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## **A long way to go: collective paths to racial justice in Geography**

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### **Abstract**

Despite decades of concern about diversity, our discipline remains persistently white. That is, it is dominated by white bodies *and* it continues to conform to norms, practices and ideologies of whiteness. This is a loss. At best, it limits the possibilities and impact of our work as geographers. At worst, it perpetuates harmful exclusions in our discipline, its working environments, institutions, and knowledge production. This remains deeply concerning for many geographers, and there has been important research, commentary, and institutional activity over the years. Yet, research shows us that little meaningful progress has been made. We know mentoring is one vital part of the journey towards change. As such we reflect here on our experience developing a *research* collective built on a transformative *mentoring* practice. We outline the key challenges, strategies, and tentative successes of the collective in supporting women of color undergraduate, graduate and faculty geographers, arguing that such feminist formations are a vital part of the path to intellectual racial justice in our field.

*Keywords: Diversity, Feminist Geography, Higher Education, Mentoring, Race.*

“...in almost every instance, integration appears to have resulted more in invisibility than in the achievement of equality. Even geography has fallen short on its efforts to be fully integrated in the sense that integration means that minorities are recognized as valuable and integral to the development of the discipline.” (Sanders 1990, 229)

“I think the hardest thing for me to grapple with from all my visits was the lack of representation in faculty who look like me, and as much as I did not want that to be the case, geography as a discipline has a long way to go to where we need to be.” (Email communication, prospective student 2017. Used with permission.)

Made nearly thirty years apart, these statements speak to our discipline’s entrenched and ongoing problem with race, or rather with *whiteness* (Bonilla-Silva 2012; hooks 1997) and the challenges this poses for promoting, valuing, and sustaining students and faculty of color. There is much to unpack in these powerful words: the pervasive domination of geography by White bodies and the past-presents of White privilege; the repelling effect on non-White scholars; the reciprocal lifelines of support faculty and students of color afford one another and the crucial mentoring resource White faculty have been and can become, if this is an ethical and professional priority; the missed opportunities for all when the difficult work of racial intellectual justice is repeatedly, systematically, quietly sidelined or, in exhaustion, given up on.

I [Caroline Faria] received the email above late in the spring semester of 2017. It came as a deep, but unsurprising, disappointment. This student held one of the strongest academic records I had seen in seven years assessing graduate applications. Just a year out of undergraduate studies, she already had substantive research experience, publications in print and on the way, and several

research awards. Her scholarship was exciting, connecting several disciplines and approaches, and rooted in social justice. Trained outside of our discipline, I knew her project would be extended by our field. She felt the same, describing her excitement at the possibilities of a geographic future. I saw great potential in her, as did my colleagues. We worked hard to secure a prestigious pocket of college-level recruitment funding, and made a competitive offer. After much consideration, she declined.

Of course this is not the first time, nor the last, that we will lose excellent graduate students in recruitment efforts. Their decisions involve many factors, including those unrelated to a particular program or wider discipline. But this student's words touch on the complex challenges in recruiting students of color into our program and geography more broadly. Paired with Rickie Sanders' argument, made nearly *three decades* prior, it seems clear that our discipline has yet to demonstrate that addressing racial injustice, and its intellectual, institutional and personal losses, is a priority.

A quantitative analysis highlights the scale of the problem. In 1990, African Americans and Hispanics<sup>1</sup> comprised 2 percent of AAG members, rising to 10 percent in 2015 (AAG 2016). Given increased response rates, comparisons over time are difficult, but these figures suggest sustained challenges for building and sustaining racial diversity in geography. Looking deeper, between 1990 and 2015 the proportion of African American and Hispanic students enrolled in undergraduate degree granting institutions increased from 16 to 31 percent (figure 1). Graduate enrollment increased from 8 to 21 percent (figure 2). For available Geography data (2005-2015), undergraduate and graduate enrollment of African American and Hispanic students hovered

around 7 percent. Growing minority membership depends, in part, on developing a larger pool of undergraduate, graduate, and faculty of color in our field. Such growth has occurred in the wider academy, but not in our discipline. In fact, many departments reported no undergraduate or graduate students of color in their programs (Solís et al. 2014).

Figure 1: Undergraduate Enrollment in Degree Granting Institutions (African American and Hispanic Students)

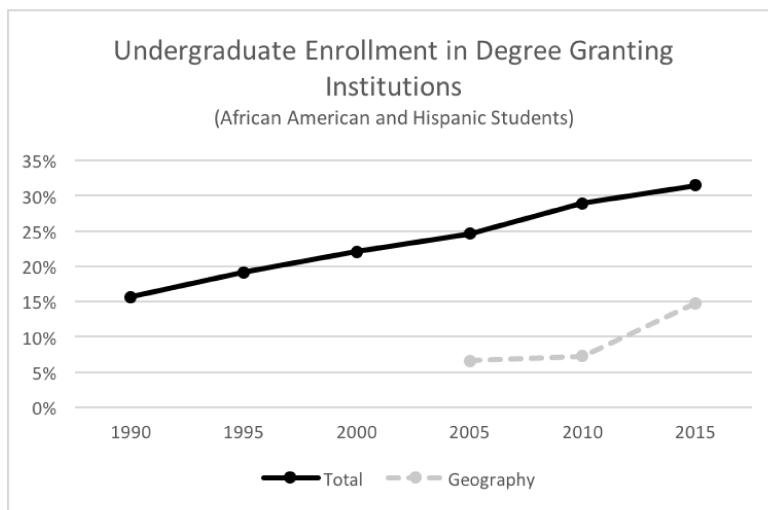


Figure 1 sources: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES); Adams, Solís & McKendry 2014 (2005, n=48); 2010 AAG Survey on Diversity in Geography Departments (2010, n=61; 2015, n=30)

