


# From Harlem to New Haven: The Emergence of the Advocacy Planning Movement in the late 1960s

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### **From Harlem to New Haven: The Emergence of the Advocacy Planning Movement in the late 1960s**

This paper examines the advocacy planning movement and the socio-political climate of civil rights around 1968, paying special attention to the struggle over civil rights for African Americans in the United States in the 1960s. It scrutinizes the impact of urban renewal debates and critique on the academia on east coast architecture institutes, and their highly privileged position. It places particular emphasis on the opposition between advocacy planning and urban renewal strategies. In the United States of America, the term “urban renewal” refers to a federal government program that began in 1954 with the purpose to replace blighted urban areas with new urban projects. In contrast with the connotation of the “urban renewal” in North-Western European cities, where the term was linked with a democratization movement and the establishment of new forms of participatory governance, within the American context the “urban renewal” is related to the implementation of top-down strategies that “decimated older black neighbourhoods, forcing relocation in rapidly ghettoising areas, or in some cases creating physical barriers that confined African Americans to certain areas”<sup>1</sup>. The paper aims to illuminate the issues of democracy in such a charged environment and to shed light on the fact that the top down urban renewal projects, in many cases, were aimed against black communities. It focuses on two case studies that are closely connected to the critique of urban renewal in the United States: firstly, the founding in 1964 of the Architects’ Renewal Committee in Harlem (ARCH), the first organization solely devoted to advocacy planning in the United States, and secondly, the establishment in 1969 of the City Planning Forum at Yale School of Art and Architecture, an independent governing body which consisted of all full-time faculty members and students and – in dialogue with the civil rights movement – had as its main purpose to bring greater diversity to the department.

As Fern M. Colborn notes, in *The Neighborhood and Urban Renewal*, an important turning point regarding the emergence of the urban renewal politics in the United States of America during the post-war years

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth L. Kusmer cited in Mary E. Triece, *Urban Renewal and Resistance: Race, Space, and the City in the Late Twentieth to the Early Twenty-First Century* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2016), 90.

should be considered the Housing Act of 1949, which was supported not only by professional urban planners, but also by city officials, and business leaders among others. The 1949 Renewal Program defined urban renewal as “the diversified efforts by localities, with the assistance of the Federal Government, for the elimination and prevention of slums and blight, whether residential or non-residential, and the removal of the factors that create slums and blighting conditions.”<sup>2</sup>. This program contributed to the formation of an ethic of city rebuilding. Before its revisions in 1954 the term that was officially used was “urban redevelopment” instead of “urban renewal”. As H. Briavel Holcomb and Robert A. Beauregard maintain in *Revitalizing Cities*, after the revisions of the program in 1954 urban renewal became more attractive to private investors<sup>3</sup>. Between 1945 and 1965, within the framework of the Urban Renewal Program federal funds were used to construct hundreds of thousands of public housing units in many American cities. The two cities that used most of the federal funds for this purpose are New York City and Chicago. By 1960, New York City was the city that received the highest percentage of federal money for urban renewal. This money was used to replace “slums” with modern public housing. Holcomb and Beauregard have shed light of the reasons for which the Urban Renewal Program was largely criticized, while Martin Anderson, in his seminal book *The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal, 1949-1962* tried to distinguish the reasons behind the large criticisms of the Urban Renewal Program<sup>4</sup>. A reason that explains the disapprovals of this program is that fact that it provoked the replacement of low-rent dwelling units with high-rent ones.

The advocacy planning approaches considered urban renewal to be incompatible with any kind of socially effective approach to urban planning. The Architects’ Renewal Committee of Harlem (ARCH) was founded in 1964, and was one of the first Community Design Centers (CDCs). It emerged in the context of the civil rights movement in the United States and intended to provide technical and design advice to communities who could otherwise not afford it. It was established by Richard Hatcher, who was joined, in 1967, by John Bailey, and, in 1968 by Max Bond, who became ARCH’s new executive director. A program of ARCH that is worth mentioning is “Architecture in the Neighborhoods” (1970), which aimed to recruit local black youth to become architects. Key figures for advocacy planning movement in the late 1960s in the United States were C. Richard Hatch and Christopher Tunnard, Chairman of the Department of City Planning of Yale University’s School of Art and Architecture between 1966 and 1969. The Advocacy Planning Movement rejected the methods of urban renewal, which had contributed significantly to the transformation of the urban fabric of New York City and other American cities such as Chicago during the years that preceded 1968. Paul Davidoff, who taught city planning at the University of Pennsylvania, Hunter

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<sup>2</sup> Fern M. Colborn, *The Neighborhood and Urban Renewal*. New York, National Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers, 1963), 7.

