BEYOND THE CONE OF VISION
BLACK PERSPECTIVES IN ARCHITECTURE EDUCATION AND PRACTICE BY ANDRÉ TAYBRON

In some architectural history courses, students may be told that the Frank William Andrew's house by H.H. Richardson introduced the veranda into American domestic design. The rationale stated for this innovation is that in the late-nineteenth century the United States wanted to open into the natural setting. The idea that an open inside/outside design may have originated in the West African rainforest, where it was used to mitigate the extreme heat, is conveniently left out. The following extract from the Director of the College of Engineering and Architecture at Howard University Bradford C. Grant's critique "Accommodation and Resistance: The Built Environment and the African American Experience"[1] ought to ignite questions about the validity of what is currently taught in traditional core curriculum courses. Grant notes that Berkeley Professor Carl Anthony[2] counters the pretense of "so many architectural historians, that the slaves played no important role in shaping the architectural traditions of the country during its formative years."[3] Says Grant: "...Anthony sheds light on the New World evolution of the now-ubiquitous front porch, countering the conventional view that 'early English colonists invented it in response to new climatic requirements.'"[4]

Pointing out that the "veranda is widespread in the indigenous architecture of the West African rain forest," he asserts that the front porch is not so much a matter of colonial invention as it is of colonial adaptation. This hypothesis is borne-out by the later work of John Michael Vlach, writing in Dell Upton's primer *America's Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups That Built America*.[5]

Including discourse and instruction like this empowers black students. It is also important to hear about black pioneers who have achieved just as much as their European, Asian and Latin American peers. Architecture Departments must teach budding architects about talented black architects, who have been left out of the continued discourse of great architects and designers.

This perspective falls outside the "cone of vision" of mainstream architects and students. It continues to resonate from the voices of practicing

TABLE 1

In 1996, African-American Students at the Nation's Highest-Rated Architectural Schools*

SCHOOLS (School's Listed in Rank Order)	TOTAL STUDENTS	BLACK STUDENTS	%BLACK STUDENTS
Harvard University	261	4	1.5%
Mass. Institute of Technology	350	16	4.6%
Princeton University	74	1	1.4%
Columbia University	338	8	2.4%
Rice University	80	2	2.5%
University of California at Berkeley	167	6	3.6%
University of Virginia	203	4	2.0%
University of Pennsylvania	191	5	2.6%
University of Texas at Austin	225	0	0.0%
University of Michigan	219	3	1.4%
University of California at Los Angeles	189	5	2.6%
TOTAL	**2,297**	**54**	**2.4%**

*Source: *The Journal of Black Higher Education*, Spring 1999

TABLE 2
Grant and Mann study of Universities with 10 or more licensed African American Graduates

Universities	Total Licensed African-American Graduates
Columbia	57
Pratt	56
City College of New York	55
Illinois/Urbana	53
Harvard	48
Cal/Berkeley	37
Cornell	34
Michigan	31
MIT	30
Georgia Tech	23
NYIT	21
Detroit/Mercy	21
Lawrence	21
Yale	20
Southern California	19
IIT	18
Kansas State	18
Notre Dame	18
Illinois/Chicago	17
Syracuse	17
Washington University	17
Kent State	16
Texas/Austin	15
Cal Poly/San Luis Obispo	15
Virginia Tech	15
Florida	14
Ohio State	14
Clemson	14
Cincinnati	14
Kansas	13
Rice	13
NC State	13
Virginia	13
Arkansas	12
Catholic	11

black professionals and ambitious, courageous black students. Courageous because speaking out to question the status quo of the architectural programs throughout the United States and the work environments of the firms they supply is taboo and causes black students and professionals further isolation from their peers.

There is a continuing disconnect between mainstream architecture and the number of Black Americans having opportunities to study, practice and influence the world of architecture. The same individuals who would have a strong, positive, constructive and influential impact on academics would also bring a rich new view to the professional field because of diverse backgrounds, cultures and experiences.

Hegemony is the power of one group to determine everyone else's reality. Today, the way into the practicing world of architecture is through Eurocentric academic programs. In the West, architecture has historically been the profession of the elite. Accredited architecture programs in the United States and Canada encourage historical study and analysis, studying the great masters of classical, modern, and contemporary architecture. Persons who have a place in this privileged profession have

prescribed this course of study for decades. Students rarely learn about the invisible people who designed without recognition from the accepted mainstream.