Figure 2: Graduate Enrollment in Degree Granting Institutions (African American and Hispanic Students)

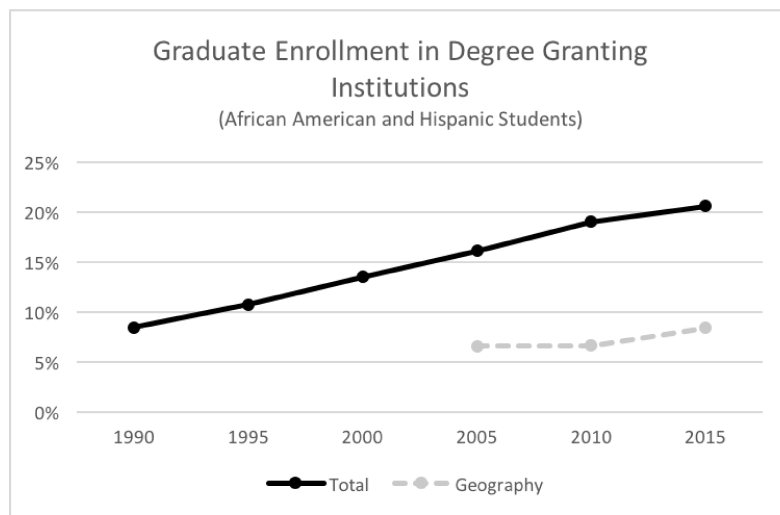


Figure 2 sources: NCES; Adams, Solís & McKendry 2014 (2005, n=40); 2010 AAG Survey on Diversity in Geography Departments (2010, n=45; 2015, n=23)

Degrees conferred is also important to consider. In Geography, undergraduate degrees conferred for African American and Hispanic students rose from 4 percent in 1995 (our earliest available data) to 11 percent in 2015 (figures 3 and 4). In the same time-period, graduate degrees conferred rose from 4 to 7 percent (figures 5 and 6), lagging significantly behind related disciplines like Sociology, Anthropology, and wider STEM<sup>2</sup> fields (figure 3). Indeed, Geography must *double* its

African American and Hispanic graduates to match the Social Sciences<sup>3</sup> and all combined disciplines (figures 3 and 4).

Figure 3: Graph of Bachelor Degrees Conferred I (African American and Hispanic Students)

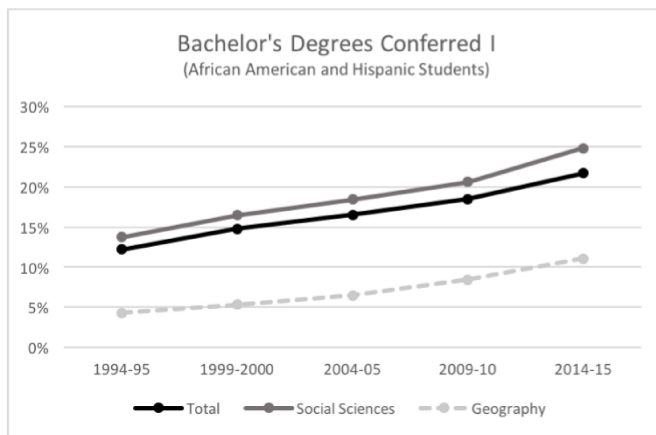


Figure 3 sources: NCES, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data (IPEDS).

Figure 4: Graph of Bachelor Degrees Conferred II (African American and Hispanic Students)

