

# CHICAGO ARCHITECT

JULY // AUGUST // 2020

## TRUTH TO POWER // 16

A woman with long braids, wearing a black top and grey leggings, stands on a sidewalk holding a white sign. Behind her is a vibrant, multi-colored mural featuring stylized human figures, trees, and abstract geometric shapes. The mural is painted on a wall that appears to be made of concrete or stone. The scene is set outdoors with trees and foliage visible in the background.

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# A START ON THE RIGHT PATH

As a society, we are experiencing a great reckoning.

From climate change to the #MeToo movement and now Black Lives Matter, architecture as a practice and as an industry is faced with deciding who and what we are going to be: Will we begin to answer for inequities, injustice and inaction, or will we promote the status quo? As a member of AIA Chicago, I'm proud to say that rising and standing for positive change, promising to do the hard work with true action through equity, diversity and inclusion is what we believe. It is simply a start on the right path to healing our relationships with each other and the earth.

Since our last issue, our city and the world have taken up the mantle of action against racial injustice due to the despicable murder of George Floyd. As we promised in early June in our statement regarding racial injustice and violence, we want to dedicate this issue's feature articles and give a platform to individuals and firms who are pushing the field not only to acknowledge large-scale racial violence, but also to recognize how their own organization's systems have inadequately addressed those inequities.

You'll meet Tiara Hughes, Assoc. AIA, NOMA, senior urban designer at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP, whose story weaves the personal with the institutional. As she and her Black co-workers at SOM sought healing after George Floyd's murder, they also implored leadership to actively connect with the issue of systemic violence — and also the personal stories told by Black team members. Her article is an example of how listening to our most vulnerable community members can be a form of disseminating power — it is also possibly an example of how firms that have yet to engage in this process can begin.

You'll also read a curated conversation with WJW Architects and their journey from being

a firm that specializes in social justice projects to embodying those values in their firm hiring and culture. You'll learn about how longevity, accountability and leadership play a role in adopting constructive practices and systemic change within; from creating systems for hiring and promotion, to making space for ongoing dialogues that give equal space to employees at all levels.

You'll also hear from Roberta Feldman, Ph.D., and Walter Street III, AIA, in an op-ed about the role of socially just design in improving equity in our cities. This comes before the AIA Chicago Foundation launches the Roberta Feldman Socially Just Design Award next year. Our Chapter Report focuses on the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDI Committee). You'll learn about their goals and directives for the remainder of 2020. And finally, in this issue's Q & A, AIA Chicago speaks with Kimberly Dowdell, AIA, president of I-NOMA.

We wanted to devote as much space as possible to sharing the stories, opinions and processes put forward by individuals and firms doing the work toward a more equitable city.

I'd like to close by adding that this commitment to change, particularly as it relates to racial injustice and particularly in our profession, means that we are going to need to get comfortable with being uncomfortable. The old ways of doing what is easy are behind us; difficult conversations need not be met with resistance, but patience and empathy. The only way we will truly make change for the better is as a collective, one that will need to take the risks of changing the status quo, to bring to fruition a profession of architects that will benefit a diversity of voices so that we may all share equally in a healthy, livable planet.

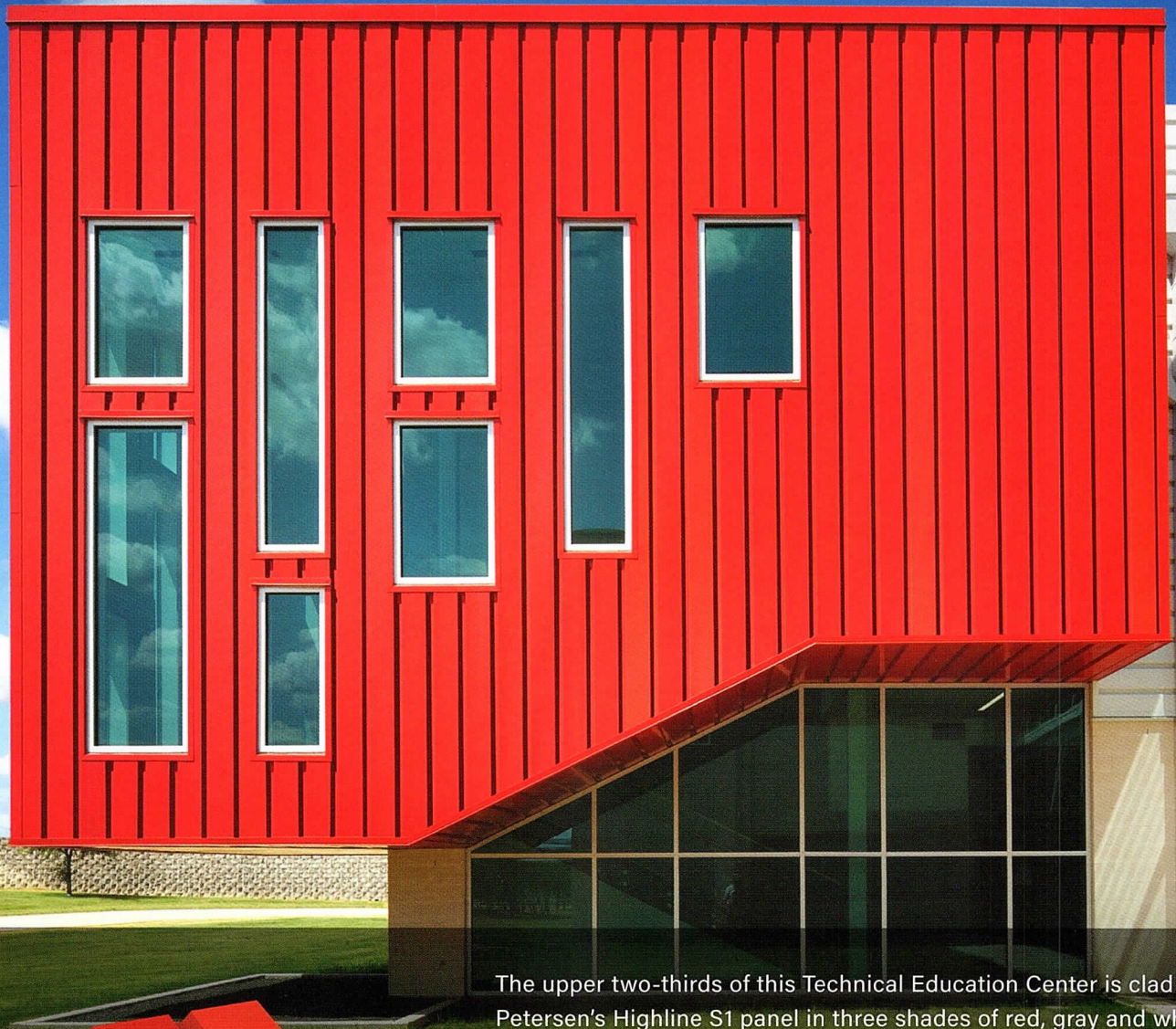
April Hughes, AIA



Chicago Architect, the primary outreach tool of AIA Chicago, is published six times a year as an authoritative resource for architects, the larger design community and the public about architecture and related issues of interest to Chicago architects. The magazine communicates industry trends, the value of high-quality design and the role of AIA Chicago and its members in the world of architecture.

