I am an economist studying **race in the United States**, with work spanning **political economy** and **economic history**. Since the nation's founding, unequal treatment and opportunity by race have been defining features of American life. Even today, large majorities of Black Americans report ongoing experiences of racial discrimination and believe that core institutions were designed to disadvantage them.[1] Yet much of the economics literature on discrimination has focused on testing whether racial bias exists in individual decision-making. My work broadens that focus by asking two distinct but fundamental questions. How do experiences of discrimination shape the beliefs, behavior, and well-being of minority communities? And what role do institutions play in producing, transmitting, and entrenching racial prejudice and inequality?

To answer these questions, I employ rigorous applied econometric methods to study pressing racial issues in both historical and contemporary settings - from America's first blockbuster and its most notorious hate group to the rise of organized Black activism and the most consequential acts of police violence of the 21st century. Throughout this work, I construct large-scale datasets from historical and administrative records and develop novel identification strategies that leverage incidental features of history and geography to generate new evidence on the causes and consequences of racial discrimination.

I received my Ph.D. from UC San Diego in 2018, have been a Faculty Research Fellow at NBER since 2024, and was recently recognized as a **Alfred P. Sloan Research Fellow** in 2026. My recent papers have been published exclusively in leading outlets for their respective formats and audiences, including the *Quarterly Journal of Economics, American Economic Review, American Economic Review: Insights,*, and *American Political Science Review*. My earliest paper in this agenda appeared as the lead article in *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*. Given its cross-cutting nature, my work has been largely self-directed, and all but one of the publications in this agenda was solo-authored or co-authored with graduate students.

Social Consequences of Police Violence

In many heavily-policed communities, law enforcement is the most visible arm of government, shaping daily life through a wide range of encounters. As the Kerner Commission observed more than half a century ago, for many Black Americans, "police have come to symbolize white power, white racism, and white repression." Yet research in economics has focused primarily on one dimension of policing: its effects on crime. My work builds on broader sociological, criminological, and public health scholarship to identify and measure the wider social consequences of policing. I do so in the context of police violence: a defining feature of American law enforcement that accounts for roughly 5 percent of gun homicides and has precipitated nearly all of the largest episodes of urban unrest since the 1960s.

In **"The Effects of Police Violence on Inner-City Students" (*Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 2021)**, I show that the costs of police violence extend far beyond its immediate victims. Combining administrative schooling records for over 700,000 Los Angeles public high school students with detailed data for over 600 police killings across 15 years, I leverage hyperlocal variation in students' proximity to an incident to estimate its spillover effects. Daily absenteeism is flat in the days leading up to a police killing, then rises sharply afterward among students living within a half-mile of the event relative to those living slightly

[1] Recent Pew surveys find that 75% of Black respondents report experiencing discrimination at least occasionally, while large majorities believe that core institutions like the prison, political, and economic systems were "designed to hold Black people back" a great deal or fair amount.

farther away. This sharp divergence, in the absence of any preceding trend, helps distinguish the effect of the killing itself from underlying differences across students and neighborhoods. Over subsequent semesters, I document persistent declines in academic performance and mental health. The long-run costs are substantial: I estimate that each police killing in Los Angeles caused three students to drop out of high school. These harms are concentrated among Black and Hispanic youth and cannot be explained by exposure to violence alone: the marginal police killing is twice as damaging as the marginal criminal homicide. Instead, the largest effects follow the most contested events—police killings of unarmed minorities—suggesting that perceptions of racial injustice have lasting consequences for children's lives.

Police violence may also erode residents' basic trust in the state. In **"Community Engagement with Law Enforcement after High-Profile Acts of Police Violence" (*American Economic Review: Insights*, 2025)**, with Panka Bencsik, Jesse Bruhn, and Ellora Derenoncourt (assistant professors at Vanderbilt, Brown, and Princeton), I examine how the 2020 murder of George Floyd affected community engagement with police. While prior work has used raw 911 call volumes to study responses to other episodes of police violence, such measures may conflate changes in willingness to contact police with changes in underlying crime. We develop a novel call-to-shot ratio that benchmarks emergency calls against gunshots automatically detected by acoustic sensors and show that this measure is strongly correlated with survey measures of trust in local police, while raw call volumes are not. Applying it to thirteen major cities, we find that the murder of George Floyd triggered a sharp and sustained drop in civilian reporting. National victimization surveys likewise reveal a significant increase in households declining to report crimes due to mistrust of police. Combined, these patterns reveal how high-profile acts of police violence may erode civilian cooperation, a critical input to effective policing.

