We want to thank the Board for authorizing the establishment of this task force and requesting its recommendations. As area experts, scholars of color, and committed members of SCMS, we offer the following report, knowing that frank discussions of racial bias often pose an inherent, uncomfortable challenge in predominantly white spaces. We nonetheless carry a sense of excitement and determination for the collaboration and important work that we hope will follow. Based on our charge from the Board, our current goals as a body include: 1) making SCMS a more welcoming space for media scholars of color, 2) increasing the numbers of media scholars of color in SCMS’ membership, 3) improving the visibility and sense of belonging for the existing membership of color, and 4) leveraging SCMS’ status as the leading organization of our discipline to support and foster emerging scholarship by film and media scholars of color. As these broadly conceived goals suggest, embracing a policy of anti-racism demands a holistic approach, from the bottom to the very top and everywhere in between. This document commences with an assessment of the current shape and impacts of racial inequity in SCMS, then moves to what we imagine as achievable, high-impact best practices, and closes with our very preliminary ideas for a plenary session for a future SCMS conference.

I. Racism and the State of SCMS
Currently, we do not have an accurate account of the numbers or percentages of scholars of color in SCMS, as the organization’s most recent membership profile (2012-2015) did not include questions about racial demographics. This is notable, and suggests the real power and impact of unconscious racial bias to shape an historical, institutional neglect of questions of racial diversity. Despite a lack of concrete statistics, the ideological dominance of whiteness at SCMS is evident in a variety of ways that this task force hopes to use as catalysts for a needed transformation of our collective organizational culture and practice. For example, the generally tokenistic presence of people of color in the organization finds many events and subsections of the conference attended by few or no scholars of color. One byproduct of this reality is that in panels, on workshops, and in meetings, scholars of color are often, even routinely mis/taken for one another. Such experiences might be dismissed; they are largely unconscious acts of microaggression that white scholars may fail to note. However, for faculty of color who have attended SCMS for years, or for graduate students of color who are newer to the organization and the conference space, such instances are commonplace.

1Currently the task force is comprised only of SCMS members who are designated URM (underrepresented minority) in institutions of higher education. This includes American scholars who are “Hispanic/Latinos, African Americans, Native Americans, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, and those of two or more races.” This choice is discussed in some detail in the Best Practices section of the report below; for now it is worth mentioning that we are in conversation as a body about inviting and including other groups who are statistically underrepresented in SCMS.
memorable, and cumulatively exhausting (“I’m not that one; I’m the other one”). Such stories, as they accumulate and are shared among scholars of color and our allies, form one low-frequency backdrop for our experiences of SCMS. And while such interactions are not unique to SCMS, they are exacerbated by the ephemerality and quick pace of the conference experience.

On a grander scale, racial bias and the dominance of whiteness at SCMS are likewise emphasized in the book exhibition hall and at the awards ceremony, both of which generally showcase a paucity of scholarship by media scholars of color and/or books that highlight issues of race and media. Walking the exhibition hall can be especially jarring for scholars of color like ourselves, who attend other, comparable scholarly conferences, such as ASA, MLA and NWSA. In these other spaces, we regularly see the same university presses presenting a far more racially diverse lineup of authors, even as the disciplines represented at these conferences are no less predominantly white in principle. (We have joked in our task force meetings about what it would look like for SCMS to ask its participating publishers to give us the “ASA package” at our next conference.)

We provide these examples of both individualized and macro-level experiences of racial bias at SCMS as context for our recommendations to the Board for the enactment of new policies in integrative, rather than piecemeal fashion. We contend that without concerted and intentional effort on the part of the Society from its leadership down, without attracting a critical mass of scholars of color to our membership, and without sustained attention to developing antiracist practices for SCMS, we simply nurture the racial status quo, which in turn goes about undermining and potentially undoing the work that we attempt in the name of diversity. So, for instance, there is much to celebrate about SCMS’ innovative step down membership strategy, which resulted in our recruitment of 13 new Native and Indigenous media scholars this year. This increase in turn made for a significant upsurge in the 2019 conference’s panels to do with Native and Indigenous media.

