind racism.

It is critical when we think about all things equal because of one's gender, one's race, one's ethnicity, one's nationality that has either an asset in that aspect or a debt in that domain. That is critical, and it links back to the politics because how is it that we can have this economy that's growing in despair without a political movement to move us towards the rights' framework? Well, it is offering people relative status or the property rights and whiteness at the expense of somebody else. That becomes the political weapon in my mind that leads us away from achieving what I think will be good for everybody.

### **Binyamin Appelbaum (00:59:54)**

I really appreciate this point about the infrastructure of opportunity because we're not just talking about endowing people, we're talking about giving them the capacity to move and to move up. And that that's obviously critical.

### **Derrick Hamilton (01:00:06)**

I promise you real quick. I forgot the firms. Firms thrive as well. Now, let me not be misleading and tell of fable, the current structures firms are able to capture and hoard more because of the power they have. But with that infrastructure that you are alluding to, that only not only benefits people, it benefits firms. Public infrastructure is good. And for those firms that want to achieve fairness, well, it prevents a race to the bottom. It creates a structure to discipline bad acting firms so that those that are good acting don't face a course disadvantage in how they engage in the marketplace.

### **Binyamin Appelbaum (01:00:48)**

And we have a problem of language. We talk about investing in firms and giving to people. But Jim, I want to come back to you because we have a problem, which is how do we sell this? How do you inject morality into discussions about budgets? How do you get finance ministers talking about human rights?

### **Jim Wallis (01:01:09)**

Well, you start by saying the moral measure of a new economy is who has the resources, and who has the power. Right there, that's [inaudible 01:01:19]. I'm still thinking about this. 50 kinds of jobs in Russia aren't allowed.

### **Rangita de Silva de Alwis (01:01:25)**

Yes.

**Jim Wallis (01:01:25)**

So that's by law. And I'm just-

**Rangita de Silva de Alwis (01:01:27)**

40 categories.

**Jim Wallis (01:01:27)**

Right, categories-

**Rangita de Silva de Alwis (01:01:29)**

Including captain of a ship. Yes.

**Jim Wallis (01:01:32)**

So what categories here, not by law, but by tradition, culture, bias, are the same. Oh, like the President of the United States or Cardinals in the Catholic Church. Just saying, okay. Now this phrase I want to get back to, "The budget is a moral document." That came out of a meeting with some democratic senators years ago with a view of this from the faith community. And they're worried about how do we not just be tax and spend Democrats. They're all worried about their image tax and spend Democrats.

So I was thinking about that a lot. And I said to them, "What about a budget as a moral document?" I mean, think about it. A budget for a family, for a congregation, an organization, a city, a state, a nation. Budgets say who and what is important? Budgets define who and what we think are important. So that's a whole different way of getting beyond the old debates and saying, "It's the budget. It shows who we think is important or not." So back to the sacred text thing, the Hebrew prophets, I hope some of you read some of those, Micah, Amos, Isaiah, I'll just say a sentence about them. What they're saying, and they're very clear, is that the test of any nation, the test of righteousness, they would say for a nation, is how they treat their poorest and most vulnerable. That's clear. Write them off if you want.

But that's what they say. Isn't there GDP? Isn't there military firepower? Isn't there cultural dominance? It's how they treat those who are the most vulnerable. Burger King mom. And when the prophets said that, they just didn't aim that at the kings of Israel, but all the nations around. Rulers, princes, how are they being treated? And then we get to Jesus. Well, he really all the allegiance to Jesus and people never hear what he said. So at the McCourt School, our first faculty gathering last week, we had a little reception and I got into a conversation with some ... these are policymakers, not the religion department. And I said, "What if we talked about the economics of Jesus?" And it really sparked the conversation. What are the economics of Jesus? Look at the parables. What are they about? Wealth management, daily wages, land ownership, lost coins and debt. Parables are full of economics.

