

## Panel Discussion Takeaways

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### Allyship

Allyship is the practice of emphasizing social justice, inclusion, and human rights by members of an ingroup, to advance the interests of an oppressed or marginalized outgroup. It is not the sole responsibility of the Black community to advocate for these interests but requires the support of ingroups and people that hold positions of power who are willing to share that power with those that have none.

Allies are extremely important for Black people to navigate the profession. Black people are seldom in positions of power and often rely on the support of those in power to let their voice be heard. Creating a safe space is of fundamental importance and if someone doesn't feel comfortable speaking, it can suggest far greater issues embedded within an institution.

### Education

Education within the architecture, engineering, and construction (AEC) industries has traditionally held a Eurocentric view with respect to history and design. There is a flagrant lack of acknowledgement of people of African descent and history, and these unconscious [or conscious] biases start early. When students don't feel accepted or empowered, they are discouraged from entering the profession.

Black architectural history and design should be more widely celebrated, and young Black people should be given more exposure and encouragement to study and work in the industry. This can take the form of academic outreach, offering scholarships, bursaries, and opportunities for Black teachers and teaching assistants, panelists on critical reviews, and mentoring. Education is understood as the first and most fundamental step in achieving a more equitable and diverse industry.

### Representation

Representation matters and providing leadership opportunities to minorities normalizes the visibility and acceptance of Black leaders within the industry. Only 2% of licensed architects in North America are Black, with Black women representing less than 0.3% of the industry. As professionals in the AEC industries, we are responsible for ensuring that people's human rights needs are being met (housing, transit, day care, public space), and those most affected have the smallest representation.

Examples of representation can include Black led projects and teams, support groups for others facing similar challenges, and non-profit/grassroots organizations involved in the planning and design process, to ensure that communities and neighbourhoods are getting what they need. Many of the organizations that hold power in the industry have very little Black representation within them.

### Contribute

Contribute your money or time to organizations and programs listed on the attached resources sheet that are working to create a more just industry. Many Black-led organizations are operated outside of the 9-5 working day in addition to the organizers' day job, and require funding to affect real change.

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[Click Here](#) to watch the recorded panel discussion!



## Resources for Change-Makers

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### Organizations + Community Groups

[BAIDA](#) | Black Architects and Interior Designers Association (BAIDA) is a non profit organization which aims to support diversity, equity and inclusion.

[Black Planning Project](#) | Stated vision to increase engagement and collaboration among Black professionals working in planning, design and real estate development.

[Hip Hop Architecture](#) | Exploring the intersection of Hip Hop culture and the built environment through three interconnected realms: media, professional practice, and academia.

[AfroBiz.ca](#) | A database with over 1,500 Black-owned business to search.

[Beyond the Built Environment](#) | Engages community through architecture to advocate for equitable, reflectively diverse environments. This forum allows architects of minority groups to publish their work in a global library.

[Black Futures on Eglinton](#) | CP Planning + Black Urbanism Toronto partnered to collaborate with the community in identifying, celebrating and supporting cultural strength within the Eglinton Avenue West and Little Jamaica neighbourhoods.

[BEAT](#) | Building Equality in Architecture, Toronto is a volunteer-run organization that promotes equality in the profession through advocacy, mentorship and networking with aims to advance achievements and visibility of women, minorities and other underrepresented groups.

### Articles, Books + Digital Media

[15 Architects on Being Black in Architecture](#) | Elizabeth Fazzare, Curbed

[Black People in Canada Officially Face Way More Challenges When It Comes To Getting a Job](#) | Lisa Belmonte, Narcity

[Growth in Racial Diversity Among Architects Is Slow, But Experts Say The Conversation Continues](#) | Kelsey Landis, Insight Into Diversity

[5 Essential Books to Read on Making Cities Anti-Racist](#) | Diana Budds, Curbed

[Natives: Race & Class in the Ruins of Empire](#) | Akala, Two Roads (an imprint of John Murray Press), 2018

[Akala | Full Address and Q&A](#) | Akala (Speech at Oxford Union, video recording on YouTube)

[Why is Planning So White](#) | Saquib Ahsan, Ruth Belay, Abigail Moriah and Gervais Nash, Spacing

[Report: A Black Business Conversation](#) | Black Urbanism Toronto, URSA + OACC

[Planning and Human Rights: Legal Cases and Resources](#) | Ontario Human Rights Commission

[A Guide for Municipalities: Inclusive and Sustainable Urban Development Planning](#) | UN Habitat, 2008

[The Right To Adequate Housing](#) | Leilani Farha, United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner

### Connect with our Panelists via LinkedIn



[Sam Oboh](#)



[Camille Mitchell](#)



[Cheryll Case](#)



[Ossie Airewele](#)

Click the [links](#)  
above to view!



