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A MANIFESTO AND CALL TO ACTION TO BUILD A COOPER UNION FREE OF RACIAL AND SOCIAL INJUSTICE

SUBMITTED BY THE ANTI-RACISM TASK FORCE OF THE IRWIN S. CHANIN SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE

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0 PREAMBLE

As Architects, we hold a precious and critical space for how social imaginaries evolve, are reflected and contested. This delicate space ideally seeks to balance the poetic and the pragmatic, intangible virtues and tangible deliverables of “dwelling,” and requires an ongoing dialogue with society and the multiplicities and particular roles of architecture. We are collectively seized with the matter of contributing toward true social justice, through the vehicle of architecture, architectural thought, empathy and a profound belief in the power of creativity to unlock and lubricate the stymied wheels of social progress.

As architects we are not the sole arbiters of the built environment, but we are complicit in the perpetuation of the structural injustices when we give credence and expressive agency to power configurations that exist at the expense of others and when we are uncritical of the injustices which allow certain architectures to thrive in the real or imagined world.

The Black Lives Matter movement and its associated articulations are not a new cry for social justice; they are one of many waves of struggle, extending back centuries, but it is our wave, it is our struggle. The baton is firmly in our hands. Racism is a wicked problem, interwoven with capital, political structures and the very founding material of the Republic. As much as democracy is not an event, but a lived practice of diligence, oversight and rigor, so too must our fight against Racism be, in all its deceptive and surreptitious forms, and in so doing we may build a new edifice on the ashes of the old.

We seek a world beyond the narrow confines of racism, but one which celebrates our diversity as critical ingredients for the social imaginary of a progressive world. We are anti-racist, but unashamedly and even more so, pro-humanist—but to achieve that we must measure, frame and understand the ways in which racism conceals itself through our pedagogy, our canon, what we celebrate as virtuous and what we condemn.

We embrace the unfamiliar path that lies ahead. Our struggle is as much institutional as it is personal. We are modest about our capability to change the world, but we are bold enough to assert our right to attempt to do so. We are cautious about our certainty in this moment, but we are determined to discover a better way of being. This is why we are architects.

Context: In July 2020, students, faculty and alumni of the School of Architecture of The Cooper Union formed an *ad hoc* task force to propose positive actions to dismantle structures of racism and injustice in our institution. We were inspired by the “Collective Student Letter on Fostering an Actively Anti-Racist Institution” and the Zoom Town Hall following the collective grief and outrage over the murder of George Floyd and the subsequent Black Lives Matter protests. Taking into consideration the distinct authority and spheres of influence of four tiers of institutional power at The Cooper Union, this Task Force presents a Framework for Partnership and action items at each of those levels: 1. Individuals and Small Groups; 2. Formal Committees and other Institutional Entities; 3. Deans; and 4. The Administration and Board of Trustees.

1 FACULTY AND SMALL GROUPS

Achievable Fall 2020 Semester

Faculty are responsible for the transformation of the curriculum and pedagogy through developing more inclusive teaching methods, embracing more expansive topics and drawing from more diverse sources in scholarship and design. These important endeavors can be undertaken in different stages, both short- and long-term; we can begin immediately and take actions for the fall semester.

In destabilizing the canon—the notion of an objectively superior and normative Western tradition—faculty are responsible for proposing new forms of knowledge that embrace previously marginalized cultures, overlooked regions and neglected voices. By guaranteeing greater presence of under-represented communities and minorities into our reading lists, case studies and precedents faculty can stimulate diversity of thought and bring global lenses to our classrooms.

As part of this transformation, faculty and students alike must also challenge an educational system that uses a one-way, linear communication *from* professor *to* student based on a traditional, authoritarian master-pupil dynamic in favor of a more experimental relationship, one which recognizes the knowledge and lived experiences of students as well as of professors. Both should be active participants in the process of education, engaging diverse points of view and acknowledging that much of what is taught is open to question. We will need to become inventive with our pedagogic tactics and improve our communication to create a classroom dynamic that is just, making sure that equity in gender, socio-economic class and ethnicity are integral to course content and assignments.

