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Editorial

Confronting Racism in Chemistry Journals

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We confront the terrible reality that systemic racism and discrimination impacts the daily personal and professional lives of many members of the scientific community and broader society. In the U.S., the brutal killing of George Floyd while in police custody is one of the most recent examples of the centuries of systemic violence suffered by Black Americans. This moment and its aftermath lay bare the legacies of racism and its exclusionary practices.

Let us be clear: we, the Editors, Staff, and Governance Members of ACS Publications condemn the tragic deaths of Black people and stand in solidarity with Black members of the science and engineering community. Moreover, ACS condemns racism, discrimination, and harassment in all forms. We will not tolerate practices and viewpoints that exclude or demean *any* member of our community. Despite these good intentions, we recognize that our community has not done enough to provide an environment for Black chemists to thrive.

Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson, Chairwoman of the U.S. House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology said, "So far, we have gotten by with a STEM workforce that does not come close to representing the diversity of our nation. However, if we continue to leave behind so much of our nation's brainpower, we cannot succeed."[1] Indeed, the U.S. National Science Foundation notes that Blacks and other under-represented minority groups continue to be under-represented in science and engineering education and employment.[2] What is abundantly clear in this moment is that this lack of representation is a symptom of systemic racism across all levels of education and professional life. We know that supportive words are not enough. We must develop and implement a concrete plan for changing our trajectory.

Publications and citations are academic currency, and while we like to think publishing a manuscript is "just about the science", we know that is not true for everyone. We have seen the biases (largely through the lens of gender and in Western countries because of the limitations in bibliometric analyses) and applaud our colleagues at the RSC for their massive study that explored these gender barriers in the publishing pipeline[3] and their recent Inclusion and Diversity Framework.[4] At the present time, unfortunately, less is known about the effects of race and ethnicity on publishing success. A study published in *PeerJ*, however, found that unprofessional reviewer comments had a disproportionate effect on authors from under-represented groups.[5]

As the world's leading society publisher, we have a responsibility to aggressively combat bias in all aspects of the publishing process, including systemic under-representation of Blacks in this endeavor (no ACS journal is currently led by a Black Editor-in-Chief). Within ACS Publications, we actively track gender and geographic diversity of editors, advisors, authors, and reviewers, and we anecdotally report on race of editors. Diversity encompasses many more dimensions than these, and we acknowledge that we can do much more than we have. We affirm that diversity and inclusion strengthen the research community and its impact, and we are committed to developing, implementing, tracking, and reporting on our progress to ensure that our editors, advisors, reviewers, and authors are more diverse and that all authors receive the same fair treatment and opportunity to publish in our journals. We acknowledge that we do not have all the answers now, but we seek to hear from and listen to our community on how we can improve our journals to be more diverse and inclusive. As first steps, we commit to the taking the following actions:

- Gathering and making public our baseline statistics on diversity within our journals, encompassing our editors, advisors, reviewers, and authors; annually reporting on progress
- Training new and existing editors to recognize and interrupt bias in peer review
- Including diversity of journal contributors as an explicit measurement of Editor-in-Chief performance
- Appointing an ombudsperson to serve as a liaison between Editors and our Community
- Developing an actionable diversity plan for each ACS journal

These are only initial plans and the start of a conversation: other ideas are beginning to germinate, and we commit to sharing them with you regularly. We invite you contribute your ideas on how we can do better via our Axial website. We are listening carefully.

We encourage you to take immediate action in your own circles. In a recent editorial, *JACS* Associate Editor Melanie Sanford[6] offered practical steps to take now. Take a moment to find out more about these actions and how to bring them into your work and your life.

We all have a responsibility to eradicate racism and discrimination in the science and engineering community; indeed, to make a real difference, we need to be antiracist. The tragic events we have seen in the Black community provide great urgency to this goal. The work will be difficult and will force us to confront hard realities about our beliefs and actions. We fully expect that you, and everyone in the community, will hold us accountable.

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Notes

This joint Editorial was simultaneously published in other American Chemical Society journals.

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