

Geography of Religions and Belief Systems Statement of Solidarity

The Geography of Religions and Belief Systems Specialty Group (GORABS) expresses its unconditional condemnation of anti-black racism, militarized policing, and all other forms of oppression. We affirm our support for the struggle of black geographers and all activists and protesters in the community who fight against this oppression every day. Following the lead of the Black Geographies Specialty Group, the Queer and Trans Geographies Specialty Group, the Indigenous Peoples' Specialty Group, and the Latinx Geographies Specialty Group, among others, we express solidarity with all marginalized peoples and call on the AAG and all geographers to resist by any means necessary structural racism and violence, police brutality, and white supremacy.

Recent events in the United States have once again brought into stark relief the profound, racialized inequities that pervade American society, which are too often overlooked, downplayed as someone else's problem, or simply ignored. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, David McAtee, and Ahmaud Aubrey are only the latest in a long history of violence perpetrated against people of color. It is not enough to say that responsibility for this brutality can be attributed to racist structures of state, to the dehumanizing economic system that has left millions in grinding poverty, or to the white supremacy that has characterized much of American history. All of these things are to blame. But responsibility, ultimately, is woven into the very fabric of our society and of our lives.

As fundamental parts of our lives and of our society, religion and other belief systems are thus inexorably tied to issues of racial injustice. While religion is frequently a potent symbol of hope and a unifier of people, it is just as often been employed as means to divide, to downgrade, and to 'other.' Whether in justifications for the violence of colonialism, the destruction of places of prayer for marginalized people, or discriminatory immigration policies, religions and belief systems are intimately bound up with systems of oppression. Only recently have we witnessed the appalling spectacle of chemical weapons being employed against peaceful protesters to allow the President to pose with a Bible in front of a hijacked church, putting into stark relief how geographies of religion are interlaced with geographies of violence. It is the task of geographers of religions and belief systems to confront this violence, both in our scholarship and our lives, and to commit ourselves to supporting our colleagues and those in our community who are most affected by it.

This begins with amplifying the voices of marginalized peoples in our scholarship, centering their histories in the classroom, promoting them in our departments and institutions, and decolonizing our course curricula. But our efforts cannot end there. These can only be first, partial, steps towards a fuller reckoning with the legacies of racism and oppression in the academy, in our communities, and in society at large. GORABS stands with all those seeking to achieve those ends.

Black lives matter.

-The Board of the Geography of Religions and Belief Systems Specialty Group