



## **OUGS Statement on Anti-Racism**

**9<sup>th</sup> of June, 2020**

We are writing to you in our capacity as your elected committee members to show our solidarity with those protesting for the Black Lives Matter movement across the world, and to condemn the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Abernathy and countless others, as well as the recent events of the Christ Church JCR Hustings. We recognise that the systemic racism demonstrated in these events is prevalent in Oxford, including within Earth Sciences, and, by extension, within OUGS as well. The committee believes that it is not only our duty to acknowledge this fact, but also to speak out against racism and any other inequalities, because to remain silent is to deny the existence of these significant problems.

The fact that the geosciences have some of the lowest levels of diversity of any of the STEM subjects (Dutt, 2020), as well as an almost ubiquitous lack of diversity seen across all geoscience-related industries, demonstrates that internal institutional-level racism is still extremely pervasive. There are also innumerable examples of external discrimination by geoscience corporations spanning every single continent, directed especially towards indigenous populations. The origins and histories of many prominent, modern geoscience corporations are undisputedly and inextricably intertwined with the establishment and maintenance of colonialism. Indeed, many of these companies were set up directly to extract and export minerals and other natural resources away from colonised countries, with little to no reparations ever made, including examples such as:

- BP's problematic origins as the Anglo-Iranian Oil company in Iran.
- The establishment of De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited, which, for a long time, held a monopoly on the diamond industry, and was founded by the highly-controversial imperialist (and University of Oxford graduate) Cecil Rhodes.

Yet these problems related to geoscience-linked industries continue to be just as pervasive today, as demonstrated by, but not limited to:

- The ongoing dispute between First Nations groups and the Canadian government over the extension of the Trans-Mountain oil pipeline in Canada.
- The destruction of a prominent 46,000-year-old, sacred Aboriginal site in Australia, only two weeks ago, by mining giant Rio Tinto.

Whilst most of this is not new information, in light of recent events we have, yet again, been reminded of a failure to address any of the systemic discriminatory issues that exist both within, and in relation to, the geosciences. It is highly likely that many OUGS members will, as they have done in the past, pursue careers within the petroleum and mining industries, or alternatively may go into consultancy firms, environmental agencies, government sectors, etc. As a result, it is likely that many of our members will someday be in positions to make tangible changes to governmental and corporate projects and policies that may have long-lasting effects at both local and global scales. We therefore have a tremendous duty of care to properly educate ourselves, and those around us, in order to recognise and fight discrimination at every level, both within and outside of geosciences. Furthermore, we must acknowledge and seek to learn more about the tainted legacies of geoscience-linked industries and educational institutions, of which we are a part; from this, we can embrace the responsibility of fully dismantling the institutionalised, discriminatory structures that still exist within them.

The Earth Sciences department has already detailed their commitment to improving diversity within the department. However, after some serious reflection this committee feels that we, as a society, have failed in doing enough to promote diversity and inclusion within Earth Sciences and OUGS. After discussions between the committee and some of our BAME and LGBTQ+ OUGS members, we believe that the best course of action to ensure our accountability as a society is to add a new committee position to the OUGS committee: an Equalities Rep. Our hope is that this rep will aid in ensuring that the voices of every member who identifies as a minority, including, but not limited to identifying as LGBTQ+ or BAME, are heard and their opinions are fully represented. We acknowledge that this concept may seem problematic at first, but we must clarify that we are not trying to lump together the opinions of members who we recognise come from a large range of different backgrounds and who share differing values and beliefs. As such the Equalities Rep's role will not be that of a direct representative of every minority group, but rather a facilitator of discussion and feedback. Their main responsibility will be to hold regular, informal meetings during term, thereby creating a safe space in which any OUGS members can openly discuss issues that they may be facing themselves or are aware of. Through this appointment, the committee aims to begin actively addressing the discriminatory issues we acknowledge within our department and in OUGS.

In addition it is our hope the new Equalities Rep will:

- Liaise more directly with the department's current Equalities working group to improve communications and stimulate joint action.
- Be a friendly face that anyone experiencing discrimination can directly talk to in confidence, especially if any member feels too uncomfortable to talk to their tutor, the department or the other OUGS committee members directly.
- Give advice if they are able, or to refer members to the appropriate body if they are unable, such that any issues can be appropriately and quickly addressed.
- Actively promote relevant resources and encourage all members to educate themselves on systemic racism, sexism and other discrimination that occurs both within and in relation to geosciences.
- Work closely with the department to improve access schemes and seek to encourage undergraduate involvement with these schemes.
- Advocate for more programs and events run by both OUGS and the department to promote diversity, including increasing the number of talks in the department that are presented by geoscientists from a more diverse range of backgrounds.
- Help the committee in assessing the suitability and accountability of any current or future OUGS external sponsors.
- Provide additional feedback on how to alter/improve this feedback structure and the responsive action that the OUGS committees take going onwards.

The Equalities Rep will be a non-executive committee member (which means they are encouraged to, but not required to attend all committee meetings) and the position will be available to stand for along with the rest of the committee positions at the upcoming committee election (TBA formally in the next week or so). We recognise that the addition of this role is long overdue, but hope that it is a good first step in addressing the systemic racism and other forms of discrimination OUGS members may be subjected to.

Further to this, the committee has signed an open letter written to the Vice-Chancellor on behalf of the society. This letter demands more direct action by the University to tackle systemic racism, and we encourage you all to sign your names as well:

<https://medium.com/@OxfordAntiRacismLetter/open-letter-oxford-university-must-tackle-systemic-racism-db09f3b0b1a3>

A second petition, more specific to addressing the systematic racism within the Geosciences which we also encourage you to sign, is found [here](#).

In addition to the multitude of resources emailed around by department here are some additional further reading and resources you may not have yet encountered:

- Paper in Nature Geoscience: Dutt, 2020, Race and Races in the Geosciences.  
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41561-019-0519-z.pdf>
- Geoscience and Colonialism: An extensive reading list of material covering geosciences and colonialism can be found:  
[http://mineralogy.digital.brynmawr.edu/blog/geology-colonialism-reading-list/?fbclid=IwAR2YVnfFjZshtA2W4YGLHRXXK3F1A\\_Jfyb1mzrdz3pfiZnllrnuWYkJ\\_ed4](http://mineralogy.digital.brynmawr.edu/blog/geology-colonialism-reading-list/?fbclid=IwAR2YVnfFjZshtA2W4YGLHRXXK3F1A_Jfyb1mzrdz3pfiZnllrnuWYkJ_ed4)
- A link to a compiled twitter list of inspiring geoscientists who identity as being a part of a minority group:  
[https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ROH8G1qkugdbV02\\_FnUkn27W7dzKITK33F-Rc5st54w/edit#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ROH8G1qkugdbV02_FnUkn27W7dzKITK33F-Rc5st54w/edit#gid=0)
- Podcast episode: *Revisionist History; Season 1 Episode 1* - A well-told explanation of a concept called moral licensing - an important idea to consider as the media coverage/protests/social media posts begin to fade from the forefront of people's attention - (Available on Spotify/Apple Music/at this link: <http://revisionisthistory.com/episodes/01-the-lady-vanishes>)

Please note we will be emailing in regard to the upcoming committee elections shortly. We will also be sending out a feedback form for you to give any more general suggestions or feedback on the committee in order to guide next year's committee. However, if you do have any immediate suggestions or concerns that you wish to raise, in particular in regard to anything within this email, please address them to the [OUGS Secretary](#) and we will endeavour to address your concerns promptly.

Rocks of love,  
**Your OUGS Committee**  
2019 - 2020