



## **Black Lives Matter**

West 8's response

### **Update - Fall 2020**

As 2020 comes to a close, West 8 is taking some time to reflect on the year that has gone by. There was much work to be done - reflection, questioning ideals, shifting priorities, and listening – lots of listening. Our team, along with many others in the design profession, has been grappling with the reality of racial inequality, our role in its continuance – but also our role in promoting equality. Below is an update on what we have learned thus far, and how we have applied it to our practice and work. We believe we have a long road ahead, but we appreciate all who have joined us in our efforts to make Landscape Architecture more accessible, inclusive and anti-racist.

#### **Miami Beach Remembers Juneteenth at Pride Park, Miami Beach**

This year, Juneteenth (June 19<sup>th</sup>) marked the 155th anniversary of the day slaves in Texas were notified of the end of legal slavery - years after the Emancipation Proclamation. For the first time in Miami Beach's history, the city recognized this event by hosting a ceremony at Pride Park, designed by West 8 and completed in 2020. The ceremony included the planting of a rainbow eucalyptus tree to symbolize and celebrate the contributions of African Americans to Miami Beach and an 8 minute and 46 second moment of silence to reflect on the past, present and future. West 8 Project leaders Ashley Schwemmer and Daniel Vasini (photo below), along with others in attendance, wrote positive words and messages on stones and placed them under the tree in a gesture of solidarity and collective dedication to growing a more inclusive community. West 8 feels proud that Pride Park was the selected site to host this important event.



#### How Can We Do Better? The West 8 Team Gathers to Discuss Race and Equality

West 8 held an open online discussion to give all employees an opportunity to share thoughts on our firm's plan and statement and collectively brainstorm for initiatives that could further the statement's objectives within our professional spheres and project work. This event also introduced an online 'living' reading list, created by and editable for all team members, containing a range of sources facilitating a better understanding and awareness of the issues underlying the Black Lives Matter movement, inclusivity, and decolonisation in design. More than half of West 8 staff attended. The forum was an open dialogue where colleagues could share goals, actions, and criticisms in a safe and productive environment.

#### West 8 Joins Fellow LA's in Cut|Fill Conference to Share, Learn, and Brainstorm how Landscape Architecture can better Address Racial Injustice in Practice and Design

This summer, seven members of our design team and director Adriaan Geuze participated in the discussion-based Cut | Fill Unconference alongside fellow landscape architects from across the US to unpack the challenges of our field that have been augmented this year by a global pandemic and widespread civil unrest. We identified opportunities for collective action as well as strategies for individual action that can help break down barriers within our profession. A 5 minute summary of the conference is available [here](#).

#### Update on BLM Action items

In addition to updating our [hiring policy](#), a number of West 8 staff across both offices have individually engaged in mentorship actions in line with promoting access to the profession.

West 8 founder and director Adriaan Geuze visited Curaçao to meet with [KREA](#), a "multidisciplinary collective of young engineers from Curaçao sharing a common passion for creating our built environment" to share knowledge and networks. West will continue to offer KREA ongoing support and exchange of resources and ideas.

In conclusion, we understand the efforts outlined in this update are the first steps in the larger work towards equality, opportunity, and the accessibility of design. We look forward to continued learning, listening, and collaboration.

#### Our General Statement - June 2020

West 8 strongly stands by the Black Lives Matter movement and we believe, unequivocally, that there is zero room for any form of racism or discrimination, in our offices, our field and the rest of the world. The recent protests have opened the door to serious conversations, not only in North America but also in the Netherlands. It is not enough to be complacent; going forward we must be actively anti-racist and call out systematic injustices within our communities to create positive change.

As landscape architects and urban designers, we help shape the public domain. We know that the spaces we design can create a groundswell of change and affect a broad cross section of society. Since the founding of our firm in 1987, each of our designs has been based on the core values of

inclusivity, accessibility and freedom of expression. Our work process strives to represent and include the identities of the communities that we are building for.

This would not be possible without our culturally diverse team. West 8 is a collective of designers that includes people from over 18 different nationalities and of different cultural backgrounds. We truly embrace this diversity and believe it is essential to do our work right: to create spaces that support human expression and -inclusion.

We realize that as a global leader in our practice area, we are in a privileged position and are not divorced from our responsibility to drive change at all levels.

We are aware that we can all do better and are committed to taking quantifiable actions to make it happen. We have taken the past weeks to reflect and propose a thoughtful response that includes a list of actionable efforts to accelerate change.

This list is in no way exhaustive of our commitments to encourage change, but should be seen as our first step. Internally, we have started a larger discussion and we will work with our existing diverse group of employees to investigate, address and remove the barriers that directly affect Black, Indigenous and People of Color within our field.

#### **Action 1**

##### **Mentorship prioritization for Black, Indigenous and People of Color considering a career in design**

West 8 has a responsibility to encourage and promote the talented minority voices in the field of Landscape Architecture and Urban Design. Going forward, our leadership team will actively offer opportunities for one-on-one sessions, network building, portfolio guidance, and application consult. Both our offices aim to deliver a minimum of two mentorship tracks per year / five mentorship actions per year.

#### **Action 2**

##### **Increased opportunity internships for Black, Indigenous and People of Color**

For the past 35 years, West 8 has offered paid, 6 month, internship positions for both the Rotterdam and New York offices. Effective immediately, we will actively invite Black, Indigenous and People of Color to apply for a landscape architecture or urban design internship. We continue to offer all talented interns and employees opportunities to grow within the firm.

#### **Action 3**

##### **Commitment to improve design by offering local employment within projects**

We believe that meaningful community engagement is at the heart of good design for the public realm. Through our project work we will employ Black, Indigenous and People of Color to join our project team. We will actively engage local universities and colleges for exchange and reflection. This role will be a vital, visible, and engaged team member working within the design process, engaging the local community, advising on community feedback and design direction.