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**NORTH AMERICA**  
**MONTHLY NEWSLETTER**  
May 2023

Good afternoon,

I am excited to begin work as Scientific Advisor and chair of a newly-formed advisory committee at J-PAL North America focused on racial equity. Our committee will inform J-PAL North America's year-long process to examine how research related to racial equity can best be funded through J-PAL, how we can identify the researchers best-positioned to do that work, and how we can support those researchers. We will also examine how J-PAL North America's practices in general can be made more inclusive to help support a diverse group of economists and others studying racial equity via randomized evaluations.

My research background includes leading a number of randomized evaluations, including some funded and supported by J-PAL North America. In addition, my work has, of late, shifted toward a greater focus on issues of racial equity. I have found it important to incorporate lessons from the rich interdisciplinary body of work on the social construction of race, the racialization of ethnic and other groups, and structural forms of inequality and discrimination. I also have some background in doing policy work within the federal government on leveraging administrative data to measure racial equity, exploring the causes of inequality and sources of discrimination, and identifying policy solutions that help achieve greater racial equity. Finally, I have participated in a number of initiatives aimed at supporting scholars from underrepresented backgrounds within the field of economics. I hope to bring this experience to bear on our work at J-PAL North America.

I am most excited to gather our advisory committee, comprising scholars from within and outside of J-PAL's network of researchers. In particular, we will critically assess the role that randomized evaluations might play in researching racial equity, including identifying and clarifying what limitations might exist. We will explore how researchers can go beyond simply measuring inequality or reporting heterogeneous treatment effects by race. Randomized evaluations might serve as helpful tools in understanding the process of racial stratification, the reproduction of racial hierarchy, or identifying the present impacts of historic forms of discrimination, but it's important for our field to be thoughtful about when and how randomized evaluations are—or sometimes are not—a good fit. It is also important to consider when researchers need other tools to understand racial equity, and how to make our work complementary and additive to the wealth of critical scholarship across disciplines. The committee will explore these questions, and discuss how researchers conducting randomized evaluations might benefit from and be informed by an understanding of these concepts.

Our first tasks will be to convene the above-mentioned advisory committee and provide a set of recommendations to inform J-PAL North America's funding strategies, internal policies related to inclusion, and general support of a diversified pipeline of economists and others conducting randomized evaluations. I look forward to working with the very capable team at J-PAL North America, without whom such an endeavor would not be possible. For those interested in this work, please explore the [MIT News announcement](#) and two [blog posts](#) we highlight in this newsletter, and stay tuned for more to come.

Damon Jones

Associate Professor, University of Chicago

Scientific Advisor and Chair, J-PAL North America racial equity advisory committee



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## **News release: Laying the foundation to diversify the economics field and center racial equity in economics research**

J-PAL affiliated researcher Damon Jones (University of Chicago) will lead J-PAL North America's new advisory committee to develop a strategic vision for prioritizing research that addresses racial equity. "I'm eager to gather a group of scholars who can give us insightful, and even critical, feedback on the state of research on race in economics, and the potential limitations of doing that work using field experiments," Jones said. "As is the case when we invest in making sure researchers and potential partners have buy-in and the capacity to carry out experimental studies, we also want to do the same when it comes to making sure researchers have a robust understanding of race and racism as it is studied in the social sciences." [Read more about this effort »](#)



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## Researching racial equity: Stratification economics

A new blog post highlights the work of J-PAL invited researcher Dania Francis (UMass Boston) in the field of stratification economics, a framework that investigates inequality through rigorous study of systems and institutions, social relationships, underlying mechanisms, and power dynamics. Using the tenets of this framework, Francis is developing a randomized evaluation to pinpoint factors that may constrain Black high school students' ability to participate in Advanced Placement courses at the rate their white peers do. [Learn more about the tenets of stratification economics and how Francis applies them in her work »](#)

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## Researching racial equity: Racial discrimination, choice constraints, and policy implications

A team of researchers, including J-PAL affiliated professors Peter Christensen (Illinois) and Christopher Timmins (Duke), are investigating the connections between racial discrimination in the housing market and environmental exposure risks. In a recent [interview](#), Christensen shares the motivation behind this research and explains how he is employing randomized evaluations to understand racial inequities and identify underlying mechanisms. Christensen also discusses results from a 2020 randomized evaluation that explored how property managers respond differently to rental inquiries from prospective tenants of different races.

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### FEATURED EVALUATION SUMMARY



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## A Randomized Evaluation of STEM-Focused Summer Programs

Black and Hispanic workers are underrepresented in the well-paying fields of STEM, contributing to income and wealth inequality. J-PAL-affiliated researchers Sarah Cohodes (Columbia), Helen Ho (Harvard), and Silvia Robles (Michigan) [evaluated three STEM-focused summer pipeline programs](#) for high school students. Students offered seats in the summer programs were more likely to enroll in a highly-ranked university and persist through and graduate from college. The programs also increased the likelihood that students graduate with a degree in a STEM field.

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### FEATURED RESEARCH RESOURCE



## Evaluations and Racial Equity: Considerations for State and Local Policymakers and Researchers

Evaluations pursuing racial equity at the state and local level have often focused on interventions that are designed to interrupt incidences of individual-level bias, such as implicit bias training. While this is a crucial area of work, it is also important to expand the body of evidence on addressing systemic and institutional barriers to racial equity. [In this video](#) from J-PAL North America's State and Local Webinar series, research and practice experts discuss how state and local governments are confronting the legacy of inequitable policies and how research and evidence can play a role in dismantling present-day structural racism.

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