At the same time, in **"Civic Responses to Police Violence" (*American Political Science Review*, 2024)**, with John Tebes (former Harvard Ph.D. advisee), we find that acts of police violence may mobilize engagement with formal democratic systems. Exploring detailed voting records in Los Angeles, we show that local exposure to police killings increased voter turnout and registration rates among nearby citizens, while spurring support for ballot measures that sought to reduce criminal justice penalties. As in the schooling study, these effects are driven by young Black and Hispanic registrants in response to police killings of unarmed victims, showing how experiences of institutional injustice can simultaneously weaken trust in the state and spark efforts to reform it through the political process.

Together, these studies document the far-reaching social costs of state violence. This agenda originated in my 2018 dissertation - two years before George Floyd's murder brought the broader social spillovers of law enforcement to the center of public debate - and has helped widen the empirical study of policing beyond crime and deterrence. It has also introduced new strategies for identifying hyperlocal causal effects and for measuring civilian trust that other researchers have built on.[2] This broader accounting can materially change how policing is evaluated: cost-benefit analyses centered on crime reduction may overlook substantial effects on education, mental health, civic participation, and even the civilian cooperation on which effective law enforcement depends. That perspective has increasingly entered policy analysis and practice: Los Angeles County incorporated the half-mile exposure measure from my

[2] For examples using the hyperlocal design, see González and Prem (2024, *Review of Economics and Statistics*), Markarian (2023, *American Politics Research*), and Li and Wu (R&R, *Journal of the European Economic Association*). For subsequent work building on the distinction between changes in civilian reporting and underlying crime, see Mikdash and Zaiour (2024, *Journal of Public Economics*), Braakmann (2025, *British Journal of Criminology*), and Facchetti (conditionally accepted, *AER*).

schooling study into its youth prevention metrics, while organizations including the U.S. Health and Human Services Department, the National Academies, and the Vera Institute have drawn on my work in assessments and recommendations regarding policing's broader community consequences. My findings have reached wide audiences through extensive press coverage and been cited across economics, political science, sociology, public health, and education, with a recent criminology review of police use of force concluding that *"perhaps the most rigorous evidence of community-level harm comes from Ang."*[3]

Looking ahead, I plan to extend this agenda both to new consequences of police violence and to the broader ways coercive institutions shape communities over time. Ongoing work examining online racial polarization after high-profile police killings explores consequences for public discourse, while a new project digitizing millions of historical inmate records traces the emergence and long-run economic consequences of the modern carceral state. Broadly, these efforts aim to provide a fuller accounting of the social impacts of policing and punishment - with the goal of informing policy choices about the design and scope of these institutions.

Civil Rights Mobilization and White Backlash

The struggle for racial equality has been one of the most consequential forces in U.S. history, catalyzing sweeping legal, political, and cultural changes that paved the way for a more inclusive society. Yet these advances have rarely proceeded uncontested, and powerful efforts to preserve the existing racial hierarchy are evident in every era. A rich literature across history, sociology, political science, ethnic studies, and related disciplines has examined the forces behind Black mobilization and white resistance. Yet the historical record is inevitably much more detailed for select individuals than for the broader population involved in these movements. My work combines comprehensive individual-level historical records with novel designs leveraging major institutional and policy shocks to study mobilization and backlash at scale - characterizing the breadth of participation, isolating the experiences that drew people into these movements, and tracing how their effects spread and persist over time.

