

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

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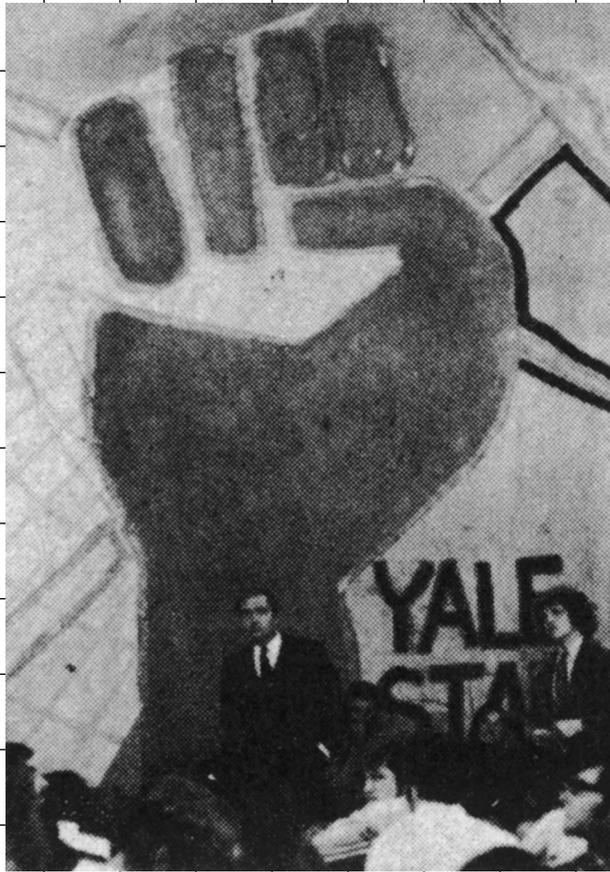


Figure 1 Yale President Kingman Brewster (centre) meeting with activist students at the School of Art and Architecture on May 12, 1969. Students adapted the familiar closed fist motif for their own radical campaigns, portraying it holding a paintbrush and a T-square. Source: *Yale Daily News*, May 16,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

From Harlem to New Haven. The emergence of the advocacy planning movement in the late 1960s

In the United States of America, the term ‘urban renewal’ refers to a federal government program that began in 1954 with the purpose of replacing blighted urban areas with new urban projects. In contrast to the connotation of ‘urban renewal’ in North-Western European cities – where the term was linked with a democratisation movement and the establishment of new forms of participatory governance – within the American context ‘urban renewal’ was 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.”¹ The paper examines certain democratic practices in such a charged environment, shedding light on the ways in which top down urban renewal projects were often aimed against black communities, exemplified with two case studies that are closely connected to the critique of urban renewal in the United States: the founding in 1964 of the Architect’s Renewal Committee in Harlem (ARCH) as the first organization solely devoted to advocacy planning in the United States, and 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 – sought to bring greater diversity to the department.

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 created slums and blighting conditions.”² Before its revisions in 1954, the official term used was ‘urban redevelopment’ instead of ‘urban renewal’. After revising the program, urban renewal became more attractive to private investors.³ Between 1945 and 1965, federal funds were used to construct hundreds of thousands of public housing units in many American cities as part of the program. The two cities that used most of the program’s funds were New York City and Chicago. By 1960, New York City received the highest percentage of urban renewal

1 Kenneth L. Kusmer cited in Mary E. Triage. *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.
2 Fern M. Colborn. *The Neighborhood and Urban Renewal*. New York, National Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers, 1963), 7.
3 H. Briavel Holcomb, Robert A. Beauregard. *Revitalizing Cities* (Washington, DC: Association of American Geographers, 1981).

funding to replace 'slums' with modern public housing. Holcomb and Beauregard explained the reasons for which the Urban Renewal Program was largely criticized, while Martin Anderson tried to distinguish the reasons for those critiques⁴ among which is the replacement of low-rent with high-rent dwellings.

Advocacy planning approaches have often considered urban renewal to be incompatible with socially effective approaches to urban planning. Among them, the Architects Renewal Committee of Harlem (ARCH), founded in 1964, stands out as one of the first Community Design Centers (CDCs). ARCH emerged in the context of the civil rights movement in the United States and intended to provide technical and design advice to communities that could otherwise not afford it. ARCH was founded by Richard Hatcher, who became the executive director. Hatcher was joined by John Bailey in 1967, and in 1968 by Max Bond. Among ARCH'S most important realizations is "Architecture in the Neighborhoods" (1970), which aimed to recruit local black youth to become architects. Key figures of the Advocacy Planning Movement in the late 1960s in the United States were C. Richard Hatch and Christopher Tunnard, Chairmen of the Department of City Planning of Yale 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 like Chicago during the years that preceded 1968. Paul Davidoff, who taught city planning at the University of Pennsylvania, Hunter College, and Queens College, was one of the major contributors to Advocacy Planning. Among his efforts to increase the opportunities of participation in city planning for the excluded groups, he established the Suburban Action Institute for research and litigation; to provide access to suburban housing for low-income citizens. The main 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, organisations, or individuals who are concerned with proposing policies for the future development of the community."⁵ Davidoff's article entitled "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning", played an important role in the dissemination of advocacy planning. It paid special attention to advocacy planning's aim to establish "the bases for a society affording equal opportunity to all citizens,"⁶ and encouraged the replacement of models based on land-use by socio-economic planning strategies. Thomas L. Blair expressed his doubts regarding the capacity of "advocacy planning really [to establish] [...] a participatory democracy," maintaining that in certain cases it had been "a pretext for public manipulation."⁷ 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

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

5 Paul Davidoff, "Advocacy and Pluralism in Planning", *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, 31(4), 1965, 332.

