Is STEM Education Compatible with Racial Justice?

STEM education is typically seen as intrinsically beneficial to individuals and to society, particularly in the context of a technology-driven modern economy. For people from racially minoritized groups, who remain excluded from this high-tech, high-paying labor market, access to STEM education is often framed as a matter of racial justice.

In this talk, I question the underlying logic of these dominant narratives by asking: Is STEM education compatible with racial justice? Drawing on several lines of research on how STEM learning becomes racialized for students of color, I argue that we cannot assume that participating in STEM constitutes a net benefit for people of color. Specifically, I discuss how dominant forms of STEM education can do substantial harm by dehumanizing both Asian students and non-Asian students of color. I conclude with an invitation to consider how less STEM education might actually better serve a vision of racial justice.