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**Application Essay**

Diversity in the architecture profession enhances the diversity of the built environment which is essential to sustaining inclusive life for the wide variety of people around the world. Through my studies, I have come to learn that what we build directly impacts our everyday lives: from access to resources, our health, down to how we perceive others.

The built environment has the power to dictate what places matter and what places don't. Consequently, it can determine whether the people in those places matter or not. It is important to have diversity in the architecture profession because that is what will help inspire future generations of diverse architects. More fundamentally, it is crucial that we have diverse viewpoints and cultures represented in architecture because the world should be built in such a way that caters to the diversity of the individuals who live in it respectfully, uniquely, and equally.

Growing up, I had very few adults in my life with established careers to look up to as examples. I am half Trinidadian and half Panamanian and from both sides, my family represents the iconic struggle for immigrants to make a life in this country. My family emphasized that a college education was necessary for me to succeed in the world. Despite this, when I got to college, I didn't know what I wanted to be or what I was truly passionate about.

Through years of exploration, I finally discovered that my strengths and interests were perfectly suited to architecture. In my first semester at Morgan State one of my initial projects was to create a poster on a historic architect. Of all the names listed to choose from, Norma Sklarek caught my eye because she was the only woman on it. She was the first licensed- African- American- female architect in the nation. Sklarek's story was inspiring to me because of her great achievements and contributions to the field, but more importantly because I saw similarities between us. Her parents were immigrants from Trinidad and she was a woman of color. The resilience and determination that led her to become legendary in this profession as a minority of two groups spoke to my potential and made me feel purposeful in this major. I connected with her story in a way that made me feel like I belonged in architecture.

Bringing more diversity to the profession allows for more moments like this to be created, where people who aren't commonly represented are encouraged to take a chance and break traditional ways of thinking. When I decided to study architecture, my family made comments that could have discouraged me from pursuing this career, such as how it might be hard to find steady income as an architect, and how it might involve hands on work that was not suitable for a woman. Perhaps, if they were able to see more people like me in the profession, it would have been easier for them to believe I could make it. People of color belong in architecture and women belong in architecture so that people like me can see themselves and trust in their abilities.

This very scholarship was incited by the speech given to the AIA by civil rights leader Whitney M. Young Jr. in 1968.

Interestingly enough, I studied this speech during my first semester at Morgan and went on to read his book, *Beyond Racism*. In his speech, he tells a story of taking members of the Kerner Commission to a tenement house so that they can experience first hand the gap between the living conditions of Americans. When the men in the Commission saw the starving children, "smelled the stench of urine," and talked to the distraught parents, their plight became real. Thinking of how this housing unit was designed and built, how could these

people have believed that they were valuable members of society? Young Jr. asks how the architect “could even compromise his own profession and his own sense of values to have built 35- or 40- story buildings, these vertical slums, and not even put a restroom in the basement and leave enough recreational space for about 10 kids when there must be 5,000 in the building?” As a solution, Young Jr. concludes, “the decent people have to learn to speak up, and you shouldn’t have to be the victim to feel for other people.”

This anecdote exemplifies why it is imperative that diversity is prioritized in the architecture profession. Having people from different cultures and viewpoints in the architect’s role means that they are better able to empathize with and understand the concerns of the people they are building for. Because people come from all walks of life there is so much richness and beauty in their imaginations that can be harnessed as architects. These minds as a collective in the architecture profession can come together to build the world with our collective interest in mind. With diversity represented in the field, architects can design and build spaces designated specifically for different cultures, religions, and practices, so that people feel purposeful when they’re in them. While racial discrimination is Young Jr.’s main target focus, he is petitioning the pathos of his audience. He is calling people to employ their moral compass and strive to be good architects, but better yet, good people in all that they do.

It is important to have diverse viewpoints and cultures represented within the architecture profession to ensure that our field, and that the work coming out of our field, reflects the ever- diversifying realities of our world. The built environment has to change as much as we do. Furthermore, having a diverse set of leaders in the field will help inspire new generations of forward- thinkers to join our cause. Personally, I know that my diverse background has shaped how I welcome differences and connect with others. I am looking forward to bringing these skills to the field.

It is my firm belief that welcoming diverse viewpoints and cultures must remain an essential priority in our profession and I am confident I will bring that to the architecture profession once I make it.