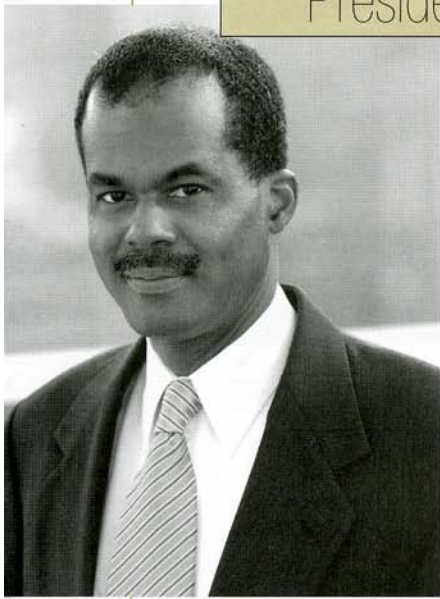


President's Message



Terrence E. O'Neal, AIA

Historically, the architect was a master builder. Builders, whose meeting place was the local masons' hall, were overseen by craftsmen who centuries later would be recognized as "professionals." They handled all aspects of the design and construction of every structure, from modest residences to grand public buildings. By the 13th century, they were well on their way to the "professional" status of today's architects.

As the building trades evolved, tradesmen began to acquire "professional" status as master builders. As their skills and knowledge progressed, they became the Renaissance designers of Brunelleschi's time. Some would say, therefore, that architecture was born in the fifteenth century.

Centuries passed, the profession grew, and American builder-architects were educated in Europe. The status of the architect in Europe provided a narrow focus that led to an iconography of the architect as "artiste." Ambassador Richard Swett, FAIA, in his book *Leadership by Design* (2005, Greenway Publications), describes this phenomena superbly, "...the status of the architect changed from that of the leader of the building team to just the designer on a team of building experts." I believe this statement resonates with many architects today. This sea change was the result of rigorous effort by members of our own organization – the American Institute of Architects – in the late 19th century.

Unfortunately, the portrayal of the fictional architect Howard Roark in Ayn Rand's 1943 novel *The Fountainhead* further endorsed the idea of the architect-as-single-minded artist, rather than collaborator. Rand used the character Roark as a tool to convey her philosophy.

Architecture was a new profession as the 20th century began, and the majority of buildings were not designed by architects. Significant portions of the building process were given to others and the architect became marginalized. We still see the effects of this today but, fortunately, there appears to be a movement to reclaim portions of the building process that were once not as important to us and even looked upon with disdain.

At the turn of the century, a relatively small number of architects were AIA members. Not all agreed with the direction of this new organization formed for this relatively new profession. Yet, in spite of their focus on design and aesthetics, the architects of the late 19th and early

20th centuries were intensely involved in politics. Most probably this was a consequence of the need to protect and define a new profession. Other professions, particularly law and medicine, were long established.

Today the situation for our profession has changed. Many architects become deeply involved in their communities and in politics.

The past few years have seen a particularly high level of involvement. The number of architects active in business and politics is on the rise. Looking around the nation, we find that architects are increasingly engaged in dialogue with elected officials and business leaders. We acknowledge the importance of these interactions to the design process. Indeed, many of us have been frustrated by the marginalization of the profession. Often, when an architect is called for a project, many of the major design decisions have already been made, by politicians and businesspersons. We now recognize that our integration into the process is essential.

This is what our annual **Architects In Albany (A.I.A.) Day** is about. Once a year, we gather in at the state capitol to visit our legislators and advocate for issues relevant to our profession. We are often asked if the AIA takes positions (for or against) on controversial building projects around the state. In the past we have focused only on issues that involved large-scale urban planning/developments, and commented on individual projects regarding landmark status only. Perhaps we should consider taking positions on building projects. We have not done so in the past, but an advocacy organization like AIANYS should consider being heard on this.

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