In "**Vanguard: Black Veterans and Civil Rights after World War I" (*Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 2026)**, with Sahil Chinoy (former Harvard Ph.D. advisee), we show how discriminatory institutions can inadvertently catalyze the collective action that ultimately challenges them. Digitizing the universe of Black World War I draft registration cards and linking them to comprehensive interwar NAACP membership rosters, we reconstruct the draft lottery to estimate the causal effect of military service on civil rights activism. Black men randomly inducted into the Army were significantly more likely to join the nascent NAACP and to become prominent civic leaders in the early civil rights movement. In aggregate, the draft induced over 10,000 Black men into what would become the nation's most prominent civil rights organization. We find little evidence that these effects are explained by improved socioeconomic status, consistent with the relegation of Black soldiers to menial labor in segregated units. Rather, effects on NAACP participation are largest among men inducted by the most racially biased draft boards and assigned to the most racially-exclusionary camps. Contemporaneous surveys show that these same soldiers were most likely to name racial injustice as a defining consequence of their service and that perceptions of injustice are, in turn, the single strongest survey predictor of Black civic engagement. At the community level, NAACP membership among non-veterans was substantially higher in counties with larger shares of Black veterans, corroborating historical accounts of how Black

[3] See Justin Nix (2026). Officer-involved shootings. *Critical Issues in Policing: Contemporary Readings*, 9th Ed.

soldiers' wartime experiences and encounters with discrimination helped fuel the broader political and cultural mobilization of the New Negro era.

The end of the First World War heralded the twin rise of the nation's most renowned civil rights organization and its most infamous hate group. In **"Pure Americanism: World War I and the Rise of the Ku Klux Klan" (revise and resubmit, *American Economic Review*)** with Sahil Chinoy, we explore the opposite side of the struggle for racial equality. Assembling the largest known collection of Klan rosters, we show that the organization drew disproportionately from civic and professional elites - public administrators, law enforcement officers, and medical professionals - with veterans significantly overrepresented in its ranks. Extending our novel draft lottery instrument to nearly 8 million white registrants, we find that randomly conscripted men were twice as likely to join the KKK and became significantly more nativist in spousal choice, child naming, and party affiliation. Consistent with the role of military indoctrination, effects are concentrated among soldiers most exposed to wartime "Americanization" programming - moralistic messaging on ethnic and civic purity strikingly similar to the Klan's own rhetoric. Zooming out, we document the significant role of veterans in facilitating the spread of white supremacism in the interwar era, with higher Klan penetration rates among non-veterans in households and streets with higher conscription rates. Our results highlight the power of military institutions to shape the worldviews of millions of ordinary citizens and influence the organization and ideology of later extremist movements.

The same tension between Black mobilization and white backlash arises again at the height of the civil rights movement. In **"Do 40-Year-Old Facts Still Matter? Long-Run Effects of Federal Oversight under the Voting Rights Act" (lead article, *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 2019)**, I find that anti-discrimination protections mandating federal oversight of local election laws ("preclearance") bolstered long-run minority turnout in covered jurisdictions by nearly 30 percent. But the same protections also provoked a sharp political backlash: despite the surge in minority participation, Democratic vote shares fell on net, as Republican-leaning newspapers ramped up coverage of the controversial policy and white voters shifted rightward. These findings provide the first causal evidence of the effects of preclearance, considered "the heart of the Voting Rights Act," and speak to the racial dynamics underlying the collapse of the New Deal coalition and the broader political realignment that followed.[4] The study has also informed legal debate over the Voting Rights Act: in her dissent in *Brnovich v. Democratic National Committee* (2021), a major Supreme Court decision narrowing the scope of the VRA, Justice Elena Kagan described it as "the most comprehensive study available" of the consequences of removing federal oversight for minority turnout.

Together, these projects reveal both the fundamental tension between minority empowerment and white backlash and the active role of mainstream institutions - rather than fringe actors - in brokering these dynamics. Methodologically, they develop new sources of causal variation across some of the most consequential episodes of American racial politics, while providing detailed insight into the identities of those who fought for and against racial equality. Amid renewed Black activism and the resurgence of militant white nationalism, understanding these forces remains central to American public life today. Beyond academia, this research has reached broad audiences through features in *The Harvard Gazette* and *The Atlantic*.

