

*I think that the past is all that makes the present
coherent, and further, that the past will remain horrible
for exactly as long as we refuse to assess it honestly.*

--James Baldwin

Minneapolis, and now the nation as a whole, is facing its history in a new and urgent way. The killing of George Floyd has reverberated around the globe, and we in Hennepin County find ourselves at the center of it all.

Like all organizations, Hennepin History Museum must reckon with our past actions and inactions. History is a powerful tool, both to inform and motivate as well as to distort and erase. The relevance and significance of local history, neighborhood stories, and community voices comes into sharper focus in times like these, but we have much work ahead to embrace a truly inclusive and honest history of our region.

For example, our founders' passion for local history did not usually extend to the stories of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. As such, we have inherited collections that do not fully represent the communities we profess to serve. And we have not done enough in recent generations to address this problem.

It is instructive that the museum's most successful exhibit in recent memory was *Owning Up: Racism and Housing in Minneapolis*. There are two lessons from this that are worth keeping in focus. First, we are at our best when we deal with topics that have immediacy, relevancy, and inclusivity, that appeal to people's sense of lived reality. And second, we do our best work in partnership with other organizations, taking the contributions of each entity for a sum that is greater than its parts.

So, what's next? Here are a few immediate things that we are pursuing to document this moment and to be active participants in forging new solutions to the structural racism that exists in our society:

- Listen more intently and widely, forge new partnerships, and [collect stories](#) and artifacts from a period of time that is sure to be revisited and studied for many years to come.
- Continue to push ourselves towards greater diversity, equity, and inclusivity in our staff and board, through our participation in the American Alliance of Museum's *Facing Change* initiative and our ongoing community engagement.
- Use this current spotlight on Hennepin County to engage with citizens and help build our capacity to make history relevant and a force for good in the community.

We are a community resource and can be even more so. But we need your help to realize our full potential. Join us on this journey as we create more specific ways to engage in this work, and hold us accountable to our statements of purpose and action.

Together, we can create a greater understanding of history for the betterment of our world.

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