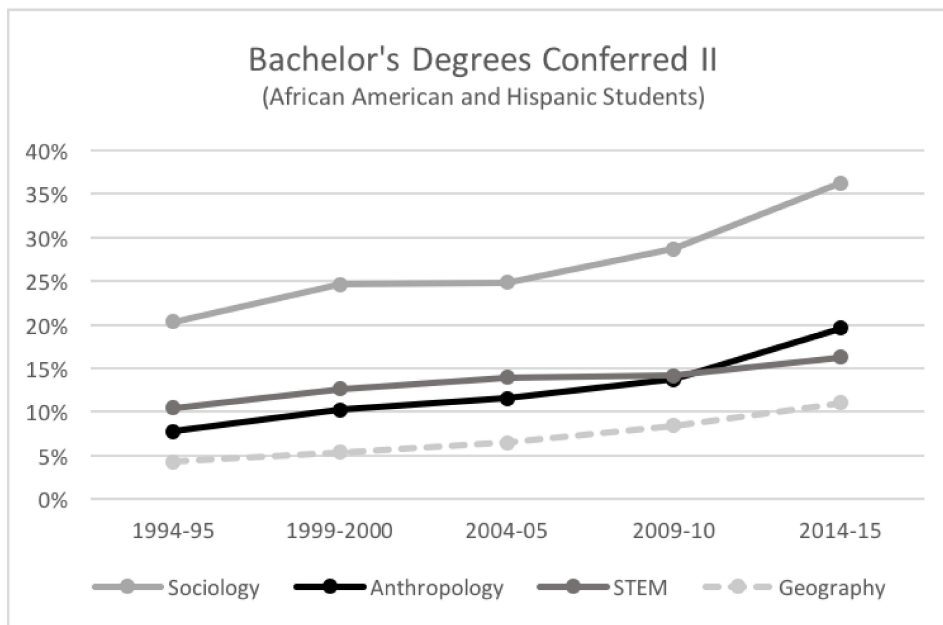


Figure 4 sources: NCES; Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) for Geography and Cartography (includes Geography, Geographic Information Science and Cartography, and Geography Other).

Figure 5: Graph and Table of Graduate Degrees Conferred I (African American and Hispanic Students)

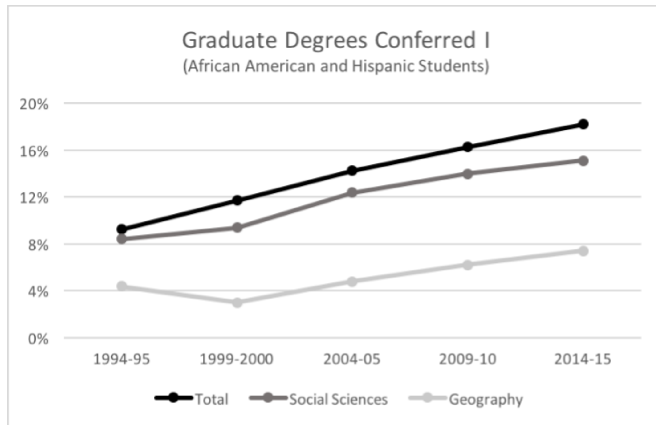


Figure 5 sources: NCES; IPEDS. Graduate degrees include Master's and Doctorates.

Figure 6: Graph and Table of Graduate Degrees Conferred II (African American and Hispanic Students)

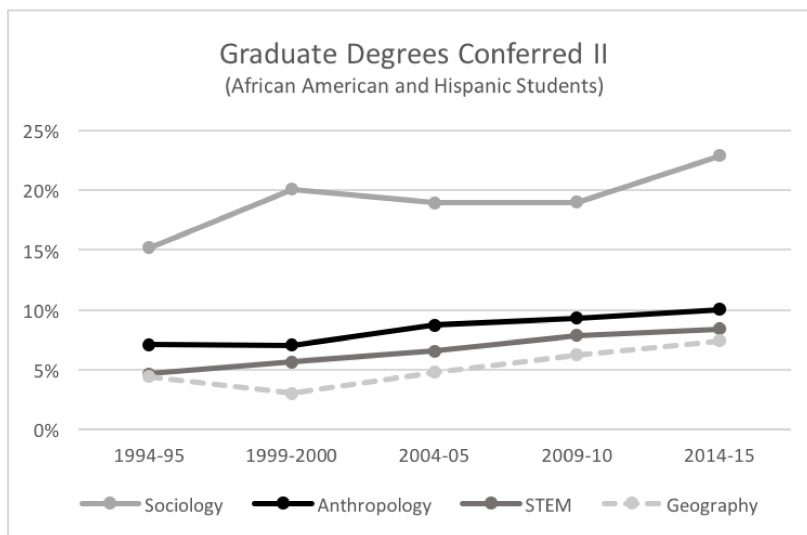


Figure 6 sources: NCES, IPEDS

Another crucial move towards intellectual racial justice is the recruitment and retention of faculty of color. Despite the modest increases in graduate degrees conferred, the proportion of African American and Hispanic geography faculty hovered at 4 to 5 percent between 2005 and 2015 (AAG 2016). To compare, in 2015 the figure was 10 percent across all higher education faculty, twice that of Geography (NCES 2016). Data on tenure track and tenured faculty also reveal key challenges in recruiting and promoting faculty of color, and particularly women of color. In a survey of geography departments African Americans and Hispanics comprised 3.7 percent of tenured faculty in 2010 and 4.7 percent in 2015 (AAG 2016). Most African American and Hispanic geography faculty are assistant professors, instructors, or adjuncts (59 percent in 2010, 58 percent in 2015), mirroring wider findings on the disproportionately female and minority makeup of contingent faculty (Finkelstein et al. 2016). The reverse is true for White faculty. The majority hold full and associate positions: 57 percent in 2010, 54 percent in 2015 (AAG 2016). And while our statistical analysis is limited by small numbers and underrepresentation, robust qualitative research underscores the precarity experienced by faculty of color (Mahtani 2004, 2006; Solís et al. 2014; Tolia-Kelley 2017). Together this data signals racial injustice both in the *recruitment and promotion* of faculty of color. It offers us a stark indication of the whitening of the discipline as we move into its highest, most secure, and powerful ranks.