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[4] The study was followed by a growing empirical literature examining the consequences of the Voting Rights Act and its subsequent retrenchment. See, e.g., Aneja and Avenancio-León (forthcoming, *AER*); Bernini et al. (2025, *JPE*); Facchini, Knight, and Testa (2025, *AEJ: Applied*); and Eubank and Fresh (2022, *APSR*).

Over the next several years, I plan to build on the linked military, census, and organizational records to study how experiences of institutional discrimination persist across generations. With Sahil Chinoy and Hantao Wu (Princeton Ph.D. student), I have already assembled the universe of NAACP membership records through the 1960s, covering nearly one million individuals, which will allow us to trace the persistence and transmission of civic activism, racial identity, and political engagement within families and communities.

Media, Prejudice, and Inequality

My final line of research examines how media shapes the transmission of prejudice and inequality across American society. While a large empirical literature in economics explores media effects, much of it is centered on news and political information. My work extends this research by focusing on popular entertainment, which accounts for the bulk of media consumption while frequently trafficking in cultural tropes and stereotypes.

In **"The Birth of a Nation: Media and Racial Hate" (*American Economic Review*, 2023)**, I study America's first blockbuster: the 1915 film The Birth of a Nation, a fictionalized account of Reconstruction villainizing Black Americans and glorifying the Ku Klux Klan. Still one of the highest-grossing movies of all time, the film toured the country through a five-year road show, which I reconstruct from historical newspaper advertisements. Leveraging the exact timing and location of film screenings, I document the extreme racial violence left in their wake, with a four-fold increase in local lynchings in the following months. Instrumenting for roadshow locations using theaters predating the film's release, I demonstrate that the movie played a central role in the Klan's resurgence during the 1920s, nearly tripling the likelihood that a local chapter would form. Even a century later, the white robes and hoods invented by the filmmakers remain a core part of Klan iconography, and former road-show counties continue to exhibit higher rates of hate crimes and white supremacist activity. These findings offer rare causal insight into the power of entertainment media to shape real-world violence and hate, further reinforcing how core pillars of American life - from military service to popular culture - can drive extremist behavior.

In ongoing work with Carlos Avenancio-Leon (UCSD assistant professor) and Patton Chen (HKS Ph.D. advisee), we explore the culture-shaping role of music, one of the most pervasive and least studied forms of media. Digitizing millions of modern and historical radio playlists from stations across the country, we trace local exposure to music by artists of color - from the rise of hip-hop and Latin influences in the 1990s to the K-pop wave of recent years. To isolate causal effects on racial attitudes and intergroup cohesion, we then leverage station-level preferences for certain musical qualities - like tempo and pitch - that predict a community's future exposure to different musical artists and genres, but are unrelated to pre-existing racial views.

If the above projects reveal how media content can shape group divisions, my findings in **"Paywalls" (under review)** with Avinash Moorthy (former HKS Ph.D. advisee), Stephen Pettigrew (UPenn data scientist), and Ben Schneer (HKS associate professor), show how media access may further exacerbate those divides. Constructing a novel database tracking paywalls across the universe of U.S. daily newspapers and linking it to detailed browsing histories of over a million households, we provide the first comprehensive analysis of how paywalls have reshaped Americans' access to local news. Between 2006 and 2020, the share of households facing a paywall at their local newspaper rose from under 2 percent to over 90 percent. We show that the shift from free to paid news sharply reduced local readership and

skewed the remaining audience toward higher-income households. Rather than seeking out alternative sources of local news, displaced readers turn toward national outlets, which lean more liberal than the papers they left behind. This reallocation cascades into a leftward shift in voting behavior in low-income communities and widening gaps in knowledge about local economic conditions between rich and poor households.

Together, my work has helped shape how researchers and the public alike understand the power of media. My research on The Birth of a Nation appeared on the cover of *The Economist* and was cited in the State of California's Reparations Report. The study has helped broaden media economics toward popular entertainment, a ubiquitous and culturally dominant part of American society, while its theater-based identification strategy has since been adopted by other researchers.[5] Meanwhile, my work on paywalls has attracted interest from economists and political scientists alike and speaks to growing concerns about informational inequality at a time when social media platforms, streaming providers, and AI services are all transitioning to subscription-based models.

