

LOUISIANA'S CAJUN BAYOU TOURISM

Dear LACVB Members,

The last few months for me have been some of the most difficult I've ever experienced in my life. If COVID-19 was not debilitating enough, we have all witnessed the shooting death of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia, the assassination of Breonna Taylor while she slept inside her Louisville, Kentucky home, and the savage murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. We literally listened to him cry out for his mama and plead with the officers on his neck and back "I can't breathe". I am traumatized and emotionally exhausted. While I have watched the endless news coverage and never-ending social media posts detailing every new development in the senseless death of yet another black human being, I've also tried to escape it. I tried watching mindless television and playing games on my phone to steady my emotions. But, sadly as a Black American that is simply not possible.

Like old, unhealed wounds, George Floyd's death reminded me of every incident in my personal life where I feared for my safety as a person of color. Most recently, police officers showed up at me and my fiancé's apartment claiming that a stolen cellphone had been pinged to our home and questioned us about it. They did not just show up in one car. They showed up in three with lights whirling and horns blaring alerting our neighbors to the commotion. It was embarrassing and scary at the same time. We told them who we were and about our professional positions in the community. They looked at us with skepticism. Only when we pulled out our business cards did the officer concede that we could be telling the truth. The only people they questioned in our complex was us. We are the only people of color that live in the building.

In the days that followed, I had nightmares about the police bursting into our home and killing us. This is a fear that is shared by so many in the black community including your co-workers who you work with side-by-side on a daily basis. For many of them, just passing a parked police car sparks anxiety and fear. Living in constant fear is no way to live.

Over the last few days, I reached out to my black industry friends around the state. Collectively, we are exhausted, scared, frustrated and asking ourselves the question, when will the racism end?

In 1619 the first African slave landed ashore of America. In 2019, we silently marked the 400 year anniversary of that fateful voyage. Today our nation is still in turmoil from the ingrained, systematic racism that has dogged our country since the beginning. The biggest ongoing atrocity is that Black Americans have been made to feel like racism, and the hatred that goes with it, is solely in our imaginations and our feelings about our personal and collective experiences are diminished or worse yet ignored.

I acknowledge that as a black male, I put on my "corporate" face and go to work every day. I don't talk about the racism I experience and that's part of the problem. I have a responsibility to talk about it, because it makes it real and unavoidable as a societal problem and not just my problem. Before today,

aside from four people in my life, I have never shared the story of the police officers who came to our home.

I was asked what will it take to move past this. The honest answer is to stop killing black people for no reason, so that truly all lives really do matter and we can retire the Black Lives Matter movement. As leaders in LACVB, I want us to have the uncomfortable conversation about racism. We can no longer shy away from this issue and think it away. We've tried that and honestly that is what has lead us to where we are today. Let's try a new way that begins with open, honest and sincere dialogue about racism. These conversations are critical to not just improving our nation, but also in strengthening our organizations. This can only happen if we are truly willing to have the uncomfortable conversation that allows us to grow and heal as a community.

Specifically, here are some things that we can collectively address to do our part to end racism:

- Make a statement to our staff, industry partners and visitors that we do not condone racism and that we support diversity and inclusion.
- Have a session at the Lt. Governor's Tourism Summit that addresses racial disparity and inequity in the workplace.
- Support more black-owned businesses and vendors through our organizations.
- Strive for diverse representation on our staff, board of directors and other organizations that we influence.
- Be an ally. When you see or hear disparaging remarks and actions against black people speak out.

Tourism is one of the most powerful tools that exist to bring people of different races, cultures and backgrounds together. We are the leaders in creating happiness. Let's start the change within our own organizations and be the leaders that other industries around the nation duplicate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Timothy P. Bush". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "B" at the end.

Timothy P. Bush, Chair

Louisiana Association of Convention & Visitors Bureaus