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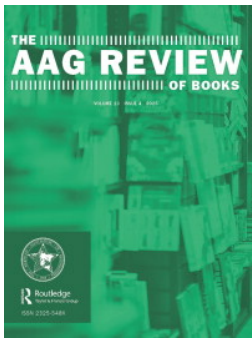
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## How to Foster Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice in Geography

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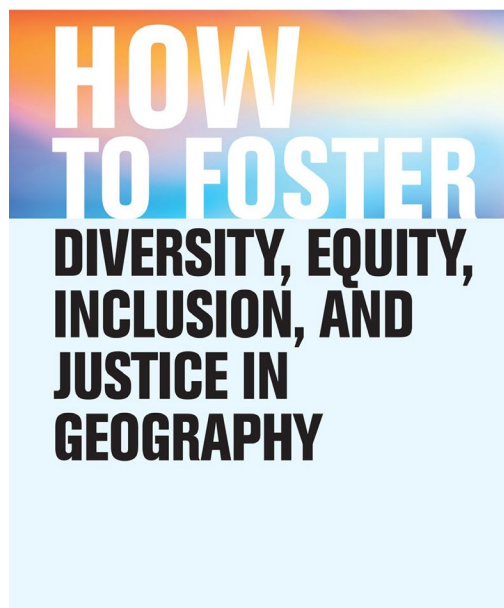
# How to Foster Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice in Geography

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As they prepared this volume in 2022, the coeditors could not have fathomed what would transpire in higher education in the United States in 2025: the relentless attacks on academic freedom and institutional independence; the systematic defunding, and thus the dismantling, of the well-respected U.S. research enterprise; and the weaponization of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) rhetorics among other things. Although elite higher educational institutions in the United States have borne the brunt of the Trump administration's attacks thus far, they reflect larger patterns of rising nationalisms across the globe that are attempting to tamp down free thought and the independence of educational institutions. Against this global political landscape, voices that bravely continue to advocate for DEIJ, like the ones proffered in this book, are all the more needed to combat the climate of intimidation and vulnerability. As this book is written by and for geographers, it serves as an important reminder that geography, as a discipline, has a responsibility and ethical imperative to use the scope of its

Edited by  
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resources—disciplinary knowledge, research tools, technological advancement and institutional and financial resources—to serve the needs of all of its members and protect those who are most marginal and at risk of being silenced. Geography and geographers must respond to global political threats in a timely, ethical manner.

Of course, many subdisciplines in geography emerged precisely to address these concerns head on. Feminist, labor and postcolonial geographies, critical urban studies, and critical geographic information systems (GIS) have long produced impactful histories of interdisciplinary scholarship that have attended to questions of social inequality, power, and transformative change. Yet, decades of cutting-edge theorizing of race, gender, and other social differences

have barely made a dent in improving the racial composition of the discipline. In one of the book's early chapters, Jordan and Raji point out that although gender representation has steadily increased in the discipline over the past couple of decades, undergraduates and graduate geography and geoscience programs are more than 80 percent white in the United States and the United Kingdom with very little change from previous decades. Furthermore, early career researchers of color in these fields face disproportionately lower levels of funding than white researchers. Troublingly, as I also learned through reading the book, Black and Latinx specialty groups have only been established a decade or so ago despite calls throughout the 1990s and early 2000s that highlighted this need (K. Davis, Nimoh, and Reason; Ybarra and Munoz). It raises the question as to why geography is slow to apply the discipline's radical thinking to the discipline itself.

Coeditors Chen and Eaves write that “our goal [is] to create a growing community of theories and praxis for all interested in understanding, fostering, advancing, imagining, and envisioning a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and just intellectual community of geography, including a space from which all under-represented geographers can speak” (p. 3). This book is an excellent starting place to learn about previous and ongoing DEIJ work in the discipline and unique projects building on these efforts. A strength of the book is the quality and range of the chapter contributions, and each chapter takes on a salient issue many geographers confront in their work, be it in their teaching, research, policy development, or efforts to promote institutional change, and explores a specific DEIJ-related issue within it. The focus spans the Anglo-American world with contributors from a range of backgrounds and identities hailing from the United Kingdom, North America, Southeast Asia, and the South Pacific. The chapter contributors probe the issues with thoughtfulness and depth, uncovering multilayered dimensions to the problems, and put forth novel ways of addressing them. Many of the contributors also thoughtfully acknowledge their own positionalities and locate themselves on a global spectrum to identify the intersecting layers of social privilege or marginality that shape their perspectives—an intentional effort to put DEIJ principles into practice. I walked away from reading this volume invigorated with fresh new ideas, tools, and additional resources to deepen both my DEIJ thinking and praxis as a geographer.