The faculty of the School of Architecture has already begun this progressive process: these

changes in Content, Process and Format, and Participants can be implemented for the semester of fall 2020:

CONTENT: Bringing a global lens and diversity of voices and case studies:

- Including scholarship and creative production by Black, Indigenous, Latinx, LGBTQIA and other under-represented minority theorists, historians, philosophers, practitioners, professionals, and artists in all courses and design studios;
- Creating an open environment to encourage diversity of thought, inviting students to add to the course content;
- Emphasizing ethical practices as reference case studies, in their use of materials, sustainability and labor practices. Making distinctions between more or less ethical examples should be an integral part of all courses;
- Providing translation to key texts to make the readings more accessible to international students.

PROCESS AND FORMAT: Encouraging experimentation and challenging hierarchical structures:

- Alternating formats of pinups, “crits” and reviews;
- Organizing classrooms physically with consciousness of the implied hierarchies and power dynamics of various arrangements;
- Actively engaging students during classes;
- Extending faculty availability to individual students by establishing designated Office Hours and an office in which to meet;
- Updating end-of-semester Course Questionnaires with a section about BIPOC representation, a curriculum free from racial and social injustice and non-authoritarian pedagogy.

PARTICIPANTS: Embracing interdisciplinary thought and the knowledge of others in the improvement of our discipline:

- Inviting Guest Speakers and Critics from Black, Indigenous, Latinx, LGBTQIA and other under-represented minorities to Courses, Design Studios, Lectures and other activities, bringing diversity of vision, expertise and experience as a norm, not as an exception;
- Aligning and collaborating with professors, professionals and alumni of other disciplines, especially with the HSS, Art and Engineering Faculty at the CU;
- Inviting more Cooper Union Alumni to the Lunchtime events to expand and strengthen our community.

These immediate necessary changes have impact beyond the School of Architecture faculty and the physical space of the school, strengthening the Cooper community, past, present and future. Faculty and alumni will assist in creating a Cooper Union network of professional support based on providing opportunities for internship and scholarship and student-alumni mentorship.

2 FORMAL COMMITTEES AND ENTITIES

Achievable by December 2020

ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE:

Fall 2020

- To promote greater participation and diversity of voices in the shared governance of the school, on 29 November 2016 the School of Architecture Faculty approved an Amendment to the School of Architecture Governance providing for expanded student and faculty representation on all standing committees; we request President Sparks

present the Amendment to the Board of Trustees for ratification so that these additional faculty and student representatives may vote;

- We recommend that all committee meetings be open to Student Council members;
- This committee should consider and discuss compensation for student representatives who serve on standing committees, faculty meetings and special task forces;
- We ask the Administrative Committee to prioritize BIPOC representation on all committees when developing slates of nominees;
- We ask the schedule of committee meetings be circulated at the beginning of each semester, Agendas in advance of the meetings, and Meeting Minutes subsequently and promptly posted.

ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE, UNDERGRADUATE: Fall 2020

- Collect data from Admissions Office for the last 10 years to better understand demographic trends, especially those related to diversity of applicants following the tuition crisis;
- Attempt to discern if any assessment tools used by admissions (i.e. SAT, GPA, Home Test, Family Income, etc.) have been a predictor of success or struggle in the architecture program;
- In light of research showing that Early Decision Admission favors students of privilege, a look at the ED demographics since the inception of ED with regard to BIPOC and economic disadvantage may suggest the Committee reconsider or pause early decision this year, or undertake more zealous recruitment;
- Collect data from the last 10 years about the disproportionate percentage of BIPOC students at Cooper Union who do not complete their BArch Degrees. Look for trends (financial need, lack of academic or other kinds of preparation or support, any particular course that has been problematic, etc.);
- Work with the Admissions office to vigorously expand and target outreach efforts toward BIPOC applicants;
- Develop a network of alumni who will attend college fairs nationally (money saved can go towards the Saturday program);
- Make a thorough analysis of the Home Test to erase any unconscious biases and references; develop a test that is anti-racist and encourages students of social, cultural, gender and economic diversities to apply. Use BIPOC references.