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# Vibrance



The upper two-thirds of this Technical Education Center is clad with Petersen's Highline S1 panel in three shades of red, gray and white, as specified by Pfluger Architects. The mix of finishes and profiles adds a high-tech appeal, with vibrant colors that pop and installation detailing that creates unique shadow effects.

Career & Technical Education Center, TX Installing contr.: Texas Roofing Co. Architect: Pfluger Architects  
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**Tiara Hughes, Assoc. AIA, NOMA**  
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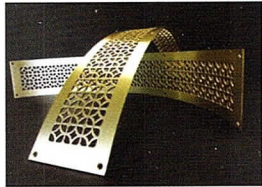
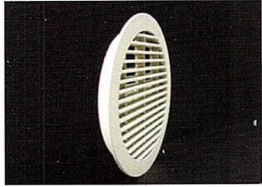
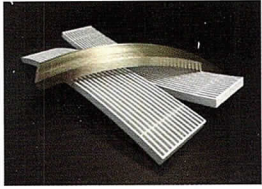
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# ALL EYES ON ALL TYPES

VIA CHICAGO BRINGS THREE NEW AFFORDABLE, SINGLE-FAMILY HOMES TO BRONZEVILLE



While conversations about high housing prices continue throughout Chicago, Via Chicago Architects + Diseñadores — a firm led by Cristina Gallo, AIA, and Marty Sandberg, AIA — have teamed up with an emerging developer to provide three new, single-family homes in Bronzeville. Inspired by the streamlined requirements of the Disruptive Design competition, these new homes are designed to create efficient, spacious living in a neighborhood that continues to see displacement due to rising costs of buying a home.



Brothers Eduardo and Alejandro Cantu grew up in a real estate family, and when they met Marty and Cristina, they knew their values would align. The Cantu brothers (as developers they are known as Triad Project) both grew up knowing they wanted to bring something to the community through development, and the idea of developing these three efficient homes at an affordable price would be the perfect beginning. “We wanted to do something different; most developers make a product and put a price on it. We started with a number and worked backward — less than \$400,000 — and worked from there,” said Alejandro. They focused on Bronzeville, where three consecutive lots were available.

“The neighborhood has such [a] fantastic location, growth and expansion, train access, lake proximity. What we see is gentrification, and what we wanted was to really invest in the existing community.”

Via Chicago worked to design three two-story homes that would accommodate a price tag of less than \$400,000. Each home provides three bedrooms and two-and-a-half bathrooms in an at-grade structure, encased under gabled roofs and unique façades. Efficiency was at the design’s core — low-maintenance, quality materials and surfaces, built-in features and straightforward floorplans. Many designers in Bronzeville run up against the challenges of creating new homes that fit in, aesthetically, with the historic character of the stone mansions



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characteristic of the area. “Much of the new development utilizes flat roofs,” explained Alejandro.

Added Gallo, “We looked at typical forms of homes in Bronzeville. Because we’ve lowered these homes to grade and [they] are only two stories tall, they were looking very small in comparison to the neighbors. That’s why we went for a pitched roof, to give them some height.”

As for the homes’ exteriors, Gallo noted, “There was a lot of debate over ‘why don’t you use brick?’ But with it being such a cost-conscious project, bringing in a mason for a misplaced brick veneer didn’t add up budget or design-wise.” While the homes use a similar floorplan, they all have different street elevations. Cement board siding provides a consistent base material, paired

with selective wood accents and metal siding. The choice to lean heavily on cement board was a strategic one, according to Gallo. “We wanted to avoid anything that creates recurring maintenance costs for the owner. Long-term affordability is important, too.”

Overall, the team of emerging architects and their developers are hoping these homes will be a starting point for a new typology for design and living. At an affordable price and with ample space to expand one’s family inside the home, the lots also provide space for any future ADUs. “The homes can accommodate growing families and aging in place, or multigenerational living,” explained Gallo. By creating attractive, affordable spaces for diverse families, the

Cantu brothers are hoping to create a new typology of housing.

Stated Eduardo, “We want to bring a new concept to the city. It’s important because you can always do business and help people at the same time. It’s very important for us, for the vision of our company. As much as possible, we want to grow and bring 20 or 30 of these homes.”

Added Sandberg, “In situations like this, there’s something to be said about being the new guy, trying out different solutions and understanding that there isn’t one right answer. But the way it has been done over the last 10 years isn’t working for everyone, and we’re hoping this is one solution.” **CA**



EQUITY  
DIVERSITY  
INCLUSION

## INSIDE EDI

The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee (EDI Committee) has been hard at work since 2018 to help create a more inclusive profession. While issues of inequity are pervasive, systemic and daunting, it is something we can change. We as a committee believe in that change, and we believe that our profession of architecture can and should do more. Our work in the built environment is intertwined and inseparable from its social context. “How we practice” and “who we practice with” are inseparable from “what we produce” and “who we serve.” Thus, we need to take a hard look inward at how we architects and our profession uphold principles of equity, diversity and inclusion in all facets, from mentoring, to workplace, to communities we serve, to city and national policies we uphold, to the people we celebrate.

We cannot accept standards of the past as normal, and we cannot move forward without acknowledging our complicity in our inaction. We need to listen and learn; we need to accept and act. The EDI Committee is committed to instilling change so our “new normal” is fair, just, accepting and aware. We believe that, as architects with a widened perspective, we will design better buildings, cities, communities and futures.

The EDI Committee promotes, advocates and creates opportunities for greater equity, diversity and inclusiveness in the practice of architecture. The EDI Committee uses the following to describe and define equity, diversity and inclusion in practice:

- **Equity** – Means a condition is level and impartial. Acknowledging an uneven playing field, recognizing inherent power differentials and disparate treatment based on identity.
- **Diversity** – Mix of different kinds of people. Identity markers, such as gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, color, religion, national origin, age and disability.

- **Inclusion** – Creates an environment in which everyone is able to equally contribute to discussions and decision-making and has the ability to help change systems.

