

To the Dean of Architecture and Design, Scheri Fultiner, Department Head, Amy Kulper, and the faculty of the Department of Architecture at the Rhode Island School of Design,

The Limits of Your Recognition: A Follow-Up Statement in Relation to the Listening Session of June 17th, 2020 with the Rhode Island School of Design's Administration Regarding the Multitude of Issues brought up and represented by the RISD BIPOC & Student Body in attendance. Sent on Friday, Juneteenth, 2020.

Three weeks have passed since the horrific and extralegal killing of [George Floyd](#) that has ignited the nation in a movement against police brutality, economic injustice, and the devaluation of Black lives, experiences, and creative knowledge. While the current efforts to bring attention to these issues impregnate our collective consciousness, we can no longer remain ignorant to the fact that the roots of these efforts stem from decades of action against the institutional and systemic injustices endemic to the building of this nation as well as to the practices of architecture, design, and institutions of higher education such as RISD.

Consequently, we can no longer ignore the actions of this institution leading up to this moment. The historical lack of accountability for those who have murdered Black people is one that has direct and indisputable parallels to the lack of accountability for the well-being and support of Black and BIPOC students by RISD faculty and administrators. In 2016, Black, BIPOC, queer and other students took on the invisible labor of making explicit their

protest and The Room of Silence minutes

film ([Eloise Sherrid](#)). In addition to the egregious lack of forethought your response to the current situation has shown the deafening silence of institutional change beyond further tokenization with which these previous protests were met, and demonstrates a pattern of obstruction and intransigence towards radical transformation against anti-Blackness at RISD. Not only was RISD's pedagogic response insufficient—a couple of wintersession courses on intersectionality and pedagogy—but the underlying points made evident in the Not Your Token Protests and The Room of Silence film were co-opted by RISD marketing campaigns ([Our RISD](#)), effectively undermining and nullifying the opportunity for institutional reflection and transformation that these two acts against systemic injustice offered. RISD's repeated inaction and inability to recognize its own position, involvement in, and responsibility to dismantle regimes of racial inequity only further demonstrates it's simultaneous exploitation of Black students when deemed beneficial and self-promoting while erasing the experiences, creativity, and labor of its Black students. **This is an unconscionable form of performative allyship.**

As this historic moment should make abundantly clear, these protests are not about singular events, individual (bad) actors, or unique institutions, but rather are aimed at centuries of systemic oppression against black people designed to ensure their dismissal, dehumanization, and devaluation. RISD is not alone in these acts, but they are endemic to the practices of architecture and design as we know them. This demands that RISD's Division of Architecture and Design and Department of Architecture acknowledge Architecture as a politically driven discipline in which professed "neutrality" is itself a

demand that RISD move beyond

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immediate and actionable steps minutes

towards consciously dismantling institutionalized anti-Blackness. The following are our recommendations for **beginning** what will be a continuous

1. **Representation:** make legitimate strides to increase the Black Faculty & Student Body from the **current 4%**. We recommend open design programs and competitions by the institution to appeal to the multitude of prospective artists and students that already exist within Providence and beyond. Your treatment of Black students in the BEB directly affects the perspectives and opinions current and prospective students hear and a true commitment to diversity and inclusion will reflect positively on the department
2. **Accessibility:** RISD must ensure a **support system** for disadvantaged students. Break down the barriers to education by providing more scholarship opportunities and TA positions so that student's work experiences directly benefit them professionally and their studio work does not suffer from their financial need. Black students should have more opportunities to teach and any rejected proposals should have a very clear constructive language that is helpful for the student to edify their future work. Faculty should not be permitted to offer students unpaid internship opportunities, and should also be open to hiring and working with new TAs over the course of the
3. **Acknowledgment:** Directly acknowledge the history of Market Square as a slave market and the direct and indirect funding of institutions

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ventures that capitalised off of

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approaching this history with

minutes

the ambivalence and timidity that the institution currently poses; leverage it as a site for a constant reflection of how **society literally capitalizes on Black bodies**. We suggest seasonal exhibitions and installations by Black artists campus and city-wide with ample financial and creative support, and in the context of the BEB some seasonal or annual design challenge that allows Black voices to be

