Description: For some, being algorithmically scored is an anxiety-inducing directive to change behaviors while others are either freed by scores enabling greater control over their outcomes or are unbothered. How do we understand for whom being scored is reactivity and anxiety-inducing or not? Drawing on theorizing from Du Bois and Fanon, I theoretically develop and empirically demonstrate how being scored differs across racial cleavages via a mixed-methods study. My findings provide evidence of credit scores as “racialized engines of anxiety” yielding key theoretical insights into how algorithmic scores generate inequality by highlighting an underspecified and uneven psychological tax that scoring exacts.

Davon Norris is an LSA Collegiate Fellow and incoming Assistant Professor of Organizational Studies at the University of Michigan. His research tries to understand how our tools for determining what is valuable, worthwhile, or good are implicated in patterns of inequality with an acute concern for racial inequality. Generally, this manifests in work that studies credit, debt, and finance. However, he more specifically investigates the functioning and consequences of a range of scores or ratings, from the less complex government credit ratings to the extremely complex algorithmic scores like consumer credit scores. By focusing on questions of valuation, his research speaks across an array of disciplines and brings into relief normative questions about the nature and possibility of ameliorating (racial) inequality and nurturing economic justice in the contemporary United States.