

2020

RISD BI+POC

**STUDENT DEMANDS FOR
RACIAL EQUITY & INCLUSION**

risdARC

RISD Anti-Racism Coalition

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PREFACE

DEMANDS FOR INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE WRITTEN BY STUDENTS OF THE RISD ANTI-RACISM COALITION

The Rhode Island School of Design perpetuates systemic racism and anti-Blackness through its violent erasure, willful omission, and actions against Black, Indigenous, and POC within our community. Through this collective behavior, RISD's administration, faculty, and staff actively affirm and expand Eurocentric aesthetic discourse and ideology thereby marginalizing and disregarding the formative contributions of Black, Brown, and POC creatives that have shaped the art and design world.

The decision to attribute art and design history solely to Eurocentric practice is not only inaccurate, it contributes to our institution's impoverished definition of diversity as conformity to "European" conceptions of art. This whitewashed view of diversity then becomes RISD's alibi in failing to provide necessary institutional, financial, artistic, and mental support for Black and Brown students. We demand that RISD behave ethically and take action. **This is the blueprint.**

This list demands that every department, administrator, faculty, and staff member at RISD be held accountable for our school's commitment to justice through social equity and inclusion. Following these demands crystalizes the institution's dedication to investing in actionable and sustainable immediate and long-term change for our institution, however, they will not be enough. Only through ongoing investment and critique will necessary transformation occur.

While this call for institutional change centers the eradication of anti-Blackness, these demands must be understood in relation to global systems of oppression marginalizing other ethnic and racial groups and its intersection with and in relation to address disability, gender and sexuality.

I

DEFUND RISD'S DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND SEVER TIES WITH THE PROVIDENCE POLICE DEPARTMENT.

1. In tandem with the Black Lives Matter Movement, RISD must **defund** the Department of Public Safety and **reallocate 30% of the funds** to the mental health, financial aid, and well-being of Black students and POC community members. Additional funds derived from ending this anti-Black relationship should be allocated to scholarship and aid programs (*see Article I.a.i for more detail*), academic support funds for students of color, as well as the diversification and expansion of CAPS and Health Services.
 - a. **With the money from defunding Public Safety:**
 - i. Make the Student Success Fund publicly accessible and available to all current eligible and incoming students. In addition, expand the uses of materials fund to include all core expenses necessitated by major specific work (i.e. Graphic Design—paper and printing. FAV—film-related expenses, equipment included etc.)
 - ii. Increase Global Exchange scholarship opportunities for low-income students of color.
 - iii. Project Open Door (POD) is a RISD sponsored art program for talented teens attending public high schools in Rhode Island's urban core cities. **RISD uses this program for publicity, but does not support it financially**; POD currently operates on donations and funding from a number of sources. RISD must use a portion of its reallocated funds from Public Safety to actively support POD so it can expand its programming and outreach to POC students. Suggestions for financial support include: purchasing art supplies, funding programs, workshops, and field trips, and supporting POD Faculty.
 - b. Between 2019 and January of 2020, RISD's Public Safety Officers became designated Peace Officers, granting them the same authority as the Police to

conduct investigations, issue citations, and detain individuals suspected of committing a crime on campus. As [publicly stated](#) by the institution, “RISD Peace Officers will continue to carry a baton, pepper spray and handcuffs”. Equipping Campus Public Safety and Peace Officers with weapons and granting them the same authority of the state Police force encourages and facilitates the continuation of historically racially-biased violent practices that have killed thousands of Black women, men, transgender, and gender non-conforming people for decades. For too long the imagination of (white) safety has entailed the violent policing of BI+POC. Replace racist social control with direct investment into Black and Brown students and faculty at RISD in addition to the local Providence community.

II

RESTRUCTURING RISD'S HIRING AND APPOINTMENT PROCESSES TO UPHOLD ACADEMIC EQUITY AND INCLUSION.

