

SER in this moment: A community-wide conversation

This session will be the first of many hard but necessary discussions of how we as scientists, citizens and members of SER, are shaped by inequity. We will also address how our individual and collective research addresses this topic.

- **Presenter: Sherman James** (PPT slides follow); **Panelists: Onyebuchi Arah and Yvette Cozier**; **Moderator: Martha Werler (SER President)**

June 15, 2020 webinar, as part of **SER Week 2020**. Recording available at: <https://epiresearch.org/2020/06/16/ser-in-this-moment-a-community-wide-conversation/>

TOPICS

Three Overlapping Crises

- **Covid-19 pandemic, economic collapse, and systemic anti-black racism by police**

Systemic Racism

- **description, mechanisms, and reproduction of racial health inequities**

Reckoning with our past and moving forward?

- **...in America...in medicine...in science...in SER**

Disparate Impact on African Americans from...

Pandemic-related Stressors

Deaths

- 13% of population, 25% of deaths
- death rate 2.5 > Whites and 2.2 > Asian Americans/LatinX

Jobs and income

- increased unemployment
- low wage essential workers
- loss of small businesses

Endemic Stressors

- **Police/Vigilante Killings**
- **Black while...**
driving...jogging...shopping
job hunting...house hunting
voting...giving birth...
receiving health care...building
careers

Racism...

...an organized social system in which the ***dominant racial group***...ranks people into social groups called 'races' and then uses its ***power*** to devalue, disempower, and limit the allocation of valued resources and opportunities to groups they deem inferior...¹⁻³

¹E. Bonilla-Silva, *Ann Sociol Rev*, 1997

²C. Jones, *Am J Pub Health*, 2000

³D. Williams et al, *Ann Rev Pub Health*, 2019

“Structural⁴”

laws, policies, social networks
(residential segregation, predatory loans, *racialized hierarchies* within elite professions/institutions, etc.)

“Cultural⁴”

negative stereotypes
(Blacks are lazy-angry-unintelligent)

⁴ mutually reinforcing

Racism is a *fundamental* cause of racial health inequities because it...

- influences *multiple* disease outcomes
- affects disease outcomes through *multiple* risk factors
- determines *access to resources* to avoid health risks or minimize consequences
- *reproduces* association with health inequities by *replacing key intervening mechanisms*

Shifting Mechanisms of Systemic Racism

Redlining
- Federal
Government

Restricted Covenants
-Homeowner
Associations

Gentrification



Driving while Black

Stop and Frisk

Food Deserts

Underfunded
Schools

Voter Suppression

Mass incarceration

Inadequate Health Care

“The most difficult social problem in the matter of Negro health is the peculiar attitude of the nation toward the well-being of the race. There have... been few other cases in the history of civilized peoples where human suffering has been viewed with such peculiar indifference.”

WEB DuBois, The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study. 1899 (1967), p.163

A 'Seismic Shift' in the Views on Racism in America

“Never before in the history of modern polling has the country expressed such widespread agreement on racism’s pervasiveness in policing, and in society at large.”

Giovanni Russonello
The New York Times
June 5, 2020



Protesters in Hollywood on Wednesday...**76 percent** of Americans called racism and discrimination “a big problem”... a 26-percentage-point spike since 2015.

Credit: Bryan Denton for *The New York Times*

Diagnosing and Treating Systemic Racism

Editorial: N. Engl. J. Med.

June 10, 2020, pp. 1-3

MK Evans MD, L Rosenbaum MD, D Malina PhD, S Morrissey, PhD, EJ Rubin MD/PhD

“...Slavery has produced a legacy of racism, injustice and brutality from 1619 to present...that legacy affects medicine as all social institutions...

...correcting this requires bringing more black people into the medical profession, with early messages sent to black children about their abilities and possible careers and working to remove racial barriers all along their education path...”

Time to look in the mirror

Editorial: Science June 12,
2020, vol 368 (6496)p. 1161

“...The US scientific enterprise is predominantly white...evidence of systemic racism in science permeates this nation...Why are the scientific areas studied more frequently by people of color *continuously underfunded* by the government?...”

italics added



**H. Holden Thorp, PhD
Editor-in-Chief
Science journals,
AAAS**

What contributes to the Black/White gap in NIH R01 grantsmanship?

Preliminary overall impact score

...a statistically (and practically) significant racial difference of **0.47** points in average preliminary impact score was reduced to **0.35** after controlling for applicant and institutional credentials; it was further reduced to **0.01** after controlling for scores on the *five NIH evaluation criteria*...

study period: 2014-2016

Erosheva *et al.* *Sci. Adv.* 2020; 6:
Eaaz4868; 3 June 2020

PI's topic choice

“...AA applicants tend to propose research topics with lower award rates (e.g., *community or population level studies*) as opposed to biological mechanisms...topic choice explained over **20%** of the funding gap...”

study period: 2011-2015

Hoppe *et al.*, *Sci. Adv.* 2019;5:
eaaw7238; 9 October 2019

“Assessing Representation and Perceived Inclusion among Members in the Society for Epidemiologic Research”

**Race-Ethnicity-Gender
(SER Membership = 1,631)**

**% Extent Feeling *Very* Welcomed
percent (95% CI)**

Race\Ethnicity	%	Response		
Asian/S. Asian	19.0	29	Minority Female	39.6 (35.3, 43.9)
Black	7.1	44	Minority Male	48.3 (43.9, 52.7)
Hispanic	5.5	27	White Female	51.7 (47.5, 55.8)
White	61.7	36	White Male	65.6 (60.6, 70.6)
Missing	4.8	28	Non-response F	10.8 (0.3, 21.4)
			Non-response M	15.6 (0.0, 32.5)

Building Scientific Careers...While Black

What can SER do?

Established Scientists

Welcome young Black epidemiologists into your professional networks

- *provide timely/constructive feedback re grant writing, publishing, “peer review” processes, etc.*

SER Leadership

- *ensure a diversity of voices/perspectives at meetings*
- *intensify efforts to make SER more broadly welcoming*
- *welcome Black-led initiatives*

SER journal editors-in chief (AJE and Epid Reviews)

- *ensure Editorial Boards/Associate Editors represent the field’s diversity*

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“... As in the past, the scientific community is expressing anguish, outrage, and renewed commitment to promote equity and inclusion. But when the protests wind down and disappear from the headlines, science will be at a familiar fork in the road. *Let’s have the courage to take the right path this time.*”

italics added



**H. Holden Thorp, PhD
Editor-in-Chief
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