The book is organized into three parts (or as a sequence of inquiries as the coeditors also put it): “Understanding DEI and Justice in Geography” (“what do we know?”); “Praxis and Examples of Fostering DEI and Justice in Geography” (“what can we do?”), and “Future of DEI and Justice in Geography: New Tools, Methods and Directions” (“what is next?”). Following the introduction, Chief Strategy Officer for the American Association of Geographers (AAG) Risha RaQuelle provides a framework for understanding institutional change and the ways the AAG has been advancing DEIJ goals since the murder of George Floyd, representing efforts to directly cultivate DEIJ at the disciplinary level in the United States. The subsequent first part “sets the epistemic and empirical foundations for DEI and justice in geography” (p. 5), and is the largest of the three subsequent parts. It consists of nine chapters, making up almost half the book. Most of the chapters that survey and locate the conversation in the discipline on a single axis of social grouping: Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Asian American, international, (dis-)abled and queer geographies, with the aforementioned chapter on the racial composition of geography and geoscience students in the United States and United Kingdom framing the part.

My reaction to the chapter-by-chapter sequencing is a bit mixed: On the one hand, each chapter gets readers up to speed about the work being done in each of these subfields. Collectively, they make the important point about shifting the foci of DEIJ conversations from issues of representation, belonging, and procedural justice to ones of epistemology, knowledge creation, and analytic frameworks and methodologies, what Mei-Singh, Cheng, and Chen, borrowing from Shih (2016), refer to as “epistemic justice.” The chapters also highlight the challenges, as Anindita Datta puts it, of the intense emotional labor of “negotiating race, gender, and location in white field.” Much of this work addresses what Settles and colleagues (Settles et al. 2021; Settles et al. 2022) referred to as “epistemic exclusion”—the way unconscious bias operates through the gatekeeping mechanisms of the academy. Epistemic justice aims to rectify the emotional exhaustion of epistemic exclusion by broadening the scope of epistemology and methodological tools to affirm cultural- or community-based ways of knowing. It is brilliantly illustrated in the chapter by Megan Ybarra and Lorena Munoz when they discuss their efforts to create a Latinx geographies specialty group (instead of an affinity group) within the AAG.

At the same time, put together in this way, the chapters felt a bit schematic and not fully reflective of the complex, intersectional ways these categories play out in the real world. I caution against presenting social groups as neatly bounded categories because of the way they can be easily taken for granted by those less well-versed in DEIJ thought. The concepts of intersectionality, positionalities, and ambiguous identities are illustrated in individual chapters in this part and in subsequent chapters in the book, most poignantly in the chapter by Fitzgerald, Garrett, and Sharma. Given the part’s length and centrality to the book, however, it would have been helpful if the coeditors discussed these concepts in more explicit terms to frame this part, perhaps through an introductory or concluding part that clarified the intersectional, overlapping nature of social identity categories. They do offer a bit of this analysis in the introduction, but it could be deepened and emphasized in the first part to ensure that the messiness and fluidity of these categories get reinforced there.

Similarly, the part could benefit from an additional chapter on critical whiteness in geography. Focusing solely on marginalized or underrepresented groups makes it easy to assume that DEIJ advocacy is the responsibility of those most negatively affected by mainstream policies and practices—a conclusion easily drawn without examples that analyze white privilege. There are several chapters by geographers who identify as white and critically address the persistent

whiteness in the discipline (e.g., through decolonial school geography in the United Kingdom, teaching geography courses from a social justice perspective at predominantly white institutions as a white instructor in the United States). An explicit chapter on critical whiteness in the epistemologically focused “what do we know?” part, however, might clarify how geography, as a discipline with roots in Western colonialism, resource extractivism, and imperialism, has been used to justify racial hierarchies and conquest of non-Western lands and cultures (Agnew and Duncan 2011). It has also been used in more contemporary racialized and racist land-use and spatial planning projects like redlining and urban decline (Aalbers 2014), the exploitation of “uninhabited” Native American lands (Sands 2011), and the justification of South African townships (Robinson 1997). Coming to terms with geography’s complicity in the creation of systemic inequalities and social injustice means challenging the Eurocentric legacies underpinning much of mainstream geographical knowledge and practices. In drawing out these arguments, such a chapter could illustrate the ways that knowledge is not objective, neutral, and value-free; it is inherently racialized in the same ways whiteness is also racialized. This explanation could amplify the arguments made by the other contributors that highlight how culturally rooted, racialized epistemologies advance disciplinary knowledge in important—and historically overlooked—ways.

