

April 2021

Dear Geographers and Sustainers,

We are writing to offer our unequivocal support for Black people and the Black Lives Matter movement. As we finish out the 2020-2021 academic year and prepare for an eventual return to campus, we return to and affirm the [statement](#) of the American Association of Geographers Black Geographies Specialty Group denouncing white supremacy and business as usual. As UTK Geography [graduate students](#) named in June 2020, Geographers can contribute through community-engagement and social justice-oriented research, teaching, and advocacy. We recognize the colonial, imperialist, white supremacist, and heteropatriarchal roots of our discipline. We are committed to confronting racism and advancing research and teaching of critical race theory and African American, Black and ethnic studies both within and outside Geography as a way to educate and combat 500 years of colonial violence. We recommit ourselves to the work of transforming Geography and higher education to cultivate spaces of learning that welcome, encourage, respect, affirm, and foster Black scholars, Black geographic inquiry, and diverse ways of knowing.

The verdict in the trial for the murder of George Floyd is an important moment of police accountability that followed international protest against anti-Black violence and police terror. Much work remains to realize racial justice. This month has brought profound grief, hurt, and outrage following the deaths of Daunte Wright, Ma'Khia Bryant, Andrew Brown Jr., and in Knoxville, of Anthony Thompson Jr. at Austin East High School at the hands of police. We send our deepest condolences to the families and communities affected by these tragedies. We stand in solidarity with Black freedom struggles and with uprisings against anti-Black racism. As educators and students, we are also committed to a world in which Black youth feel safe and supported at school.

Solidarity requires on-going commitment to action and dialogue for systemic change. We have outlined a [starting point](#) for this work in Geography and will report on our steps to make our curriculum, hiring, community engagement, and efforts to recruit and support students more equitable.

Signed,

Nikki Luke and Solange Muñoz (diversity committee co-chairs)

Derek Alderman (interim department head)

Nicholas Nagle (associate department head)

Liem Tran (associate department head)

June 8, 2020

Dear Black Colleagues and Friends,

Individual graduate students from the University of Tennessee-Knoxville Department of Geography express their support for, and solidarity with, Black geography colleagues, organizers, activists, abolitionists, and protesters fighting against police violence, systemic racial oppression, and white supremacy in the US and around the world. No amount of words will ever suffice to make up for the vile racism that has created and continues to perpetuate conditions of premature death for Black and Brown bodies, both at the hands of the state and through extralegal vigilante white supremacist violence. We are disheartened by the systemic injustices that disproportionately affect the daily lives of Black individuals and communities. We share in your grief and rage and admire your strength in the face of immense adversity and discrimination. Beyond condolences and solidarity, we are fully invested in cultivating what the late Martin Luther King, Jr. and philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce described as a *beloved community* where everyone is safe, healthy, loved, respected, provided equal opportunities to pursue their ambitions, and where our differences are affirmed and celebrated.

We reflect on the loss and honor the life of **MICHAEL BROWN**, a high-school graduate and kid who was always full of jokes, **ERIC GARNER**, a father, gentle giant, and horticulturist at the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, **BREONNA TAYLOR**, a kind, hardworking, and honest emergency medical technician with a plan to become a nurse, **AHMAUD ARBERY**, a humble fitness enthusiast with a dream of becoming an electrician, and **GEORGE FLOYD**, a father with a quiet personality and beautiful spirit who loved Latin dance. We reflect on and mourn the loss of so many more Black individuals with beautiful and rich lives that were prematurely cut short because of police violence and brutality. How many more stories will be cut short? How many more Black dreams and ambitions will continue to go unfulfilled?

As Geography Graduate Teaching Assistants and Associates, we are best equipped to ameliorate present injustices and progress towards unity by educating our students and embracing the struggles experienced by our Black colleagues and students. We reaffirm our commitment to cultivating safe spaces for Black students and colleagues that encourage greater compassion and empathy with others, celebrate and appreciate differences, and enable necessary conversations with our peers and students alike about racial discrimination, prejudice, and equity. As Graduate Students and Researchers, we redouble our efforts to engage anew in anti-racist conversations in the classroom and critically assess our research -- to check our own assumptions, question how our work addresses such systemic injustices, inform ourselves and our students about current race relations and the racial injustices that permeate academia, and reaffirm our commitments to community-engaged, social justice-oriented research and advocacy.

We reaffirm our commitment to listening to your experiences and intervening in racist systems and structures as co-laborers in the construction of a beloved community. We also reaffirm our commitment to support Black leadership without placing undue burden upon those leaders, using our platform to uplift Black and Brown voices.

Finally, echoing calls from across Association of American Geographers (AAG) specialty groups, we call upon AAG leadership and other specialty groups to show continued and renewed

solidarity with the Black Geographies Specialty Group, Black geographers, and Black activists building more just Black futures.
Black Lives Matter.

With all our love, solidarity, compassion, and support,

Jimmy Feng, Geography PhD Student and GeogGrads Vice President

Jordan P. Brasher, former UT Geography PhD student and Assistant Professor of Geography at Columbus State University

Lindy Westenhoff, Geography PhD Student and GeogGrads President

Bridgette Fritz, Former Geography Master Student

Faisal Bin Islam, Geography Masters Student

Heather Davis, Geography PhD Student

Jared Crain, Geography Masters Student

J. A. Cooper, former Geography Masters Student, Past GeogGrads Secretary/Treasurer

Reagan Yessler, Geography Masters Student

William Goldman, Geography PhD Student

Luke Blentlinger, Geography Masters Student

Ming Shen, Geography PhD Student

Nicole Callais, Geography PhD Student

Laura Smith, Geography PhD Student

Jamie Alumbaugh, Geography, PhD Student

Jacob Dein, Geography PhD Student

Ethan Bottone, former UT Geography PhD Student, past GeogGrads President, and incoming Assistant Professor of Geography at Northwest Missouri State University

Daniel Burow, Geography PhD Student