

From: Nikolas Tucker <Tucker@bora.co>
Date: May 13, 2020 at 8:19:48 AM PDT
To: ALLSTAFF <ALLSTAFF@bora.co>
Subject: A Few Equitable Thoughts

Dear colleagues,

I would like to thank everyone who participated and rallied together to support the memory of Ahmaud Arbery. It is a positive move for our equity initiatives to be vocal about a broad range of social issues affecting our community and to not allow our office to omit itself from taking the steps we can to create a friendlier work environment and produce change.

The lynching of Arbery has personally prompted some thoughts and in accordance with our equity initiatives, I felt that I should share a few words and open us to a potentially uncomfortable but necessary conversation.

While I appreciate the effort made with the company's Instagram posting, I would like us all to consider the questions: How involved is Bora? And how involved am I in the effort to end racial violence? I say this because I feel our office seems to conflate the larger structures of social inequality with feminist struggles. This paints the cliché picture of a white-feminist priority, which can be traced back to arguments made by Susan B. Anthony, who vocally prioritized her white-woman right to vote over that of black individuals. We do this too, our equity training was centered on white-feminism. I believe this was the result of the voices in the room at the time and I understand it is difficult to think outside ourselves, but that is what we must do if we want to see change.

The Instagram effort was made possible when I brought the lynching to the attention of Amy Donohue to explain why I needed mental health days away from the Microsoft project. I share this because, again, how involved are we in ending racial violence? Do we care? Do we care enough to research and be informed, or do we wait for someone from the targeted group to be affected by oppression to spark us to action? Do we care enough to need a mental health day to digest the disturbing reality that America still supports the lynching of black bodies, primarily young black men? I do not think most of us in the office do. I don't think that most of us wake up each day, as I do, knowing that whether it's Covid-19, a police officer, or a random citizen, the fact remains that as a black man, I can be killed and no one will care.

I understand why. Most of you are not a black man in his 20's living in the United States. Most of you probably are not aware that we are the most targeted group, with the most unsolved murder cases, because the law, and the U.S. in general, does not care if a black man dies, or if any black individual dies for that matter. Arbery was not unique. Countless of Black bodies have fallen in the past decade, which are lynching's disguised as law enforcement: Dontre Hamilton, lynched April 30, 2014. Eric Garner, lynched July 17, 2014. John Crawford III, lynched August 5, 2014. Mike Brown, lynched August 9, 2014. Ezell Ford, lynched August 11, 2014. The list goes on, and these do not even account for half of the deaths of unarmed Black citizens that year, 2014, alone. I use 2014 as an example because this was the year I graduated from high school. How many in the office went off to their first year of college with the fear of being unjustly hunted down for the color of their skin? I am often asked why I think there are not many like me in architecture and I don't think those asking this realize that I am lucky to be alive to even think about pursuing architecture.

I say lynching because we should acknowledge what it is. It is, by historical definition, the unlawful violent pursuit of a body, typically black, for a believed, often wrongly accused crime. Burning after killing was optional, as well as the dismemberment and selling of the body parts, and selling of images and postcards of the violent death for keepsakes.

If more in the office saw what I saw, that Arbery was not unique, that his death is the sad continued legacy of lynching black bodies in the U.S. in order to retain the racial-contract, then I think we all would have taken a mental health day. The sad truth is Arbery only speaks for the unquestionably unlawful deaths. Many more have died by the hands of police officers and citizens in cases that the "Law" saw fit to turn the other cheek and say: "Well, it was just a black guy." It took 2 recuses, a video leak, and 3 months before Arbery's murderers were arrested because there was "no substantial evidence" at first. Additionally, after the arrest, media outlets have

decided to not focus on the injustice, but rather on the fact that Arbery walked into an open construction site and a neighbor “feared” that he was vandalizing the site. As though their fear of a black man walking around is greater than the life of that man. - If on a job, would someone shoot me for walking around a construction site alone? - This visit to the construction site was not a crime and the video that is circulating social media was evidence the police already had. It is just now circulating because America will use any means necessary to justify the death of a black individual and the innocence of a white man. There are countless cases where a black life was lost, but no arrests were made because of “no substantial evidence,” or because, another citizen or police officer felt unwarranted “fear.” Please don’t think Portland is free of this, the stabbings on the max in 2017 all too well demonstrate this. The night before, Jeremy Christian attacked a black woman at the Rose Quarter. The police intervened after the woman received a black eye from Christian. The police had the nerve to ask if she was sure it was Christian who attacked her, because they asked Christian and he said he didn’t. Of course a criminal would lie! But as always, the white man must be right and the black woman just misunderstood the situation. He escaped while these officers posed their ridiculous questions and proceeded to commit the stabbings. Oregon was founded as a white supremacy haven, being the only state in the U.S to outlaw black citizens in its Bill of Rights post slavery.

I don’t expect everyone in the office to feel as I do, but I urge that everyone seek the facts, history, and explore varied media outlets. I would like to see everyone in the office acknowledge their privilege, especially because most people in the office are directly benefiting from the oppression of black people. If you are white in America, you directly and indirectly profit from the impact of slavery and the racial hierarchies that currently exist in our society. Additionally, if you are a non-Black person of color, you are benefitting from the death of black bodies because of the insidious nature of the black vs. white and the legacy of slavery in American history, which is consistently privileging those who are non-Black.

Racial hierarchy is so fine tuned to dehumanize blackness that we even have colorism at play within the black community. Covid-19 all too well demonstrates this hierarchy and its disparities. I do not think we acknowledge this privilege of benefit that is steeped in racial violence. Even quarantine purchases are steeped in racial violence. With all this talk of the “front-line” and how important our healthcare workers are, we too easily forget about our retail and factory workers, who are primarily black and brown people without the inflated salaries and luxuries healthcare providers enjoy and utilize to secure themselves and their loved ones during this time. The retail and factory worker does not have a high salary, a home with separate space to quarantine, nor, often, a primary care provider to check in with if illness occurs. While some of us stay comfortable at home or have the means to adjust if we must be in public, it is black and brown workers who die from Covid-19 because companies have inadequate protection and social distancing standards. It is black and brown people who disproportionately hold these work positions because they are forced into these industries through systematic racism, trauma, and oppression that doesn’t allow for advancement and retains the racial-contract. It is us who support these industries that are okay with killing to make it happen.

Ultimately, equity training is pointless without knowledge and action. I urge our office to continue its efforts to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion standards. I also encourage fellow colleagues to become informed about the history that resulted in yet another lynching and to advocate for change because otherwise, we are content and complacent with injustice. I do not think this is the intention of anyone in the office, but it is the *impact*. To all parents in the office, I urge you to not shy away from teaching your children of the truth of America’s racial history because our schools currently do not, no more than a superficial narrative. It is the lack of knowledge of such injustices that perpetuate the violence and festers ignorance and complacency. We need a change in the way our country sees race if we are ever going to see diversity in architecture or any industry.

Thank you,

Nik