The subsequent two parts, which make up another ten chapters and the second half of the book, cover specific ways in which DEIJ is being practiced in geography and give examples of tools that can be used to continue building on this work. A wide range of important topics are represented here, topics that need to be—but are rarely—addressed in ongoing professional development for geographers. In Part II (“what can we do?”), examples include decolonial and inclusive teaching methods as previously mentioned (Puttick and Cope), institutionalizing DEIJ policies and practices at the unit level (Skop and Li), and developing guidelines for safe, inclusive, and community-engaged field work (Alwan et al.). Part III (“what is next?”) highlights a range of novel geographic tools and methodologies, like using GIS to map health inequalities (Jung); integrating (virtual) field work into teaching (York, Hurrell, and Hutchinson); and using games, podcasting, and crafting as tools for radical storytelling (H. A. Davis and Alderman), among others. The contributions in this part are grounded in praxis and real-world examples, so they address some of the messy, overlapping complexities I was seeking in the first part. At the same time, the authors helpfully discuss ways their projects could be adapted for other contexts and settings. Given

how different each project is from one another, each part would benefit if the coeditors synthesized the chapters to explicitly identify key takeaways, general principles, or strategies “to practice DEIJ in geography,” instead of leaving it to readers to deduce.

One observation about the book as a whole is that it leans heavily toward the academic. Most (but not all) of the contributors have academic credentials and affiliations, and the approaches and topics might appeal most to academic geographers. Let me make two points about this: First, for a book that is academic in orientation, I might suggest discussing the ever-increasing corporatization of academic labor and the impacts of the resulting growing toxicity of academia as a profession on scholars from underrepresented backgrounds. There is a great deal of literature on this topic outside of geography (S. M. Davis 2024; Pittman 2025; Niemann, Gutiérrez y Muhs, and González 2020) and individual chapters in the first part do take some of this up (e.g., Fabris). Much of this literature discusses the isolation and “cultural tax” of being the sole faculty member from an underrepresented group in one’s department or discipline and the increasingly extractive, dehumanizing nature of having one’s scholarship and teaching measured by productivity metrics while working within increasingly bureaucratized institutions led by a disproportionate number of highly paid leaders from the managerial class (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004; Washburn 2008). The demographic cliff, institutional fiscal crises, rising student debt, and the global pandemic have only exacerbated these issues, all of which took place before the second election of Trump. In response, departments and disciplines are downsizing and merging, and institutions are shuttering in their entirety, creating an even greater scarcity of sustainable career options on the academic job market. As geographers from underrepresented groups, how do we navigate or even make sense of this terrain? How do we reestablish a sense of self and agency over our labor and find authentic support for our work? Is a career in academic geography even worth it? In a profession with a future that is so unpredictable, how do we advise graduate and undergraduate students, especially from similarly underrepresented backgrounds, who might want to emulate our career choices? It is heartbreaking to consider, but given factors affecting the profession overall, is it possible that steering students away from academia is a means to foster DEIJ in geography? There is a lot of room to discuss the ways scholars from underrepresented backgrounds in our discipline negotiate or push back against academia’s unrelenting demands.

Second, we need to broaden the conversation to include geographers outside of academic geography. Those

adjacent to or outside of academic geography deserve to be served by these conversations as well. From my own experiences on the margins of academia (as a non-tenure-track lecturer), many nonacademic geographers do not feel they have a place in mainstream professional geography associations because of the perceived requirement that members focus heavily on research. Nonacademic geographers confront very different sets of DEIJ issues in their workplaces—issues that academics could possibly learn from, but that they, and the professional organizations that serve them, do not take up as often. If we are going to take inclusion seriously, we need to bring in voices and experiences outside the academic realm and similarly expand support by our professional associations. What does DEIJ look like for someone who teaches AP Human Geography at an urban high school? Or for a federal worker who is no longer permitted to use the language of “diversity, equity and inclusion” in their workplace? Or for someone who is head of a food justice nonprofit or an entrepreneur running her own GIS consulting firm? Incorporating these perspectives can showcase the diverse range of professions in which geographers work while bringing in different sets of questions, concerns and analytical lenses to DEIJ in geography. In turn, it also broadens what DEIJ in geography looks like and who is served by this profession.

Overall, *How to Foster Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice in Geography* is an excellent starting place for learning and garnering ideas about how to put these values into practice in our field. It helped me think more deeply about how we can widen the scope of inclusion and justice in our field, some suggestions about which I have offered here. Clearly, in the current political climate, expanding knowledge and praxis under the banner of DEIJ will be harder to achieve. Although we might change the name, the framing, or the approach of what we do, it is important that, unlike the corporations and institutions who preemptively shed their commitments to DEIJ in the wake of Trump’s second election (Naidu and Jessop 2025), we continue to stand up for and work toward these ideals. Those who continue to make changes in ways big and small wherever they are, like the projects and voices represented in this book, will lead the way regardless of political circumstance. When the fiery rhetoric has died down and the dust has settled in the aftermath of this latest iteration of white nationalism, the ongoing legacies of this work will be apparent, as it is with so much past DEIJ work.

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