



AFS Position Statement on Race-Based Violence and Injustice

June 5, 2020

Black Lives Matter.

We, the American Folklore Society and our undersigned partners listed below, unequivocally condemn racism in our communities and institutions, and we call for deep listening and action against race-based injustice.

In the past few days and months, we have witnessed horrific violence and injustice in our country, most recently the callous police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, in close succession with the appalling murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and Tony McDade. Their deaths and many others have engendered deep sorrow, anger, and massive, widespread uprisings in Minneapolis, across the US, and the world. Yet, this moment in time is not only in response to the recent past; it is an indictment of the long history of systemic violence against people of color in the United States.

This nation was founded on the enslavement and dispossession of black and indigenous people, and the reverberations from this trauma continue to our present day. We see it in the disproportionate impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on communities of color, in the malign neglect of Puerto Ricans after natural disasters, and in the heartless treatment of asylum seekers in ICE facilities where children are torn from their parents, to name just a few recent examples in a long series of compounded injustices that have roots in the creation of our nation.

Yet, it is not enough to simply recognize systemic racism and economic inequality as being the products of broad external or historical forces. We recognize that not all have benefited from the individual privileges afforded to some and that we must support those who have not. We must ask ourselves, have we made space for all people in our organizations? Do we acknowledge our individual privileges and sacrifice our comfort to ease the discomfort of others? Are we aware of our own micro-aggressions? It is easy to condemn the amorphous category of racism—it is much harder to do the work of finding our own actions within that category. We must challenge silence on issues of personal, systemic and institutional racism. We should create space for change in our actions, in our organizations, and in our world right now.

What in our shared history will help us to understand and to commit to transformation? As folklorists trained in deep listening, we must also ask ourselves how our field has been implicated in perpetuating inequity, from the voices we elevate to those we ignore. Then, we need to thoughtfully consider new ways that our insights and methodologies can be used in partnership with communities, supporting the necessary strides toward equity, inclusivity, and justice in collaboration with the communities that we have an ethical duty to listen to and be guided by as folklorists.

What action can we take? How can we contribute as organizations and as individuals?

We make these commitments for our organizations for the benefit of society as a whole:

- We reaffirm our duty to listen to, support, and fairly treat ALL of our members while encouraging new members from diverse communities to join our organizations.



- We commit to scrutiny and reflection on our own historic implication in systemic and institutional racism.
- We commit to listening to the needs and concerns within our own communities and those we serve, offering proactive approaches to social justice, equity, and our work with partners to help dismantle systemic racism.
- We commit to implementing and enacting equity within our organizations and in the larger world.
- We pledge to combat entrenched racial privilege in the academy, in cultural institutions, and in our communities.
- We will ensure that the discussion and analysis of institutionalized racism is on the agenda in our meetings, in our publications, and in our communications with our members.
- We pledge that our work to dismantle racism and oppression will be integrated into all of our work.
- We commit to being an integral part of the change necessary for social transformation.
- We urge our members to honor the essence of the Humanities and its commitment to the moral and ethical values of our society.
- We urge our members and friends to reflect upon these commitments and honor them.

Finally, we thank the many people who have contributed to this statement, as well as those who have worked over the years to raise awareness and make meaningful change in our organizations, in our field, and in our society.

We, the undersigned, representing or working at public or academic programs or cultural organizations, are partners in this call to action:

Association of African and African American Folklorists
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The Association for Cultural Equity

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Center for Folklore Studies, Ohio State University

Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures at the University of Wisconsin-Madison

Center for Washington Cultural Traditions

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The Fellows of the American Folklore Society

Folk & Traditional Arts Program, Erie Arts & Culture

Folk Arts & Heritage Program, Mass Cultural Council

Folk Studies Program, Western Kentucky University

Folklore and Public Culture Program, University of Oregon

Folklore Program at Utah State University

George Mason University Folklore Studies Program

Indiana University Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology

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*The individuals listed above pledge their own support and cannot speak for the institutions where they work

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