### 2020 EDI Committee Goals

The EDI Committee has set measurable goals that meet AIA National keystones and local priorities via a two-pronged approach: action “pledge” and awareness “outreach.”

As a pledge, we seek office commitments to creating equity, diversity and inclusiveness in practice. Through outreach, we seek to connect and collaborate with existing organizations, groups and offices working on EDI topics collectively to spread awareness and instill action in our community.

The EDI Roundtable goals for 2020 include awareness and action.

### Awareness = Data Collection and Analysis

- Measure and report how principles of equity, diversity and inclusion permeate the AIA, which begins by compiling data of AIA staff, volunteers, and elected and appointed leaders on national, regional, local and component levels.
- Promote guides for equitable, diverse and inclusive practice via the AIA Guides for Equitable Practice.
- Develop a firm self-assessment tool to measure and track initiatives that create a more equitable, diverse and inclusive practice. Criteria can include policies, life/work, family-friendly benefits, etc.
- Require equity, diversity and inclusion data as part of AIA awards submissions.
- Tell our stories through open meetings and panel discussions that continue to develop the messaging that highlights the equity, diversity and inclusion within the profession.

- Ensure that AIA publications do not reflect limited multicultural and gender representation, and that they make broader depictions of the full range of communities represented in the ranks of architects.

**Action = Creating Change**

- Promote equity, diversity and inclusion as core values for the Board of Directors. Those actions include resolutions, business items and member-led initiatives that prepare AIA Chicago to lead relevant and socially conscious conversations and become an organization that embodies those values.
- Advocate for equitable and accessible paths to higher education by working with NAAB on accreditation, through advocating for support of existing bridge programs and the creation of new ones, and establishing and growing diversity scholarships

- and funding for underrepresented students.
- Engage the next generation and their families with K-12 architecture mentorship programs and to enlist architects to volunteer in communities.
- Create a pledge for offices to commit to equitable, diverse and inclusive principles and practices.
- Work within and outside of the workplace to contribute to equity in our communities through architecture.
- Advocate for equitable policies in our building practices at city and state levels.

The EDI Committee will be hosting programs and open meetings throughout 2020. To learn more or get involved, visit [www.aiachicago.org](http://www.aiachicago.org). **CA**

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**DII Architecture** recently completed a single-family home renovation. The main goal was to create a revamped first floor plan that was more functional and spacious. The owners wanted better flow, a bigger kitchen and more light, including a new vaulted ceiling.



LCM Architects promoted **Katherine Susmilch, AIA, CMCA, AMS, PCAM**, to associate principal and four individuals to associate: **Mary Beth Armstrong**; **Steven Montgomery, AIA, LEED AP**; **Deborah Talamantez**; and **Elizabeth Zaverdas, Assoc. AIA, LEED AP BD+C**.

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Kathryn H. Anthony, PhD, has been awarded the Chicago Women in Architecture Foundation (CWA) 2020 Lifetime Achievement Award. CWA recognizes the work of Professor Anthony for her career-long dedication to equity advocacy and her contributions to the advancement of architectural discourse and scholarship.



Emma Cuciurean-Zapan, AIA, LEED AP BD+C, joined SmithGroup in early 2020 as an architect working in the firm's higher education studio.



Olga Dauter, AIA, NCARB, joins SmithGroup with 13 years' experience to serve health care clients as a senior project architect.



Smitha Vasam joined SmithGroup in Spring 2020 as an architectural designer. She is the 2019-2020 president of the Illinois Chapter of the National Organization of Minority Architects and is passionate about how equitable design can be used to reinvigorate communities.



As a part of the AIA 2030 commitment, Shabbir Chandabhai, Assoc. AIA, NCARB, COA, of Burhani Design Architects (BDA), joined local conservation efforts in the Mount Kilimanjaro region of East Africa and summited Africa's tallest mountain (19,341 feet) earlier this year to raise awareness on global climate change. BDA is also a member of Architects Advocate, continuing their effort to educate clients and encourage and create more sustainable projects in line with the 2030 commitment.



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Future Firm and Norman Teague Studios recently completed the renovation of The Silver Room, a retail store and community space located in Hyde Park.



**Thomas Hoepf, FAIA**, is now senior vice president/ design director of global operations at EXP.



LCM Architects has promoted **Todd Douglas, AIA, LEED AP**, to partner.




Goettsch Partners has unveiled its design for Poly 335 Financial Center, a 300,000-square-meter mixed-use complex in the Zengcheng district of Guangzhou, China.



Palma was recognized in Crain's 2020 Notable LGBTQ Executive and Businesses Championing Diversity and Inclusion.







# TRUTH TO POWER

BY TIARA HUGHES, ASSOC. AIA, NOMA



PHOTO CREDIT: DAWVEED SCULLY, AICP



*Tiara Hughes, Assoc. AIA, senior urban designer at Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP, discusses the important process of organizational transformation taking place at SOM as a response to ongoing protests after the murder of George Floyd. Her lived experience sheds some light on the importance of listening, empathy and measurable goals in creating equitable firm culture.*

**T**raumatized, angry and scared are a few of the many emotions experienced again and again for Black people in this country. Second-guessing your clothing or the tone in which you speak is a daily mental struggle, for fear of perpetuating the damaging stereotypes embedded in people's minds. The truth is most of us live in two worlds, professional and personal, and in both we fear for our lives.

Design is no different. I have found myself in collaborative settings receiving a silent audience after contributing design ideas. Though unacknowledged,

those ideas end up being conceptualized into the project after being repeated by white counterparts without question. How do you compete with someone whose ideas will never be second-guessed or judged purely based on the color of their skin? Now here I stand to speak my truth, and in Whitney Young Jr.'s words from his 1968 AIA Convention Speech, "repeated experiences like that left no choice except to, as we say, tell it like it is."

Design firms and the industry at large have discussed "equality of opportunity" as a remedy to systemic racism in America. Equality is not the solution; many students of color enter academia having experienced decades of

economic and emotional trauma stemming from redlining, policing, environmental exploitation, pay inequity and more. They bring these burdens with them into the university environment, which ensures "equality" by providing students with the same toolkits for success without acknowledging those previous burdens.

However, this toolkit does not contain every essential item needed for architecture school — financial support, housing and materials, for example — and not every student has the resources to procure the remaining essentials, resulting in higher dropout rates or even homelessness. It is just one of many significant barriers to entry for students of color and

is why we need to start talking about equity.