He didn't just say, "Let me talk to you about spiritual things." The Lord's Prayer. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." We rather say sins. It's debts. And there was a jubilee year in the Hebrew tradition where every 50 years debts were forgiven. We had that around the G-8 millennial thing. We had the jubilee campaign by a bunch of us did do that, and Bono joined and all rest. But Jesus' first sermon, his first gig, his mission statement was Nazareth. I called His Nazareth manifesto. He quotes Isaiah and he says, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to bring good news to the poor."

Flat out. Set the oppressed free, all the rest. And the word for good news there in the Greek is evangel. Huh? Ironic, isn't it? From where we get the word evangelical, which you would not today, I'm from that tradition, nobody would say the evangelical tradition is known for good news to poor. Nobody would say that. So I would say from his first gig, any Christian gospel that is not good news to the poor is simply not the gospel of Jesus. Period. Now that's somehow something I've never had a debate about in Capitol Hill with alleged Christians who are senator because they know they lose a debate, they won't have the debate. They just ignore Jesus.

And I'll end with this. The final example of the economics of Jesus is the text that was my conversion text that brought me out of the movements of my day to Jesus. Matthew 25, I call it the, it was me text. He says, "I was hungry. I was thirsty. I was naked. I was sick. I was in prison. I was a stranger." The word stranger means immigrant, period. That's what it means. That was me. That was me. When you see them was me. And he says, "As you've done to the least of these, you've done to me."

And I found that at the time more radical than Hồ Chí Minh, Che Guevara and Karl Marx who I was reading at the time. I found this more radical. It is the great reversal, the great reversal of values because the least of these are the least important in Washington DC and New York City. They're the least important. And this radical itinerary rabbi named Jesus says, "No, these people are the most important." They're the test, to use for our language today. How they're doing is the test of an economy. And it then goes on and say, "Will you worry about your personal relationship with me?" All the Christians talk about that. "Well, as you treat them is how much you love me."

### **Binyamin Appelbaum (01:08:15)**

You put me in mind of the mayor of New York recently announcing that his message to immigrants is that there is no more room at the end. So I'm not [inaudible 01:08:24] your help understanding that passage. If we can get back to workers for a second, one of the dynamics we've seen in American politics recently is that many of those most affected by trade have resonated to a political message that is quite different than a human rights economy. How do you reach them? How do you convince workers that a human rights economy is the way forward?

### **Thea Lee (01:08:50)**

That's a good question and a hard question. So I think that, I don't know, I'm trying to figure out where to jump into this, but in terms of, for example, the Trump base, it was some workers, definitely some line workers and so on, but it was also a little bit wealthier than that. I think sometimes we have a little bit of a stereotype of the Trump voter, but a lot of them were pretty well off too, that they took advantage of the moment. Here's what I would say about globalization is that we had the decades of the nineties and the two thousands, which was the feast of globalization, all in corporate globalization, what I would call it. And both Democrats and Republicans tended to be, for the most part, especially the elite of the parties, were tone deaf to the outcomes. And presidents of both parties, I think played along with it.

Bill Clinton campaigned being critical of NAFTA. And then he put in some weak labor and environment side agreements, but went ahead and put it forward. And that played itself out many times. And there were many doors I knocked at in Pennsylvania or other places or phones I called in Ohio when I was working for the AFL-CIO that said I was betrayed by Bill Clinton. I trust, I voted for him, I worked for him, and then he sold me out with NAFTA and I lost my job and I'll never vote for another Democrat. And I would always say to people, "Are you going to vote for George W. Bush? He's not going to be any better." But the point is, I think that people didn't feel heard, and there was a lot of elitism in both parties. Donald Trump busted that up in the sense that he actually spoke to a Republican base that also hadn't felt heard by their elected leaders.

And he said, "Corporations are moving out of the United States. NAFTA was a terrible trade agreement. I'm not going to do any of that crap. China is taking advantage of us." And there was some germ of truth to it. And the germ of truth was that the globalization we had engaged in was bad for working people, was bad for America, I would say. But he had a different solution. His solution was beat up on immigrants, stop trading in erratic and not very systematic ways, but not necessarily engaging around workers' rights or human rights and blame foreigners for everything. So what I think we need to do is to build a different narrative, which is not that Mexicans are stealing our jobs or Chinese workers are living high off the hog, because that isn't the point at all. The point is that we've built a global economic system that is bad for working people all over the world.