Yet such gains juxtapose painfully against the 2019 conference awards ceremony, where a distinguished scholar accepting a career achievement award shared a film clip depicting the disinterment and vicious defilement of a Comanche man’s corpse as a site of ostensible pleasure and nostalgia, offering only the barest comment to the audience about the horrific and racialized violence of the scene. The task force does not aim to single out any one member around a problem that is collectively, culturally and historically constituted. On the contrary, this instance is simply an all-too-relevant object lesson in the kind of difficult work we are challenging the society to do—admitting when even celebrated and widely-beloved members of the organization reflect and feed back into racist norms that are no less toxic and damaging for their unconsciousness. Especially in the context of the awards ceremony, in which SCMS celebrates its members’ contributions to the field, and arguably showcases its values as an organization, this year’s speech is simply the most current, public and visible instance of the kind of unthinking Eurocentrism that scholars of color in SCMS witness time and again at panels, roundtables, workshops, and other programmed events.

Moreover, it is difficult to imagine this specific and highly public scenario occurring at any comparable national conference without generating intense protest, whether immediately or soon after. As such, it also speaks to the considerations influencing media scholars of color as we navigate our relevant academic professional worlds. There is, on one hand, the Scylla of non-media studies conferences and humanities-oriented organizations, in which one’s body, race, hair, skin, and culture are explicitly welcome even as one’s scholarship may be engaged and appreciated on limited terms. In these spaces, media studies approaches and discourses, while not necessarily unwelcome, may well be marginalized or misinterpreted. On the other hand is the Charybdis of SCMS, in which film and media studies is vibrantly centered, as are up-to-date debates about many of the fields that our
work engages, even as we find our black, red, brown and yellow selves, marginalized, misinterpreted, and even wholly unwelcomed in the space. For those of us who study race as part of our media scholarship, many of our most important ideas may be treated likewise.

With this untenable choice in mind, members of the task force are sympathetic to film and media studies scholars of color who limit or actively avoid participation at SCMS, despite its stature as “the leading scholarly organization in the United States dedicated to promoting a broad understanding of film, television, and related media...”. After all, the cumulative negative effects of experiences of institutionalized and individual racism and racial bias are profound, and largely unavoidable at the predominantly white institutions where many of us work and teach. It is not surprising that many of our colleagues of color would resist subjecting themselves to more such experiences at even such a preeminent scholarly conference as SCMS; for some, the price, both literal and figurative, is simply too high.

Given the complex, concrete, and long-standing obstacles in our way, we recognize that the act of building or mending bridges to create a more welcoming space for media scholars of color cannot be taken up incidentally, (color)blindly, or partially. We advocate for a comprehensive approach, one that includes assessing the current racial demographics of the organization, publicly committing the society to the work of antiracism for the long term, explicitly identifying equity as a shared and critical priority, manifesting that priority by supporting and fostering the transformation of the discipline’s literature, strengthening and tapping into existing pipeline programs as well as creating new, customized pipelines of our own, and finally, investing in regular, practical antiracist and equity training and skill-building for our membership.

II. Best Practices

Best practices must be sustainable, which means that white members of the Society must be both models and advocates for the kind of substantial cultural change that SCMS wishes to see take place. Especially given 1) the evidently low numbers of scholars of color like ourselves in SCMS and 2) the ways in which anti-racist work is typically a recurring component of our labor across the many various institutions, organizations and communities in which we work and live, it follows that without intentional, well-conceived action on the part of white scholars, this work cannot be undertaken with any hope of concrete success. For these reasons, it is imperative that the white membership of the Board leads by example, actively modeling and engaging other white scholars around the organization’s commitment to these ideals in theory and practice, if they are to become a new normal for the Society.

With the goals and concerns outlined above in mind, we propose the following preliminary best practices for SCMS, to develop its capacity as an equitable, anti-racist organization:

- **Gather Organizational Demographics & Statistics on Race**

We recommend that SCMS run a new membership survey within the next year that will ask members to self-identify with respect to race, in order to cull essential statistics about the organization’s makeup. Analogous surveys should be disseminated among the relevant subsets of the organization, i.e. the Home Office, the JCMS Editorial Board, the Executive Board, etc.

We likewise recommend that SCMS reach out to the following Caucuses for guidance about appropriate and precise language for the wording of these questions: the Asian/Pacific American Caucus, the Black Caucus, the Latinx Caucus, and the Middle East Caucus. At this time the Task Force is purposefully using the widely accepted definition of URM (Underrepresented Minority)
status cited above to shape its mission and recommendations to SCMS, largely because of the intentional and unintentional statistical conflation that often occurs in academic settings around international and US born scholars of color.\(^2\) We wish to retain what we see as an essential emphasis on the distinction between these categories, especially insofar as they are substantially influenced by distinctly American histories of genocide, enslavement, and discrimination. With that said, the organization should obviously seek to create as thorough and complete a picture of its membership as possible with this survey.