1. RISD must **dismantle its racially discriminatory search and hiring processes** and construct a system that is based on ability, expertise, intellectual competency, knowledge, and the institutional transformation of academia, art, and design.
 - a. RISD's [claimed core values](#) center: "a classroom, studio and campus environment that advances principles of social equity and inclusion," yet, data shows that it's an act of performativity:
 - i. In [2017](#), 80% of RISD full-time faculty were white—3% were Hispanic, 3% Black, 7% Asian, 6% "Non-Resident Alien", 1% "American Indian or Alaska Natives", and 1% "Unknown". In 2003, the proportion of white full-time faculty was 90%; this has only decreased by 10% since then. RISD has been an overwhelmingly white institution for over 143 years. It can no longer be acceptable for RISD to point to adjunct diversity as representing real diversity within the institution. In 16 years, RISD should aim to have at least 55% non-white staff; this ratio should continue to adapt, reflecting true diversity around the globe.
 - ii. Improvements in diversity should also apply to Project Open Door, Continuing Education, and Pre-College faculty to ensure a safe space within a high-quality education for all prospective and current students.
 - iii. If the school has frozen all full-time faculty searches for 2021, those funds can be reallocated to financially support Project Open Door, Project Thrive, along with scholarship, research, and material funds for students of color. **Real connection requires real funding and support.**

If RISD is raising or has raised any funds for exceptional investment for 2021, the most urgent priority is supporting the diversification of full-time faculty and staff.

2. RISD rarely upholds its [core values](#) of “contextual and culturally diverse methods of creative practice and rigorous scholarship”. Full-time faculty past critical review who have worked at RISD for 30+ years and are not actively furthering racial equity and inclusion must be given an early retirement package for the following reasons:
 - a. Every 3-5 years, art and design industries make incredible advancements. These particular faculty are actively hindering our institution’s ability to remain relevant at the forefront of artistic innovation and social engagement. Paying their salaries endorses the continuation of outdated practices while depleting RISD’s financial capital.
 - b. Hiring adaptable and forward-thinking creatives of color as full-time faculty is critical to maintaining RISD’s mission to achieve “...enlightened engagement with emerging and evolving technologies, along with critical reflection...”.
 - c. These accomplished professors have devoted ample time to the advancement of our institution and should receive the distinguished honor of becoming Professor Emeriti.

3. We demand the implementation of **a new structure where students of color are extensively involved** in the process of hiring and leadership appointment.
 - a. This structure for full-time faculty hiring and appointing Department Heads is as follows:
 1. RISD students of color must be involved in Departmental proposals to hire new full-time faculty and in departmental meetings.
 2. These students of color must be directly involved in the formulation of position descriptions and communicate the rationale to the student body for the new hire.
 3. Upon approval of the new line, a RISD student of color must be included in the search committee.
 4. These students of color must be involved in selecting the short-list of interview candidates from the long-list of candidates.
 5. When the finalists have completed their on-campus visits, presentations, and teaching sessions, these students of color must be

involved in deliberations and voting over the successful candidate. The same student representatives of color must be invited to any departmental meeting at which changes in departmental leadership are in discussion. Minutes must be kept.

- b. The hiring committee and any persons involved in the appointment process must also work directly with the **newly expanded SEI** (*see Article X.*) to democratically hire staff and faculty of color in each major department (Positions including Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor-in-Residence, Critic, Senior Critic, Lecturer, or any administrative position with departments, and more).
 - c. Both Department Heads and full-time faculty members directly impact student learning by approving course curricula and influencing part-time faculty hiring, respectively. Students of color from racial and ethnic minority groups must be involved in every step of the petitioning process for new full-time faculty seeking critical review and tenure. Prior to the final selection, as the list of eligible candidates is narrowed, these student representatives must be granted the opportunity to argue for or against said candidates with 40% voting power. **We are not asking to interview candidates. We are asking to be involved in formulating the rationale, in determining the candidate pool, and in deciding the successful applicant.**
4. RISD must commit to regularly and continuously **changing departmental leadership** over a period of no more than five years so that no Department Head continues to lead a department for longer than five years in a row.
 - a. RISD must empower Junior Faculty to bring any concerns about bias or discrimination related to departmental leadership to an organization located within the **newly expanded SEI** (*See Article X for more information*). RISD's transformed hiring process must identify experienced diverse faculty who are therefore ready to assume leadership positions within realistic time frames.
5. Empower representatives from the Part-Time Faculty Association to have a standing meeting with Department Heads (broken up by division) at which they can advocate for the adjunct-faculty demands. The selection process for part-time and full-time faculty must include the following considerations:

