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Statement of Belief

The Black students presently attending the Rhode Island School of Design demand that the administration, as well as the faculty and student body become aware of its growing obligation as an institution dedicated to the development and practice of the visual arts. To remain relevant as an educational institution, it must establish a meaningful liason with the spirit and expression of Black American culture.

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun
Or fester like a sore---
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over---
like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags like a heavy load
Or does it explode.

If RISD is to implement this statement of beliefs, (which applies not only to Blacks, but to all deprived and minority groups), it will be necessary to re-examine its educational and social priorities; to increase its awareness of the world outside its physical confines, the world that today is the resultant buildup of generations of ignorance and insensibility of White men to Black.

The education a person should receive far exceeds pure academics. What is education if not the development of an ability to learn and relate positively to people around us. Isn't the primary drive of education to fulfill a desire for personal, one-to-one touch with our total surroundings? And, isn't it true that this process dies with the refusal to admit that what one has learned could possibly be wrong? A man is not a man, in the true sense unless he has a sensitiveness for all men and all things.

On the issue of minority group recruitment, we can no longer tolerate wishy-washy, well intentioned, but non-activational compliance on the part of the administration. Since we feel that a recruitment program can and must show tangible effects by the beginning of the fall term starting in 1969, time will be of the essence. Indecision and half commitments will get us nowhere. Agressive action on the part of the administration is imperative. Because we believe in this program, we are willing to commit our effort towards its implementation. But, we exhort the administration to realize that the lion's share of the work is not the responsibility of either the students or the faculty.

We feel that the demands we are about to present, to be both just and reasonable. It is not our intention to put the administration in a bind that would neither be possible to meet, nor desirable to carry out. We simply ask that you act in good faith on these points which we feel to be long, long overdue.

1)

The Administration of RISD must take more visibly positive steps toward admission of minority group students. A reasonable starting point would be 20 students enrolling by fall of SEPT. 1969

The first point to be considered is that six black students on a campus of over a thousand is absurd. Whether this happened consciously or not, it still exists. This smallness serves only as tokenism and begs a state of invisibility. (20 SPACES LEFT OPEN FOR STUDENTS AUG 7)

Second point. In creating a community, you have to have a number of people substantial enough as to allow some freedom in social choice. In this way, you create a community which is both self nourishing and self replenishing. It is able to turn both inwards upon itself, and outwards into the greater RISD community.

II)

Of those special minority groups students accepted by RISD proving critical financial need, the school will have to accept the burden and arrange that either total scholarship, or partial scholarship and employment, the student will be able to attend RISD.

long range program to be established
Point. Obviously the 3,000 dollars plus that it costs to attend RISD is too much to ask any member of a low economic strata to pay completely. However, we are not looking for a handout. Wherever possible, a family will contribute as much as possible towards the students education.

III) Financing of recruitment travel by RISD students and probably/or with Admissions Officer and supply of necessary materials for meaningful communication in a recruitment program must be paid for by the administration.

IV)

By the beginning of the next academic year in the fall of 1969 we expect to see; six Black faculty members, four in fine arts and And two in liberal arts, (English and History); and one Black admissions officer.

Maximum substantiation of Black expression would be achieved not only for the incoming Black enrollment, but the entire student community of RISD by concentrating Black professors in the Fine Arts rather than the liberal arts.

Second point. Six we feel to be the minimum figure in that it is necessary to create a nucleus among Black faculty and Black students. This thus allows for a free range and exchange of ideas and associations.

Third point. A Black admissions/recruitment officer will facilitate recruitment of minority students through field work. This will thus short-circuit RISD's application problem of not being able to identify these special minority group students.

V)

a required,
The institution of ~~an~~ effective Black art and History course. Two semesters must be taken one in the freshman year, the other to be taken anytime before graduation.

While we understand the needs to study the ideas and artistic influences that provide the bedrock of Western Civilization, we also see the urgent

need to study those cultures and ideologies that are asserting themselves in the history we are all presently creating. This country has just experienced what may be just the first in a series of racial upheavels. Is it not important for us as designers for the world to study and become aware of the roots of this crisis?

VI)

The administration must set up a program for the continual implementation of these demands.

The steps that we have outlined only serve as a place of begining. It must be clearly understood and accepted by the administration of RISD that twenty students alone do not solve the problem. Long range provisions must be made for the duration of each students stay in school. A high acceleration program must be put into effect until the RISD minority representation reaches some reasonable proportion of the student body and can follow a more normal pattern. (A reasonable proportoin is not two or three per-cent).

We, the Black community of the Rhode Island School of Design are well aware of the administration's extremely slow, but well intentioned progress towards minority recruitment. It is our hope now, that through a more direct confrontation of this problem we will be able to underline this immediacy. It is to this point that we now press upon the administration of RISD to reflect, and accordingly, decisively act.

Submitted by the black student community of the Rhode Island School of Design on January 15, 1969.