The first step toward equity is recognizing identity-based power and privilege differentials. The current protest movement has created a growing awareness in wider society about the everyday inequities of being Black in America. One former colleague that I grew to admire used to be a proponent of the “All Lives Matter” movement; today, he sings a different song, one of recognizing his white privilege as he takes his morning runs into unfamiliar territories without worry or consideration. Recognizing his privilege, he now stands and says Black Lives Matter. These small yet significant changes must happen in white-collar professional life, too, and this is where design firms can learn from current events to make a real systemic change in our industry for minority designers and architects. It’s a journey that SOM took after the murder of George Floyd in May.

#### 06.01.2020

Monday morning was heavy. I could not believe I was able to pull myself up to the computer for work that day. Between mental breakdowns and the endless tears, several co-workers reached out to check in. Two SOM partners called to ask, “How are you?” and “Is there anything I can do?” Unfortunately, in that moment there was nothing they could do or say to bring back the countless Black lives lost or to reverse our trauma. However, I knew the firm could address the current events in a meaningful way that went beyond just an external statement. After conversing about my raw feelings and state of mind, they followed up with, “Tiara, we know we need to respond to this, and we don’t want to be the ones crafting our statement. What is

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NOMA.net

your opinion?” We scheduled a virtual working session that evening with SOM NOMA leaders, partners and our chief people officer.

Like many organizations in the immediate wake of George Floyd’s murder, the public statement draft that was presented in the working session was reactive and generic. We wanted a more actionable stance from leadership directly addressing us, the Black colleagues of SOM. Dialogue around how the firm should move forward, both internally and externally, continued. We suggested an emergency firm-wide address, similar to those of COVID-19, and emphasized actionable follow-up. The leadership listened and was receptive to *all* of our feedback. The next morning, SOM’s platforms publicly posted our revised statement.

As architects, designers and engineers — as human beings — we stand with our Black colleagues, the Black community,

and all people of color in the fight for justice and equality. Racism has no place in our culture, and we unequivocally condemn it in all forms. The fabric of our society, the founding promise that all humans are created equal, needs to be restored, and it is our responsibility to raise our voices and be part of the solution.

We support the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA) and their profound statement — Public Statement Regarding Racial Injustice. At the same time, we reflect internally, ask ourselves hard questions and explore how we can become better stewards for our communities — and how the design environment can contribute to the betterment of racial justice, social welfare, and equity.

We will fight to:

- Foster equal opportunity
- Increase representation
- Confront racial bias
- Advance our professions to better reflect our communities

We met again after the final statement was issued to discuss SOM’s internal response. We decided that a global townhall followed by individual office sessions was the necessary path forward. This engagement and dialogue around SOM’s statement, and how the partners quickly mobilized to schedule global and local townhalls, showed me that our leadership genuinely recognized this moment.

#### Coordination

The global townhall consisted of the partnership presenting the public statement, followed by SOM NOMA’s address to the firm:

*Dear SOM,  
Your Black colleagues are saddened and conflicted as we continue to live in fear witnessing the senseless deaths of our people. We wish to emphasize that the reaction of the Black community is a direct, traumatic response to 400 years of outward and systemic racism. We are not OK.*

"WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO HAVE PEOPLE AS COMMITTED TO DOING THE RIGHT THING, TO INCLUSIVENESS, AS WE HAVE IN THE PAST TO EXCLUSIVENESS."

— WHITNEY YOUNG JR.



ABOVE: SOM NOMA members at the 2019 NOMA Conference in Brooklyn, NY.

BELOW: Paul Bamson, Assoc. AIA, NOMA, Adede Amenyah, NOMA, Ellen Abraham, MBA, NOMA, Tiara Hughes, Assoc. AIA, NOMA, and Dawveed Scully, AICP, NOMA.

PHOTOS CREDIT: NEVILLE SIMPSON



*As Black architects and members of the SOM collective, we want to make it clear that we are directly impacted by the injustice, police brutality and violence against our community and families. This, while simultaneously experiencing disproportionate COVID-19 infections and deaths. These burdens are carried with us daily. However, we continue to maintain our professionalism and our commitments to our projects and global teams. It is our human right to freedom, a fair judicial, economic and educational system.*

*We all will be impacted by these events, and we need to be part of the change. While no words can adequately describe the anger and hurt that we as design professionals feel today, we felt that silence is simply unacceptable. We ask that SOM leverage its position of privilege, as a leading practice, to be committed to social justice, eradicating systems of oppression within the built environment, our office culture and our industry settings at large.*

*We are more than a quota, we are more than a percentage, we are an integral piece of this firm.*

*In unison, we come to you with our call to action:*

- *Fight systemic racism within SOM and the AEC industry*
- *Confront discriminatory policies and persons*
- *Expand practice to include high-IMPACT projects that combat social injustice and inequity in communities of color*
- *Create a safe space for our SOM Black community*
- *Increase minority representation at all levels of leadership within SOM*
- *Promote Black excellence through mentorship and career advancement*
- *Evolve from “diversity” to equity and social justice*

Our colleagues expressed their support, but there were a lot of

## "AS ARCHITECTS, DESIGNERS AND ENGINEERS — AS HUMAN BEINGS — WE STAND WITH OUR BLACK COLLEAGUES, THE BLACK COMMUNITY, AND ALL PEOPLE OF COLOR IN THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE AND EQUALITY."

questions for leadership surrounding what actions beyond verbal affirmations SOM planned to take to demonstrate their commitment. We then transitioned to our local townhalls where each office hosted their own virtual sessions.

Chicago's townhall was raw and unfiltered. There were tears and testimonies when most of our Black colleagues, including myself, shared their personal experiences with the office. In the beginning, leadership wanted to verbally acknowledge each testimony. However, their need to respond was uncomfortable. A colleague gently reminded everyone, "Don't be defensive." Once that message was received, we spoke organically about what

being Black in America means for parenthood, personally experiencing police brutality, inequitable architectural experiences, office life and more; Black architects and professionals in the design industry are not exempt from and do not live outside of the systematic violent acts you see on television.

The sharing of stories was a deeply impactful experience, with direct follow-up from many colleagues who expressed their appreciation and newfound understanding of the racial injustices faced today. Several colleagues also expressed how much more connected they felt to current events after hearing their colleagues' testimonies. This was a pivotal moment in SOM's history.

### **An Actionable Future**

Following the townhalls, SOM's leadership continued the dialogue. With the help and collaboration of SOM NOMA leaders, we identified measurable next steps for leadership with a short- and long-term action plan. Our concerted effort to develop a roadmap to guide the ongoing decisions incorporates us all being B.R.A.V.E. (an acronym published in NOMA's public statement) together moving forward.

### **Moving Forward Together**

It is critical at this time to act responsibly, equitably and justly. But it is equally critical to continue monitoring the results of policy implementation. It was 52 years ago that Whitney Young Jr. challenged the AIA to implement positive change for greater inclusion of the disenfranchised in America. We have been here before; let's not be here again in 50 years.

