

The Indiana County Historian Program

Training Module 2: Difficult History



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Diversity and Inclusion

- Diversity – The unique attributes, characteristics, identities, and perspectives that make each person who they are.
- Inclusion – Intentional efforts to ensure that individuals feel valued, heard, respected, welcomed, and engaged within a group.



<https://inclusivehistorian.com/diversity-and-inclusion/>

www.aam-us.org/programs/diversity-equity-accessibility-and-inclusion/facing-change-definitions/

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Increasing Inclusion in History Practices

- Tell more diverse stories and work to counter stereotypes.
- Be sensitive to language.
- Build trust.
- Consider multiple perspectives.
- Ensure Representation:
 - Elevate the stories of people who have traditionally been marginalized or underrepresented.
 - Give people ownership over their own stories. Invite, encourage, and share community-generated content.
 - Advocate for the preservation of places and stories that need to be told.



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Understanding Implicit Bias

Our brains are hardwired to organize and categorize information subconsciously without our awareness. This means we can form unconscious judgments with even realizing it.

To begin to counter implicit bias:

- Focus on seeing individuals.
- Adjust our perspective.
- Consciously work to change our stereotypes.



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The Indiana Historical Society

Difficult History

- “History is critically important. It has the power to unite us in our ongoing desire to build a better future. By listening, learning and striving to understand, we will continue to hold conversations about our history and how that history has shaped our current world. Without change, our state, nation and society will not be able to overcome the weight of its own violent and racist history.”
 - Jody Blankenship, President and CEO, Indiana Historical Society



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Difficult History

- Difficult history addresses issues of social injustice, oppression and violence.
 - Specific examples of this history may vary from community to community.
 - African American history
 - Native American history
 - Latino history
 - LGBTQ history
- Talking about difficult history is uncomfortable.
 - Asks people and organizations to question their existing knowledge and, sometimes, their core beliefs.
 - Requires a different kind of listening and understanding.
 - Often brings negative feelings to the surface.



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The Indiana Historical Society Collecting Initiatives (2020)

- **Telling Your Story: Documenting COVID-19 in Indiana**

<https://indianahistory.org/telling-your-story-documenting-covid-19-in-indiana/>

At the Indiana Historical Society, we have collected items that document Indiana's past since 1830. There are thousands of letters, diaries, scrapbooks, photographs, slides, albums, graphics, and ephemera in our archives documenting the Hoosier experience.

Right now, we are all grappling with a unique historical moment as we respond as a state, nation, and world to a pandemic. At the Indiana Historical Society, we want to add your story of how you and your family are understanding and experiencing the current "new normal."



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The Indiana Historical Society Collecting Initiatives (2020)

- **Project Take A Stand – Listening to the Voices of Protest**

<https://indianahistory.org/project-take-a-stand-listening-to-the-voices-of-protest/>

"Protests, demonstrations, and uprisings have occurred throughout American history in response to various forms of oppression. From the formation of Civil Rights organizations to the creation of movements like Black Lives Matter, previous and recent events are both critical parts of our history—important for us today and invaluable for future generations to understand ongoing patterns of racism and police brutality. Reactions via protests and demonstrations occurring throughout the state of Indiana, across the nation and around the world often result in positive societal change.

Since 1830, the Indiana Historical Society has collected and preserved items that document Indiana's past. This history has the power to unite us in our ongoing desire to build a better future. By listening, learning and striving to understand, we will continue to collect materials and hold conversations about all aspects of our history and how that history has shaped our current environment."



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County Historians and Difficult History

- Role in the community
 - Acknowledge that history is not simple or one-sided.
 - Research as many perspectives as possible.
 - Look for primary sources.
 - Talk to individuals from marginalized communities.
 - Provide solid historical evidence.
 - Participate in community conversations.
 - Encourage open, civil and honest discourse.



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County Historians and Difficult History

- Role as representatives of the IHS and IHB
 - Recognize when you are acting as an official County Historian versus when you are acting as private citizen.
 - Acknowledge that difference in your response.
 - Focus on being open to civil conversations.
 - Work to move the conversation forward in a productive way.
 - Act as a mediator and facilitator when appropriate.



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De-escalating tense situations

- Think about potential conflicts before you enter the situation.
- Know the signs that a situation is becoming tense and may escalate.
 - Changes in physical stance and tone of voice.
 - Changes in topic focus.
- Make a plan for de-escalating conflict.



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De-escalation techniques

- Take time to calm yourself.
- Assess the situation.
- Respect personal space.
- Listen to the other person's concerns.
- Keep your body language and tone of voice neutral.
- Shift the conversation to problem-solving and steps forward.
- Recognize when you've done all you can and step away.
- Contact the IHS and IHB for guidance and help.



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Questions?

Indiana Historical Society (IHS)

A private nonprofit organization.

Jeannette Rooney

Assistant Director, Local History Services

(317) 233-8913 | jrooney@indianahistory.org

Tamara Hemmerlein

Director, Local History Services

(317) 234-0170 | themmerlein@indianahistory.org

Indiana Historical Bureau (IHB)

Division of the Indiana State Library, a state agency.

Dr. Michella M. Marino

Deputy Director, Indiana Historical Bureau

(317) 233-8940 | mmarino@library.IN.gov