This overview paints a sobering picture of whiteness across U.S. American geography. The ALIGNED project (Addressing Locally-Tailored Information Infrastructure and Geoscience Needs for Enhancing Diversity) echoes these findings and underscores the geographically-specific challenges of building geographic racial justice (Solís et al 2014). The University of

Texas at Austin, part of the ALIGNED pilot project, offers one geographically particular account of these challenges. Here diversity is also on the agenda. UT Austin has seen a rise in combined rates of Hispanic and African American students from 16 percent in 1990 to 27 percent in 2015. Most growth is amongst Hispanics<sup>4</sup>, with the figures for African Americans remaining static around 4 to 5 percent for over 25 years (UT Institutional Reporting (UTIR) 2017).

These diversity measures are mirrored in our college, the College of Liberal Arts. Hispanics are underrepresented here, comprising 22 percent of undergrads in 2015 (UTIR 2017) but 44.6 percent of the 18-24 year old Hispanic population in Texas (US Census 2015). The disparity is greater for African Americans, who form only 4.9 percent of undergraduates but 13.3 percent of the state's 18-24 year old African-American population. Most college faculty<sup>5</sup> remain White, with retention and recruitment of faculty of color a key problem (Heinzelman and Nicholus 2017). Over fifteen years (2001-2016) we see only modest gains in Hispanic and African American faculty, from 7 to 10 and 2 to 6 percent respectively.

Our department has made uneven gains in undergraduate student diversity. Hispanic and African American enrollment grew sporadically from 13 to nearly 25 percent between 2000 and 2015 (UTIR 2017). In addition to geography, we house three other majors, including urban studies, established in 2003 as part of a university-wide diversity initiative (Schlemper and Monk 2011). While no sub-field should be beyond the interest of underrepresented students, urban studies *is* historically far more diverse, with 23 percent Hispanic and African American undergraduates in 2005 compared with 9 percent in geography (UTIR 2017). Encouragingly, the gap between the two programs is narrowing to 28 and 25 percent respectively in 2015. Despite these gains, our diversity rates remain below the college and the university (which trend near 30

percent). Further, and heeding ALIGNED calls to situate departmental diversity geographically, these rates are far from reflecting the diversity of our state (UTIR 2017).

At the graduate level, student diversity at UT Austin remains well below that of undergrads. The proportion of Hispanic and African American graduate students enrolled university-wide and in our college has grown slowly, from 7 and 8 percent respectively in 2000 to 13 and 16 percent fifteen years later. Our department is doing no better than the college or university. For the period we have data (2001-2015), there were no geography degrees conferred to African American graduate students, with perhaps a handful conferred over the more than sixty year history of the department. Interestingly, we *are* doing well in terms of recruiting and retaining women undergraduates and graduates. In fact, in terms of the percentage of female geography graduates between 2000 and 2012, a recent study places us as top (Kaplan and Mapes 2016). This is an important achievement given the sustained challenges for women across the discipline (Domosh 2000; Luzzadder-Beach and Macfarlane 2000; Monk, Droogleever Fortuijn and Raleigh 2004). But this finding also gives us pause. Indirectly, it highlights the elided challenges faced by women of color, and suggests to us that distinct, if connected, strategies are required to address antiblackness. In turn, it suggests that liberal efforts to increase, for example, numbers of female graduate students, often do not fundamentally challenge wider reaching power structures.

Our review of national, institutional, and departmental-level data makes clear that the problem of racial injustice in our discipline is now a well-researched reality. Crucially, our discipline recognizes this as a problem. This is evidenced through statements, speeches, funds, and pilot programs initiated by the AAG (Lawson 07/2004; Darden et al 2006; Estaville and Frazier 2009;

Pandit 2009; Schlemper and Monk 2011; Kobayashi 09/2011, 05/2012; Sheppard 12/12, 7/12; Solís et al 2014; Domosh 02/2015, 06/2015, 05/2015; MacDonald 01/2017). Together, this body of commentary and analysis confirm the reflections of our prospective student. That indeed, geography has a long way to go.

### **The grounds of whiteness in geography**

Why is this the case? Geographers, along with a wider body of scholars, have carefully researched this issue. We now have a solid understanding of the interwoven elements producing this stasis. We take seriously Kobayashi's argument that to understand the challenges of building "diversity" in geography, and indeed celebrate it, we must confront our discipline's long histories of racism (2012, 3). Higher education itself is situated within a wider structural context that limits educational equity (Solís et al 2014)<sup>6</sup>. But our quantitative analysis is powerful in demonstrating that, while these structural factors affect all STEM and social science fields, geography's African American and Hispanic rates still lag behind. As such we ask: why, despite these common challenges, does geography in particular still see lower rates of African American and Hispanic students?

Here we follow Katz (2001) and McKittrick (2013) in seeking to understand the *grounds* of this complex issue: its historical production and sedimentation, how it produces and constructs power

inequities, and how it forms in particular ways in distinct intellectual and physical places.