This past month has been a roller coaster of hope and anguish and renewed reflection. I am inspired by the movement but focused on action. In considering both our country's inequitable treatment of Black people and SOM's particular response this time to inequity in design, I have gained the following insights and key takeaways:

- **Internally reflect** and be honest with yourself. Really consider your past experiences and what you could have done differently.
- **Listen and educate yourself** in addition to furthering the dialogue. Be considerate and understanding to the fact that Black people you know will not have every answer nor feel comfortable sharing their experience. But for those that do share ...



- **Don't be defensive.** Confronting your part in systemic racism will be uncomfortable. Consider how scared and uncomfortable we have been for 400-plus years.
- **Hire more Black people.** If you are a mid- to large-sized firm without any Black people, you are a part of the problem. Establish processes to ensure equitable pathways

to promotion throughout design career phases.

- **No more excuses** for not being able to find Black people. NOMA is a national organization with the resources to connect you to Black talent.
- **Equitably approach** how you support Black people. Support us in our path to licensure, nurture us in academia, foster our growth to leadership.

- **Revisit our policies.** Policies contribute to systemic racism and are the rules we often fall back on to justify perpetuating the system.

“We are going to have to have people as committed to doing the right thing, to inclusiveness, as we have in the past to exclusiveness.” Whitney Young Jr. could not have been more correct; so,

it's important to effect change in our own firms and professional groups. We must support diverse voices and perspectives being made available, as SOM has begun to do. As we share and continuously engage with each other to make real progress in the workplace, our efforts will expand outward to evolve our entire industry and, by extension, our communities. **CA**

# DESIGNING ACCESS TO



## THROUGH COMMUNITY-LED RAPID RESPONSE

BY PAOLA AGUIRRE, ASSOC. AIA, AND GLENANCE GREEN

**W**hen we proposed to Aaron “Lefty” Boyd to collaborate in helping with food distribution efforts at Overton the following week after the protests, uprising and looting, it was only natural for all of us to join forces to help and support our community with access to food, since most of the grocery stores were closed and boarded.

Lefty has been running basketball training for a couple of years now at the former Anthony Overton school (closed in 2013), located on Indiana Avenue and 49th Street in Bronzeville. He believes

basketball is a tool to engage with young people and keep them safe. Paola Aguirre, Assoc. AIA (Borderless Studio), has been working to activate Overton school since 2017 through the

Creative Grounds<sup>1</sup> initiative to hold space; connect with the community using arts, design and architecture; and demonstrate a more inclusive and equitable pathway for the development of



# FOOD

closed schools. The bottom line of both efforts is about caring for community and supporting equitable access to opportunities.

While joining a community cleanup and helping to sweep broken glass from the sidewalks at the Walmart located on 47th and Cottage Grove on Monday, June 1, 2020, we talked with other neighbors about all the grocery stores closing and started worrying about food access options. At that moment, the only grocery store options available were at least a couple of miles away. Using public transportation was not an ideal option due to COVID. Additionally, CPS stopped providing daily free meals from the neighborhood that week — as



PHOTO CREDIT: JAMIE KELTER DAVIS



PHOTO CREDIT: GLENANCE GREEN



PHOTO CREDIT: JAMIE KELTER DAVIS



PHOTO CREDIT: PAOLA AGUIRRE



PHOTO CREDIT: PAOLA AGUIRRE



we know many families depend daily on this source of food.<sup>2</sup> All food systems and infrastructure were failing our community. So, just like us, many other neighbors started organizing their own ways to support other neighbors with access to food and other basic goods.

So, what does it mean to organize a rapid response, community-led food distribution effort?

That's where Paola's training in architecture/urban design and practice as urban planner came in handy, along with the community organizing and research skills of Glenace Green, Deputy Director of FreeSpirit Media and Co-Founder of the Black Researchers Collective. This was in addition of course to both of our extensive professional and personal community networks. Through Borderless Studio, Paola constantly develops research and creates maps and diagrams of urban and neighborhood systems, assets and resources; she also designs project frameworks, collaborative strategies and planning processes, and civic participatory processes. Through Glenace's training in sociology and practice in communication, research and advocacy, she collaborates and engages with project partners in multiple fields of practice, and organizes community through art, media and activism. She's also a Bronzeville resident. Paola and Glenace met as part of a fellowship program led by Chicago United for Equity (CUE) in 2019, centered in racial equity and justice. This collaboration was only possible due to the very strong relationships the fellows develop through the CUE fellowship program.

After the first week of operations, we decided to think of this project as a connector of

## AS FOOD SYSTEMS AND ACCESS GET RESTORED IN THE COMMUNITY, WE ARE TRANSITIONING INTO THINKING WHAT THE LEGACY OF THIS PROJECT COULD BE, AND HOW WE CAN SUPPORT THE CONNECTION OF RESIDENTS TO THE RESOURCES THEY HAVE AVAILABLE IN THE COMMUNITY — ESPECIALLY SENIORS AND VULNERABLE FAMILIES.

all the resources and partners that we were able to identify in a very short period of time — that's how the South Side Food Distribution Network emerged. It was important for us to be strategic and to think about making distribution as accessible as possible to not only Bronzeville but multiple Southside community residents. We have received an amazing response from volunteers, donors and site partners for distribution — we started with a meeting with Lefty, and he immediately signed up his own organization (I Am Chicago Basketball) and his employer (Acclivus) to partner with us. After seven weeks of operations, we have distributed goods to more than 20 pop-up pickup sites across the Southside (Bronzeville, Washington Park, Back of the Yards, Woodlawn, Grand Crossing, Auburn, Roseland, Chatham, South Shore).

This food access effort was only meant to be temporary — a rapid response. We have been planning and recalibrating our operations on a weekly basis since most of June, and because of the support received, we decided to extend this effort during July and August. He had designed and deployed a system; it was only fair to keep it running until donations dry up or as long as supplies last.