- a. A standing meeting should be created between three student representatives of color and the Department Head at the conclusion of each semester to discuss faculty performance. This ensures that the Department Head has heard student concerns directly and that those concerns inform future hiring decisions. Students can produce a document that describes any concerns at the end of each semester. If these concerns recur at the end of the following semester, the student representatives must be invited to review them with the Divisional Dean and the Department Head.
 - b. **All part-time faculty appointments or hires must be driven by proven expertise and not nepotism or favoritism.** RISD can no longer empower full-time faculty to hire their intimate partners. Any decision going against this is in contradiction with RISD’s mission of “diversifying our community and expanding access to RISD” and “developing innovative curricula and pedagogy that reflect our values.”
6. Currently, the Dean of Fine Arts and President of Student Affairs **are open for hire**; these positions must be filled by people of color.
 - a. With the increase of student admissions from different racial and ethnic minority groups, RISD must hire a person of color as the Dean of Fine Arts to lead continued diversification of the faculty, staff, curricula, and students. This position represents all studio departments at RISD and is an integral figure in advocacy for BI+POC students.
 - b. According to [Student Affairs](#), the President of Student Affairs should “reflect the values of community, inclusiveness, responsibility, leadership, and well-being. The Office of Student Affairs serves as a general advocate for all RISD students.” This Office and its President should **not only “reflect” the values of our community, but they must embody diversity**, actively uphold our values, and critically address the student body they represent.
7. In response to RISD’s biased hiring and appointment processes, **we demand that the new systems mentioned above be implemented** and that all faculty and staff selections be made on the basis of ability, expertise, intellectual competency, knowledge, and the institutional transformation of academia, art, and design.

III

INCREASE MULTI-ETHNIC AND RACIAL REPRESENTATION BY 30%.

1. RISD must increase admission rates of students from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds through the evaluation and **improvement of its application and admission process**. These changes in admissions should be implemented with the enrollment of RISD's incoming class of 2025, with achievement by 2027.
 - a. RISD must **increase Black and Indigenous representation in admitted students**—undergraduate and graduate—entering in Fall 2021 by approximately 400% from their representation in Fall 2017. Specifically, these new enrollments in Fall 2020 should reflect a change to 15% Black and 5% Indigenous.
 - i. Low-income students and students of color's graduation rates increase as institutions evaluate and improve their admission and application practices to ensure access and educational opportunities. See ([Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education](#)) for comprehensive research in regards to this demand backed by institutional examples across the United States. Implementing this will ensure RISD's mission for true diversity becomes a reality.
 - b. Racial and ethnic data reported by RISD as per [IPEDS](#) standards are currently inadequate due to their attempt to conduct thorough nuanced analysis of diversity demographics of the RISD student body. RISD must develop a more thorough collection practice through the adoption of subcategories within the six-race and ethnicity categories presented by IPEDS. This data must be presented publicly, regardless of what RISD must report to the NCES.
 - i. Subcategories may be aggregated as such: Indigenous peoples of North and South America, Caribbean people, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders, regional groupings in Asia (i.e. South, Central, East Asia), etc.

IV

TUITION RESET.

1. RISD must increase accessibility for all students by reconstructing its annually inflating financial model through a **tuition reduction of 20%**.
 - a. 65% of students omit universities in their selection process solely based on tuition prices without any further research ([Sallie Mae, 2018](#)). The exorbitant cost of private institutions prohibits any possible attempts to achieve diversity in student ethnicity ratios as the intersections of race and class are disregarded. With a tuition reset, RISD becomes more accessible, thus encouraging a more inclusive group of students from different ethnic and economic backgrounds.
 - b. Institutions such as UVA, Rutgers University, and Cornish College of the Arts have implemented this plan by balancing tuition cuts with an increase in admissions. A reduced tuition sticker price will result in an increase in net tuition per student as well as long-term financial stability for the university itself as more families are attracted to a feasible tuition price.



REQUIRED COMPREHENSIVE DIVERSITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING.