<sup>3</sup> H. Briavel Holcomb, Robert A. Beauregard, *Revitalizing Cities* (Washington, DC: Association of American Geographers, 1981).

<sup>4</sup> Martin Anderson, *The Federal Bulldozer: A Critical Analysis of Urban Renewal, 1949-1962* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1964).

College, and Queens College, was one of the major contributors to Advocacy Planning. In the framework of his efforts to increase the opportunities of participation of the excluded groups to city planning, he established the Suburban Action Institute for research and litigation. The main objective of the Suburban Action Institute was to provide access to suburban housing to poor citizens. Davidoff was also a member of the governance board of the American Institute of Planners. As Davidoff underscores, in his article entitled "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning" published in 1965, the core concern of advocacy planning was the conviction that "[p]lanners should be able to engage in the political process as advocates of the interests both of government and of such other groups, organizations, or individuals who are concerned with proposing policies for the future development of the community". The above-mentioned article played an important role for the dissemination of advocacy planning, shedding light on the fact that the latter treated pluralism as an important component of planning. Davidoff paid special attention to the concern of advocacy planning about establishing "the bases for a society affording equal opportunity to all citizens"<sup>5</sup>. Davidoff also encouraged the replacement of models based on land-use by socio-economic planning strategies. Thomas L. Blair, who seems to have been more skeptical regarding the ability of advocacy planning to really enhance equality, in *The Poverty of Planning: Crisis in the Urban Environment*, originally published in 1973, expressed his doubts regarding the capacity of "advocacy planning really [to establish] [...] a participatory democracy", maintaining that at certain cases it had been "a pretext for public manipulation"<sup>6</sup>. The advocacy planning movement aspired to respond to the fulfilment of needs related to the welfare of society as a whole and the responsibility to provide equal housing opportunities and equal access to public amenities regardless of race, religion, or national origin.

The New York Urban League, which was aiming to improve social and economic conditions and opportunities for African-Americans, organized the "Street Academies" program, which was funded by the Ford Foundation and aimed at educating high school dropouts and getting many of them into a college or university, and established a prep school in Harlem named "Harlem Prep". The "Street Academies" intended to offer opportunities to access education to the black youth, labeled by the African-American press as ghetto dropouts. The Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) proposed in 1968 a pilot study of Harlem to the New York Urban League. The proposal of this pilot program, which equated black America with urban America, concluded with the following phrase: "But if 'black' and 'white' are truly symbiotic, then modern technology could be as much a symbol of black America and the modern city as it is of white America"<sup>7</sup>. In order to grasp how the early activities of the IAUS are related to the debates around urban renewal, one

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Davidoff, "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning", *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 31(4), 1965, 331-338.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas L. Blair, *The Poverty of Planning: Crisis in the Urban Environment* (London: MacDonald, 1973).

<sup>7</sup> A proposal from the IAUS to the New York Urban League urging them to incorporate a model study of Harlem city blocks into their program. 19 September 1968. Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Gift of Eisenman Architects. AP057.S2.SS2.ARCH272386.

should take into consideration the fact that the formation of the IAUS was related to the Urban Design Group, a department within the New York City Planning Commission of the Mayor Lindsay's administration, formed with the Columbia team that participated in the projects that were included in the exhibition "The New City: Architecture and Urban Renewal" held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (MoMA) in 1967. One of the early projects of the IAUS was a project aiming to "develop a new form of educational mechanism in Harlem". This project had as objective to "translate community desires into programs". In its description, there is a reference to the need for "community planners" and "urbanologists", who were differentiated from the "university-trained urban sociologist[s]" in the sense that the former, in contrast with the latter, were capable of providing "living documentation of the experience of the ghetto". This project intended to shape "physical and social design" tools with the aim to provide "economic and political stability"<sup>8</sup>.

