



The Washington State Historical Society (WSHS) has witnessed the turmoil in our nation of the past months and the outpouring of grief and pain by the Black community. We acknowledge the historical truths that underpin the protests in our state and in our nation: slavery, discriminatory laws, and racism that permeates our systems of justice, housing, healthcare, and more. We have also taken stock of our own institution's role in systemic racism and acknowledge the need to address it.

Founded nearly 130 years ago, as was the case with historical societies across the United States, the Historical Society's origins are rooted in the desire to document the arrival of white explorers and settlers to Washington Territory, and to remember and memorialize how they transformed this place by their presence. Such a perspective guided the work of the Historical Society for decades upon its inception. Objects were collected, markers and monuments were placed, and selected histories were recorded that privileged the lives and legacies of these white men.

In recent decades, leading up to today, the Historical Society has embraced a more diverse perspective – collecting more broadly, reaching out to diverse communities, and working toward sharing a more inclusive history. Museum practices across the U.S. have evolved, and so have we. And yet, our staff and board of trustees remain predominantly white. While we have an organizational commitment to embrace inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility outlined in our strategic plan – we have not taken all of the necessary steps to make manifest this vision. This lack of diversity limits our ability to meaningfully live out our mission of partnering with our community to explore how history connects us all.

We are committed to taking concrete steps to build a more inclusive organization. We pledge to take these actions publicly and transparently. We probably won't get everything right on the first attempt, but we will be transparent about our failures as well and are committed to learning from them. In doing so, we hope to be able to engage historical organizations across our state in a similar process of introspection, community dialogue, and evolution of practice that will benefit us all.

Moving forward, we are committed to the following:

1. By November 2020, we will develop a plan to increase the diversity of the WSHS board of trustees and staff that addresses barriers to inclusion at all steps of the selection process. This plan will be informed by the input of our community. We will value the unique perspective and skills that each trustee, employee, and volunteer brings to our organization and provide an inclusive environment that provides opportunities for personal and professional growth.
2. Through exhibitions, public programs, education, outreach, and collecting, we will continue to build upon our work to bring voice to the diverse people of Washington, especially those whose voices have been silenced or minimized in the past. For example, flowing from our work with the Black community during our recent Men of Change exhibition, we will partner with groups statewide to develop robust learning resources focused on the history of Black Washingtonians, to debut in Spring 2021. In 2020 we will also open a new gallery in our Great Hall of Washington History focused on the unjust incarceration of Japanese Americans in Washington State during WWII. Our newest permanent gallery renovation will

provide an opportunity to share multiple viewpoints regarding the impacts, both societal and economic, of the settlement and industrialization of Washington. We will seek out partnerships with Black, Native American, Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islander, LGBTQ+ and other underrepresented communities to ensure their stories are recorded and shared.

3. Building on an initial training session held July 2, 2020, WSHS will identify and provide training for all staff focused on infusing diversity, equity and inclusion principles into our daily practice, as well as policies and official procedures. This work will begin immediately and continue as standard institutional practice.
4. WSHS will research and develop a comprehensive list of historical markers and monuments placed by the Society across time and review these markers for structural integrity, historical accuracy, and language/interpretive sensitivity. We will bring sound scholarship, diverse perspectives, and community conversation forward to determine whether, as tangible objects of our work, these markers continue to uphold our mission and values.
5. We will prioritize making our object and archival collections more accessible to the public in person and online, and increase our partnership with Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color to proactively collect objects that reflect their lived experiences and histories. Only by collecting broadly, now, can we ensure our ability to tell these stories authentically in the future.
6. We will audit language in our collections database and previously developed language in the Washington State History Museum's permanent exhibition galleries to ensure that the writing reflects cultural sensitivity and respect. This project will be ongoing until completed and will involve community input in a variety of ways.

We hope that our greatest partner in these endeavors will be the people of Washington. We invite you to learn more about the Society, its programs and collections at www.washingtonhistory.org.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Kilmer, Director

WSHS Board of Trustees