1. RISD must restructure THAD’s curriculum by **decentering the Western art historical canon** to reflect a comprehensive view of decolonized art histories from a global perspective.
 - a. Artists of color and art movements before, during, and after colonization of Non-European countries should be embedded within foundation year THAD courses; this history should be taught by professors of color. THAD should **embody the diversity that RISD promotes**.

2. Every department—both undergraduate and graduate—must **remodel its mandatory department history course** to include the critical role marginalized groups have had in the development and on the practices of the industry.
 - a. By encompassing extensive non-Eurocentric discourse, taught by several contracted professors of color, this course will help properly prepare all students and faculty for the experience of race in art-making within their respective fields.

3. **Comprehensive educational training** on the histories of marginalized people and intersectionality must be **mandatory annually** for all faculty and staff.
 - a. This new comprehensive training model must be taught by an academic of color with a background in racial ontology, critical race theory, and/or Black studies. This training must address intersectional issues of race, power, gender, and socioeconomic status. While this is intended to educate and engage faculty and staff on these issues in a broader context, SEI’s Decolonizing the Curriculum course must maintain the praxis of addressing these issues in direct relation to restructuring faculty curriculums. Both the training and SEI courses must be mandated annually for all faculty in every department at RISD—both

undergraduate and graduate. A formal evaluation of faculty improvement in these areas must be assessed at the end of each year.

- b. In order to proactively further real diversification training, see ([Brown Diversity & Inclusion Syllabus Requirements](#)) for ideas on diversity statements and Native Land Acknowledgements in classroom environments.

VI

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR COMPLICITY IN THE SLAVE TRADE AND THE OCCUPATION OF INDIGENOUS LAND.

1. Black students' demand the right to **reclaim Market House** through the renaming and improved progressive use of the building against its brutal history.
 - a. Market House and Square were used as slave markets, RISD can no longer disclaim its long history with slavery. Market House must be reclaimed by Black and Indigenous students and renamed to honor these communities.
 - i. There should be a designated space within Market House for the advancement of *BAAD*. This space could be used for healing purposes regarding RISD's Black community. In keeping with our Zero-Tolerance Policy for ableism (*See Article IX.*), RISD must include an elevator to make this building handicap accessible.
 1. While the repurposing of Market House is dedicated to BI+POC reclamation, this act displaces RISD FAV Upperclassmen along with FAV faculty. It must be stated as a potential solution that this portion of the FAV Department be given a newly renovated studio near the Auditorium with space for both 2D Animation and Stop-Motion studios. During the renovation process, FAV must be given adequate temporary space for all displaced students and faculty, including but not limited to the entire fifth floor of The Chase Center. As student seniority takes priority, any displaced Freshman should be dispersed between ProvWash, Waterman Building, and any other space deemed suitable for foundational practices.
 - b. By 2023, parts of Market House must be **repurposed to become a space for RISD's Black students** and the larger Providence community; it should

eventually be completely refurbished for this purpose. The model should be similar to [Brown's Center for Students of Color](#), which acts as a place of meeting, healing, and a gallery space for Black and Indigenous artists.

2. RISD must acknowledge that its very existence is owing to the theft of Indigenous land. The institution must work with the Indigenous communities to determine the next steps for its continued existence. While it is up to these communities to dictate these terms, some ideas are as follows:
 - a. RISD is built on and occupies Narragansett and Wampanoag Land. In consideration of this, the slave labor that built this country, and [racial capitalism](#), RISD must create a fund to **offer full-ride scholarships to Black and Indigenous** Providence students by 2030. In addition, **full-ride scholarships** should be offered to these students for RISD's **Continuing Education** program.
 - b. [The RISD Museum](#) must **divest and deaccession Indigenous stolen artifacts** as such possession is an act of colonialism in itself. Appropriate measures must be taken to meet the wishes of the objects' rightful owners.
 - c. **Publicly acknowledge this stolen land** by making graphics such as flyers, postcards, and banners on webpages. The creation of [land acknowledgement documents](#) should be annually commissioned to honor RI native BI+POC. All professors must be required to include a detailed land acknowledgement along with a diversity statement in every syllabus (*See Article V.3.b.*).

VII

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND PAYMENT FOR BI+POC LABOR AS WORK-STUDY.

