

# Nature Microbiology after #ShutDownSTEM

Efforts to improve representation of Black communities in *Nature Microbiology* start now.

**G**alvanized by calls from #ShutDownSTEM, Strike for Black Lives and #ShutDownAcademia, we devoted 10 June 2020 to educating ourselves about racism in science and to plan what we, the editorial team, can do to amplify Black voices and act as allies to help eradicate anti-Black racism in academia and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), in both the immediate and long-term future.

*Nature Microbiology* has six full-time, professional editors from different regions of the world, all of whom are white. We spent time individually reflecting on our education in science, from school through to undergraduate, postgraduate and postdoctoral training. We read articles and stories shared online in recent days, including those tweeted to #BlackintheIvory.

We did not have Black lecturers, nor were there many Black PhD students in our laboratories. Our experiences in education mirror published data. At undergraduate level, [Black British Professionals in STEM](#) reports that only 6.2% of UK-domiciled students studying STEM subjects are Black (4.8% Black African, 1.2% Black Caribbean and 0.2% Black Other). There are very few Black science editors known to this team. There are very few Black microbiologists represented in our pages, or at the conferences we attend or in the institutions we visit. Although we were all aware of this problem, we have not had a focused discussion at this journal on Black representation in STEM until now, and our discussions brought home the true extent of the issue.

We acknowledge that a single day of reflection cannot hope to yield solutions when others have been trying to identify and implement strategies to improve diversity in science for decades. But we are also reminded by the Black community that white people must do better and must be a part of the solution, and that systemic racism is a pervasive issue that — albeit not having any easy fixes — can also start to be addressed with individual actions, no matter how small. We must be vigilant and recognize ways in which our own racial biases, as well as systemic discrimination and inequalities,

have made success for Black researchers, authors and editors especially difficult.

This is one Editorial among the many already written by (usually) white editors of high-profile life sciences titles. That there is racism in science and in science publishing cannot be denied. We attempted to digest the tweets, videos and articles by Black academics including Lesley Weaver (<https://go.nature.com/30DWwdA>) and Jasmine Abrams (<https://go.nature.com/2ABI0bB>), and consulted sources such as [Better Allies](#) to help us in planning what we can do to improve the diversity of voices in published science.

Efforts at Springer Nature have been underway to improve diversity in authors and reviewers, as reflected in our company-wide diversity statement (<https://go.nature.com/2Y1dEYP>). Much of the effort to increase diversity in our pages to date, however, has been focused on gender or geography, but not on race. It is crucial to note that tackling diversity in science is, of course, not new and has been highlighted by commentaries in our sister journals ([Iwasaki, A. Nat. Immunol. 20, 1085–1088; 2019](#)).

What can editors do about racism in science and science publishing? Editors select manuscripts for publication. We select reviewers to provide guidance and critiques that help to improve manuscripts during peer review. We organize conferences and choose speakers to present their science. We commission articles to highlight important issues in the field. As editors, we curate content for the communities served by the journal, and in doing so we decide which topics to cover and who will write about them. We visit institutions and talk to undergraduate and graduate trainees about science, science communication and careers in publishing. We reach out to scientists working in academia, start-ups and pharmaceutical companies, and scientists who work as policymakers or in non-governmental organizations, to encourage them to submit papers or commentaries in areas of interest.

Editors therefore have multiple opportunities to amplify Black voices and mentor Black students. Our day of reflection was an opportunity to take stock of every part of our journal — from the articles we

publish to the reviewers we select; to the researchers, clinicians and policymakers we follow on Twitter; to the conferences we have organized; and to the laboratories, departments and countries we have visited — to voice uncomfortable truths and verbalize the challenge ahead.

Put simply, our team has not done enough to amplify Black voices in microbiology. We need to increase the diversity of the community of scientists we interact with and to highlight the fantastic microbiology research that is being done by all of the best scientists out there — not just the white scientists. During our day of reflection, we planned actions that we hope will amplify Black voices, and the voices of Black and minority ethnic scientists who work in all of the fields that microbiology embraces.

We will develop a diversity statement for our journal. We are increasing the number of Black and minority ethnic scientists we follow on our journal's Twitter account. We will seek out a more diverse set of authors and reviewers and improve the representation of Black experts among our reviewers. We will speak up if we are invited to attend or speak at conferences at which there are few or no Black speakers. We are committed to seeking Black speakers for conferences that we help to organize and to finding ways to diversify both speakers and attendees at conferences we are currently involved in. We will investigate ways to mentor and attract Black scientists into science publishing, by visiting and speaking at historically black colleges and universities, and at other diverse institutions. We will arrange to speak with Diversity and Inclusion committees during institutional visits. We will invite Black microbiologists to come and talk to us.

Inaction on racism is unacceptable. We must be anti-racist. We pledge to continue what we have started by setting specific goals to improve Black representation in our pages and by reporting back on our progress at the end of the year.

We welcome your comments and suggestions. □

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