And we can build a different set of rules that will address climate change, that will address human rights, that will address democracy, that will address workers' rights, that will actually be good for working people in other countries and be good for workers in the United States. That's the vision. And I think President Biden and Ambassador Ty, the US Trade Representative, has been really articulating both a foreign policy for the middle class and a worker centered trade policy. And that's I think where we need to get our heads back around, which is that if we can use our trade policy to harness the value, the prize of market access to the United States, and instead of asking people to have copyright and intellectual property rights protections or financial services rules that are good for big corporations, we ask them to respect human rights, respect workers' rights, respect democracy, then we will end up in a different global economy, and I think we can sell that.

### **Binyamin Appelbaum (01:12:57)**

Rangita, I want to ask you a version of the same question. Chile just had what I think of in many ways as a referendum on a human rights economy, and they turned it down. There was a constitution, a proposed constitution that enshrined many of the things we're talking about for the first time, including rights for women, including a mandate that women have a defined share of the seats in the legislature. A lot of really great stuff. And the Chilean people said, "Thanks, but no, thanks." What does one do to sell these ideas? How do you convince people that this is the way forward?

### **Rangita de Silva de Alwis (01:13:31)**

So I was very disappointed in what happened with Chile because I looked at the draft constitution as a model constitution, which was led in its drafting by indigenous woman who was the head of the constitution assembly. And because the very fact, as you mentioned, there was a quarter for women, quarter for indigenous women, and because of what we have been talking about, the need for the shift, from what I think in the United States, what is privileged is formal equality rather than substantive equality. In the United States, we look at formal equality as an equality of opportunity rather than equality of result. And many of the international human rights frameworks and the Chilean constitution, the model constitution, and many of the constitutions that are emerging out of conflict, enshrine core tasks for women. So as to equalize the playing field, so as to address a legacy of discrimination against a particular group.

So this is not a charitable model. It is to really, as you said, a corrective model. It's about redistribution of the economy, redistribution of justice. So the Chilean model, as you said, failed. And I think it is because there wasn't enough education done about the values that were enshrined in this constitution. So there are other reasons, I think, for the failure and the ways in which the referendum did not bring about the perceived outcomes. But at the same times, I do not want to lose hope in that constitution, especially the constitution process that led to the drafting of that constitution. And there are problems in Chile. Chile in Article 34 of the penal code says, and this is, I'm reading the article 34, "That the punishment for the woman who has engaged in abortion would be reduced if the abortion was done in order to hide a woman's dishonor."

So this is the way in which law constructs a woman's honor by stating in the law that abortion is only allowed if it is to hide a woman's dishonor. So there are problems, structural and systemic problems in countries, in all of our countries that need to be addressed through systemic and structural solutions. Going back to the question you asked some of my panelists as to how do we make the case for either women's empowerment in the economy or women's empowerment in politics to the finance minister? So I have a problem with that because of the ways in which we, and I've done that, I've done that with governments around the world where we are making a case for women's empowerment and women's leadership to the finance minister, that it is about a numbers game. We are collecting data and showing the finance minister one third of your women experience violence during the life cycle of a woman.

But for me, the idea is that even one life lost to violence or to starvation is one life too many. Why is it that when we have to make this case, we resort to a business case for human rights. So we have to have this data to show Mr. President, it's often Mr. Minister, this is a pervasive issue that needs a response that would not come out unless we make this business case, but we need to make a human rights case based on our humanity rather than the ways in which we are making this false dichotomy between the business case and the human rights case, that's a model issue. Women's leadership in the economy is a model issue first and foremost. And I don't think we need to resort to.