## Q+A from the Discussion

### QUESTIONS

### ANSWERS

<p>Ossie, why did you decide to leave the U.K.?</p>	<p>My partner was born in Canada, so eventually moving here is to fulfil a promise made many years ago. So far, I haven't looked back. – <i>Ossie</i></p>
<p>How do you feel about something like the BlackNorth Initiative CEO pledge to help remove barriers within organizations for Black folks to advance?</p>	<p>I admire Wes Hall's willingness to openly stand up and speak on a matter of importance. The founders of this initiative are in a position to figuratively "remove" themselves from issues they may encounter less frequently from their positions of power. I applaud their initiative to take more people with them and conquer barriers together. Aside from job retention and professional advancements, it is important to ensure that a healthy and vigorous pipeline exist to position potential candidates in this position to begin with. – <i>Camille</i></p>
<p>Do we as Black people have any role to play for better visibility in the built environment?</p>	<p>As inhabitants of the built environment, we, as Black people, automatically have a role to play for better visibility in the built environment. Unfortunately, we may not be in a position to have a seat at the decision-making tables. But we can engage our services and opinions to help shape the outcome. As end users, we should also have the willingness to be present and ask questions and hold discussions on the structures that surround us. – <i>Camille</i></p>
<p>People of color are underrepresented in all aspects of the built environment. As a result of systematic racism in Toronto there is emphasis on jobs, but we are also underrepresented in clientele. How can we make some headway on creating more clients of color in the built environment as well as jobs?</p>	<p>Great question! Smart answer: everyone is the client, as we're held by the standard of "the public interest." But really, go and ask people of colour what services they want, create new services that also meet them where they are. – <i>Cheryll</i> Become the clients – make your own decision-making table. Architecture works at various scales. Support Black and marginalised designers by engaging their services and promoting their work. – <i>Camille</i></p>
<p>Camille has provided an example, stating that Black architects set an example for youth, and slightly contradicting her is Ossie with another point that is extremely crucial by my opinion: based on education from an early age, is it not safe to say that you are the examples that the youth need, and your troubles and pains will set a platform for them when their time comes to develop their tomorrow?</p>	<p>I don't see how our statements conflict. Additionally – there is no singular path or form of advice to shape the next generation. – <i>Camille</i> The statements make reference to different stages in educational development, one at formal education, to which Camille explained the work that could be done, the other by Ossie at elementary and high school. We need to highlight and address the systemic issues in education at elementary and school age that disenfranchise or obscure opportunity for Black children. Key examples are: Black history being limited to the narrow spectrum of slavery, too few references in schools of Black protagonists (but this is getting better than my day in school), underassessment compared to examination results and a limited promotion of positive racial identity. – <i>Ossie</i></p>
<p>Low-income housing or affordable housing has traditionally been faced with a certain stigma in society. At the same time, the populace of these types of housing developments has a larger proportion of Black people and people of color due to the lack of generational wealth. In your opinions, how can the design and planning of low-income housing communities serve to bridge the lack of generational wealth and other socio-economic biases? Can design and planning help to change the stigma surrounding not only low-income housing, but also to the Black and other non-white communities in these developments?</p>	<p>My initial thought is to break down the barriers between these communities. Mixed-use developments by nature bring diverse economical or ethnic groups together. – <i>Camille</i> Design with high-quality materials that will last; Provide opportunities for households to grow (kind of like how Parcel's design works); Explore opportunities for co-op housing / land trusts. – <i>Cheryll</i></p>
<p>To follow up on a previous question, what do you do when you've voiced your concerns regarding the silence of your organization and they reply that they support 'equal rights for everyone' or 'they don't collect data, so they cannot speak about representation'? (i.e. they don't want to speak out against anti-Black racism because it's viewed as controversial)?</p>	<p>That is a difficult question to answer because there are various aspects to consider. (1) As in – who made this statement and are they in a position to speak on behalf of the firm? (2) Is HR available / an option? (3) Do you have an office buddy to share this insight with? (4) it's not an easy situation to be in but the individual won't be the last person to experience that either – <i>Camille</i></p>
<p>Camille mentioned an organization that she is a part of, I just wanted to know what the name was again. I think it was Black Architect and Interior Design?</p>	<p>I am a founding member of local organizations Black Architects + Interior Designers (<a href="http://www.BAIDA.ca">www.BAIDA.ca</a>) and Building Equity in Architecture Toronto (<a href="http://www.BEAToronto.com">www.BEAToronto.com</a>) – <i>Camille</i></p>

