

Exhibition Opening - A Call to Act(ivism): Echoing Whitney Young, 50 Years Later
On view July 10 – September 15, 2018

Remarks by Marcia Y. Cantarella, Ph.D

It is exciting to be back here for this event. The exhibit and this whole focus is powerful testimony to the importance which you as a profession have given to my father's words. Last winter here you and my alma mater, Bryn Mawr, collaborated on an event to discuss daddy's speech also. Certainly a highlight was having Phil Freelon, noted architect for the Smithsonian National Museum of African American Art and Culture, show slides and tell the story of that regal space, and also hearing the visionary work being done by Steven Lewis. Equally important in framing the environmental issue was Bryn Mawr alumnus Dr. Mindy Fullilove, an AIA partner, who as a psychologist focuses on lived environments especially in urban, inner city communities.

A reality is that since daddy's speech many things have not changed but the exhibit reveals that it is not for lack of trying on the part of architects. My father would be impressed that this focus, triggered by his amazing speech, maintains 50 years later.

In 1968 the profession of architecture was two percent African American and it is still today. Ghettoes remain. In New York during parts of this winter which were incredibly cold, low-income housing went without heat even in city subsidized buildings. Lead paint remains an issue. Gentrification of areas like Brooklyn does not mean integration of traditionally Black middle class enclaves, it means those communities are priced out and moved out. My former Hunter student Irwing Forbes is part of the battle against that. There are apartment complexes which are structured so that the tenants who are on subsidy have different entrances and exits from those who pay market rate. New towers prevent light from coming into buildings that were built long ago but may be the sole source of sun and light for senior citizens who can't afford to move.

Another aspect of the importance of our lived spaces is the economic inequality of who gets to live where. Housing choices or the lack of them impact where people can work, the kinds of work they can do, the kinds of schools they have access to and the people they encounter. There is a meanness when housing subsidies originally allowing all kinds of people to live in a community are eliminated, and those who may even work in those communities are forced to commute significant and expensive distances, leaving the neighborhood sterile and homogeneous in ways that do not reflect the real world (that

translates to affluent and white). These are issues you can't fix alone but you can weigh in with your ideas and leverage.

Our current political environment perpetuates and reinforces a discriminatory environment and socio-economic disparity that is both economic but also psychological and seems part of a never ending cycle that leaves us having this same discussion 50 years after my father began it.

I want to close with words from that 1968 speech. It was a call to action to you and its message rings especially true today: In 1968 my father Whitney Young said:

“As a profession, you ought to be taking stands on these kinds of things. If you don't as architects stand up and endorse Model Cities and appropriations, if you don't speak out for rent supplements or the housing bill calling for a million homes, if you don't speak out for some kind of scholarship program that will enable you to consciously and deliberately seek to bring in minority people who have been discriminated against in many cases, either kept out because of your indifference or couldn't make it—it takes seven to ten years to become an architect—then you will have done a disservice to the memory of John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Bob Kennedy and most of all, to yourselves. You are part of this society. It is not easy. I am not suggesting the easy road, but the time has come when no longer the kooks and crackpots speak for America. The decent people have to learn to speak up, and you shouldn't have to be the victim to feel for other people. I make no pretense that it is easy.”

So in my father's name let's take action against those kooks and crackpots!