### **Rangita de Silva de Alwis (01:18:03)**

Model issue first and foremost. And I don't think we need to resort to this false dichotomy. I want to get back to the ways in which you framed, Jim. The ways in which our divine texts, our religious texts have the seeds of human rights in them. And the translation of human rights, these are universal documents and they're non durable, inalienable rights, but they have to be translated and vernacularized into the local idiom.

### **Jim Wallis (01:18:31)**

Right.

### **Rangita de Silva de Alwis (01:18:31)**

In a way that really resonates with the people on the ground. And that can be done by finding the roots of these rights in the context of the religious. Now, having said that, we had to be very careful because there is tension between rights and religion, but culture is not immutable. It is a living organism that changes with every generation's experience and engagement with the culture. So it is important for us to look at the adaptive nature of culture and the way in which culture grows and evolves and is not set in amber. And that it is a dynamic quality of culture that makes it so powerful and strong ally of human rights.

So when we look at the Quranic edicts, the first revelation of the prophet is Reed in the name of God. But it is a politicized interpretation of Islam, a very much a male-dominated patriarchal interpretation of Islam that subordinates women. So women are reclaiming the Quran and a new interpretation of the religious texts in a feminized, progressive, pluralistic manner. And this is happening across the religious divides, across the religious and cultural context. So most recently, the-

**Binyamin Appelbaum (01:20:03)**

I'm sorry, we actually need to turn to audio's questions in just a minute, but I want to get back to Darrick before we do. Darrick, I think that when people hear you talking about a human rights economy, making sure everyone has an endowment of resources, some of them think that you're proposing to take away what they have or what they might have. Talk to them, explain to them why this is the right thing to do.

**Darrick Hamilton (01:20:24)**

We got a strong monetary system that allows us to shift resources in productive ways. I like to make the point that we need not only rely on taxation or rely on taxation to do some of these big bold initiatives. A little earlier you asked the question, you pointed out some of the counters in Chile as it relates to a human rights economy, but there's a lot of momentum as well.

During this pandemic, we were able to release lots of money, I want to say billions, but actually trillions of dollars to the American people at a drop of a dime without raising taxes because we're a sovereign monetary entity. And guess what? That's momentum towards the human rights economy. So we had the conversation about the child tax cut. The fact that it wasn't continued into law. 10 years ago I couldn't have imagined the American government sending money directly to the American people as it relates to having a child or even dealing with this pandemic. So there are lots of examples that momentum might be tilting our way.

But to answer your question more directly, the public sector has great capacities to fund and invest, I love your word, invest in these initiatives in a way to generate what it is we're trying to achieve. And then the last point really quick, is that part of the human psyche, a notion of human rights is the ability to contribute productively to society. That is fundamentally a human characteristic. I scarcely know or can't imagine people that don't have that psyche or that desire for some reason. And again, going back to the original provocation, I guess I put out there, what is the purpose of an economy? That would be one of those things front and center in my mind, the ability to facilitate people to make productive contributions to society.

**Binyamin Appelbaum (01:22:33)**

Excellent. Well, I feel bad about cutting off these four people because they're all interesting and they all clearly have more to say. But we are going to turn to audience questions now. Start over there. Yeah.

**Speaker 1 (01:22:50)**

Years ago I took my first economics class. The professor told us that the economics was the dismal science. I hope my question will not come across as a dismal question. Plato says, "The only way to get rich is not to have more goods, but is to limit one's desires." Gandhi says, "The world has enough for our needs. It doesn't have enough for our greed." The society that we live in, greed is attractive in America. I can think of Bill Gates for example. Sufficiency, is it possible to make sufficiency attractive? Is it possible for a Gates type to pursue the principle of sufficiency? And is it possible for a Gandhi type to invent the Microsoft?

**Binyamin Appelbaum (01:23:37)**

Would someone like to take that?

**Derrick Hamilton (01:23:40)**

I'm going to jump on the dismal science point that you made and just iterate that that is a normative choice of the profession. The welfare theorem of economics. The first one is one where you can't make somebody better off without making somebody worse off. Well, that has framed scarcity, that has framed the discipline, and that's a theory of value. And some people may believe that that's a good approach of understanding society, just like I might have a theory of value. But the point I'm trying to drive home is that it is indeed a normative perspective and other normative perspectives can come into our mindset and drive economic attributes from that. But that one frames it as a dismal science because scarcity becomes the primary normative perspective by which someone begins.

