

Beat: Travel

## **BLACK TRAVEL LEADERS Address SYSTEMIC RACISM In -5 QUESTIONS ABOUT RACE-**

### **FOLLOWING THE DEATH OF GEORGE FLOYD**

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**USPA NEWS** - Following the death of George Floyd and the overwhelming response nationwide, seven Black executives from destination marketing organizations across the country partnered on a video to share their experiences and encourage an open dialogue about race and racism throughout their lives and in the tourism industry. Running 8 minutes and 38 seconds, "5 Questions About Race" takes less time to view than the 8 minutes and 46 seconds that George Floyd had a knee on his neck when he was murdered on May 25, 2020.

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According to data from The Washington Post, Black Americans are killed by police at a rate of more than twice as high as the rate for white Americans. Since 2015, 96 percent of Black Americans killed by the police have been male. This video is intended to share the male perspective.

"As a Black professional who has worked hard to be in a position of leadership in my industry, I have experienced and seen my share of racial inequality," said Cleo Battle, Chief Operating Officer, Louisville Tourism. "The time is now to make changes in our industry for the future and I proudly join my colleagues in helping to lead the conversation forward."

"There are a few reactions as this public conversation continues: some people are concerned; some don't know what to say; some are scared; and some, unfortunately, will remain ignorant," said Elliott L. Ferguson, II, president and CEO, Destination DC. "But these are discussions we need to have and then follow them with action if we are to effect real change in our country, so I encourage everyone to have open and honest dialogue."

In a shared statement, Al Hutchinson, president and CEO, Visit Baltimore and Charles H. Jeffers, II, chief operating officer, Visit Baltimore, said, "Visit Baltimore wants to do its part in eradicating racism in our city, industry and America. As Black destination leaders for a majority African American city, we make a special call to our White colleagues to help us confront racism. We can't do this alone; we'll only achieve positive, lasting change by working together."

"The first step in making meaningful and lasting change is the acknowledgement that these inequities exist and are prevalent in our industry and society," said James Jessie, chief sales officer, Travel Portland. "Yet, this only where the journey begins. It must be followed with a dialogue resulting in changes we will all make today and hold ourselves accountable to tomorrow to ensure a brighter future for Black men and women in America."

"We're at a tipping point for our community, our country and our industry," said Melvin Tennant, president and CEO, Meet Minneapolis. "We must heed the words of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, who said we must act on racial injustice with 'the fierce urgency of now.' We must be ready to roll up our sleeves and get to work. It's important that everybody who needs to be at the table is included in this discussion. Otherwise, we'll find ourselves repeating this cycle once more."

"We've watched as calls for social justice have swept the nation in recent weeks, and it's time for the tourism industry to step up," said Dan Williams, vice president, convention sales and services, Experience Columbus. "If history has shown us anything, it's that the Black community cannot do it alone, so we're asking for our industry's help. Yes, it starts with listening and learning; but we also have to have some tough conversations. We have to allow ourselves to see others' reality and get uncomfortable. We need you to stand beside us and use your voices to ensure equity in our industry, and our lives, starting now."

The video premiered at Destinations International's 2020 Annual Convention on July 14.

"A lot of conversations centered around race may be uncomfortable by many; but in order to grow, we must break out of our comfort zones and have an open dialogue with one another," said Don Welsh, president and CEO of Destinations International. "We are excited to debut this impactful video on race with our convention attendees and we are thankful for the travel and tourism leaders who opened up to shed a light on their experiences. Hopefully, we can all learn and start to make real change and put words into actions."

Source : Destination DC

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