Going forward, I plan to connect these projects more explicitly around the institutions that govern cultural exposure and information access. The music project examines whether exposure to minority cultural production can reduce social distance, while the paywalls project raises a concern about how economic inequality may increasingly determine what people know, believe, and engage with. Building on my *The Birth of a Nation* study, these projects ask when media widens group divisions, when it narrows them, and what role policy and institutional design can play in shaping its broader social consequences.

Cross-Cutting Contributions

These projects bring into empirical economics longstanding questions about the broader processes in which discrimination is embedded. Across pivotal moments of U.S. racial history, I use large-scale data and rigorous econometric methods to study what comes before and after discrete episodes of unequal treatment: how racial prejudice arises; how discrimination affects minority communities; and how those effects feed back into political and racial dynamics.

My research documents the historical origins and long-run persistence of racial extremism. I find that a blockbuster film that propagated revisionist narratives about Reconstruction helped revive the country's most infamous hate group, while a national army that paired racial segregation with a moralized vision of "Americanism" further swelled the Klan's ranks, reshaping the geography of racial hate in ways that remain visible today. Meanwhile, the scale of our membership records reveals the group's broad reach across society and its deep penetration into positions of public authority. Together, these findings implicate core pillars of American society - rather than simply fringe actors - in the rise and spread of racial prejudice.

My research documents large and lasting spillovers from racial injustice and discrimination. Police killings of unarmed minorities disrupt the educational trajectories of nearby Black and Hispanic youth and erode civilian cooperation with the state, further compounding disadvantage and distrust in affected neighborhoods. A century earlier, the discriminatory experiences of African-American soldiers reverberated through their home communities, becoming part of the broader political consciousness and

[5] For example, Hui Ren Tan and Tianyi Wang, "McCarthyism, Media, and Political Repression: Evidence from Hollywood," NBER Working Paper No. 32682 (revision requested, *AEJ: Applied Economics*), uses historical theater exposure to study the political effects of Hollywood film content.

mobilization of the early civil rights era. These spillovers fall largely outside the scope of conventional empirical approaches to discrimination**.** Yet their magnitude and persistence suggest that they are first-order, showing how a focus on disparate treatment can substantially understate the costs of discrimination.

My research documents recurring patterns of racial mobilization and contestation. The First World War saw millions of men inducted into a strict racial hierarchy shaped by white fears of racial equality, helping catalyze both Black civil rights activism and white supremacist mobilization. Decades later, federal oversight under the Voting Rights Act imposed anti-discrimination protections on resistant local jurisdictions, significantly increasing minority participation even as it pushed white voters rightward. More recently, acts of police violence have repeatedly become defining flashpoints in American racial politics. Across settings, these patterns show how disputes over discrimination and the role of institutions can generate competing forms of racial mobilization, leaving political and organizational legacies that persist for generations.

Taken together, these studies trace the far-reaching and dynamic consequences of discrimination. At a broader conceptual level, they also reveal how racial polarization reflects not simply disparities in outcomes, but divergent understandings of how those disparities came to be. Indeed, recent evidence shows that disagreement over the magnitude of racial inequality explains relatively little of the Black-white gap in support for race-neutral redistributive policies, while differences in beliefs about the prevalence and nature of discrimination explain nearly all of it.[6] A parallel divide has long shaped academic scholarship, where approaches to studying race and racism differ sharply across disciplinary traditions. My work aims to bridge these perspectives by bringing the tools of economics to broader questions about the origins, consequences, and persistence of racial discrimination in America, documenting how discrete episodes of unequal treatment can become enduring sources of racial division.

[6] See Alesina, Ferroni, and Stantcheva (2024), "Perceptions of Racial Gaps, their Causes, and Ways to Reduce Them," NBER Working Paper No. 29245 (revision requested, *JPE*).