ADMISSIONS COMMITTEE, GRADUATE: Fall 2020

- Expand and target outreach efforts to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) with BArch Programs.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS COMMITTEE: Fall 2020

- Collect data from the last 10 years about race and gender of graduating students, students on final probation, students required to take leave of absence, students who are dismissed;
- Identify or create resources for students who fail a studio to gain design skills while on required leave of absence;
- Provide proper support for students especially in years 1-3 to ensure they are provided the resources to develop the skills to elevate and thrive in the program; Make the wellbeing of BIPOC students an explicit goal;
- We urge offering students the option of Pass/Fail grading for design studios to reverse non-productive hierarchies in the design studio and to give students freedom from

making design decisions based on an anticipated final grade. The Curriculum Committee to establish clear criteria on what a student must demonstrate in order to advance to the next studio and individual faculty or teams to include their expectations in the course syllabus. Written evaluations for each student to be provided in lieu of grades by faculty or team.

CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

Achievable by AY 2020-21

- Curriculum committee to recommend (and Faculty to approve) course adjustments and additions with emphasis on non-Western history and theory, architecture within the context of capitalism and exploitation, the inclusion of more urban history and theory earlier in the sequence and a less exclusively formal focus in the first four design studios;
- Curriculum committee to encourage all faculty to incorporate interdisciplinary lecturers and literature in course curricula;
- Curriculum Committee to establish clear criteria on what a student must demonstrate in order to advance from one studio to the next (as above).

FACULTY SEARCH COMMITTEES

N/A during hiring freeze

- Faculty Search Committees to identify and advance candidates who are BIPOC.

NOTE: The Task Force recognizes that The Cooper Union has instituted a hiring freeze, so action on this item is unlikely for the next few years. We request The Cooper Union provide the School of Architecture with resources to hire BIPOC faculty on a part-time basis, ideally with multi-year contracts and benefits.

3 DEANS

Achievable December 2020

- Support expanded admissions outreach by organizing and funding students and recent alumni;
- Support diversification of the faculty by expanding outreach and recruitment of part-time faculty, given the institution-wide hiring freeze. Hire at least 3 new BIPOC faculty at the adjunct level for the spring 2021 semester and hire at least 2 new BIPOC faculty at the proportional time level for the 2021-22 academic year;
- Appoint non-architects such as sociologists, urbanists and activists to supplement studio faculty to broaden the conversation of what constitutes the architectural project;
- Encourage that all design reviews include multiple BIPOC critics;
- Expand and intensify new student orientation to ensure newcomers feel welcomed and that their concerns are understood and will be addressed. Increase BIPOC and LGBTQIA representation in both student- and faculty-led new student orientation programs;
- Reduce attrition by invigorating advisership, counseling, communication and academic support.
- Hire a BIPOC Human Resources person as support for all students, perhaps as an intermediary between the School of Architecture and the Dean of Students;
- Proactively cultivate a strong network of Black professionals, alumni and students;
- Proactively nurture the school's relationship with NOMAS (National Organization of Minority Architects);
- Invest in school-wide programming for Black History Month;
- As student work is increasingly digital, expand the mission of the School of Architecture Archive to collect ALL student work, or at least to allow students a voice in the selection

process, and not archive only what is selected by the teaching team. This will allow the Archive to maintain a comprehensive, not a narrowly edited, history of the evolution of the School.

4 ADMINISTRATION AND BOARD OF TRUSTEES December 2020

COOPER UNION ADMINISTRATION, BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

- Redirect as quickly as is feasible the School's endowment into Funds and Securities that are socially responsible, ESG (Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance), meaning those credibly tied to sustainable environmental practices (no fossil fuels), to undoing racist socio-economic structures (no prisons) and to diversifying their own corporate governances with female, BIPOC and LGBTQIA executives;
- Model transparency in governance at all levels: publish in advance upcoming meeting schedules of the Board of Trustees, the Cabinet, and all Faculty and Committee Meetings; release meeting agendas in advance and make meeting minutes, including any votes or other actions, promptly available to the community. Publish budgets with sufficient detail to show where resources are being allocated;
- Prioritize diversity of individuals selected to serve on the board of trustees to include BIPOC individuals.