During the 1950s and 1960s, in reaction against top-down redevelopment in New Haven, students in the Department of City Planning at Yale School of Art and Architecture expressed their disapproval of urban renewal politics. The Department of City Planning was founded in 1960 and emerged from the city planning program at Yale School of Architecture, which had been founded in 1949. The phase of the Department of City Planning that started with the appointment of Tunnard is associated with the intensification of the critique of the involvement of Yale University in urban renewal projects in New Haven, on the one hand, and of the close collaboration between Yale University and the City of New Haven for, on the other hand. It was during that same period that the famous advocacy planner C. Richard Hatch was teaching a course entitled "Planners and Clients" at the Department of City Planning at Yale University. During the period that preceded Tunnard's appointment, as Brian D. Goldstein highlights, Yale University "had acted as a principal partner and consultant in the city's urban renewal efforts"<sup>9</sup>. Under the chairmanship of Arthur Row, in the Department of City Planning Yale's planning department top-down approaches to urban planning were dominant. Row, who, as it becomes evident in his article entitled "The Physical Development Plan" (1960)<sup>10</sup>, believed in the potential of top-down strategies, was responsible for Philadelphia's Physical Development Plan, completed in 1960. The concern about involving neighbourhoods in the planning of their own housing became a central issue in the Department of City Planning at Yale School of Art and Architecture after the appointment of Tunnard as Chairman in 1966. Tunnard largely criticised the involvement of Yale University in urban renewal projects in New Haven. On 12 May 1969, Kingman Brewster Jr., President of Yale University since 1964, met with activist students at the School of Art and Architecture (fig. 1). Some days later, on 27 May 1969, Brewster Jr. announced the dissolution

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<sup>8</sup> Another project proposal from the IAUS to the New York Urban League arguing for a new form of educational mechanism, based on the success of the Street Academies program, to break down racial barriers in architecture and encourage minorities to lead local planning projects. 1968. Institute of Architecture and Urban Studies fonds, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Gift of Eisenman Architects. AP057.S2.SS2.ARCH272388.

<sup>9</sup> Brian D., Goldstein, "Planning's End? Urban Renewal in New Haven, the Yale School of Art and Architecture, and the Fall of the New Deal Spatial Order," *Journal of Urban History* 37(3) (2011): 400-422.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Row, "The Physical Development Plan," *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 26, no. 3 (1960): 179.

of the Department of City Planning, and invited Tunnard to leave his position, as did Louis DeLuca, Assistant Dean of the School.

In 1969, a group of students from the Department of City Planning of Yale University's School of Art and Architecture, who marshalled a critique against the university's leading role in the top-down urban renewal strategies, founded a new governance committee named City Planning Forum, which soon joined the Black Workshop, an activist group formed by ten African American design students in late 1968. The City Planning Forum was an independent governing body founded by a group of students and faculty of the Department of City Planning at Yale School of Art and Architecture who intended to democratize the decision-making process in their department. Its chair was Professor Henry Wexler. In spring 1968, it issued an official recognition of both the Black Forum and the City Planning Forum. The Black Environmental Studies Team (BEST), which would later be renamed Black Workshop, was founded in 1968 by ten students from architecture, urban planning and environmental design, who submitted a proposal for a new course study that would fight against the racial barrier between academy and inner city. This course study aimed to link the "urban crisis" to the "black experience". The Black Workshop collaborated closely with the architects Don Stull, Max Bond, and Art Symes. During the first year, Richard Dozier was director of the Black Workshop. A particularity of the Black Workshop that is worth noting is the fact that the students selected and hired their instructors themselves and set their own educational agendas.<sup>11</sup> The formation of the City Planning Forum and its collaboration with the Black Workshop played an important role in the efforts of challenging the top-down strategies related to urban renewal and of establishing advocacy planning strategies.