As food systems and access get restored in the community, we are transitioning into thinking what the legacy of this project could be, and how we can support the connection of residents to the resources they have available in the community — especially seniors<sup>3</sup> and vulnerable families. As a result, we are in the process of designing a food access resource guide for the Southside, inspired by other efforts, such as City Bureau, which created an online Chicago COVID Resource Finder<sup>4</sup> and aimed at integrating databases created by the city (grocery stores status and CPS free meal distribution). We believe community care and solidarity take different shapes and forms. Designing access to food through community-led rapid response is where we found the place to support and serve our community through our professional skills, training and networks. **CA**

### Resources:

- <sup>1</sup> [www.creativegrounds.org](http://www.creativegrounds.org)
- <sup>2</sup> [schoolinfo.cps.edu/mealdistribution/sites/index.html?timeperiod=postspring](http://schoolinfo.cps.edu/mealdistribution/sites/index.html?timeperiod=postspring)
- <sup>3</sup> *Bronzeville area has one of the highest percentages of senior population in the city*
- <sup>4</sup> [covid.citybureau.org/en](http://covid.citybureau.org/en)

### WORK TO DATE AND RESOURCES

- We have been receiving donations from all around the city since June 3.
- We started with direct distribution during Week 1 (June 3-6) and during Weeks 2-5 (June 8-12/June 15-19/June 25-26/July 1). We pivoted to distribution of goods in the form of care packages identifying/outreaching to a network of sites across the Southside.
- During the last five weeks, we've assembled and distributed ~4,685 care packages to 20 pop-up pick-up site partners across the Southside (Bronzeville, Washington Park, Back of the Yards, Woodlawn, Grand Crossing, Auburn, Roseland, Chatham, South Shore).
- We have directly served 2,500-plus people (walk-ins at Overton, about ~1,500 during Week 1).
- Care package types included: dinner (items to prepare a meal); household (cleaning supplies, trash bags); toiletries (soap, shampoo, paper towels, toilet paper, toothpaste); baby (diapers, formula, wipes); feminine care; fresh produce; and snacks (nuts, crackers, chips, fruit, water).


### WHAT'S NEXT

- Active during July-August
- Food access resource guide (for Southside)
- Connecting/making resources accessible to residents (they all have different platforms)
- City portal for grocery stores status
- CPS meal distribution
- City Bureau COVID resources

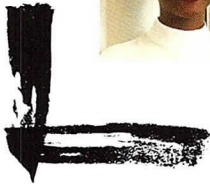


# How WJW Architects Created a Dialogue for Racial Justice and Equity

**F**or decades, Worn Jerabek Wiltse Architects has focused the majority of our design attention on the needs of underserved populations, including people with disabilities; families seeking affordable housing; health care and housing for seniors, veterans and those in need of addiction recovery and mental health services; along with holistic community redevelopment efforts. As a result of decades of disinvestment and institutional racism, a common factor for all these populations is that they inevitably intersect with communities of color.

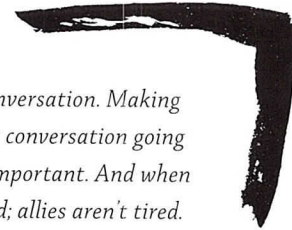


BY TODD WILTSE, AIA  
ALBERT WANG, AIA  
MAGGIE GRZELAK, ASSOC. AIA  
JOI COPELAND  
AND LIEZEL PIMENTEL, AIA



*“There has to be a conscious decision every day to sustain this conversation. Making a conscious choice every day, even when you’re tired, keeping that conversation going and pushing past your fatigue to sustain these discussions is so important. And when we sustain it, nobody’s tired: People who are oppressed aren’t tired; allies aren’t tired. The conversations are just happening because it becomes something we just do.”*

— Joi Copeland, Architectural Designer



As a firm, we are proud of this design focus and also proud of our progress toward meaningful gender equity — 50 percent of partners and associates are women, up from 25 percent just four years ago. However, racial inclusivity and dialogue have proven more difficult.

The recent murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Dominique Fells and too many others to name, along with the resulting outpouring of protest in Chicago and across the nation, leave us grasping for answers. **We find that in spite of our experience designing for and within communities of color, we don’t know how to talk about race.** We don’t know enough about how our designs could better respond to race. We don’t know enough about how to address the systemic lack of diversity within the profession.

What we do know is that architects don’t have all the answers. That said, we want to strive to ask the right questions, listen to the voices of the community with an empathetic ear



WJW volunteers at the Kilpatrick Renaissance community garden in Portage Park, a development designed by the firm.

and then take action based on what we learn.

In the wake of the outrage over George Floyd’s murder, a group of young architects and architectural designers within our firm took the initiative to self-organize a forum for

dialogue and action on the issues of racial justice and equity. Building off the work of our grassroots Volunteer and Education committees, they created multiple forums for learning, listening, fundraising and direct action.

As leaders of the firm, the partners concluded that the most important role that we could play was to provide unflinching support and space for these endeavors, and to make it clear to the staff that these explorations support the core mission



*"We started the dialogue because we saw it as a necessary step to acknowledge the systemic racism, racial inequality and police brutality that are major issues in the United States. It was a small action that we hoped would lead to larger actions as individuals in educating ourselves on racial equity, justice and policing, creating ongoing conversations about these topics and working towards concrete actions and change that are so desperately needed. The dialogue has led us to think about these issues as they relate to us as individuals and as an architecture firm in Chicago."*

— Maggie Grzelak, AIA, Architectural Designer



*"Consider that we have a relationship with history and that history is our maker. This means that history provides us with richness, but it also gives us burden, and burden is a difficult bag to carry. So, while we may not be 'responsible' for the past, our relationship with history means that we are 'accountable' for it."*

— Albert Wang, AIA, Project Architect

of the firm. A top-down exercise or pronouncement from management would not have had the profound effect that we've already seen from this bottom-up engagement. While we know that the 24 people that comprise one architecture firm cannot formulate solutions for all manner of deep-seated societal problems, we are heartened by the courage our younger thought-leaders are demonstrating in facing these challenges.

Below are excerpts from the ongoing internal dialogue, curated by Maggie Grzelak, architectural designer, and Liezel Pimentel, project architect. The focus to date is on the development of questions, more than the generation of answers. Architects

love process: Consider this a window into how our firm is engaging in the transformational processes currently underway, as architects and as community members.

**How do we begin a discussion, as a firm, about racism, equity and social justice?**

- Just start! We started with an all-firm Zoom call, not knowing where it would go and what form it would take.
- Recognize that this problem isn't new.
- Speak up about the inequities we notice and experience.
- Provide a platform for other voices to share their experiences.

- Seek out information that we find uncomfortable or that may even offend us to understand the scope of the problem.

**How do we sustain that conversation?**

- Have a champion and distribute the load to rotating staff.
- Keep talking: Every two weeks, we hold a scheduled meeting for those who want to participate to continue the conversation.
- Create a Google Doc that includes books on race, justice and policing; organizations to support that focus on racial equity, police reform and an end to police brutality; places to donate, volunteer opportuni-

ties and updated lists of demonstrations and protests going on throughout Chicago.

- Create a designated chat channel for discussion on these topics, activism and education.

**How can we as a firm begin educating ourselves, and what actions can we take?**

- In meetings, have a member of the WJW team lead a discussion on a particular topic that may include articles, news clips and conversations with individuals outside of the office who are involved in making real change.
- Share actions related to local advocacy and activism.

