

# The Filson Historical Society

June 8, 2020

Dear Filson Community,

On June 3, 2020, the Filson Historical Society published a [list of resources](#) on race, violence, injustice, and segregation in Louisville and across the American South along with resources about creating constructive conversations about race among families, in classrooms, and in communities. The Filson was prompted to do so in response to the protests which have spread to many American cities in the wake of the killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.

The Filson was not alone. The [American Historical Association](#) published a statement endorsed by 57 affiliated societies of professional historians. “As a nation, we’ve shown a reluctance not only to learn our own history but to learn from it,” writes the leading professional body in our field. Likewise, the [Midwest Archives Conference](#) reiterated our professional shared values that archives “serve as evidence against which individual and social memory can be tested.” It is and for over a century has been the Filson’s commission to help Louisville remember its past and learn from it.

The Filson is a research organization, whose mission is to preserve and tell the stories of the Ohio Valley region. The researchers who have studied our collections, who have presented in lectures to our membership, and who have published in our peer-reviewed journals have painted a composite picture of the city's long history of discrimination, violence, and residential segregation directed against the African American community. Furthermore the silences in our records, by themselves, speak volumes.

The Filson stands by the lessons of history that we have shared with our community and stands with the community as it applies those same lessons in the present. The words and the resources we have shared were chosen based on the Filson's published and presented interpretations of our rich collections and the ideals upon which the nation was founded but up to which it has, sadly, long struggled to live.

The Filson recognizes, further, that concrete action items must follow from this moment of national reflection.

- Actively engage with the Louisville Black community to more fully archive the marginalized histories of our city, state, and region. This means first and foremost supporting and empowering the community to preserve its own history by being a resource, whether the histories end up at the Filson, in self-directed archives, or deposited at the Filson’s peer institutions.

- Achieve greater diversity in public program subjects and presenters to feature perspectives which have been a vital part of Kentucky history, but which have been historically marginalized.
- Examine our membership recruitment efforts to actively pursue a more diverse Filson community and thereby provide easier access to empowering knowledge about our past.
- Engage Filson staff and board in a structured professional development plan that cultivates a culture of equity, inclusion, and welcoming.
- Proactively collaborate with partners in secondary and higher education to involve more students of color in the professional life of the Filson and prepare a more diverse workforce to find careers in the fields of archives, museums, publishing, and scholarly research.

The Filson recognizes that work towards these goals will be ongoing for many years and may be complicated in the short term by the devastating effect of the global COVID-19 pandemic on our partners in cultural and educational organizations. But our reading of history tells us that this is work that demands doing.

In the coming weeks and months, the Filson will be expanding its contact with organizations who can help us achieve these goals, and we invite any similarly minded local, regional, or national group to reach out to us to help leverage the power of our past to build a better American future in Louisville and the Ohio Valley.



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The Filson Historical Society