

## **ASA Section on Environmental Sociology Stands in Solidarity with and Support of Black Lives**

Founded in 2013 following the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's killer, the [Black Lives Matter](#) movement challenges the pervasive, institutionalized violence against Black communities in and beyond the United States. Evidence about and protests against the persistence of anti-Black racism in the United States reinforce the relevance and urgency of the Black Lives Matter movement and the broader movement against white supremacy and other forms of oppression with which it intersects. Evidence of the urgency is punctuated by the recent murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery by police and white vigilantes, and by the [racial disparities in COVID-19 illnesses and deaths](#).

White supremacy and the state-sanctioned devaluation, segregation, persecution, and killing of Indigenous, Black, and other people of color undergird the global political and economic order and our unequal experiences of the biophysical environment. The systematic devaluation of Black and brown lives underpins disparate exposure to environmental health hazards, the denial of adequate healthcare, and safe access to green spaces. Despite decades of civil rights and anti-colonial mobilizations against white supremacy and promises of state-based racial reforms, we find ourselves in the midst of a growing threat of white nationalism within and beyond the halls of state institutions and the persistence of racial disparities in illness, death, and freedom to simply breathe, jog, bird watch, enjoy nature, protest, and otherwise live and flourish.

In this context, each of us must stand firmly against such oppressive institutional and popular forces. There is no neutral position in this struggle; individuals cannot be non-racist when racism is embedded in systems and institutions. The silence and inaction of white people and predominantly white organizations reproduces systems of power just as thoroughly as overtly racist policies. As environmental sociologists, we have the ability to expose these power dynamics and support antiracist policies and practices. We have the responsibility to be accomplices in the fight against white supremacy, as it shapes every aspect of social life. We have work to do to confront the ways in which environmental sociology and higher education have been complicit in white supremacy.

Environmental sociology was founded as a response to sociology's failure to account for the role of the environment in social life – and yet, despite the fact that a number of scholars in our field long have grappled with the roles of white supremacy in structuring environmental outcomes as well as our own work, our field as a whole has not centered these concerns. We must recognize that the predominantly white-led subdiscipline of environmental sociology reproduces systemic racism and oppression (as the section's ad hoc Committee on Racial Equity helped [show](#)) – and we must actively subvert those power dynamics. Our section has been welcoming to many of us – but has not been a particularly welcoming space to many scholars of color. It is imperative that we acknowledge and confront this, and that white scholars in our community listen to and honor our students and colleagues of color while participating in the ongoing work needed to dismantle white supremacy within the section, discipline, and broader society.

The Council of the American Sociological Association's Section on Environmental Sociology stands in solidarity with and supports Black lives and the critical work of antiracist mobilizations unfolding in the United States and abroad. To demonstrate this solidarity and support, the section pledges to:

- Focus council work on assessing and developing ways to address the fact that our section and the broader discipline often continue to function as a [white institutional space](#) (a seemingly race-neutral social space that reproduces white privilege), and sharing these lessons with the broader membership through the listserv.
- Critically examine and change section business practices to help redress the whiteness of environmental sociology, including but not limited to addressing the overwhelming presence of white scholars among section award winners, council members, presenters in section sessions at the ASA annual meeting, and active participants on the section listserv. These changes are made through section bylaws (for details on those we enacted this year, see [here](#)), council positions' instructional handbooks (which we will continue to revise accordingly), and informal practices.
- Work across ASA and in our own departments to recruit sociologists of color as members and leaders in the section and other institutional spaces we inhabit.
- Establish and support a formal Committee on Racial Exclusion and Equity to help continue the work started by our ad hoc Committee on Racial Equity. This was just approved by section membership, and we will soon issue a call for nominations for this committee.
- Revise the "canon" of environmental sociology posted on the section's website. Section members have [cultivated lists](#) of recommended scholarship that address race, racism, and the environment; settler colonialism and Indigenous environmental movements; and other critical and underrepresented bodies of literature that decenter and challenge white, heteronormative, and other privileged experiences of the environment. We have more work to do to elevate the work by Black scholars and other scholars of color and others underrepresented in the academy to elevate their voices and scholarship within our own teaching, research, service, and outreach, including how we represent "core" environmental sociology.
- Revise our mentoring program to better serve the needs and interests of junior scholars, particularly those of color.
- The white members of council commit to listening and learning about how to be better accomplices in the fight against racist oppression and to honestly examining our own practices that reinforce white supremacy, which scholars of color have long called for. We implore our white colleagues throughout the section to join us in this work.
- Commit ourselves to speaking up about exclusionary claims, actions, dynamics, and other expressions of white supremacy in section affairs and on section listservs, and to following through on redressing them.
- Push beyond self-education, diversity training, and campus programming into advocating for antiracist policies and structural changes at our universities.

- Increase our media presence in order to more meaningfully support Black Lives Matter and affiliated movements against injustice.
- Regularly disseminate a survey inviting section members to suggest additional ways council can address racism within the section and the discipline more broadly.

There is much more to do. As always, if you have other suggestions for how council can pursue such work and/or would like to help in these efforts, please contact the section chair or another member of council (see list of current section council members [here](#)).

In Solidarity,

Council for the American Sociological Association Section on Environmental Sociology  
<http://envirosoc.org/wordpress/section-officers/>

### **Suggestions for further reading**

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