4. **Decentralize:** The push to 'decentralize' Europe in our education is a promise that the majority of us have heard at some point in our time at RISD. In the context of the architecture department, we believe that promise is more of a claim as we are still not presented with enough content by Black architects. **In every course syllabi, precedents and projects by Black architects are still secondary or non-existent** and we are no longer content with alternative voices to architectural practice and history being relegated to seminars and sporadic winter session courses. We demand that the architecture department bolsters its commitment to placing alternative voices within our education. Furthermore, these examples should not come from the already archaic and 'canonized' meta of the Maghreb, there are multitudes of forgotten, unique, fascinating, and innovative architectural practices outside of the Middle East and Northern Africa and we challenge the respective faculty to take strides in doing research outside their comfort zones.

The inclusion of Black voices in

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the lack of alternative voices is

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repercussions to students for minutes

5. **Accountability:** The Accountability and assessment of non-Black faculty should be a definite devotion to reviewing and expanding diversity in the educational content not just in the BEB but campus-wide. **The labor of this review and assessment should not simply be given to a body of Black staff and faculty** but should be pursued and demanded of **all** faculty in the BEB
 6. **Training:** Require Art School
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Specific Diversity Training for Instructors: under the context of art and design learning and practice, we believe that faculty should undergo specific training under these contexts to **understand the existence and propagation of microaggressions and racism**, consciously or unconsciously in their teaching and critique practices.

7. **Design/Build Equity:** Create a Policy on Design/Build Projects in which all students have the opportunity to design and all students share the labor of building. There are too many examples of BIPOC being given only labour tasks in group projects and assignments.
8. **Sponsorship: Access to tools and resources that support academic and professional growth through sponsorship of Black students to attend one conference per annum** (such as AfroTech, NOMA, and other Black-led conferences). **The financial support of these initiatives should not be relegated to the CSI**, the elevation of minority voices in architecture should be a collaborative effort.

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9. **Health:** Over the past couple of

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and the larger

minutes

architecture student body
have pointed to our
workloads and the minimal
promotion of communities
and initiatives like NOMAs for
their underutilization. The
effects of the architecture
curriculum and workload on our
personal and social lives is not
a new subject, and as we
mentioned earlier in the letter
RISD's NOMAs chapter gets all
their funds from CSI and is not
supported directly by the
architecture department, and
this must change immediately.
NOMAs is the **primary**
community in the Architecture
Department for BIPOC and our
inability to fully utilise this
community by virtue of the
design of our curriculum and its
anaemic support reflects **larger**

10. **Labor:** Moving forward, we
want the department to
understand several
things: institutional responses
that are no longer acceptable:
being "ready to listen," being
"ready to learn," "opening up

the space to... , these institutional 'blanket' responses are not only paternalistic but also avoids accountability by passing the work that needs to be done onto the shoulders of BIPOC. **Should the end result of the discourse of this letter be the shifting of responsibility on yet another task force formed purely of Black people and people of color, then the Department of Architecture and RISD would have failed once again.**

Finally, change the attitude towards discussions of racism, diversity, and inclusion as 'tasks' that 'must be completed' - the discourse (and changes) that we hope these demands generate should center around the fact that discussions on

race, diversity, and inclusion are

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relegation of these discussions to minutes

diversity training days, diversity talks, and sporadic events during Black history month only hinders your capacity to change. Be it at the student-teacher level, to larger conferences with the institution, **all** interactions concerning race, diversity, and inclusion should be approached head-on with a genuine willingness to have the conversation, the respect to listen to the conversation, and the heart to evaluate what was said against our personal biases and misconceptions no matter how uncomfortable, or from an institutional standpoint, 'unprofessional' the conversation may seem. **Once again. what we want is**

We are open to having more direct **conversations** with the department, and we emphasize **conversations**, to expand or clarify the demands we are presenting. We will not, however, be called to defend, curtail, or even apologize for these demands. We are adding our voices to those of our respective colleagues and peers who embraced their trauma and similarly presented their thoughts, feelings and experiences with the institution and we hope that with this letter we can provide the BEB and the RISD some help in tackling the issue at hand.

Below are names of Black students and alumni in the Department of Architecture that have contributed to or read this letter urging for the dismantling of anti-Blackness. By signing, they each support this message.