

**WHEN IVORY TOWERS
WERE BLACK**

WHEN IVORY TOWERS WERE BLACK

**A STORY ABOUT RACE IN AMERICA'S
CITIES AND UNIVERSITIES**

SHARON EGRETТА SUTTON



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*To the memory of
J. Max Bond, Jr., FAIA, Columbia University's first
black professor of architecture and the "dean" of
African American architects*

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Foreword

The 1960s and early 1970s were socially and politically disruptive and divisive times, eerily, and sadly, almost identical to those this country is currently experiencing. In *When Ivory Towers Were Black*, Sutton explores the history of race and power at one of this nation's most distinguished universities.

On December 17, 1972, a fire burned our family out of its home. Coinciding with this was my beginning tenure as the fifth dean of the School of Architecture at Columbia University. That day I went from fire to fire.

A few of the dramatic events that occurred just before and during these early days of my tenure defined the context of these turbulent times.

In 1968, nineteen days after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., as the nation quaked with the fear of race riots, the first confrontation of the student-led "revolution" at Columbia University occurred.

In 1969 the military draft was authorized, Richard Nixon's swearing-in as president initiated four years of covert bombing in Cambodia, and an unprecedented flood of African American students entered the academy, including at Columbia's School of Architecture.

In 1970 the massacre of unarmed students at Kent State University took place, sparking student strikes at hundreds of universities, colleges, and high schools across the nation.

In 1971 a half million people (my family among them) marched in Washington, D.C., to oppose the Vietnam War. Shortly thereafter, the *New York Times* fueled national outrage by publishing portions of the *Pen-*

tagon Papers, which disclosed secret communications about U.S. involvement in the war.

In 1972 the clandestine and sometimes illegal activities of the Nixon administration, known as the Watergate scandal, began to be covered by the media (and would dominate the news for the next few years).

In 1973 the Paris Peace Accords brought a formal end to the Vietnam War. That same year, after the United States supported Israel in a war with Syria and Egypt, Arab members of OPEC (plus Syria and Egypt) announced an oil embargo. The embargo doubled the price of crude oil, caused massive shortages and a cascade of devastating recessions, and seriously weakened the economy-dependent practice of architecture.

Clearly this was a difficult time to assume the deanship at Columbia. Fragments of political unrest remained on campus and in the architecture school, particularly within the community of African American faculty and students. I was not yet aware that architecture schools within academic research universities were misunderstood and treated like second-class citizens, as were the minority students.

Architectural education as a discipline was first created at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris, while in the United States architecture study was often located in schools of engineering. The first freestanding school of architecture was at MIT, followed soon after by ones at the University of Illinois, Cornell University, and then Columbia University. From those beginnings, the profession of architecture evolved into an elitist, predominantly white pursuit dependent for patronage on both private financial power and social prestige. Almost one hundred years later this situation has not materially changed.

Early in the fall semester of 1974, six representatives of the Black and Puerto Rican Student, Faculty, Administrators Organization visited me. Given the context and the recent history, I should not have been surprised. It quickly became apparent that I was to be tested in regard to various grievances and the call for long-sought structural changes within the school. At this time I did not understand that a dean is part of the “establishment” and as such is ultimately responsible to the trustees of the institution. It became clear to me that a political collision between the school administration and its minority community was inevitable.

While I shared many of the opinions expressed by the minority students at this first meeting, I was still a midwestern, upper-middle-class, Caucasian male and academic amateur. I had no conception of how to move forward. But move I did.

Over the coming months I received approval from the Provost’s Office

to add “graduate” to the school’s name. I was also able, with considerable difficulty, to see that a doctoral program was created in the Urban Planning Division, and to allow the Historic Preservation program to grant master degrees. As a result, the school eventually was renamed the Graduate School of Architecture Planning and Preservation.

While the name change did not necessarily solve all problems, it was a symbolic triumph that publicly emphasized the intellectual achievements of the school’s three divisions. Even my harshest critics would likely agree that the school moved toward a significantly brighter future during my tenure. Sadly, for a whole host of reasons, the cohort of African American students who flourished in the school during its brief revolution did not survive to partake of this future.

