

WE VOW TO ACKNOWLEDGE. WE VOW TO LISTEN. WE VOW TO LEARN. WE VOW TO ACT.

"Do the best you can until you know better.
Then when you know better, do better." – Dr. Maya Angelou

It is time to do better. The chapters of the AIA and NOMA in Tennessee stand in solidarity.
We cannot change the past, but we WILL change our future.

ACKNOWLEDGE.

A Message from AIA Tennessee | AIA Chattanooga | AIA East Tennessee | AIA Memphis | AIA Middle Tennessee

In recent weeks, we have been confronted with the wounds of social injustice and racial discrimination bared by the reality of the senseless killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Michael Brown, Shantel Davis, Atatiana Jefferson, Laquan McDonald, Tony McDade, Pamela Turner, Korryn Gaines, Trayvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, and so many others.

If you have not already done so, we encourage you to read the [National Organization of Minority Architects' newly issued BRAVE statement](#) and the statement from [AIA National](#) as well as the statements from NOMA Nashville and NOMA Memphis below.

As you read them, remember that none of us are without bias. Each one of you will have your own opinion and feelings about what is written. Some of us will wonder whether AIA, as a professional organization, should be addressing this topic at all while others will say that not to speak out makes us, the AIA, complicit in the problem and that we as architects should lead the discussion. No matter what you personally believe is the correct role of AIA on this subject, we want to encourage all of us, as architects and members of AIA TN, to look inward and commit to ending racism within our own profession.

Let us stand together for racial equality, acceptance and inclusion. Let us seek to end racism and discrimination in all forms. Let us renew our commitment to listening and learning, to fostering a culture of equity and justice across our profession, and to creating environments where all thrive.

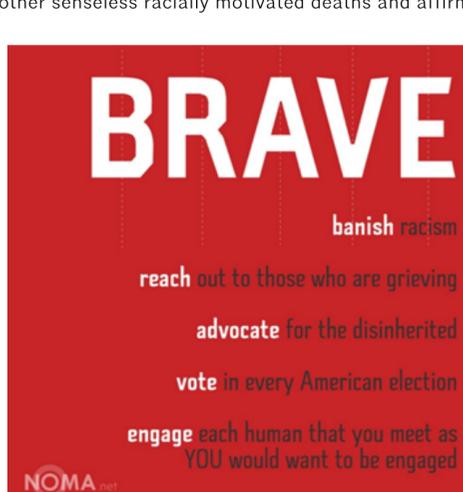
To begin our discussion, we have reached out to leaders from the National Organization of Minority Architects chapters in Tennessee to hear their perspectives and have shared their messages in their own words.

LISTEN.

Words from NOMA Nashville Chapter President Valarie Franklin, AIA, NOMA:

"In 1971, twelve African American architects from different parts of the world met, some for the first time, at the AIA National Convention in Detroit. They recognized the need to work together to fight discriminatory policies that limit or bar minority architects from participating in design and construction programs across the nation. The National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA) was founded to advance those ideals and with the mission of inspiring minority youth and promoting access to quality design to all people regardless of race.

'NOMA's mission, rooted in a rich legacy of activism, is to empower its' local chapters and membership to foster justice and equity in communities of color through outreach, community advocacy, professional development, and design excellence.' The Nashville and Memphis chapters of NOMA echo our NOMA National President Kimberly Dowdell's words concerning the killing of George Floyd and the countless other senseless racially motivated deaths and affirm to continue being BRAVE:



In reading AIA National's statement, two essential action items stuck out to me; AIA vowed to "acknowledge, listen, and learn" and "work more closely with our partner organizations that can assist in making meaningful, lasting change for society and our profession." As minority architects and design professionals, we do have stories to tell, and in telling these stories and having our counterparts acknowledge, listen, and learn we hope that we can begin to heal and stop the process of repeating history. Many licensed architects within our organization either grew up during times of segregation or were first-generation post segregation.

As a first-generation post segregation member, I look back on my childhood and think about how my parents not having equal access to housing, education, food, and healthcare affected not only their quality of life but mine as well. I remember being the first member of my immediate and extended family to attend college; and because there was a lack of resources my college attendance came with much struggle and many sacrifices, so much so that I was the only one of four siblings afforded that level of education. It is so important to support scholarships and internships for black students because the black community is in the trenches trying to eradicate the effects of generational poverty as a result of systemic and lawful racism.