Geography has deeply rooted racist grounds, formed via capitalist colonial endeavors that extend to the present day (Kobayashi and Peake 2000). The connected, and colonially rooted, racialization of ‘wilderness’, ‘nature’, and ‘the great outdoors’ has alienated, distanced, and dispossessed people of color (Finney 2014; Mollett 2015). This has powerful legacies for the construction of nature (and formerly colonized spaces and subjects more generally) as appropriate objects of study for white researchers (Pulido 2015; Abbott 2006; Kobayashi 1994). Further layered here, is the exclusion, marginalization and non-recognition of Black and antiracist thought from the discipline’s early formations; the ongoing forgetting of key geographers of color in our intellectual history (Kobayashi 2014).

This racialized, colonial history plays an important part of geography’s ongoing injustices. However, the problem is also entrenched and reproduced by racisms that take new and varied forms, rooted in and produced through place. Explicit and overt aggressions, what Pulido calls “personal prejudice and racial hostility” (2015: 3) are influential, though they are widely (at least publicly) condemned in our geographic community<sup>7</sup>. But racial injustice is woven into a more expansive and widely-sanctioned quilt of structural racisms; our legal frameworks and systems of governance, the policies, ideologies, and cultural practices of our institutions and departments (Pulido 2014, 2002; Kobayashi and Peake 1994; Peake and Kobayashi 2002), and via the whitening imperatives of our neoliberalizing public educational system (Abbott 2006; Kobayashi 2014; Kobayashi, Lawson and Sanders 2014; Pulido 2015). Much of this is enacted in our everyday ways of working and being together: dismissals, closures, silences, denials, exclusions, the sense of being unseen, unheard, misheard. The expected and considerable labor of ‘fitting in’ and how this goes unrecognized, unvoiced, and unchallenged. The lack of encouragement,

recognition, and invitation that can turn students away from their discipline and hinder the recruitment, support, retention and advancement of women, faculty of color, and in particular women faculty of color. The limited engagement with racial power in our curricula, colloquia, and research agendas. And on and on.

Research in the U.S. (Pulido 2002, 2014; Domosh 05/2015; Joshi, McCutcheon and Sweet 2015), the UK and Canada (Mahtani 2004, 2006; Ahmed 2012; Desai 2017; Tolia-Kelley 2017) shed light on these quotidian violences of intellectual injustice. The adhesive holding together our disciplinary apparatus of structural sexism-racism. At [university] the most recent and incisive report on faculty diversity argues, “nothing will change if one expects only those who are here ‘being diversity’ to also undertake the enormous task of ‘doing diversity’”. Diverse faculty long for relief from the emotional, intellectual and physical exhaustion that accompanies their academic and personal lives” (Heinzelman and Nicholus 2017: 8). Rather than simply a ‘quality’ or ‘quantity’ problem, an argument that positions students and faculty of color as lacking, the evidence confirms that the cause of our disciplinary whiteness is rooted in far more complex, historically rooted and sustained structural racisms. Together these cement the “toxic environments” (Mahtani 2014; 2017) that stymie a just geography.

### **Moving forward: Research Collectives**

These reflections prompt a sense of intractability, of paralysis. We sit with and recognize this feeling. And we try to move. Scholars have devoted their careers to better understanding what works (Bengochea 2010; Smith et al 2004; Turner et al 2017). There are well-recognized, *effective* strategies to build racial justice in our academy. Many are not complicated or difficult to implement, if the will is there. In geography we have seen important positive moves<sup>8</sup>. Most

comprehensively, the ALIGNED project-participants developed 32 experience-based ideas<sup>9</sup> for geography departments to enhance diversity (Solís and Ng 2012). Varied and instructive, they speak to the importance of *prioritizing* diversity (e.g. developing and evaluating plans for recruitment and department well-being), *conveying* this priority publicly (e.g. through the website, job adverts and recruitment materials), and using *non-traditional networks* in faculty and graduate recruitment (e.g. targeting HBCUs, HSIs, nontraditional undergraduate majors, and more diverse mailing lists). While clear and achievable, they are not simply a checklist, but an effective tool to prompt *meaningful and sustained* discussion, action and structural change.

Mentoring is widely recognized as a vital part of these wider efforts (Grant 2012; Reddick 2012; Reddick and Young 2012). Within our field, feminist geographers have long advocated for the radical potential of mentoring for women (Moss et al. 1999; Hardwick 2005; Domosh 2015; Datta and Lund 2017; Oberhauser and Caretta in review; Al-Saleh et al. 2018 for the most recent AAG panel discussions), though they are not alone in highlighting its wider importance (Cheruvilil 2014). Mentoring generates intrapersonal relationships of trust and care that in return transform research itself, decentralizing and challenging the production of hegemonic knowledge, research practices and advising norms. Mentoring policy and practices alone, without wider institutional and societal shifts, cannot address diversity. However, since much of the structure of the academy is centered around research, and instruction and advising tied to research, radical mentorship serves as a potential site of deeply rooted structural change.