Administrators of architectural institutions would benefit by mixing up the teaching structure of their programs, particularly courses covering architectural history. It is vital that first impressions of an architecture program promote a higher level of retention and encourage increased applications for enrollment from black students. If black students do not see instructors, lecturers, or professors during the first year with whom they can identify, and if the educators are not culturally competent, this contributes to a program that lacks strength and to students' feelings of cultural isolation. It may also increase the likelihood that those students transfer to universities in other parts of the country where they can find fundamental, quintessential support that addresses their need.
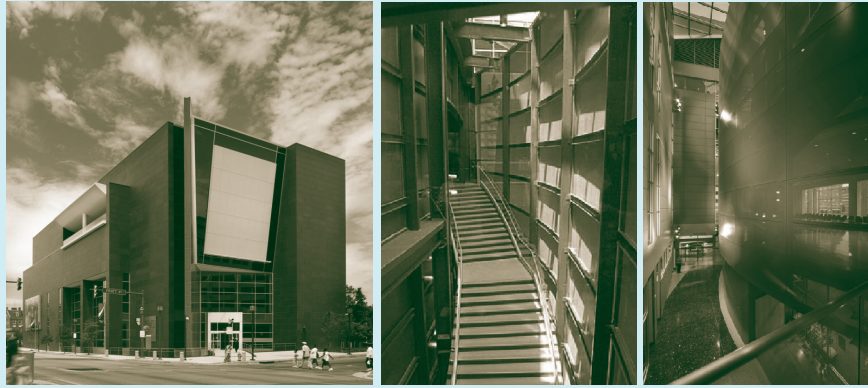
Dr. Victoria Kaplan, in her 2006 book, *Structural Inequality: Black Architects in the United States* asserts that "The embedded structure of education in architecture is a reflection of the dominant culture"[6] and further claims that

Architecture, with its focus on a Eurocentric aesthetic and its legacy of patronage, could hardly be expected to welcome difference. Like all professional training programs, the architecture curriculum reflects the culture of the practice…the education is designed to reproduce the profession. The training program for architects fosters the existing professional systems, thereby also maintaining the cultural disparities.[7]

University of Washington Professor Dr. Sharon Sutton's writings and speeches corroborate the view that universities have this long-standing disparity. At the 2006 Grassroots Leadership and Legislative Conference,[8] she argued,

In a nutshell, the field has made insufficient progress on diversity, has a white macho culture framed by education experiences, engages in discriminatory employment practices, suffers from a glass-ceiling phenomenon and attrition, and socially isolates underrepresented individuals.[9]

The educational experience Dr. Sutton describes touches on how many black students have been kept out of the architectural game and emphasizes the need for additional efforts to create an even playing field. Jack Travis, a leading proponent for Afrocentric architecture speaks of his experience, stating, "My education—Eurocentric and designed by white males—has given me a narrow view of who I am, (and) where I come from. So, in a sense, my education is the foreign influence in my work."[10]

A 1996 study by the Center for the Study of the Practice at the University of Cincinnati, shared in the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (JBHE), reports there were 1,313 black students in bachelor's or master's degree programs in architecture. This was only 6 percent of all architectural students. Of the number of students who earned bachelor and master degrees in the same year, only 182 were black, 3.8 percent of all students who received architectural degrees.[11] The number of African American students at the nation's highest-rated architectural schools, compared to the total number of students, is represented in Table 1.

Over ten years later, statistics continue to show a disturbing trend that cannot be left out of the discourse surrounding the topic of disparity in the architecture profession. Academic programs are ultimately the gatekeepers to that profession. Studies, such as the one completed by Professor Bradford Grant and Professor of Architecture at the University of Cincinnati, Dennis Alan Mann, show that black students end up feeling isolated while studying in architecture programs and working in the profession because of the disparities found within both.

Grant and Mann tracked licensed African-American architects since 1989, and completed two professional surveys in 1995 and 2000[12] and a later working paper and update in 2007.[13] Their study emphasizes licensed architects, as completed licensure is obtainable through public records. This narrows the demographic group. The research identifies at which university each study subject received his or her degree(s) (except for eight people).[14] University of Washington did not make the list of majority schools with ten or more "Licensed" African American graduates.[15]

As of Kaplan's 2006 book publication, the number of African-American licensed architects within the United States totaled 1,487, of which 171 were women. Fortunately, the counts were up in Grant and Mann's 2007 study; 1,545 African-Americans were licensed architects, an increase of 58, with 24 of those being women.[16] 35 architecture schools, out of 83, were identified which had ten or more 'Licensed' African-American graduates (see Table 2).