**Thea Lee (01:24:39)**

Well, I don't know if I'll meet your loftiness, but I think the point about economics is that there's a question about harnessing markets. And so you don't maybe have to ask that question about greed versus sufficiency because that is maybe, I don't know if it's normal, a normal desire to accumulate and accumulate and accumulate. But then you also can have a society that makes conscious choices about how to use collective resources efficiently to make the world a better place. And whether it's public parks or libraries or public education or infrastructure, there's so many things where it's very clear that if you took a little bit off the top, especially of the wealthiest, and you were able to do something else.

So I guess rather than asking whether we can change people's attitudes of don't be so greedy, the question is whether an economic society and political system can make a different choice. And we used to have much higher tax rates on the wealthy. So people could still be greedy and try to do everything they wanted to do. And then we just said, that's fine, you've got enough right now and we're going to take this and we're going to use it for a better purpose. Something that maybe we all need like clean water or public education. So it was just a redirect maybe.

**Binyamin Appelbaum (01:26:03)**

Yes. Go ahead. Microphone. Yep.

**Kate Donald (01:26:08)**

Hi. Thank you so much for this really excellent panel. My name's Kate Donald. I work at the Center for American Progress, and I was previously at the Center for Economic and Social Rights where we did a lot of work on this idea of the human rights economy. So it's super exciting to see this discussion now. I'm going to kind of build off, especially off the Thea's points about the rules of the global economy and the fact that we are kind of on the outskirts of foggy bottom here, where of course the international financial institutions are based. And kind of acknowledge that we are having this discussion in the US in some ways from a place of privilege because despite what Kevin McCarthy and the other kind of MAGA Republicans might say, in the US, we do have the fiscal space actually to make the human rights economy real tomorrow if we wanted to.

But many countries don't have that privilege, and that's partly because they're not as much the kind of sovereign monetary entities that you were talking about, Darrick. And some of that is because we know the strangling debt crisis, conditionalities imposed by the kind of unfair global economic rules that you were talking about, Thea. Kind of IMF loan condition, climate impacts, trade agreements, all those kind of things. So I just wanted to ask the question. So how can we and how can the US government use its leverage to make sure that these institutions at the global level aren't pushing against an equitable and right based economy in other countries? Thank you.

**Darrick Hamilton (01:27:35)**

I mean you in your question stated the problem. I guess the answer to the question is a lot what Jim was talking about in my mind, which is there needs to be a moral suasion for the US government to do right. And we need a political movement to make them do right, that a human right doesn't just end in US borders, it transcends all borders and all people. To me, that's the point.

**Thea Lee (01:28:01)**

And I'll just jump in a little bit. You've talked about these very, the big powerful institutions, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and it is true. And I spent maybe 30 years of my career fighting those organizations because there was sort of a built in neoliberalism in the way policies were put forth, especially the IMF, but the World Bank also. It's an anti-poverty institution. And yet, for a long time we had to fight that having worker protections was not an anti-business thing. But right now, I would say we are very engaged and certainly my little agency, ILab, the International Labor Affairs Bureau, a big part of what we do is engage with the World Bank and the IMF around development finance to make sure that we are conditioning finance, not just on financial viability, but on workers' rights. We sound like a broken record sometimes.

We come back all the time. But we have a good ally over at the World Bank, Adriana Kugler, who used to be the chief economist at the Labor Department is now the US executive director to the World Bank. She's very much on board. And so I feel like we have the capacity. But you're absolutely right. The United States has a position of tremendous privilege and power in the global economy, and we need to use it to articulate what a more worker centered set of policies would look like.