Recognizing these transformative possibilities, student and peer-faculty mentoring has become a central part of what makes our work meaningful. Yet, we are academic workers at a flagship

university, powerfully driven by neoliberalizing benchmarks (Caretta et al 2018; Mountz et al 2015). We each face traditional academic hurdles while navigating the gendered and racialized environments we describe above. We find ourselves under pressure. We are keenly aware of the many hours we invest in mentoring work that we do not spend writingpublishingwritingpublishing. We recognize and value calls for slow, meaningful scholarship while providing emotional, intellectual and professional support to our peers and students (Mahatani 2006; Mountz et al 2015). Indeed, as feminist geographers we refuse to separate our “work” from these kinds of efforts. Indeed we are epistemologically unable to do so. For us, a research collective offers one way forward.

The Feminist Geography Collective emerges out of these connected imperatives: to survive, thrive and resist in a neoliberalizing research institution; to expand our departmental space through networks of feminist intellectual thought and practice; and to support students excited by geographic research, but who do not see a place for themselves within the discipline<sup>10</sup>. In defiance, we strive to make our collective that place. Founded on longer-established mentoring and research relationships, Caroline Faria, a graduate student (Dominica Whitesell), and an undergraduate student (Annie Elledge) self-organized as a ‘collective’ in Fall 2016. Their connected research centered Caroline’s NSF-funded project on the geographies of hair and beauty, with a rich, qualitative dataset of images, newspaper articles, social media coverage, participatory maps, focus groups, and interview transcripts collected from fieldsites in Uganda and the United Arab Emirates. We met for two hours each week. In spring 2017 three undergraduates joined the group. Some came regularly, others when they could. Other we described as ‘friends of the collective’, offering or asking for support as needed. We sought to create a space of support, retreat, and recuperation. Of fun and feminist rigor. Where enthusiasm

for academia, excitement about *ideas*, an embrace of challenging and complex problems, is cultivated as and through the practice of feminist antiracist research.

The collective is founded on a feminist ethics of knowledge production, research practice and caring, transformative space-making. We view mentoring and research as inseparable. First, a feminist and antiracist *epistemology* informs our attitude to knowledge and knowledge production. It shapes the research design, analysis, writing, and sharing of our findings. At each stage we reflect on how power, in varied forms and including our own, shapes the process. Such an approach also demands that we recognize the centrality of our research collaborators in Uganda, who are part of the collective and with whom we maintain regular contact. This enables a more rigorous and grounded approach to our data, strengthening our findings and fostering more innovative, accessible outputs.

Our feminist epistemology reflects and informs our feminist and antiracist *practice*, the nuts and bolts of our weekly work. We recognize and try to deconstruct power hierarchies in the academy and in our group, fostering a sense of responsibility to the collective that respects the different pressures we each endure. Members practice peer to peer, bottom-up, and traditional top-down mentoring, taking turns at more tedious labor, presenting research, facilitating meetings, and writing. Through this model each participant (including the faculty) receive useful mentoring tools, while providing valuable research labor to the group. Moreover, by sharing the mentoring responsibility, the weight and repetition of mentoring labor is reduced. This intellectual labor provides analyzed data from Caroline's NSF-funded project and makes possible a set of shared "outputs" (in neoliberal terms), including academic grants and publications (co-authored and

lead-authored by student-members), honors and graduate theses, conference presentations, and posters.

Also central here is a feminist practice of collaboration and sharing or ‘commoning’ (see Henry, 2018), one that rejects neoliberal drives for competition. This includes creating a database of materials like sample research proposals, human subjects applications, graduate applications, and editorial cover letters. It also means word-of-mouth advice to navigate the frustrations, roadblocks, and opportunities (often obscured to women and minority students) of everyday academic life.

Last, we work to create a caring, rigorous, and transformative feminist *space* for our work. We take time to discuss the different pressures we are each under and the challenges we each face, to watch lectures on the topic (for example Mahtani 2017), or to critically reflect on campus presentations, readings, assignments, or events that prompted frustration, irritation, anxiety, or paralysis. We also seek to critically reflect on our own practice, to acknowledge, and learn from our own moments of racism, sexism, and privilege. This critical, caring space extends to UT-based friends of the collective, a wider, and growing network of feminist collectives (in the US, Canada, and Switzerland), and our research collaborators in Kampala, Uganda.

It was in one of these moments of critical reflexivity, at the end of our first year, that the racial makeup of the group came into focus. We had solicited undergraduate members through informal networks and recommendations within Geography and a program that department is closely aligned with, [Political Science]. We welcomed those who *knew* of and expressed interest

in the group. But this uncritical recruitment method shaped the racial formation of our initial membership. The students were self-motivated and inspiring to work with. And they all identified as white.

Critically reflecting on our recruitment strategy, we recognized we were reproducing the whiteness of the discipline. Less evident in debates around mentoring is the fact that *not all* practices of mentoring are effective in supporting gender and racial diversity, and not all *feminist* practices of mentoring are effective in supporting students of color. They must be attentive to the interconnected work of *both* racial and gendered power. Despite our thoughtful efforts to build a feminist space, we realized that we were no more transformative in terms of racial justice than the wider field of critical geography (both human and physical) which, as Berg notes, remains “an amazingly white field of research and teaching” (2012, p509).

