

The Limits of Your Recognition: Race and Diversity at the D... Updated automatically every 5 minutes

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,

personal traumas and struggles

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attending RISD in the students when deemed
Not Your Token protest beneficial and self-
and The Room of of promoting while
Silence film ([Eloise](#) erasing the
[Sherrid](#)). In addition to experiences, creativity,
the egregious lack of and labor of its Black
forethought your students. **This is an**
response to the current **unconscionable form**
situation has shown the **of**
deafening silence of **performative allyship.**
institutional change

beyond further As this historic moment
tokenization with which should make
these previous protests abundantly clear, these
were met, and protests are not about
demonstrates a pattern singular events,
of obstruction and individual
intransigence towards (bad) actors, or unique
radical institutions, but rather
transformation against are aimed at centuries
anti-Blackness at of systemic oppression
RISD. Not only was against black people
RISD's designed to ensure
pedagogic response their dismissal,
insufficient—a couple dehumanization, and
of wintersession devaluation. RISD is
courses on not alone in these acts,
intersectionality and but they are endemic to
pedagogy—but the practices of
the underlying points architecture and design
made evident in the as we know them. This
Not Your Token demands that RISD's
Protests and The Division of Architecture
Room of Silence film and Design and
were co-opted by RISD Department of
marketing campaigns Architecture
([Our RISD](#)), effectively acknowledge
undermining and Architecture as a
nullifying the politically driven
opportunity for discipline in which
institutional reflection professed “neutrality” is
and itself a stance enabling
transformation that further violence that
these two acts against can no longer be
systemic injustice tolerated as tenable
offered. RISD's and sustainable. As
repeated inaction and Black and BIPOC
inability to recognize its students and alumni
own position, from the
involvement in, and Department of
responsibility to Architecture, we
dismantle regimes of Published by [Google](#)
racial inequity only [Drive](#) – [Report Abuse](#)
further demonstrates it's
it's
simultaneous minutes
exploitation of Black

demand that RISD move beyond

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performative recognition and take immediate and actionable steps towards consciously dismantling institutionalized anti-Blackness. The following are our recommendations for **beginning** what will be a continuous and dynamic process:

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 and institution at large.

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 academic year.

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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every 5 Black bodies. Rather than

approaching this history with 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 dominant in a place that was historically dehumanizing.

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 course syllabi should be a course requirement and when Published by [Google Drive](#) – [Report Abuse](#) minutes

the lack of alternative voices is
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every 5 raised, there should be no

repercussions to students for doing so.

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 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. Published by [Google Drive](#) – [Report Abuse](#) minutes

9. **Health:** Over the past couple of
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weeks, discussions
with **Black students
and the larger
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 issues**

**of mental and social
health** within the

Department

of Architecture.

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

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race, diversity, and inclusion are

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every 5 **constant and dynamic.** The

relegation of these discussions to 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 action that leads to tangible change.**

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.

Abena Danquah, B.Arch '23
Ayotunde Sule, B.Arch '23
Charles Ba Oumar, B.Arch '23
Clarence Mensah, B.Arch '23
Fawz Hussein, B.Arch '23
Joshua Coverdale, B.Arch '23
Leah Lara, B.Arch '23
Mackenzie Luke, B.Arch '23
Quincy Casey, B.Arch '23
Danasha Kelly, M.Arch '22
Elizabeth Mbrokoh-Ewoal, B.Arch '22
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M.Arch '22
Tajha Richardson,
B.Arch '22
Zaiir Talmadge, B.Arch
'22
Zoe Alli, B.Arch '22
Teisha Bradley, M.Arch
'21
Alexa Thorne, B.Arch
'20
Laurence von Lingau,
B.Arch '20 Christina B.
Schaller, M.Arch '18
Chloe Jensen, M.Arch
'16
Malcolm Rio, M.Arch,
'15, [AICAD Teaching](#)
[Fellow](#) '15

**Below are names of
Black and non Black
students, alumni, and
affiliated allies within
and outside of the
Department of
Architecture that
stand in solidarity
with us in dismantling
anti-Blackness. By
signing, each
supports our
statement.**

Megan Holzrichter,
B.Arch '24
Samuel leung, B.Arch
'24
Caleb Callaway,
Industrial Design '23
Deji Eclarin, B.Arch '23
Dorthy Zhang,
Illustration '23
Ioanna
Athanasopoulou,
B.Arch '23 Jack
Kostyshen, B.Arch '23
JaLeel Porcha,
Photography '23 Karas
Cowger, B.Arch '23
Ken Zheng, Industrial
Design '23 Michaela

