



Statement of the AMS

According to the Bylaws of the American Mathematical Society, the Council of the AMS has power to speak in the name of the Society, and it does so when a statement is approved by two-thirds of the entire membership of the Council. If the president and the secretary agree that a statement in the name of the Society is urgently needed, this can be accomplished between regular Council meetings, subject to affirmation at the next regular Council meeting.

The following statement was adopted by the Council on April 2, 2022 and adopted in the name of the Society on January 3, 2023.

American Mathematical Society Statement of Apology

An apology

Mathematics is often viewed as a formal body of work, confirmed by reason and unstained by human prejudice. Mathematics as a profession is carried out by mathematicians. For too long, mathematicians have neglected the human side of our profession, and our collective failure has harmed many of our own.

The American Mathematical Society, founded in 1888 to further the interests of mathematical research and scholarship, has as a component of its mission to “advance the status of the profession of mathematics, encouraging and facilitating full participation of all individuals.” This goal is admirable. However, because of their exclusion from Society activities—including overt discrimination in the pre-Civil Rights era to today’s ongoing slights—many African Americans and members of other underrepresented groups have never felt welcomed by the AMS.

On June 12, 2020, following the murder of George Floyd by a policeman in Minneapolis, the AMS Council issued a statement which includes:

In expressing our sadness, we recognize that the commitment of the AMS to be an inclusive community and to speak out against injustice has not always been matched by corresponding actions. The AMS is an organization with shameful episodes in its long history, some of which are well-documented. We apologize for these mistakes, while realizing that this apology is not complete without a clear recognition of the depth and breadth of our mistakes.

This statement of the Council was intended only as an initial apology, while the Society worked to document its

past actions in this regard. To undertake this reckoning, AMS President Jill Pipher created a Task Force to examine the role of the Society in racial discrimination within the mathematics profession. Through the study of AMS records and interviews with many mathematicians, the Task Force produced a report¹ that documents and confirms ways that AMS policies, practices, and actions have contributed to past and ongoing discrimination to mathematicians of color, especially our African-American colleagues. This account is in no way exhaustive and is probably missing the voices of some of our colleagues. Nonetheless, there should be no doubt after reading this report or other historical accounts that African-American mathematicians have faced active exclusion from Society activities and benefits.

Today, in better understanding of our past, we provide a fuller apology for these wounds that include:

- The exclusion of Black mathematicians from meetings, social functions, and lodging at AMS meetings prior to 1960, and the listing of ‘colored’ facilities in AMS *Notices*, even after the AMS had already pledged non-discrimination in its activities.
- The lack of actions to improve the climate for mathematicians of color, such as declining to participate in a study on the involvement of minorities in national professional associations (1950), declining to create a committee to study underrepresentation (1969), declining to seek broader representation on important committees, such as the U.S. National Committee that reports to the International Mathematical Union (1982), failing to follow through some of the recommendations

¹<https://www.ams.org/about-us/understanding-ams-history>

of an AMS Task of Participation for Underrepresented Minorities in Mathematics (1996).

- The failure to effectively combat the compounded effects of racism, such as the continued marginalization of Black mathematicians and their scholarly work through lack of visibility and recognition that the AMS can provide, illustrated by the relatively low numbers of AMS Invited Speakers at JMM by Black mathematicians (two between 1967 and 2019) and the discrimination that Black mathematicians face in the math community.

Some have asked why an apology is necessary, especially if they feel they are not personally responsible for racist incidents that happened long ago, or that continue to happen. Others ask what good an apology will do now since it cannot undo the harms that have been inflicted on members of our profession. Still others wonder if the AMS is wading into a political arena, which in their view is antithetical to the nature of the profession. To address these questions, we point to a contemporary precedent by the American Medical Association, who in a similar apology, illuminates an important rationale:

Although current members of a group might bear little or no responsibility for past actions, a group apology makes clear the group's current moral orientation. Acknowledging past wrongs lays a marker for understanding and tracking current and future actions.

Not acknowledging past and ongoing wrongs calls into question our stated commitment to the full participation of all and hampers any attempts we make to repair rifts with mathematicians of color. Injurious actions are not just in the past. Hence, this apology from the American Mathematical Society is an important sign of our ongoing moral commitment to learning from our mistakes.

A pledge

An apology can only be the beginning of healing the fractured relationships that exist between the AMS and members of our profession. Concrete actions must be taken by both AMS leadership and the mathematics profession more broadly, and structural changes in policies and practices are needed to sustain progress. The AMS is committed to making the mathematics community truly welcoming to all and the Council of the AMS pledges to lead this process on behalf of the Society.