“

*“The hardest part was knowing the best approach to start the conversation. We quickly realized that there is no ‘best approach’ — it was simply something that needed to be done, all of the awkward and uncomfortable moments included. The dialogue is about unlearning and actively seeking to be antiracist through actions and conversation, and the dialogue is only the first step.”*

— Maggie Grzelak, Assoc. AIA, Architectural Designer

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*“The conversation is taking shape in various forms — emails, discussions, article reviews, book clubs, podcast recommendations, protest schedules, journaling, etc. Knowing this isn’t a new problem, we’re analyzing past experiences through a critical racial lens. We’re speaking up about the inequities we see and that we unintentionally impose on others. And most importantly, we are listening. By giving minority voices the platform and acknowledging there are other lives lived beyond our own we can absorb, unlearn and advocate.”*

— Liezel Pimentel, AIA, Project Architect

”

- Gather and document lived experiences with racism and intersectional forms of oppression.

**How can that discussion begin to inform our practice?**

- Critique the current process of gathering and implementing community and resident input.
- Look for opportunities for increased community engagement before, during and after design.

**What does it mean for a project not to end when the building is built?**

- Continued involvement and volunteering.

- Keeping up-to-date to provide a competent and functional end-product that is continually evolving; it takes research to be at the forefront.
- For conceptual projects, such as the Peace Boulevard design for the 2017 Architecture Biennial, incorporate a diversity and equity lens in the submission and dialogue to advocate for the inclusion of all voices at the table.

**As a firm, how can we advocate for and take actions toward a more equitable future for the practice of architecture?**

- Seek opportunities to mentor students.

- Promote equitable hiring practices.
- Use the Women of WJW group as a forum to think about the issues of being a woman in architecture through an intersectional lens.
- Work with organizations that advocate for diversity in the profession — NOMA, Hip Hop Architecture Camp, ACE Mentor Program.
- Advocate for industry-related policies that support social and racial equity.
- Leverage the firm’s experience in engaging with and designing for underserved communities to advocate for justice.

**Questions for further discussion:**

- How can our advocacy or action further advance policies that support equitable housing policies and antiracist policies to benefit the residents of the buildings we design? What organizations are already doing this work and how can we support them?
- What can we take from what we know as architects practicing in Chicago to engage our non-architect friends and family in these discussions?
- What does it mean to be an antiracist architecture firm? CA

# CENTERING SOCIAL IMPACT DESIGN

BY ROBERTA FELDMAN, PH.D., AND WALTER STREET III, AIA, NOMA, AICAE



CREDIT: PORT

The Resonation Room is at once both an oversized percussion installation and space of public collection located on Chicago's South Side. The temporary pavilion occupied a vacant lot, providing neighborhood residents with a place to play (both physically and musically), gather, socialize and communicate.

The COVID-19 pandemic has, for many Americans, lifted the veil from the many life-threatening inequities that have existed in this country. Coupled with international protests against police violence after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, the country has found itself reckoning with our violent past and demanding structural change to shape the future. Roberta Feldman and Walter Street of the AIA Chicago Foundation Board of Directors discuss how social

impact design can be one part of this structural change.

Need we be reminded that racism is an institutionalized part of the fabric and character of all aspects of the nation? Minneapolis, a physical manifestation of the all-consuming effects of the unfettered legacy, ignored, hidden and allowed to metastasize throughout the civic body, has reminded us. Rage over a public murder at the hands of a state agency is focused on a police station and a corporate entity in the form of a Target

store. Embers from the targeted symbols respect no boundaries, causing the conflagration's spread to consume nearby properties representative of community efforts to regenerate where before there was disinvestment. A suitable metaphor for the effect of centuries of racism allowed to hinder a nation's stated aspirations: Racism, eventually, consumes all.

No justice, no peace. We see these moments ignite and bring our attention to tremulous disaffection rumbling beneath the

surface. We observe racism institutionalized as part of the physical fabric of the nation. Dancing around it, willful ignorance or denial can no longer be an acceptable status quo. Architects and our allies have the power to participate, as agents of change, in dismantling systemic racism coupled with poverty and misogyny that perpetuate disruption and disunity of our society.

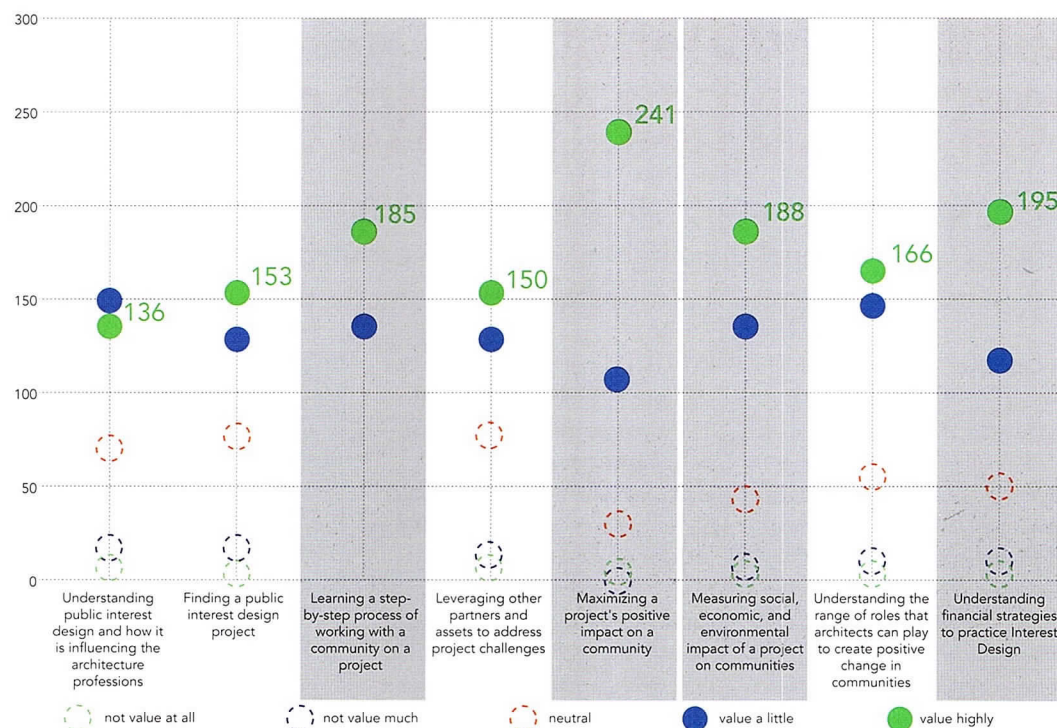
What to do? We can learn from architects, designers and planners, compelled over decades to offer



alternative means to better serve the entirety of society. Spawned out of the civil rights and student social movements of the 1970s, purposefully working with communities impacted by disinvestment, designers and planners have championed those so often ignored by partnering, by listening and by recognizing the agency and voice of the people.