Our local chapters of NOMA currently sponsor community outreach programs such as architecture-oriented youth summer camps (NOMA Project Pipeline) and creating an architecture coloring book featuring the work of [NOMAnash](#) chapter members distributed at Middle Tennessee schools and more broadly through Amazon publishing. Our chapters also sponsor programs that outreach on issues largely affecting the black community such as affordable housing and gentrification.

NOMAnash and NOMA Memphis are looking forward to working closely with AIA TN and our local chapters of AIA to review our current programs and initiatives, and to generate some new ones in unity with AIA. NOMA Memphis founded in 2010, has already begun the work of working with AIA Memphis in establishing a strategic partnership through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). AIA Memphis and NOMA Memphis are currently co-sponsoring SAY IT LOUD – Tennessee, a national exhibit that highlights the work of Tennessee's minority architects. NOMAnash is one of NOMA'S newest chapters chartered in 2018 and is looking forward to fostering similar relationships with AIA Mid TN and AIA TN. We are pleased that the AIA as a collective has asked to be kept accountable to ensure that their deeds match their words. We are happy that these conversations have begun, we are more than willing to share our experiences, we are dedicated to making ourselves available as a resource in discussing solutions, and we are hopeful that change is on the horizon."

LEARN.

Words from NOMA Memphis Chapter Vice President Colby C. Mitchell, NOMA:

"The profession of architecture is truly like none other. Through one singular vocation, we can tap into the lives of countless professions. We get the pleasure of learning what it's like to be a medical professional by designing the spaces they occupy. We're afforded the opportunity of excitement to be a professional athlete by designing their arenas, stadiums, locker rooms, and skyboxes! This same sentiment applies to any other profession you can imagine, as we have direct involvement with the development of the built environment. From the time we are born to the time we transition, each of us is either in a building, outside of a building or somewhere near a habitable space, and if we're stranded on an island, we hope to get back to a building very soon!

With that, what is the African American contribution to the design profession as it relates to the built environment in America? We are woefully under-represented, as African American architects represent about 2% of approximately 113,000 licensed architects and African American women represent approximately 0.3%.

The all-important questions must then be asked – what is the American Institute of Architects' role in diversity and inclusion of African Americans? Demographically, what do AIA Boards (both local and nationally) look like? How is AIA advocating for MWBE participation and goal setting on projects? How is AIA working to tackle gentrification? These are just a few questions, but even more importantly, how do we tackle systemic racism beyond the workplace? Non-African American members of AIA and NOMA can start by being a true ally, by verbally expressing "Black Lives Matter" not only to your colleagues but to your family, friends, and associates. It is important to understand that, as an African American, being pro-Black does not equate to being anti-White. Similarly, those who are not Black, should not be deemed as anti-White for supporting racial justice and equity. We must do more. We must say more.

Until we truly empathize and feel the inextricable pains of those lost to Police Brutality, it will just be another name. And, while important, this is just one example of how we must move beyond the formalities of public statements and issuing of letters in solidarity. We must move to action, having tough conversations, yes, and acting on what we've learned from one another.

Often the issues in our country boil down to green – not black or white. Racial equity means equitable distribution of wealth and resources and ultimately results in less crime. Awareness and joint statements are only the first steps to healing and repairing the deep wounds of these United States of America."

ACT.

All Represented Groups Stand United in our Commitment:

The AIA and NOMA will be jointly hosting a series of virtual town hall meetings to launch the movement toward Acknowledge, Listen, Learn, and Act. We hope you will participate in the town hall and share your ideas. Please watch your email in the coming weeks to learn more about the dates and registration for these town hall meetings.

During the town hall meetings, we will be discussing actions that we can take as a profession to bring about change. Actions such as the following:

- Pledge to open the lines of communication and collaborate with the chapters of the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA) in Tennessee
- Invite Black architects to participate in the AIA at all levels of leadership
- Provide support for Black architectural students at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, the University of Memphis, and Belmont University
- Encourage and participate in educational opportunities to engage minority children in inspiring ways
- Advocate against racial barriers that inhibit promotions for Black staff into leadership positions within architecture and design firms
- Encourage Tennessee architecture and design firms to provide internships for Black emerging professionals
- Encourage Tennessee firms to provide pro bono design services and offer hands-on contributions to encourage underserved communities of color
- Encourage Tennessee firms to partner with and support minority design firms and organizations.
- Promote the work of traditionally underrepresented individuals and groups in architecture
- Advocate for inclusive legislation and policies in state and local governments