The keynote address that Whitney M. Young, Jr., then the executive director of the National Urban League, delivered on 25 June 1968 at the National Convention of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) in Portland, Oregon had an important impact on the opening of the profession towards diversity and further triggered the emerging concerns about the civic rights of African-Americans. An important instance of the generalized critique against urban renewal during the 1960s and especially during the period that followed the 1968 student protests was the opposition of a group of students from the Yale School of Art and Architecture, Columbia University, the University of Pennsylvania, MIT, and Harvard University at the New England regional conference of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) on 8 November 1968<sup>12</sup>. During the late 1960s, the pressures to reshape the methods of urban planning in a way that would take distance from urban renewal models pushed the local chapters of the AIA to establish the so-called Community Design Centers (CDC), which, in many cases, collaborated with universities, and aimed to support low income groups.

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<sup>11</sup> Craig Wilkins, *Diversity among Architects: From Margin to Center* (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), 125.

<sup>12</sup> "Statement Read to the New England Area AIA Conference," *Novum Organum* 1 (1968).

Worth mentioning is also The Architects' Resistance (TAR), a group formed in 1968 by architecture students from Columbia GSAPP, MIT Department of Architecture, and Yale School of Architecture and lasted for little more than two years. In its press releases and position papers, TAR described itself as "a communications network, a research group, and an action group ... concerned about the social responsibility of architects and the framework within which architecture is practiced." (fig. 2) TAR's engagement with contemporary architecture provided the basis for a radical critique of professional culture and in particular, the role of the architect within society. Among the position papers that TAR published I could mention "Architecture and Racism" (fig. 3), "Architects and the Nuclear Arms Race", and "Architecture: Whom Does It Serve?". TAR also organized counter-conferences. In "Architects and the Nuclear Arms Race", TAR declared: "Architecture is not an end in itself but part of an economic, political and social process. The Architects Resistance hopes to bring social and moral conscience to the practice of architecture."<sup>13</sup> In March 1969, TAR's "alternative meeting" entitled "Design for Nuclear Protection", which conceived as a counter-event during an AIA-OCD workshop held in Boston, had an important impact on academia. Symptomatic of its popularity is the fact that, in contrast with the AIA-OCD workshop that was attended by only 12 people, it attracted 150 attendants. The position paper "Architects and the Nuclear Arms Race" was published in conjunction with this counter-event<sup>14</sup>. Another organization that played a major role for the struggle over civil rights for African Americans in the United States was the so-called National Organization of Minority Architecture Students (NOMAS), which was founded by the following African-American architects: Wendell Campbell, Nelson Harris, William Brown, Robert Wilson, Robert Nash, Leroy Campbell, John S. Chase, Harold Williams, Kenneth Groggs, Jeh Johnson, D. Dodd, and E.H. McDowell in Detroit, Michigan, in 1971 during the AIA National Convention. The main purpose of this organisation was the defense of the rights of minority design professionals and the combat of policies that condoned discrimination.

ARCH, TAR, Black Workshop, City Planning Forum, and NOMAS's aspirations to democratize urban planning should be understood within the context of the struggle over civil rights for African Americans in the United States in the 1960s. ARCH and City Planning Forum's strategies, to a certain extent, were aligned with the ambition of President Johnson's Great Society to renew citizens' role. A paradox underlying their efforts is the fact that, despite their intention to broaden opportunities in participation, they were based on policies that maintained the centrality of federal aid and the prominence of professional expertise. President Johnson launched a "War on Poverty" in pursuit of his "Great Society". ARCH and City Planning Forum's strategies were characterized by a tension between the intention of advocacy planning approaches to bring equality into the planning process and the risk of being co-opted by a local bureaucracy or a more powerful

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<sup>13</sup> TAR, "Architects and the Nuclear Arms Race", position paper, 1969.