COOPER UNION DEGREE PROGRAMS:

- Identify or hire a scholar in each School and the Faculty of HSS to initiate and sustain anti-racism in the classrooms and studios as a part of the students' creative intellectual development. This position could have authority to assess progress and create a framework of accountability;
- Until we are able to return to a full, zero-tuition model, redirect all merit scholarships **above** the 50% awarded to all admitted students towards need-based funding only. Provide grants for living expenses and materials; set and make public a cap on debt for any student who qualifies for financial aid;
- Provide financial support for undocumented or international students who do not qualify for FAFSA but demonstrate financial need.

COOPER UNION CIVIC PROGRAMS:

- Curate ongoing programming at the Great Hall focused on actions and changes taken at Cooper Union to re-build its foundations on anti-racism principles and socially just frameworks, as well as other topics and issues that would promulgate awareness and suitable reform;
- Dedicate a portion of the Tax Equivalency payments we receive from the City of New York to the Saturday Program, renewing our mandate to serve New York City public high school students (see Letter of Support for the Saturday Program from this Task Force of 08/17/20);
- Support the Saturday Program as a student-initiated and student-run enterprise: provide or help secure funding for supplies and student-teachers;
- Help secure funding to support outreach to, and student recruitment at, NYC High Schools—especially those without arts programs—for the Saturday Program;
- Feature the teaching model and outcomes of the Saturday Program on the Cooper Union website, including both creative results and human stories;

- Recognize that the Summer Program and Saturday Program are separate enterprises; recruit in accordance with the mission of each;
- Help secure funding for BIPOC scholarships for the Summer Program;

DECOLONIZING LABOR AT COOPER UNION:

- The Cooper Union must renew its commitment to fostering a truly inclusive community in which all who contribute to and participate in the educational process engage each other with an understanding of shared goals and mutual respect. All contracts with individuals who work at The Cooper Union should model the highest standards of equity, social justice and progressive labor practices, and be informed by the guiding ethics and principles of The Cooper Union’s mission in both their negotiation and their terms;
- All those who provide work and service to The Cooper Union, including workers employed by outside contractors, contribute to the educational process, and are, therefore, part of our community. As such, all should be acknowledged, compensated at minimum with a NYC adjusted living wage, have access to affordable health benefits, reasonable job security and a defined and manageable workload;
- In modeling best practices for equity and social justice, contracts that define the terms and conditions of the labor necessary to sustain The Cooper Union (including those with outside contractors, such as security and cleaning, which engage predominantly with BIPOC) would be published. Cleaning staff, who mainly work overnight, are essential, but invisible, and as such more vulnerable; we think they, and the security team, should be acknowledged as essential workers, especially for their work during the COVID crisis;
- Adjunct faculty teach a significant percentage of required and elective classes across The Cooper Union. Many are alumni and/or have taught at the school for many years. We acknowledge them as full partners in the work of the educational project. We recommend a collaborative process to develop a contract that acknowledges their critical value and fosters this partnership;
- Starting salaries and ranks for new adjunct faculty hires should be consistent within each school in terms of education, practice and scholarship;
- Adjunct faculty should have options to share (even partially) the health benefits afforded to full-time employees;
- We urge full-time faculty to reconsider and revise those terms in the CUFCT contract that protect the status quo, make accountability difficult and limit full participation in the shared governance of the schools by students and all teaching faculty;
- We recommend that students have the opportunity to complete course questionnaires, developed by the faculties of each of the three schools and HSS, for all of their classes, whether taught by full-time or part-time faculty.

*This document is focused primarily on the Cooper Union School of Architecture, but it includes suggestions for institution-wide actions as well.

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