



September 30, 2020

As architects, we must take on difficult conversations within our workplaces about the broader social implications of our work, and the practices we allow our work to perpetuate. For too long, architects have been complicit in upholding intrinsic racism within the American criminal justice system. While many architects have attempted to mitigate injustice by applying their professional skills to associated built structures, ultimately it is beyond the role of design professionals to alleviate an inherently unjust system. Until more comprehensive policy changes are made on a national scale, good design alone is not enough to remove or overcome the racism inherent within the criminal justice system. It is time we listen to Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities that have long suffered due to unjust societal norms and outcomes.

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We must all take actionable steps to address the racism sustained by our criminal justice system.

Until there is measurable reform in the American criminal justice system to apply the law without racial bias, AIA New York is taking leadership on this issue. We are calling on architects no longer to design unjust, cruel or harmful spaces of incarceration within the current United States justice system, such as prisons, jails, detention centers, and police stations. We instead urge our members to shift their efforts towards supporting the creation of new systems, processes, and typologies based on prison reform, alternatives to imprisonment, and restorative justice.

As part of this policy, AIANY will embark on several initiatives:

- Through programming starting in late Fall 2020 and exhibitions, we will examine architecture's role in the criminal justice system, using open and interdisciplinary discussions to increase awareness and knowledge within our professional community, while highlighting the voices of those who have suffered within the system.
- Through government advocacy, we will push to limit construction of new criminal justice facilities. AIA New York Political Action Fund, our chapter's political action committee, will actively support candidates who believe in reducing criminal justice facility construction and implementing further criminal justice reforms.
- Our Architecture for Justice Committee will be reconstituted to increase focus on large-scale justice issues and reduce the current emphasis on the design of criminal justice facilities.
- We will advocate that AIA National, AIA New York State, and our fellow chapters adopt similar positions to discourage design of criminal justice facilities that uphold the current system.
- Projects in this typology may be submitted to the AIANY Design Awards program; however, Jury Instructions for judging will prioritize projects that demonstrate excellence in the support of systems, processes, and typologies based on prison reform, alternatives to imprisonment, restorative justice, and investment in communities of color.

While we recognize that the United States is not the only country with a flawed justice system and that architects have been complicit in bias and mistreatment abroad as well, we hope these changes in chapter policy will further advance racial justice within our city, state, and country. Over the coming months and years, AIANY and its members have a great deal of work ahead of us. We embrace this challenge knowing that effective advocacy can change policies and attitudes within our society.

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