We are a global society, and it takes teams of diverse individuals to compete successfully within the global economy. Academic programs should do everything possible to recruit and train all qualified individuals from all races, ethnic groups and backgrounds. Particularly, architecture programs must work harder to attract, to maintain and to ensure the success of black students. It is evident in the numbers that black students harbor feelings of isolation and anxiety. They have to fight harder for respect from their mainstream counterparts, without the benefit of famous black architect antecedents and accepted black vernacular precedents to cite.

Disparities are unseen by the privileged individuals studying within the programs or practicing within the profession. If advantaged members of academia or the profession work continually without the adversities faced by their black counterparts, how would they have the impetus to consider what it must be like to be outside of a privileged group?

Dr. Victoria Kaplan deems the discussion of institutional hegemony in professional, educational, and firm dialogues as the "background noise of daily life" for some. Mainstream Americans rarely, if at all, hear these sounds—the sounds of structural inequality are barely audible. In contrast, for people within the underrepresented groups, there tends to be a "deafening roar." She states, "It is these systems that make access to successful practice more and less attainable."[17] The ears of black students continue to ring from the painfully audible clangs. The sound sucks the humanistic spirit and excitement of architecture away from the future black architects studying within programs across the country.

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Notes

The image captions highlight projects by African American architects.

1. Grant, Bradford C. "Accommodation and Resistance: The Built Environment and the African American Experience." *Restructuring Architecture: Critical Discourses and Social Practices*. By Thomas A. Dalton, Lian Hurst Mann, Inc. University of Minnesota Press (1996), 258-259.

2. Anthony graduated from Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation in 1969, and is a Senior Ford Foundation Fellow, in the Department of Geography, at the University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of "The Big House and the Slave Quarter: Prelude to New World Architecture" (California. University. Berkeley. Dept. of Architecture. (Working paper) by Carl Anthony (Unknown Binding, 1975)).

3. Grant, Bradford C. "Accommodation and Resistance: The Built Environment and the African American Experience." *Restructuring Architecture: Critical Discourses and Social Practices*. By Thomas A. Dalton, Lian Hurst Mann, Inc. University of Minnesota Press (1996), 259.

4. Ibid., 258.

5. Vlach also states that, "No antecedent for the front porch, as it is commonly found in the South, can be found in England or elsewhere in northern Europe. The experience of tropical heat and humidity inspired by such additions, and verandas are common to African house design. Soon after both slaves and their masters arrived in the New World, a cross-cultural encounter occurred, and generations of white builders adopted the custom of porch building. Although the Victorian period spawned galleries and verandas on houses all over the United States, for almost 250 years the southern front porch has owed its existence mainly to the adaptive genius of local carpenters acting on African notions of good architectural form." (Grant, 259).

6. Kaplan, Victoria. *Structural Inequality: Black Architects in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham Maryland (2006), 28.

7. Ibid. , 185.

8. Dr. Sharon Sutton, FAIA: 2006 Diversity Matters Grassroots keynote speaker asks AIA leaders to "relentlessly question" diversity practices.

9. Ibid.

10. Kaplan, Victoria. *Structural Inequality: Black Architects in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham Maryland (2006), 28.

11. "The Declining Enrollments of Blacks in Schools of Architecture," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, No. 23 (Spring, 1999), pp. 35–38 Published by: The JBHE Foundation

12. Kaplan, Victoria. *Structural Inequality: Black Architects in the United States*. 2006. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham Maryland (2006), 197–201.

13. Grant, Bradford C. and Dennis Alan Mann. "African American Architects and Their Education: A Demographic Study". *Working Paper #1*. Winter 2007. Center of the Study of Practice, College of Design Architecture, Art & Planning, University of Cincinnati.

14. Kaplan, Victoria. *Structural Inequality: Black Architects in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham Maryland (2006), 198.

15. Majority Schools are defined as all accredited programs at American Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) where the majority of students are not African American (excluding the ten Canadian schools or newly accredited programs unlikely to have licensed graduates, and (even in this decade) universities located in the USA where there were unlikely many African American graduates). 83 programs responded. The comparison category was Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), of which there are only seven accredited architecture programs compared to over 110 other accredited programs in the USA. (Kaplan, 199–200).

16. Grant, Bradford C. and Dennis Alan Mann. "African American Architects and Their Education: A Demographic Study". *Working Paper #1*. Winter 2007. Center of the Study of Practice, College of Design Architecture, Art & Planning, University of Cincinnati.

17. Kaplan, Victoria. *Structural Inequality: Black Architects in the United States*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham Maryland (2006), 184–185.