

# 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 Silence film ([Eloise Sherrid](#)). In addition to promoting while  
the egregious lack of erasing the  
forethought your experiences, creativity,  
response to the current and labor of its Black  
situation has shown the students. **This is an**  
deafening silence of **unconscionable form**  
institutional change **of**  
beyond further **performative allyship.**

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

**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 ar**

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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  
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Racquel Clarke,  
M.Arch '22  
Tajha Richardson,  
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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 +  
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Textiles '23  
Shreya Kaipa, B.Arch  
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Metalsmithing '22  
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Industrial Design '22  
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M.Arch '22 Carolyn van  
Artsdalen, Painting '22  
Chris Shen, Illustration  
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David Auerbach, M.Arch '22

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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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NOMAS E-Board, 2020-2021

RISD AIAS, 2020 - 2021

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