

An Open Letter to the Board of ASOR:

The moniker *The American Schools of Oriental Research* is a shameful name for the most prominent membership organization in Near Eastern Studies. *Oriental* is a term rife with a legacy of negative associations. It carries with it a racist, reductionist portrayal of the multitude of communities present throughout the regions of Asia and North Africa. This critique was expressed over forty years ago in the seminal book, *Orientalism*, by Edward Said, and in his and other scholars' re-writing on the topic since.

This term connects our present work in the region, with a history of archaeology as a tool for colonialist endeavors in the construction of arbitrarily demarcated states, the theft of cultural heritage under the guise of a patronizing concern for preservation, and the continuing depiction of local communities as static and underdeveloped and therefore in need of intervention. We implore the organization to make a commitment to framing research as done at the behest of primarily local stakeholder communities, therefore carrying a duty to involve representatives in every aspect of the research process, from designing research questions to deriving best practices in fieldwork to dissemination of research findings to exhibition of cultural heritage. We envision our organization promoting this new standard in the research of our members by updating grant expectations to include documentation of these efforts as well as explicitly defining timelines for post-field analyses and the ultimate repatriation of objects of cultural value.

We are far from the first group of scholars to see an issue with this name and take action to rectify the problem. As of now, a committee has formed to move forward on devising a new name for the organization, and they have made efforts to survey the membership about potential name replacements. We support these efforts, but would caution against any utilization of 'Near Eastern' or 'Middle Eastern' in the new title, as these terms also position the region in relation to an Euro-centric perspective. This necessary divestment with this racist terminology is only the first phase of a reckoning of our participation in a system of inequality. We must undertake this effort to critique our institution if we wish to be an organization with a membership that reflects the totality of a community with interest in the study of this heritage, not just those of us in Euro-American academic institutions.

We would also like to encourage you, as a leading organization in our field, to commit to thinking about broader initiatives that contribute to promoting anti-racism and diversity and to decolonizing our profession. While promoting diversity in a more general sense is admirable, we feel that specifically supporting current and future Black and Indigenous students and scholars in the field is imperative.

- To promote a diverse member body, the organization should provide additional support and mentoring of Black students, other students of color, and other underrepresented groups. The organization should partner with faculty and students from HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities) and MSIs (Minority Serving Institutions), providing them support and a strong platform to ensure that more BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) students enter the field and thrive within it.
- We ask that the organization establish a fellowship for BIPOC students.
- We ask that a policy is put in place for instituting tailored implicit bias training for those in leadership roles engaging in the process of creating and renewing any and all ASOR-affiliated field projects
- We ask that those field projects with affiliations to the organization or pursuing such affiliations be required to pursue formal collaborations with faculty at HBCUs or MSIs in order to provide

more opportunities for BIPOC students to be introduced to our field and have their interest cultivated through institutional mentorship.

- We ask that the organization create a DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) Committee to address the lack of diversity in the leadership and membership of the organization. This committee should include BIPOC scholars and range from graduate students to career professionals. The committee should be headed by co-chairs in order to diversify the voices of representation on the CCC (Council of Committee Chairs). Additionally, a new Board member seat should be instituted, and this seat should be filled by a member of the DEI committee.
- We would also like to see the formation of a number of recurring workshops that would focus on ongoing efforts to decolonize our research, since the history of our profession is very much bound to white supremacist ideologies and other problematic colonial practices and systemic racism. Topics relevant to such workshops include (but are not limited to):
 - analyzing troubling histories of scholarship and identifying ways forward
 - designing syllabi that center the work of Black and minority scholars, including integration of the theoretical scholarship of scholars outside of archaeology specifically
 - developing anti-racist practices in scholarship
 - a general re-imagining of what the role of this discipline should be in the present day

These workshops should be developed in coordination with BIPOC scholars or educators, whose work should be appropriately compensated.

We the members of this organization have the power to prioritize new objectives and begin taking steps on the long arduous path to justice and equity in our discipline. This community of scholars can be visionaries in the future of ethical pursuit of our work, rather than merely doing just enough to keep up with peer institution standards.

Sincerely,

Abigail Buffington, William & Mary

Ioana A. Dumitru, CSRM Foundation

Lesley A. Gregoricka, University of South Alabama

Smiti Nathan, Johns Hopkins University

Tiffany Earley-Spadoni, University of Central Florida

Allison Mickel, Lehigh University

Laurel A. Poolman, Johns Hopkins University

Jill S. Waller, Johns Hopkins University

Morgan E. Moroney, Johns Hopkins University

Rosanne Liebermann, Washington University in St. Louis

Susan Guise Sheridan, University of Notre Dame

Alexander Nagel, State University of New York, FIT

Annalee Sekulic, Ohio State University

Rachel Kalisher, Brown University

Pinar Durgun, The Met

Avary Taylor, Johns Hopkins University

Ian W. N. Jones, University of California San Diego

Craig A. Harvey, University of Michigan

Alexis T. Boutin, Sonoma State University

Kara Larson, University of Michigan

Petra M. Creamer, University of Pennsylvania

Bianca Hand, Johns Hopkins University

Jonathan Gardner, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Anna Glenn, LMU Munich

Danielle Steen Fatkin, Dept of History, Knox College

Anne Austin, Assistant Professor of Anthropology & Archaeology at the University of Missouri St. Louis

Joseph Lehner, USyd

Marc Flores, Johns Hopkins University

Jaime Ullinger, Quinnipiac University

Amir Zaribaf

Sasha Boghosian, McGill University