In response, we researched strategies to address intersectional exclusion. ALIGNED’s 32 tips (Solís & Ng 2012) helped, as did our varied experiences. This included time engaged with faculty searches on campus in centers and departments where diversity was actively centered, and both the students experiences with, and strategies to mitigate, exclusions in their classrooms. We determined four strategies. We crafted an advert and accompanying website that centered our commitment to diversity. We mailed this to a broader range of undergraduate advisors and listservs, including geography, Government and International Relations, *but also* Africa and African Diaspora Studies, Women’s and Gender Studies, Middle Eastern Studies and Latin American Studies. And we asked candidates to talk explicitly about their interest in a collective like ours, committed to gender and racial diversity. Last, we recognized the economic constraints

around our collective model, which mirrored unpaid ‘volunteer’ internships and uncredited research experiences often excluding minority and working class students. In response, we formalized a system of course credit for all participants clearly stated in our advert that research-experiences (from lunches to conference and field travel) would be financially covered. That semester, we received a range of excellent applications and a dramatically diversified pool. Our collective, and its growing visibility, also played a vital role in the successful recruitment of a graduate student and a new assistant professor that year, both women of color. Each named the collective as central to their decision to join the intellectual community at UT. One new undergraduate member noted in our end-of-year reflections that she had never considered geography as a field of study. But when she read the advert, and learned more about the collective she began to *see herself* as a geographer. This is a sea change from the sentiment expressed in the opening words of this article.

A year later, the collective and its members are doing well. Our four undergraduates presented at the AAGs this year in New Orleans, while the last was in the field conducting fully-funded independent research on gender and state violence in Turkey. We have won multiple college, university, and national awards (including our college’s sole social science undergraduate thesis award), many undergraduate research fellowships, a Mellon-Mays undergraduate fellowship, a research paper award, and a NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program award. Our two most junior members were top six finalists in a university-wide research competition. Amongst the awardees, they were the only finalists selected from our college. Two women of color representing the student body of researchers in the entire College of Liberal Arts. The *undergraduate students alone* have earned over \$40,000 in research funding and awards,

presented on campus, nationally and internationally, and are now submitting articles for consideration in our discipline's top journals. We recognize that these metrics of success form part of the new neoliberal measures that are reshaping intellectual life and work. Yet through the collective, we found that we could provide *both* a supportive environment for navigating academia *and* a space to produce meaningful, rigorous, intellectual work. In this sense, we used the research collective to operate more healthily within our neoliberalizing academy, one cast in the existing mold of racial and gendered power.

In the fall, we will grow to include three new faculty, a new graduate student, and five new undergraduate students, with new strands of research on environmental racism, feminist economic geography, and feminist migration studies. Women of color are now well-represented, and in the majority, at each career stage. Building on our efforts to attract and support more students of color, we are more clearly articulating an *antiracist feminist* practice. And, while our focus is intersectional, we see insights for wider diversity work. It doesn't mean the students will now sail through all the challenges of life and work in the academy. But we believe such a collective is part of the path that makes the journey possible.

We might seem provocative, or naïve, to suggest it was *not that hard* to diversify our small corner of geography. But ofcourse, in addition to a few hours reflecting, crafting an advert and website narrative, and publicizing it, we had already spent years thinking, reading, and listening to understand that racial diversity matters, to know the language to use, and to build recruitment networks. ALIGNED's resources are an excellent starting point for those without this knowledge. Ofcourse, succeeding requires wide-ranging structural policy and practice shifts. But we can make meaningful changes in how we think, act, and produce knowledge within our field,

no matter our chosen epistemologies and methodologies. Given that even critical strands are also dominated by White scholars and norms of whiteness, this move *alone* may not foster, and may even confound, racial justice (Pulido 2002; Mahtani 2006; Sanders 2006; Nayak 2011; Berg 2012; Kobayashi et al. 2014). As such, we must also support and sustain far more students and faculty of color across all reaches of the field. Antiracist mentoring must be part of a department and discipline-wide transformation if we are to see *meaningful* diversity, i.e. *intellectual racial justice* in geography<sup>11</sup>.

## Conclusion

We began this article with the words of scholars at very different ends of the professional spectrum: a preeminent geographer with an expansive body of urban geographic work and an undergraduate student, a geographer-in-the-making. Their words, complemented by wide-ranging qualitative and quantitative data, make clear that *in three decades* our discipline has failed to make meaningful progress towards racial justice: in our AAG membership, and in the faculty and student makeup of most of our departments. Other fields are making strides. The American Association for the Advancement of Science, American Geophysical Union, and National Academy of Sciences, have concrete goals for improving diversity as well as dedicated funding and resources. These plans also recognize their disciplines must assume *responsibility* for the “limited participation of diverse groups” and correct for how weaknesses in their structure and culture have impinged upon minorities (AGU 2002 p.1; AAAS 2011; NAS 2011). Given our slow disciplinary progress, we must double our efforts to disrupt the social and spatial foundations of racism, inequality, and exclusion. Without this commitment we will never meaningfully address the intellectual, institutional, and personal losses inflicted by racial power.

We will not answer our most urgent questions; indeed they may not even be asked. And, more importantly perhaps, we cannot claim to be a discipline with justice of any kind at its heart: environmental, human, or other. What then, does that make us?