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<p>We'd like to know more about the initiatives that are being led by BAIDA, Black Planning Project, etc. What kind of support are you looking for from individuals like us, besides the institutional support discussed?</p>	<p>BAIDA is currently preparing a portfolio review and a mentorship program with local design firms. We are also looking to start a camp for Black youth to build the pipeline. Community support can simply include working within your realm of responsibility. You can offer space, suggest programs and promote the work of Black designers. – <i>Camille</i></p> <p>Email <a href="mailto:blackplanningproject@gmail.com">blackplanningproject@gmail.com</a> and visit our website for more info. Also, you can email me <a href="mailto:Case.Cheryll@gmail.com">Case.Cheryll@gmail.com</a> – <i>Cheryll</i></p>
<p>Opportunities for leadership were mentioned in the discussion. Can you provide examples of leadership opportunities that Black design students and professionals working in the built environment should be seeking to obtain?</p>	<p>I identify leadership as being present and accessible – at any scale or location. Start with volunteering with local design festivals or career fairs within your community. – <i>Camille</i></p> <p>Check out <a href="http://openarchtoronto.org">openarchtoronto.org</a> – <i>Cheryll</i></p>
<p>The population of Black people in Canada is approximately 3.5% of 35 million – representation at every level is challenging. Relying on corporations to truly consider interests that aren't necessarily impacting their day to day actions is difficult. Thoughts?</p>	<p>All professional institutions need to abide by and uphold those institutions through a moral code of conduct. It should be seen as a duty of these institutions to extend their role to try to achieve equity of representation in their institutions. Not actively aiming to do so, should be seen as a dereliction of duty. – <i>Ossie</i></p>
<p>This is more of a comment. Since this entire matter of anti-Black racism is the in-group's problem to fix, we should leverage those within firms that have accepted responsibility to be at the forefront of naming it when they see it or hear about it from the affected person, and then act to dismantle it.</p>	<p>We need all hands on board to effect any long term change – especially those in a position of power and privilege. – <i>Camille</i></p>
<p>Ossie &amp; Camille: the discussion has been geared towards 'architecture by Black architects'. Can you shed light on 'architecture for black communities' creating enabling spaces, spaces for engagement, spaces for empowerment ...?</p>	<p>This is a complicated issue – depending on how you approach this topic. First, I think of zoning bylaws and land lease values that restrict spaces for the Black community to remote areas or limited transportation options. I am also mindful of organizations that want to record our footprint and honor and preserve historically Black neighbourhoods. Additionally, and unfortunately, we continue to live in a "police state" where large gatherings of Black people are heavily scrutinised and deliberately dismantled. – <i>Camille</i></p>
<p>Architecture is currently based on white centrality. How would you like to see the change to Black and/or diverse architecture and planning?</p>	<p>One option is through education: challenge typology that is regarded as "successful" architecture and the conscious or unconscious biases of the messenger. – <i>Camille</i></p> <p>More representation of Black people in the planning and architecture profession is needed until equity is achieved. Stakeholder considerations and engagement needs to be balanced to enable decisions to be made that fairly reflects the needs of all races. – <i>Ossie</i></p> <p>Painting new buildings / housing something other than grey. More colours (yellow, ocre , green)! – <i>Cheryll</i></p>
<p>Architecture is a profession that is notoriously poorly paid (in my opinion). I believe that remuneration versus educational commitment is also a challenge for minorities coming from often less than privileged backgrounds. Why do you think future generations would be interested in the profession?</p>	<p>This may be a class issue along with race and ethnicity as financial burdens or lack thereof strongly influence career choices. – <i>Camille</i></p> <p>It is important that any young person is as informed as possible about the rewards, both financial and personal, associated with careers of interest. Like any profession, we should strive to enable pathways to allow for a successful career regardless of colour and class. – <i>Ossie</i></p>
<p>I thank the panelists for this candid discussion. I've watched many like this since structural racism was brought to the forefront. Often, we talk about moving forward and helping those coming up and I think that's wonderful. But I can't help but feel frustrated with the injustices of the past. Many of the big firms in the city, including the one putting on this panel, are not immune to a history of problems with systemic bias. Is this propelling voices forward enough?</p>	<p>Personally, acknowledgment of past wrongs and existing biases and willingness to un-learn is a first and necessary step to effect positive change. – <i>Camille</i></p> <p>Propelling voices is not enough. No. It's actually a great stress for speakers to speak on these topics and then later see these same institutions not commit to action. Clearly it's a stress also for those attending and looking for action. – <i>Cheryll</i></p>