



June 2, 2020

NCPH Statement on the Killing of George Floyd

The National Council on Public History (NCPH) shares the sorrow, anger, despair, and demands for change that have been so evident across the United States following the killing of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, by a law enforcement officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota. As public historians, we recognize that Floyd's death and the response to it have a deep historical context.

We mourn the recent killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, and Nina Pop. We grieve for Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Freddie Gray, and others who died in police custody. We grieve for those like Trayvon Martin, who were tracked down and shot dead under the guise of vigilantism. We grieve for the nine Black people murdered inside their historic church, Mother Emanuel, in Charleston, SC. We grieve for the many, many others whose deaths have not received national notice, but who are mourned by family and friends. Black Americans live in a state of perpetual and acute mourning as they grieve for community members killed by white supremacist violence, whether or not these deaths have received national attention.

The pain and injustice of these events is made deeper by a long history of racism, terror, violent oppression, and genocide against Black, Brown, and Indigenous people in the United States that is older than the nation itself. Recent protests are the result of decades of activism, led by those who are themselves the targets of this structural violence, and they are remarkable evidence that tens of thousands of people are willing to confront the entrenched racism that led to the death of George Floyd and so many others.

Developing historical knowledge of the structures of racial violence is an essential part of dismantling this seemingly fundamental aspect of US society. Public historians share an essential function in reckoning with our nation's past. This role is only possible with intentional and ethical approaches to the past and to our collaborations and partnerships.

Public history practice does not stand apart from structural racism. Black, Brown, and Indigenous cultural workers have exposed the systemic bias working in predominantly white cultural institutions. It is the responsibility of public historians to become familiar with how the organizations of which they are a part have furthered and continue to promote structural racism through action and inaction.

Public historians, familiar with our communities' own histories of anti-Black violence, are in a position to create platforms to share and interpret this history. We can and should use our positions to materially support and amplify the work of community members who have deep

knowledge of anti-Black violence and resistance to this violence. In our institutions and our work, we must strive to provide spaces where this history can be preserved, discussed, shared, known, and put to work in the world.

It is incumbent upon public historians to use anti-racist methodologies and practices and take measures that their work, activities, and projects do not harm or exploit the communities and individuals with whom they work. This is even more essential when the public historians are working with communities other than their own. For guidance, see the principles and work of [Documenting the Now](#) and [Witness](#).

Many organizations and individuals in and adjacent to the public history community have begun this work. There is more that needs to happen. Together with the American Association for State and Local History, NCPH sponsors [The Inclusive Historian's Handbook](#) (Modupe Labode, William Walker, and Robert Weible), a guide to public history practice that “supports inclusive and equity-focused historical work in public settings.” The [#CharlestonSyllabus](#) (Keisha N. Blain, Kidada E. Williams, and Chad Williams), available as a [book](#) and on the website of the [African American Intellectual History Society](#), brings together sources on the history of anti-Black racism and Black resistance to it, as do the [#FergusonSyllabus](#) (Marcia Chatelain) and the [#BaltimoreSyllabus](#). [#MuseumsRespondToFerguson](#) (Adrienne Russell and Aleia Brown) and [#MuseumsAreNotNeutral](#) (La Tanya S. Autry and Mike Murawski) expose problems and opportunities and share resources for the museum field, and [Visitors of Color](#) (Porchia Moore and nikhil trivedi) and [Museum Hue](#) (Stephanie A. Johnson-Cunningham and Monica Montgomery) offer empowering spaces for folks in the field. We also point to the work of two essential organizations moving this work forward, the [Association of Black Women Historians](#) (led by National Director Erica Armstrong Dunbar) and the [Association of African American Museums](#) (led by Executive Director Vedet Coleman-Robinson). In particular, the Association of African American Museums will be hosting their [2020 conference in virtual spaces this August](#). Black historians and culture workers, in particular Black women historians and culture workers, have led the development of many of these resources and initiatives.

The efforts of these Black historians and culture workers point to the important role that history, public history institutions, and historians play in the struggle for social justice. The past gives us critical perspectives on the present, illuminating systemic racial oppression and highlighting efforts to overcome injustice, and mobilizing communities to craft more equitable futures. The NCPH stands with those who look at the long past and painful present of violence against and oppression of Black people and say: it must end, and we commit to doing the work.

Here are some immediate actions you can take beyond your work as a professional public historian:

- Donate to local groups on the ground pushing for transformative justice like [Reclaim the Block](#), [Black Visions Collective](#) and the [North Star Health Collective](#);
- Call [legislators](#);
- Sign this [petition](#) from Color of Change;
- [Register to vote](#) and encourage others to do the same.

- [26 Ways to Be in the Struggle Beyond the Streets](#)
 - [How to Support Protesters in Every City](#)
 - [Resources for Those Seeking to Help Anti-Police Brutality Protesters](#)
 - [Bail Funds/Legal Help by City](#)
 - [12 Things to do Instead of Calling the Cops](#)
 - [Alternatives to Calling the Police](#)
 - [What To Do Instead of Calling the Police](#)
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