- **Establish the Anti-Racism, Equity and Diversity Task Force as an SCMS standing committee**

The specific charge of this task force is a massive one: we seek nothing less than an organization-wide paradigm shift for SCMS. In addition, we recognize that the nature of racism is to shift, adapt, revise and reimagine itself in new moments and contexts, requiring novel and responsive approaches to establishing and sustaining a variety of anti-racist policies. We therefore recommend that SCMS establish this task force as a standing committee of SCMS in perpetuity, as a sign of the organization’s ongoing commitment. Given the disproportionate amount of anti-racist labor carried out by scholars of color in the academy, we also ask the organization to provide relevant service letters for members of this standing committee’s university administration for use in tenure and promotion dossiers. It would be beneficial to have this important work explicitly recognized and supported by an organization of SCMS’ stature in our discipline.

- **Instructions on Diversity to the Program Committee**

Conference panels at the Seattle conference were particularly notable for the increased presence of Native and Indigenous scholars and scholarship, in an important step forward for the organization. We applaud the work that created this change, and hope that this year’s program committee chair can pass on her best practices and suggestions in this regard to the 2019-20 program committee chair. We also applaud the prioritizing of antiracism and equity for next year’s conference program that has already been evident in the intentional call for committee volunteers and nominations among this task force and associated caucuses. We further recommend that the Program Chair for 2019-20 train and/or instruct the program committee and reading pairs to prioritize equity and diversity as they read submissions and abstracts. At the end of the document are a collection of useful links to recommended reading for the Program Chair and for committee members who may have questions about such instructions. We ask for the Home Office’s support as well, to ensure that that when at all possible, panels from underrepresented scholars/scholarship not be scheduled to conflict with one another, or “ghettoized” onto one day of the conference. We recognize that gridding the conference schedule is a decidedly intricate task and ask that such concerns be considered and addressed whenever possible.

Redouble Efforts to Recruit and Retain Native and Indigenous Media Scholars

In light of potential setbacks occasioned by the Seattle conference, it would make sense to amplify the proactive efforts begun this year by SCMS to recruit and retain Native and Indigenous media scholars with a renewed gesture of welcome, support and collegiality. Thus, in addition to continuing the reduced cost membership initiative, we recommend that SCMS and the Home Office offer increased administrative support to the current outreach efforts to Native and Indigenous scholars, including developing new contacts, finding new sites for advertising, and otherwise expanding the scope of this outreach initiative going forward.

Publication and Scholarship Initiative for Scholars of Color

We recommend that SCMS and JCMS work together with relevant SCMS caucuses to offer a yearly publication initiative for scholars of color, one that would begin at SCMS 2020 with Latinx scholars and extend over the next 3-6 years. This initiative would choose 6-8 of the conference’s strongest relevant papers to be published in a special “Latinx Media” issue of JCMS, to be edited by a senior scholar in the field and published within 18 months of the conference. We recommend that this same model be employed in turn for African American and Native and Indigenous scholars and scholarship in subsequent years of the conference. Such a gesture would allow SCMS and JCMS to contribute actively to the creation and proliferation of new scholarship from and for media scholars of color. We are cognizant of the backfile that the JCMS editorial staff and board are managing at this time, and suggest the timeline above with this consideration in mind. This initiative should also include the creation of networking and professionalization opportunities for younger scholars of color with the editor and editorial board of JCMS, as well as with the managing and subject editor at the University of Michigan Press, JCMS’ projected new journal home. These practical policy steps provide a preliminary route to the transformation of SCMS and the discipline of film and media studies, addressing key contexts of individual and institutional racial bias that we hope to target.

Replicate Indigenous/Native scholar membership/registration model to pursue connections with HBCUs, HSIs, and relevant organizations such as MMUF and UNCF

On the strength of the success of the step-down membership initiative for Native and Indigenous media scholars, we recommend that SCMS offer similar invitations for new memberships with staggered and reduced costs to film and media scholars at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and via outreach to such organizations as the Mellon-Mays Undergraduate Fellowship and the United Negro College Fund. We recommend that SCMS use the model of direct outreach to these scholars, using a database of names and institutions now being culled by members of the Task Force.