6 *Ibid.*, 331.

7 Thomas L. Blair. *The Poverty of Planning: Crisis in the Urban Environment* (London: MacDonald, 1973).

housing opportunities and equal access to public amenities regardless of race, religion, or nationality.

The New York Urban League, an organization committed to improve social and economic conditions and opportunities for African-Americans, organized the Street Academies program. This program, funded by the Ford Foundation, educated high school dropouts in the prep school 'Harlem Prep', to ultimately get them accepted in a college or university. In 1968, the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies (IAUS) proposed a pilot study in Harlem to the New York Urban League, which equated black America with urban America, and concluded that "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."⁸ In order to grasp how the early activities of the IAUS are related to the debates around urban renewal, one should be reminded 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]". It was based on the conviction that "community planners" were capable of providing "living documentation of the experience of the ghetto", and intended to shape "physical and social design" tools aiming to provide "economic and political stability."⁹

During the 1950s and 1960s, in reaction against top-down redevelopment in New Haven, students of the Department of City Planning at Yale expressed their disapproval of the urban renewal politics. The phase of the Department that started with the appointment of Tunnard is associated with the intensification of critiques against Yale's involvement in urban renewal projects in New Haven. It was during that same period that the famous advocacy planner C. Richard Hatch taught a course entitled "Planners and Clients" at the Department. Before Tunnard's appointment, Yale "had acted as a principal partner and consultant in the city's urban renewal efforts."¹⁰ Arthur Row believed in the potential of top-down strategies, was responsible for Philadelphia's Physical Development Plan, completed in 1960.

8 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 funds, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Gift of Eisenman Architects. AP057.S2.SS2.ARCH272386.

9 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 funds, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Gift of Eisenman Architects. AP057.S2.SS2.ARCH272388.

10 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.

The concern about involving citizens in the planning of their own housing became a central issue in the Department of City Planning at Yale after the appointment of Tunnard as Chairman in 1966. On 12 May 1969, Kingman Brewster, President of Yale at the time, met with activist students at the School of Art and Architecture (fig. 1). A few days later, on 27 May 1969, Brewster announced the dissolution of the Department of City Planning, and invited Tunnard, and Louis DeLuca, his assistant dean, to leave their positions.

In 1969, a group of students from the Department of City Planning of Yale, 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. City Planning Forum, which joined the Black Workshop, an activist group formed by ten African American design students in late 1968, aimed to democratise the decision-making process in their department. Its chair was Professor Henry Wexler, who, in spring 1968, 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 as 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. The workshop aimed to link the 'urban crisis' to the 'black experience', and collaborated closely with the architects Don Stull, Max Bond, and Art Symes. During the first year, Richard Dozier was its director. The students that participated to the Black Workshop selected and hired their instructors themselves and set their own educational agendas.¹¹ The formation of the City Planning Forum and its collaboration with the Black Workshop played an important role in challenging the top-down strategies related to urban renewal and establishing advocacy planning strategies.

The keynote address that Whitney M. Young, Jr., executive director of the National Urban League at the time, 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. This address 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 Yale, Columbia, UPenn, the MIT, and Harvard at the New England regional conference of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) on 8 November 1968¹². During the late 1960s, pressures to reshape the methods of urban planning in a way that would take distance from urban renewal models pushed 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.

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

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

The Architects' Resistance (TAR) was formed in 1968 by architecture students from Columbia University's GSAPP, MIT, and Yale. 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."¹³ TAR's engagement with contemporary architecture provided the basis for a radical critique of professional culture and the role of the architect within society. TAR published position papers such as "Architecture and Racism", "Architects and the Nuclear Arms Race", and "Architecture: Whom Does It Serve?", and organized counter-conferences. TAR declared in one of its position papers: "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."¹⁴ TAR's "alternative meeting" entitled "Design for Nuclear Protection" held in March 1969 was conceived as a counter-event to an AIA-OCD workshop held in Boston, and had an important impact on academia. Symptomatic of its popularity is the fact that, it attracted 150 attendants, while the official venue only convoked 12 people¹⁵. Another organization that played a major role for the struggle over civil rights for African Americans in the United States was the National Organization of Minority Architecture Students (NOMAS) founded by the 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 to defend the rights of minority design professionals and fight for 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 African Americans' struggles for civil rights in the United States in the 1960s. ARCH and City Planning Forum's strategies 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 interest group. However, Davidoff's intention to support both "the welfare of all and the welfare of minorities"¹⁶ shows that advocacy planning was trapped between the non-flexibility of bureaucracy and the idealistic vision of equality. It becomes evident that the debates on urban renewal and advocacy planning

13 TAR, press release, c 1968.

14 TAR, "Architects and the Nuclear Arms Race", position paper, 1969.

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

16 Davidoff, *ibid*, 332.

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 organisations and groups emerged within the contexts of prestigious universities and their 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 academia. It also invites us to reflect upon the necessity to reshape the urban planning models in order to respond to the call for a more democratic society. Even if certain of the struggles for civil rights of the aforementioned groups and organisations did not meet with much success, 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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