But we refuse to close here. We are filled with excitement and energy for another geographic world. We firmly support sustained structural changes at the national and departmental levels, mirroring and exceeding efforts we see elsewhere in the academy. As part of this work, and following feminist geographic moves elsewhere (Fem-mentee collective 2017, Mountz et al. 2015 and the unpublished but vital work of collectives like those at UNC-Chapel Hill, UK, and Penn State) we recognize the centrality of mentorship to racial intellectual justice. Research collectives, in myriad forms but always with social justice at their heart, are one expression that disciplinary-changing *mentoring as research* might take. They enrich our work, provide respite, energize, detoxify, and make us more responsive to the most pressing issues of our time. And while racial injustice has *always* been a problem, in this moment of explicit white nationalist ascendancy more geographers are recognizing its centrality in shaping our lives, and the importance of responding. Let's use this moment to respond effectively, to build on the sophisticated, layered, and largely unheeded work that has gone before, and move towards racial justice in geography.

### **Author Biographies**

CAROLINE FARIA is a feminist political and cultural geographer. Her research examines how gendered and racial power shape nationalism and neoliberal globalization, with a focus on East Africa-Gulf networks and the geographies of hair and beauty.

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<sup>1</sup> These terms reflect those used in the quantitative data. We acknowledge that racial/ethnic identity is more complex than these categories capture, and that other minorities experience exclusion. We contend that all minorities are differently and negatively affected by racial intellectual injustice, as is the discipline as a whole. However, we focus on ‘African American’ and ‘Hispanic’ communities here. They see some of the highest rates of exclusion and marginalization in wider academia (Reddick and Young 2012), in our discipline (Solís et al. 2014), and our institution (Heinzelman and Nicholus 2017). Yet, as scholars have argued (Winders and Schein 2014, among others), we have limited studies in geography that focus specifically on these groups or the specific forms of racism they experience. In connection, studies of ‘diversity’ that do not carefully disaggregate by racial groups, while valuable, can actually *mask* the different experiences, forms, and effects of racism. In response, our article highlights a particular feminist antiracist intervention that explicitly addresses *antiblackness* (Mollett and Faria 2018).

<sup>2</sup> STEM fields include Biological and Biomedical Sciences, Computer and Information Sciences, Engineering and Engineering Technologies, Mathematics and Statistics, and Physical Sciences and science technologies.

<sup>3</sup> “Social Sciences”, as defined by the NCES, includes Anthropology, Geography, Political Science and Government, Urban Studies, Sociology, amongst others. 1990-2000 data include History, the years thereafter do not.

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<sup>4</sup> UT Austin, unlike a number of its sister institutions in Texas is not yet an “Hispanic-Serving Institution” (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities 2016).

<sup>5</sup> We refer here to the “teaching faculty” used in the report by Heinzelman and Nicholus (2017), which includes tenured, tenure track and non-tenured instructional faculty.

<sup>6</sup> Neighborhood and school poverty, racially segregated schools, and inadequate funding for a wide range of health care, food and other safety nets diminish minority and low-income students’ access to educational opportunities and educational outcomes (Katz 2004; Wright et al 2010; Falola 2017; Falola and Faria 2018). In turn, factors such as exclusionary discipline practices, inadequate or nonexistent materials and labs, and varying access to college-preparatory or advanced placement courses also create structural barriers that contribute to minority under-representation in higher education and across different disciplines (Kobayashi, Lawson and Sanders 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Consider, most recently, the widely-condemned publication of a pro-colonial argument in *Third World Quarterly*, a piece rejected in the review process but subsequently published. Itself an act of intellectual racism, the organizing efforts of one female geographer of color were met with aggressive backlash. Such overt racism inflicts visceral violence on individuals while *also* sending chilling shock waves throughout our wider community (Sultana 2018).

<sup>8</sup> For example: the longstanding work of the Race, Ethnicity and Place steering committee; diversity efforts in the Department of Geography at the University of Washington (<https://geography.washington.edu/diversity-and-inclusivity>); the UNC-Chapel Hill’s Moore Undergraduate Research Program, with which Geographers are actively involved; the University of Tennessee-Knoxville’s faculty development program; a recent Berkeley Black Geographies Symposium ([berkeleyblackgeographies.com](http://berkeleyblackgeographies.com)); and the work of the Black Geographies specialty

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group (<https://blackgeographies.org>). We welcome further examples ongoing within and beyond the US.

<sup>9</sup> ALIGNED 32 ideas: <http://www.aag.org/cs/programs/diversity/aligned/32ideas>

<sup>10</sup> We are inspired by varied collective models, including within Geography Departments at Penn State, UNC-Chapel Hill and the University of Kentucky, and the University of Bern, and within trans-departmental groups like the Great Lakes Feminist Geography Collective.

<sup>11</sup> We recognize here, and value deeply, the vital role of our own mentors. Echoing Kobayashi (2006), given our discipline's whiteness most of these have not been faculty of color, nor have they all been feminists geographers. We say this to make clear that all geographers committed to a just discipline have a role to play.