<sup>14</sup> David Monteyne, *Fallout Shelter: Designing for Civil Defense in the Cold War* (London; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 225.

interest group. However, his intention to support both “the welfare of all and the welfare of minorities” shows that advocacy planning was trapped between the non-flexibility of bureaucracy and the idealistic vision of equality<sup>15</sup>. It becomes evident that the debates around urban renewal and advocacy planning challenged the conventional methods not only of the profession, but also of academia on the East Coast, putting into question their privileged position. The fact that several organizations and groups emerged within the contexts of prestigious universities, such as Columbia University and Yale University among other universities, and the aspiration to bridge the profession and the education shows that the emergence of counter-events, counter-publications and new modes of collectivities influenced significantly the institutional status of the universities, shedding light on the necessity to reshape the models in order to respond to the call for a more democratic society. Even if certain of the struggles for civil rights of the above-mentioned groups and organizations did not meet with as much success as their actors would have wished, a systematic study of their modes of disseminating knowledge and of reinventing the professional and academic agendas would be revealing regarding the way activism can reinvent the relationship between architecture and democracy.

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<sup>15</sup> Davidoff, *ibid.*

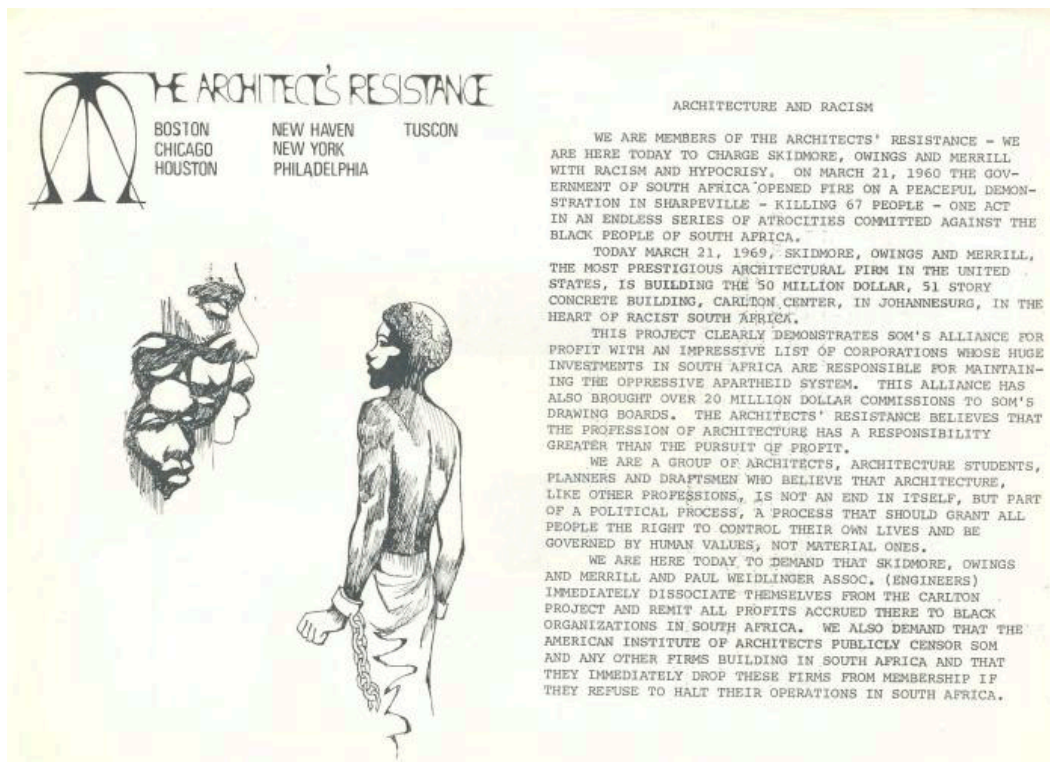




**Figure 1.** Yale President Kingman Brewster (centre) meeting with activist students at the School of Art and Architecture on May 12, 1969. Students adapted the familiar closed fist motif for their own radical campaigns, portraying it holding a paintbrush and a T-square. Source: *Yale Daily News*, May 16, 1969. Photograph by Steven Koch. Used with permission.



**Figure 2.** The 1969 "Architecture and Racism" protest organized by TAR in New York City. Photograph by Julie K. Stone.



**Figure 3.** TAR, "Architecture and Racism" handbill, 1969. © TAR

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