Shuster, Textiles '23
Min-Wei Ang, B.Arch
'23
Nat Luo, Textiles +
Illustration '23 Sarah
Goldman, B.Arch '23
Sarah Khadraoui,
Textiles '23
Shreya Kaipa, B.Arch
'23
Zane Abu Hamdan,
B.Arch '23 Zenona
Darrow, Textiles '23
Aastha Kannan, Film/
Animation/ Video '22
Adèle Roncey, Graphic
Design '22 Alexandra
Watson, Illustration '22
Amy Qu, Industrial
Design '22
Andrew Wang,
Illustration '22
Angela Lobel, Industrial
Design '22 Anna Van
Ness, Jewelry +
Metalsmithing '22
Avantika Velho,
Industrial Design '22
Cade Shuck, Industrial
Design '22 Caitlin
Dippo, M.Arch '22
Caroline Lippincott,
M.Arch '22 Carolyn van
Artsdalen, Painting '22
Chris Shen, Illustration
'22
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'22
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David Auerbach, M.Arch '22

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Emma Florence, Painting '22	Wendy Chao, Graphic Design '22 William
Evan Hildebrandt, Graphic Design '22	Blythe, Film/ Animation/ Video '22
Georgina Bronheim, '22	Xiao Yu Kang, Graphic Design '22 Bella
Henry Bohan, Painting '22	Carlos, Illustration '21
Julia Nunez, Illustration '22	Carol Demick, Illustration + Industrial Design '21
Julie Egresitz, Graphic Design '22 Jose Mata, M.Arch '22	Dorian Epps, Industrial Design '21 Enrico Giori, B.Arch '21
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Kelly Phan, Graphic Design '22 Louis Hand, Industrial Design '22	Devlin, Textiles '21
Maggie Chang, Sculpture '22	Fia Tharpe, Painting '21
Manmeet Sodhi, Graphic Design '22	Gabriel Durst, Film/ Animation/ Video '21
Mindy Kang, Textiles '22	Grace Chang, Printmaking '21 Jen
Nadine El Nesr, Apparel '22	Chenyu Zhang, B.Arch '21 Kaija Harrison, Film/ Animation/ Video '21
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Natyana Fonseca, Textiles '22	Li, Illustration '21
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Peter Mankiw, Textiles '22	Lucy Freedman, Furniture '21
Ruihan Li, Industrial Design '22 Sage	Nadia Wolff, Textiles '21
Jennings, Painting '22	Natalie Rivera, Film/ Animation/ Video '21
Sarah Tanikawa, Textiles '22	Noah Shipley, B.Arch '21
Shelly Nieto, Textiles '22	Owen Swischuk, Industrial Design '21
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Architecture '21	Tracy '19
<u>Go, B.Arch '21</u>	Louna Bou Ghanem,
Victoria Shu-Wen	B.Arch '19 Ramon
Liang, B.Arch '21	Solis, Landscape
Yasmine Alaoui, B.Arch	Architecture '19
'21	Vuthy Lay, B.Arch '19
Zhixin Shou, B.Arch '21	Diego Fernandez
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Illustration '20	Jessica Wilson,
Alexandra Venegas,	Landscape
Furniture '20 Anya	Architecture '18
Drozd, B.Arch '20	Jhanani Palanisamy,
Avril Teo, B.Arch '20	M.Arch '18 Joseph
Benjamin Han, B.Arch	Echavarria, M.Arch '18
'20	Marco Aguirre, B.Arch
Cali Hetfield, Furniture	'18
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Liz Parler, M.Arch '20	Industrial Design '18
Natasha Brennan,	Frank Gonzalez-Corr,
Illustration '20 Olivia	B.Arch '17 Joshua da
Shen, Apparel '20	Silva, B. Furniture '17
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Morales, Industrial	Landscape
Design '20	Architecture 17'
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Design '16 Ariel	Design '15
Resnick, MArch '16	Nicole Chiu, B.Arch '15
Becca McGee	Paige Mehrer,
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M.Arch '16 Connie	B.Arch '15 Sama
Wang, B.Arch '16	Saket, B.Arch '15
Elise Mortensen,	Shou Jie Eng, M.Arch
Printmaking '16 Eloise	'15
Sherrid, Film/	Zach Salinger-
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'15	Harvard GSD Jen
Alanna Reeves,	Wood, Supporter
Illustration '15 Austin	Jeremy Benson,
Blanks, M.Arch '15	Harvard GSD Jonathan
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Yingshuet Lam, Supporter
Xiao Yu Kang, Supporter

The below names of organizations that stand in solidarity with our statement.

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RISD AIAS, 2020 - 2021

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