1. RISD must put a **paid committee**—equally comprised of students, faculty, and staff—**aligned with SEI’s initiatives** to oversee issues of race and marginalization.
 - a. This committee will be a work-study opportunity for all students—undergraduate and graduate. Student members can be recruited from current active cultural clubs on campus such as BAAD, Project Thrive, NOMAS, Mango Street, etc.
 - i. This committee must attend all possible board meetings held by the RISD administration with the **power to vote and advocate for change** regarding any faculty member’s inability to abide by SEI’s commitment to social, equity and inclusion.

2. RISD must publicly acknowledge former and present Black students for their work in initiating and actively advancing RISD’s mission of “further diversifying our community and expanding access to RISD through social equity and inclusion.”
 - a. Suggestions include recognizing the following Black student initiatives in the RISD Archives + Special Collections: *Not Your Token*, *The Room of Silence*, and *The Waiting Room*. All activist and social justice work from POC students must be identified and documented on the official [RISD](#) website with its own landing page.

VIII

RE-EVALUATE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND DIVEST FROM CORPORATIONS ASSOCIATED WITH GEOPOLITICAL VIOLENCE.

1. RISD must practice ethical investing by **reevaluating strategic partnerships** on the basis of our institution's claimed core values.
 - a. In accordance with geopolitical dimensions, RISD must actively research and select strategic partnerships for the Global Exchange Program (*i.e.* [See this article](#)). Travel programs located in countries that result in the discrimination of specific racial and ethnic groups must be retired and substituted with a more inclusive alternative. For example, the [Bezalel Academy of Art & Design](#) discriminates against Palestinian students on the basis of national origin; therefore, RISD must replace this strategic partnership with a more equitable alternative. Continuing such programs is in direct violation of [Title VI](#).

2. RISD must **actively and publicly disavow** its own racist, anti-Black global position by divesting from companies and organizations that support militarized violence and racial capitalism which aids and abets the gentrification of Black and Brown spaces. RISD must also be fully transparent with the companies it invests in, partners with, and accepts money from.
 - a. The institutions' understanding of global political momentum against racism and colonization must be broadened as we **critically analyze and address RISD's partnerships**. Divest from Airbnb, Textron, and other complicit entities that profit off of militarized violence and geopolitical war crimes.
 - i. RISD must divest from [Airbnb, the target of a global boycott call](#), due to Airbnb's complicity in profiting off of Israeli war crimes by listing settlements which are illegal under international law. Airbnb's controversies also lie in its ability to exacerbate [gentrification](#) in the United States. This company encourages upper middle-class people

to purchase and profit from properties where they don't plan to live, causing the displacement of Black and Brown communities.

- ii. RISD must divest from [Textron](#) and replace it with an ethical alternative to match the scholarships that are provided as such scholarships are funded by profiting off of violence. Textron supplies the US and Israeli law enforcement with resources. These militarized entities maintain structures of white settler-colonialism that definitionally harm Black, Brown, and Indigenous people and communities.

IX

ZERO-TOLERANCE POLICY.

1. A **Zero-Tolerance Policy** for anti-Black, racist, xenophobic, transphobic, homophobic, sexist, sexual assault, harassment, ableist, and classist behavior **must be implemented, effective immediately.**
 - a. The Office of SEI must be authorized to take action towards any perpetrator of these violent acts—administrators, faculty members, or students alike—regarding racial and gender equity and inclusion. All cases must be reviewed by a disciplinary board of SEI staff and work-study students of color.

2. As stated by Title IX, “Victims/survivors are entitled to **protective measures, support,** and access to **resources for healing** regardless of whether a formal report is filed.” In the past, students and faculty have not received the proper psychological and internal support that is currently offered when navigating the process of reporting an incident.
 - a. With most cases presented to Title IX, accusations are presumed to be fabrications until proven otherwise. The *Me Too movement’s* notion of believing women who have been assaulted or harassed should extend to all marginalized people along with the intersections of gender and sexuality. After a report has been made, **precautions must be taken to protect** those who reveal the experience of harm, effective immediately. Protections include but are not limited to:
 - i. A no-contact order or restraining order, barring the said perpetrator from being near the person harmed. The priority is to reduce any future harm to the person affected, not prioritizing the person who was accused.
 - ii. In prioritizing the person harmed and their safety, they must be granted the choice for any of the following:

