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Charge

ASOR Task Force on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

ASOR is and has always been a predominantly white organization. We can tally our members of color on a single page. Why is this the case? How can we make progress toward correcting it? We archaeologists, ancient historians, and philologists who make up the professional membership of ASOR study the origins, growth and transformations of systemically unequal social orders in the past, and we have a duty to use our knowledge fight the perpetuation of oppressive systems in the present.

Our first job, however, must be to put our own house in order. We have made progress on some diversity issues in the past. Our gender balance has improved markedly; our international membership has grown, and our foreign members now have full status; we have worked to empower our early career scholars. Supporting the latter two groups were goals of our 2015-2020 Strategic Plan. Recruiting Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) to our membership was not a priority there. Now is the time to make it one as we revise our current plan and craft our next strategic plan.

Therefore, the first charge to the Task Force on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (hereafter DEI) is to seek out methods and recommend programs through which ASOR can recruit and support BIPOC members. This is not a simple task. The pool is shallow. Recent studies (Montañez 2018) show African Americans make up only 1.5% of recent Ph. D.s in Archaeology. Our related disciplines of Classics and Middle Eastern Studies produced a dismal 0% in recent years. Clearly, we must make major efforts to interest young pre-College students in our work. How to do this? Possibly by partnering with community organizations such as Archaeology in the Community (AITC). The task force should seek out and identify such partners.

Once attracted to our discipline how do we encourage BIPOC students to stay in it? Scholarships is one obvious answer, but money is scarce in the humanities. Figuring out how to raise money for such scholarships to support students both in school and in the field should be a priority for the Task Force. Again, partnerships should be sought both with colleges, foundations and private donors. We also need to examine our own assumptions about matters of diversity. The DEI Task Force should research and recommend appropriate means of sensitivity training for our leadership.

It is equally important to make ASOR's activities more attractive and in tune with the concerns of our BIPOC members, as well as the rest of our increasingly socially conscious membership. ASOR was founded in 1900 but times have moved on. Archaeology has a long history of benefitting from and providing intellectual support to colonialism and colonialist goals. The decolonization of our discipline regardless of our BIPOC members must be a goal of the organization. We must make ASOR an organization more in tune with the social justice

movements of our day. Changing the ways we teach, designing more open syllabi, asking different research questions beyond empires and great men are all good directions. We have made progress in these directions over the past several decades, but there is more to do. A more diverse membership will move us ahead by asking different questions from different viewpoints.

To succeed in these bold changes ASOR must integrate the principles of DEI systematically throughout our organization. Every one of our standing committees will have a role in this, and increasing diversity will be major goals. For instance, the Program Committee can solicit panels to propose new models of research and teaching; the Committee on Archaeological Research and Policy can fashion fieldwork fellowships for BIPOC members, and the Development Committee can devise ways to fund them. The Outreach and Membership Committee has an important role to play in recruitment and retention, while the Cultural Heritage Committee can see that our treatment of cultural heritage is respectful and takes into account indigenous concerns. Finally, our Honors and Awards and Publication committees can see that work by BIPOC members receives appropriate recognition.

Time Line: A DEI task force has been on our radar for some time, current events make its work urgent. We would like to have the task force formed and working by Sept. 1. With the CCC committees working on their own diversity goals now, this fall would be the ideal time for the Task Force and the CCC to coordinate their efforts. If possible, it would be optimal for the DEI Task Force to provide a preliminary report to the Board at its spring 2021 meeting, when the revised strategic plan will also be presented.
