

A Message from the President

Jun 2, 2020



Dear **AIA Illinois Members** and Friends:

As the pandemic seemingly recedes and we prepare to cautiously reopen, an underlying and perpetual tragedy continues in this nation. While we were sheltered at home, **Ahmaud Arbery**, **Breonna Taylor**, and **George Floyd** became the most recent unarmed black people to be murdered by police or vigilantes. It is painful that a list – a long one – continues to exist to which their names can be added. The warranted outrage of many peaceful protesters has been marred by the destruction caused by self-serving rioters. The reopening of some businesses is now in jeopardy, but that problem will eventually be fixed. What about fixing the problem that is at the root cause of this outrage?

"As long as justice is postponed we always stand on the verge of these darker nights of social disruption" ~Martin Luther King Jr.

What does any of this have to do with architecture? Over the last several years, we have seen a resurgence of interest in alleviating the lack of diversity in our profession, particularly as it relates to African Americans. We've seen people question why Whitney Young's admonishing [speech](#) to the AIA in 1968 is still so relevant today; why haven't we made progress towards better reflecting the beautifully diverse world in which we live? For more than a decade the AIA has adopted the principle of "Citizen Architect" because architects are citizens of the society we serve. We are called to serve holistically in a manner that recognizes our participation in a shared history; therefore, a shared responsibility. We've seen task forces, roundtables and seminars developed around our favorite buzz words of "diversity", "equity", and "inclusion". Good questions, salient efforts, but we must commit to digging deeper if we truly care to fix the problem. To look inward.

- If you feel that the current outrage is a response to an isolated tragedy, that is the problem.
- If you fail to see the connection between longstanding systemic racism and the lack of diversity in this profession, that is the problem.
- If you believe that you have no role to play in fixing the problem, that is the problem.
- If these topics have not even entered into your discourse at home and at work, that is the problem.
- If this message is uncomfortable or controversial for you, that is the problem.

We pride ourselves on being problem solvers...Examine it. Fix it. As leaders, we play many roles; we are givers of optimism and information, but we are also called to challenge one another. Today, I challenge you not to let another historic moment pass without connecting the dots and seeking resolution. There is REAL work to be done and it starts with having REAL dialog in concert with deliberate action. Together we own the solution.

Sincerely,

Janeen Harrell, AIA, NOMA, LEED AP

2020 President of AIA Illinois

~empowered by members to champion the profession of architecture~