

## POLISHING THE MIRROR, TENDING THE LAMP

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Over the course of the past academic year this column presented a variety of perspectives for engaging many dimensions of diversity. The authors of this column sought to provide reflections of who we are, how others might see us, and how we interact with one another. Likewise, they endeavored to challenge us by illuminating a variety of paths that we might take toward improving diversity in academia and in the profession. We hope that these articles have been useful to ACSA membership. On a personal note, I want to acknowledge the authors who contributed to making *Designing Diversity* a reality.

While this is the last column in the *Designing Diversity* series, the work of creating more diverse, inclusive, equitable, and civil environments for the study of architecture is far from complete. One of the goals of the upcoming ACSA 100th anniversary Digital Exhibition (see: [www.ACSA100.org](http://www.ACSA100.org)) is to reach individuals from underrepresented groups in K-12 education. Appealing to a more diverse student body, evolving more diverse leadership in academia and in the profession, is directly related to sustainability and survivability of the architecture profession. The Pew Research Center projects significant demographic changes in the United States by 2050 that would render our current predominantly white male profession in high contrast to the public it serves. It is hard to imagine architecture maintaining any kind of cultural relevance if its practitioners are dramatically differentiated from their fellow citizens.

Since the ACSA Board of Directors formulated its resolution on diversity actions in August 2008 we have heard some voices suggest the demographics of our profession will change naturally of its own accord in the next forty years; that architecture will change along with the demographics of the population. If the past is prologue, then there is evidence to the contrary. In 1968 Whitney Young addressed the American Institute of Architects with these words, "...as a profession, you are not a profession that has distinguished itself by your social and civic contributions to the cause of

civil rights, and I am sure this has not come to you as any shock. You are most distinguished by your thunderous silence and your complete irrelevance." When Young provided his civics lesson to the AIA the percentage of African American architects making up the profession nation-wide was at 1% and forty years later it peaked at 1.5%. The demographics of 1968 were very different from the demographics of 2008; one need only review U.S. Census Bureau statistics for proof.

We need to work hard to make architecture a discipline of choice for future generations, particularly for groups that are currently underrepresented in the profession. If we are to do that, we cannot wait until future students come knocking at our doors. We must reach out to students in K-12 environments in creative ways and demonstrate the relevance of studying disciplines that engage the built and natural environments.

It is imperative that we situate architecture in the context of Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM). That is not to say that architecture has to sever its bonds with the arts, rather we should capitalize on the fact that architecture can uniquely animate lessons of STEM in ways that connect the abstractions of science and math with life experience. One of the underlying ideas behind the Chicago Architecture Foundation's award winning, *The Architecture Handbook*, (adopted for use by the Chicago school system) is that it utilized architecture to build and reinforce reading, math, and science skills. As RISD president John Maeda suggested, at the 2009 ACSA Administrators Conference, we need to transform STEM to STEAM. Maeda's "A" was art, but perhaps our first step could be architecture -- a natural bridge to the other disciplines.

The ACSA 100th anniversary Digital Exhibition will also highlight community based design projects that so many of our schools sponsor. The objective will be to illustrate how architecture, urban design, and its allied design professions can be relevant to underrepresented and underserved populations. While many of us wit-

nessed the *Laissez les bon temps rouler* in the French Quarter during the ACSA National Meeting this past March, the real New Orleanians in the 9th Ward (that is those who returned after Katrina) toil to rebuild their communities. Following Katrina, schools of architecture across North America responded to the challenges of rebuilding the city. More recently we have seen mobilization to provide assistance in Haiti following the devastating earthquake. For every New Orleans or Port-au-Prince there are hundreds of other communities throughout North America that are served by students and faculty in architecture schools. In these instances individuals and schools operate in the spirit of Samuel Mockbee, by illustrating that "Architecture has to be greater than just architecture. It has to address social values, as well as technical and aesthetic values. On top of that, the one true gift that an architect has is his or her imagination. We take something ordinary and elevate it to something extraordinary."

Our daily actions will determine how well architecture addresses the diversity challenge. Our quotidian rituals can add up over time to produce extraordinary results. It is in that spirit that the ACSA Board of Directors voted in March to institute the Diversity Achievement Award (see: [www.acsa-arch.org/awards/](http://www.acsa-arch.org/awards/)). This new award will recognize the work of faculty, administrators, or students who have created effective methods and models to achieve greater diversity in curricula, school personnel, and student bodies, specifically to incorporate the participation and contributions of historically under-represented groups or contexts.

ACSA will continue to maintain and expand its diversity resources online ([www.acsa-arch.org/faculty/diversity.aspx](http://www.acsa-arch.org/faculty/diversity.aspx)). You can also contribute your impressions of the *Designing Diversity* series, or simply voice your opinion on line at the ACSA Northeast Region wiki (<http://acsane.wetpaint.com/page/From+May+2010+ACSA+News>).