Through the 2011 AIA College of Fellows' Latrobe Prize, my colleagues Bryan Bell, Sergio Paleroni and David Perkes and I, Roberta Feldman, identified a "public interest design" movement reshaping architectural practices.<sup>1</sup> Its roots are apparent in individual architects' desire to "address complex, long-term societal problems" and "bring about changed values, increased awareness, and raised aspirations for a more just society."<sup>2</sup>

Public interest designers have been advocates for quality design for all; designers/builders with communities in need of a health center, playground or co-op grocery store; fundraisers for underfunded projects; researchers documenting the inequitable impact of built and natural environmental degradation; creators of community tools to engage those not included in public policymaking; modifiers who encourage their clients to rethink their programs to minimize socially inequitable design solutions; educators teaching their students to challenge the unjust status quo; teachers of the younger generation with the hope of diversifying those studying and entering the profession; and emergency responders in devastating humanitarian crises, crises that impact those who have the least resources, to rebuild from the devastating impact of earthquakes, extreme weather, war and more.



2011 survey results show that architects have deep interest in and value the processes and ideals of social justice design work.

It is clear that such socially just design efforts, our preferred term, must continue and be elaborated.

Alright, you agree — socially just design is the right work to do — but how? You need to make a living. The "how" requires more time, innovation in business models, flexibility of designers' roles, additional skills and collaboration with professionals from allied fields.<sup>3</sup> We must be creative in our economic models, relationships and protocols to ensure the viability in our practices. There are professionals who dedicate up to 50 percent of their profits to pro bono work and still make a living. There are those who become developers to assure appropriate impact. Academic programs engaged in design/build and community design have multiplied. The number of nonprofits engaged in socially just design practices and initiatives are markedly more than a few decades ago.

Let us take the best of what we

know and commit to engage and eliminate the inhumane damage of the past and present. Given the pressing challenges of the faults — the racism, poverty and other social inequities that are destroying our society — we must do more. This is not a task only for individual architects but for the entirety of the profession. Again, from our research, our colleagues' challenge to the AIA is still relevant, possibly now more apparent. The public is asking us to answer its aspirations and demands.

Now is the time, lest we allow racism to continue its all-consuming blaze. We possess tools and intellect for design that can and need to become agents for change. The profession's oft-stated claim and offer is that of problem solving. Then let's make it so. Become willing to interrogate practices and policies that do harm, and solve the problems. Cease enabling detrimental enshrinement of regressive actions

and policies in the built and natural environment and heal the environment. Strengthen the profession's ethical underpinnings. **CA**



In 2021, under the auspices of the AIA Chicago Foundation Board, a new award recognizing socially conscious work will be launched. The Roberta Feldman Socially Just Design Award was established in 2020 to honor excellence in built projects and design programs guided by the conviction that access to high quality architecture is not just a privilege, it is a public (human) right.

Resources:

- <sup>1</sup> Feldman, R., Paleroni, S., Perkes, D., & Bell, B., *Wisdom from the Field: Public Interest Design in Practice*, 2011, AIA, [www.scribd.com/document/394076064/wisdom-from-the-field-public-interest-architecture-in-practice](http://www.scribd.com/document/394076064/wisdom-from-the-field-public-interest-architecture-in-practice)
- <sup>2</sup> *Op. Cit.*, p. 2.
- <sup>3</sup> *Op. Cit.*

## Q&A

# KIMBERLY DOWDELL: POSITIONED FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

AIA Chicago recently chatted by phone with Kimberly Dowdell, AIA, NOMA. Kim is the 2019-2020 president of the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA) board of directors. Professionally, she is a principal at HOK, working from the firm's Chicago office.

**AIA Chicago:** Since its creation 49 years ago, NOMA has worked to minimize the effect of racism on the profession of architecture. At the end of May you issued a call for the organization to do and to be more. Can you share some of NOMA's plans and strategies to respond to your call for action?

**Kimberly Dowdell:** We had a number of initiatives in the works leading up to my May 31st statement. Now we're really focusing on empowering our local chapters. Everyone is familiar with NOMA as a national resource, but the extent to which we support the work happening at the local level is where we'll see more traction. We now have 30 professional and 75 student chapters of NOMA around the country and know that at the local level is where the rubber meets the road. Focusing on, for example, initiatives like our local Project Pipeline summer camp for kids. In Chicago, the I-NOMA chapter has one of the strongest Project Pipeline camps in the country. Last year's program hosted 135 students with the generous support of 85 volunteers at Crown Hall and several field trip sites around Chicago. Celebrating and bolstering local programs as much as we can will be a big part of our focus.

**AC:** How can working architects who are not firm leaders contribute to positive change in our profession?

**KD:** I recommend everyone consider, in addition to their AIA membership, joining NOMA. We welcome all people to join us, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, minority or not. Being a member of NOMA is one way to be informed about issues to consider in looking at ways we can diversify the profession. Beyond that, being a mentor to a diverse set of architects, or architects-to-be, is important. I embrace the notion of 360 degree mentoring, looking at mentorship in a holistic way. Not only mentoring people coming behind you, but also your peers. Even younger people have a great opportunity to mentor their mentors.

**AC:** You've developed an established role in the community as a creative, collaborative and strategic leader. Who and what have been the primary inspirations and drivers of your career as an architect and a leader?

**KD:** I would give a lot of credit to my mentors from NOMA and from the various jobs I've had throughout my career. In fact, most of my professional opportunities have come directly through the NOMA network. There are no fewer than 10 people who helped cultivate all the things I have going for me.

**AC:** You've been known to say that architects have the power to "design for life." What does that mean to you and how would



KIMBERLY DOWDELL, AIA, NOMA

you like to see others embrace that ethos?

**KD:** We all know that the professional duty of an architect is to protect the health, safety and welfare of the public. If we look more closely at that call to action, it's more than just about the individual buildings; it's about looking at systems and ways we can ensure greater health and wellness. An important element to that is architects getting involved with policy making, which is slightly outside of our traditional

purview. But we have a lot to offer by getting involved in commissions, or by helping to shape development policies, for example. We can really get to some core issues to help reduce poverty, increase density in responsible ways, and so many other important objectives, like making sure that less well-resourced communities in our cities have better health outcomes. Using our design thinking skills can help solve very real problems and bring about positive change. **CA**

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