Use SCMSU as a site to identify & recruit, create a pipeline for new media scholars of color

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1 The choice of Latinx Media Studies for the first special issue is based on the substantial work that the Latinx Caucus has already done to promote and highlight relevant scholarship by and for their membership, including publishing a yearly ‘zine, annotating new and recent work in the field. We would suggest that the Black Caucus should be the next subject of a special issue, followed by the emerging Native/Indigenous Caucus. We hope that putting a Native/Indigenous special issue last in the cycle will allow for the growth of our Native and Indigenous membership such that this network of scholars can readily support such a project by that time.
We recommend that the guidelines for SCMSU be expanded to include suggestions around how the event might best identify and invite the participation of undergraduate students of color. SCMSU event organizers should be directed to identify, connect and perhaps partner with units at the host institution that support undergraduate equity and diversity, i.e. Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship (MMUF), McNair Scholars, QuestBridge, and the Posse Program. We likewise recommend that the conveners be provided with the same guidelines and resources about diversifying conference attendance as the program committee (see links below).

- Offer discipline-specific antiracist, cultural competency, and advocacy training as a regular feature of SCMS

We suggest that the conference itself could be a useful site for antiracist and advocacy training for Board Officers and for the membership in general. We are in the process of researching possible resources for such work; one important organization is Undoing Racism: The People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond. Another option would be inviting a film and media studies oriented organization like EDIT Media (co-helmed by a current Executive Board member) to contribute regularly with interactive workshops or roundtables, yearlong webinars, and/or special events. We recommend offering such sessions to the membership on a voluntary basis, and framing the sessions in ways that may appeal to members interested in learning and implementing antiracist practices in relevant, familiar contexts; i.e. syllabus construction, classroom management, hiring committees, service committees, etc.

III. Plenary for Denver 2020

After extensive discussion of this idea the task force members felt that the best plan would be to organize a panel discussion featuring speakers who could consider both film and media studies specifically and the more general academic parameters of issues of antiracism, equity and diversity. We also discussed orienting the panel discussion around key ideas outlined previously, including the multiple erasures and invisibilities faced by media scholars of color, the impact of publishing and the current diversity crisis facing the publishing industry (including and perhaps especially university publishing), and the limits and possibilities of interdisciplinarity for media scholars of color.

We also wondered whether a plenary for next year is too soon, and whether an additional year to plan and prepare would better serve our larger goals for SCMS. However, we did generate a list of possible panelists, who might include (in no particular order):

One or more of the editors of Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia:
Gabriella Gutierrez y Muhs (Modern Languages and Cultures, Seattle University)
Yolanda Flores Niemann (Psychology, University of Houston)
Carmen G. Gonzalez (Seattle University School of Law)
Angela P. Harris (Law, UC Davis)

Marybeth Gasman (Education, U Penn, Educating a Diverse Nation, Envisioning Black Colleges)

Herman Gray (Emeritus, Sociology, UC Santa Cruz, Watching Race, Cultural Moves)

Sarah Ahmed (Independent Scholar, On Being Included: On Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life)
Curtis Marez (UC San Diego, Past President of ASA, University Babylon: Hollywood and the Making of Student Bodies)

Jill Petty (Director of Communication, Kellogg Foundation, Former acquisitions editor at South End Press, Beacon Press & NU Press)

Beverly Daniel Tatum (President Emerita, Spelman College, past President, Mount Holyoke College, Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?)

Mary Beltran (Director, Latino Media Arts and Studies Program, UT Austin, Latina/o Stars in U.S. Eyes: The Making and Meanings of Film and TV Stardom)

Panelists might also include selected past leadership of SCMS Caucuses with an eye toward discussion of the history of race and equity in the organization.

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As we hope is clear from this report, there is a pressing need for SCMS as an organization to take up the work already begun by many scholars of color among its membership. The society overall is poorer and less rigorous for its homogeneity, and must take an active role in transforming itself against the grain of the racism so prevalent in the academy at large. We often observe the kinds of inequity and tokenism that we experience in person at SCMS replicated on film and media studies course syllabi, where one or two racial representatives are strategically and synecdochally placed, expected to do the work of entire fields of scholarship. Our recommendations to the Board are therefore admittedly ambitious in their intention, and rooted in our concerns not only for SCMS, but for the discipline as a whole. We look forward to joining the Board in this important work in the months and years to come.
Useful Links, Suggested Readings

https://medium.com/samsung-internet-dev/help-someone-has-pointed-out-my-conference-has-diversity-issues-c1162a1c8d4c

https://diversitycharter.org/considerations-for-event-organisers/

https://www.whiteprivilegeconference.com/resources


https://hechingerreport.org/five-things-no-one-will-tell-colleges-dont-hire-faculty-color/