And I think that's especially true with the World Trade Organization. One of the things that we're trying to do is to bring the World Trade Organization and the ILO, who have offices right next to each other in Geneva, to actually bridge a conversation between those two organizations. They both have new director generals and the director generals are friends with each other. So this is something that we are looking to be able to have that conversation for the first time about how workers' rights and human rights are central to the mission of the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO, not peripheral.

**Binyamin Appelbaum (01:29:52)**

Jim, did you want to address that as well?

**Jim Wallis (01:29:54)**

Just in the back room, the panelists were talking before this, and Darrick made the point, this phrase, economy is a moral philosophy. And I'll just say a word, Gandhi, you prompt this. One of my mentors was Dorothy Day, the founder of the Catholic Worker Movement. When I used to go and see her on Lori's side, the worker house, there was a graffiti on the side of a big building. It said, reporter, what do

you think of western civilization? Gandhi, I think it would be a good idea. And so Gandhi and who we just celebrated Monday, King, understood these things don't change without movements.

You said movement a moment ago. These things won't change by just inside the power structure conversation. Every movement understood, Gandhi and King knew it's an inside outside dance, I call it, inside outside dance. It's going to have to be movements, social, cultural movements that have these values and put them to those in power. Just hoping a good person gets into this place and we talk to them, that won't be enough. It won't just change from the inside. It won't. It's got to be movements on the outside.

### **Rangita de Silva de Alwis (01:31:13)**

I want to build on something that Thea said about the WTO. The WTO is for the first time led by a woman and a black woman from Nigeria. So that makes a difference in the way in which she looks at trade. Secondly, I want to remind ourselves that as we speak, we are facing a feminization of poverty and feminization of hunger around the world in a time of sovereign debt crisis. And yes, the United States is recalcitrant about the ratification of human rights treaties, but the sustainable development goals are goals that the United States does hold important in its engagements with countries around the world.

So I think it is important for us to harness and marshal the power of the sustainable development goals, which are part of the human, now a more normative human rights framework is also aligned with the sustainable development goals. So it is important when we talk about the right water, right to a climate, a clean climate, or right to women's participation in the workplace, that the sustainable development goals are another lever that we can use in the United States.

### **Binyamin Appelbaum (01:32:29)**

Let's get another question. Yes, please.

### **Speaker 2 (01:32:32)**

So Professor Hamilton practically read my mind in his remarks right before we headed into the Q and A, but my question will be addressed to all of you. Workers are having quite a moment right now, but we may be headed into a recession and there are a very large number of people outside of the workforce. So in my view, the problem is that we've got an economy that has been built around the job creators as the source of income. And so I'm wondering, like Professor Hamilton said, what we should have learned from the response to Covid was that we can give the money to the people, not to the banks. And I wonder if any of you have thought of universal basic income as a solution and whether you think the time has come for that.

### **Binyamin Appelbaum (01:33:21)**

I know you want to hit this. Yeah, go.

### **Derrick Hamilton (01:33:25)**

I love guaranteed income, but hate universal basic income. And the problem is when you make it universal, you get some of the economic attributes of, it's pretty much the definition of inflation to

literally give everybody the same amount. And it also becomes inequality enhancing because those that are wealthy will invest, those that are less wealthy will consume. And that just enhances in an unintended way, inequality. And it's also in that neoliberal frame in that a lot of people believe that UBI should be the only thing we do, and then rely on markets to figure out things like our environment, which is problematic. But let me get to the point of the question. Guaranteed income is spot on for a lot of the reasons you mentioned and the way you asked the question. But also a federal job guarantee. Also why?

And they're not substitutes, they're compliments. One of the things we're learning from the great work of Economic Security Project, for example, is that facilitating people with income didn't distract from work. It actually enabled work. They were able to do more work. But you know what else we can do with a federal job guarantee? It can be direct, and it can also be a really good source and tool to build up our public infrastructure in a way that not only helps the recipient of that job, but also builds up our economy for everyone. We can literally green our entire economy with something like a federal job guarantee. Thea did you want to?