- The said perpetrator to be removed immediately from any mutual space that the student must inhabit—classes, seminars, and housing environments included.
 - The person harmed must be granted the option to immediately remove themselves from that space without any academic or financial repercussions. Whether the person harmed is a student or faculty member, they must be given an automatic extension on assignments.
 - For students, they must be granted the ability to complete the class with no contact (offered by a virtual learning platform if requested). Protections must be granted for all students and faculty who disclose these violent instances. All reports can be made anonymously if desired.
- iii. There must be a minimum of three sexual or intimate partner violence therapists who are women, non-binary or trans-people of color on campus, preferably a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) specializing in these areas.
- b. We demand radical transparency to hold RISD accountable in abiding by this Zero Tolerance Policy.
- i. Non-RISD affiliated public forums must be created via a third party for discussions regarding racism, sexual assault, harassment, and more (*See Article IX.1. for full list*).
 - ii. Any perpetrator of this violence, especially those with more than one account against them, must be met with strict ramifications regarding their presence on RISD's campus. This is intended to hold them accountable for their actions.
3. For anyone reporting to Title IX or the Office of SEI regarding these acts, a drafted timeline of the updated incident report process mentioned above should be available upon disclosing information. All protections for the person harmed must be discussed immediately.

X

EXPAND THE OFFICE OF SEI AND INCREASE STUDENT WORK-STUDY POSITIONS.

1. The Office of Social, Equity, and Inclusion **must hire more professionals of color** from a wide spectrum of racial and ethnic groups beyond the current four positions in an effort to further ingrain the core principles of SEI into the fabric of our institution.
 - a. We must reimagine the faculty hiring and academic leadership appointment processes at their core by proactively **including professionals of color in the search committee itself**. Committee members must include Africana Studies professors and faculty in the Higher Education Department at Brown University in an effort to mitigate potential opportunities for racial-bias and discrimination. Only upon the expansion of these tenets should SEI have direct involvement in selection processes for all administrators, faculty, and staff.
 - a. In an effort to delegate tasks, more student work-study positions should be made available for students of color.

XI

IMPLEMENT TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE PRACTICES.

1. RISD must enforce its claims of diversity and inclusion by **integrating transformative justice practices** into Residential Life, Student Affairs, and the Office of Student Conduct's disciplinary and conflict resolution procedures.
 - a. The current form of justice that exists within RISD is largely formulated around punitive action and policing. RISD needs to respond to issues of harm by **actively preventing violence while promoting healing, accountability, resilience, and safety**. By implementing transformative justice practices, RISD will build opportunities for growth. Involving SEI in this process will guarantee that outcomes of correctional action are determined through collaborative effort regarding parties responsible, those harmed, as well as facilitators.

WHAT WE SEEK

Our demands as a collective hold RISD accountable for its proclaimed commitment to fostering a truly inclusive and socially equitable community on our campus. **Efforts towards social, equity, and inclusion cannot be solely the responsibility of SEI, but should be ingrained in the core of our institution.** This means every department, administrative decision, faculty hiring process, Public Safety development and course curriculum needs to acknowledge and work to combat racial-bias and the systemic injustices that are violently oppressing Black, Brown, Indigenous, and all people of color.

We have provided RISD with tangible solutions to combat our school's prolonged history of anti-Blackness and racial discrimination that affects all people of color.

We expect the following RISD academic leadership divisions, including but not limited to, the Office of The President, Provost, Deans, Department Heads—both undergraduate and graduate—to **respond with formal written statements** and a **timeline detailing the application of our demands** in order to restructure old systems. These deliverables must facilitate long-term sustainable change that earnestly addresses and further supports our Black, Indigenous, and POC students, faculty, staff, and administrators.

The public announcement must be released by **July 30, 2020, at 11:59pm**. As an institution, we will never be fully committed to diversifying our community if we do not take action to implement social equity and inclusion in everything we do.

Racial, academic, and social equity and inclusion are essential to catalyzing true institutional change. This document is just the beginning.

Respectfully,

The RISD Anti-Racism Coalition (risdARC)

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“If we were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression.”

Combahee River Collective Statement, 1977

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