### **Thea Lee (01:34:56)**

I just want to jump in a little bit. Yeah. And I think we are going in some ways in that direction with the Inflation Reduction Act, which is a huge investment in good jobs. Not just jobs in the green economy, but also good jobs and unionized jobs. And I guess that would be my friendly amendment, which is to say that I think also what's important is making sure that we are protecting in the United States where it's very precarious, workers' rights to unionize. As you say, workers are having a moment and they've been very successful and it's extraordinary. But we really do need labor law reform to make sure that every worker in the United States can exercise that basic human right to form a union if they want to do so without fear of retaliation or being fired.

And that pairing that with an increase in the national minimum wage, the strong social safety net and full employment policies. I mean, the recession is a little bit at odds with that, but that to me is what changes the power dynamic and it changes the quality of our democracy because if workers have the ability to form independent democratic organizations of their own choosing, that can change the political conversation in a way that is really healthy. And that I think is extremely important.

### **Binyamin Appelbaum (01:36:04)**

Do we have time for one more question? Yeah. All right. Over here.

### **Daniel (01:36:08)**

Thank you very much. Hi, my name is Daniel. I'm from the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights from the Office of the Special Rapporteur and Economic, Social, Cultural Environmental Rights. They just talked about universal basic income, but also wanted to see your take on two other solutions on these matters regarding human rights and an economy. What will be your take on what's been proposed, for example, by Columbia recently on a global tax on multinational corporations? And the other one is what's your take on the utility of business and human rights plans that are being laid out in many countries? Is this something that the commission has discussed in our poverty and human rights report and in our report on business and human rights. So thank you very much.

**Darrick Hamilton (01:37:03)**

Yeah, I mean, consistent with that optimism that we started talking about, the Secretary of Treasurer of the United States of America proposed a minimum global tax on capital. That's dramatic. So I think that that would be wonderful and that revenue be used in a way to enable the global south to benefit in ways that they have been restricted from benefiting. And let me also go back real quick about the sustainable development goals, which I think is right. But here's also a source of concern. In the US, desire to move us to sustainable development goals, are we kicking away the ladder? So are we imposing ways in which we were able to develop on developing countries or the global south in a way that's not just and not moral. That we also bear responsibility to make sure that they have a pathway towards development in a non-restrictive way because of a righteous right thing that we're trying to do, which is protect our environment and have sustainability?

**Binyamin Appelbaum (01:38:12)**

Well, this is clearly the beginning of a conversation. There's much more to be said, but we have exhausted our time for today. So Maureen's going to see us out.

**Maureen Conway (01:38:21)**

Great. Well, thank you all so much. This has been a fantastic conversation. I am certainly leaving with lots and lots to think about. So thank you Binyamin, Darrick, Thea, Rangita, Jim, and Todd. That was all really terrific. I want to thank also my colleagues. It's a lot of work to put these events on. So huge thanks to Colleen Cunningham, Natalie Foster, Amanda Fins, Matt Helmer, Tony Mastria, Shelly Steward, Merrit Stüven, and Sinin Young for their help. They're all affiliated with the Economic Opportunities Program. But I also want to thank my colleagues with the Aspen Institute's audiovisual and communications team and building services team. They also did a lot of work on this. Big thanks to our partners at The New School, including Grieve Chelwa, Laura Hatalsky, and the rest of their team for the partnership on this event. And thanks to all of you for your tremendous participation.

Thanks to everybody who's been tweeting on social media using our hashtag. And thanks to our remote audience for sharing your comments and questions as well. Love everybody's feedback. Please do fill out our feedback form or send us a note at [eop.program@aspeninstitute.org](mailto:eop.program@aspeninstitute.org) and stay tuned for upcoming events. I just want to say on February 9th, we'll be hosting Saket Soni for a discussion of his new book, "The Great Escape: A True Story of Forced Labor and Immigrant Dreams" at 2:00 p.m. Eastern. That'll be a virtual conversation so look for that. And to your question, on March 1st, we'll be having a conversation, guaranteed income, job quality, and worker power, a discussion on benefits of guaranteed income for workers. So please join us for that. Thanks again to everybody for being here today, and I hope we see you again soon.