Sharon Egretta Sutton’s achievement in documenting the appearance and disappearance of her minority classmates at the School of Architecture is far more than a work of exquisitely crafted historical scholarship. *When Ivory Towers Were Black* could not have been created without her living through racial injustices as a student, observing them as a faculty member, and working to change them as an activist architect.

James Stewart Polshek

Prologue

This book tells the story of how I got a free Ivy League education. The odyssey commenced on my sixty-fifth birthday in February 2006, when I began thinking about what a privileged life I had led. As I entered the home stretch of my racecourse, it occurred to me that I should somehow pass along all the privileges I had received to the next generation—which actually had a lot to do with my getting this free Ivy League education. A few weeks after my birthday, I had my first idea: thanking the person who had paid for my education, which incredibly I had never done. I knew who it was. Vincent Kling, a Columbia University trustee who owned a large corporate architecture practice in Philadelphia, paid for my education. I knew he paid for my education because I had received, just before I graduated, a letter he wrote me saying that he was my benefactor and that he would like to offer me a job in his Philadelphia office. Hah! I was too full of myself in those days to consider working in a run-of-the-mill corporate office. Being the sensitive artistic soul I was, I deserved, and got, a job with Alex Kouzmanoff, a Columbia faculty member who had a small boutique design office in Midtown Manhattan.

So I turned up my nose at Vincent Kling's job offer and never even replied to his letter. In 2006, shuddering at my astounding rudeness (and looking at the file of treasured thank-you notes graduating students had written me over the years), I tracked down my benefactor through the development office at Columbia. He was ninety at the time and living in a suburb of Philadelphia. Choosing my words very carefully, I wrote:

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Dear Mr. Kling:

As you know from [the development officer at Columbia University], I have been looking for you to deliver a really long overdue THANK YOU!!! I do not have a satisfactory excuse for why I waited thirty-three years to contact you, but in truth your name had gone out of my consciousness until the morning of March 5th when I woke up thinking, “Oh my goodness. Vincent Kling paid for my education at Columbia, and I never thanked him.”

Well, it was his turn not to answer my letter; I never heard from him. Vincent Kling died seven years later in 2013, hopefully having forgiven me.

My next idea was to set up a scholarship for an architecture student in my will. I spent some time debating with myself whether to establish an endowed architecture scholarship at the University of Michigan, which gave me the opportunity to become the first black woman in the nation to be promoted to full professor of architecture, or to Columbia University, which gave me the privilege of an Ivy League education. As it turned out, the University of Michigan’s College of Architecture and Planning was not terribly interested in my endowed scholarship, having just received a \$30 million gift from the billionaire real estate tycoon A. Alfred Taubman. So, by default, I chose Columbia University, and in 2007 I began working with my attorney and the development officer at the Graduate School of Architecture Planning and Preservation (GSAPP) to craft the terms of my will. As we were ironing out the details, I started thinking, “Hmm . . . This is nice, but it’s not very satisfying, because it will only happen after I’m dead.” Fortuitously, these conversations were occurring just prior to the fortieth anniversary of Columbia’s infamous 1968 student rebellion—which I had always assumed was the main reason for my being able to attend the university’s School of Architecture.

You see, the rebellion had closed down the university for an entire spring and summer, and part of the negotiations for reconvening classes was that the university had to recruit some black students. At the time, I was working as a musician in the orchestra of the original cast of the Broadway musical *Man of La Mancha*, playing “The Impossible Dream (The Quest)” on my French horn over and over, eight times a week. As an antidote to that mind-numbing sameness, I had begun taking interior design classes at Parsons School of Design during the day (since I mostly worked at night). But in August, in the wake of the student rebellion, I received a call from the secretary for Romaldo Giurgola, a famous architect who was then chairman of the Division of Architecture. One of my

teachers at Parsons worked in Giurgola's architecture office and had told him about this black woman who was in his class. And that's how I was recruited to the School of Architecture. The secretary invited me to come to the school for an interview with Giurgola; I showed him my portfolio from Parsons and got an instant admissions offer. So, I quit my job, sold my French horn, and by September was enrolled in Columbia University. Perhaps you can see why I assumed that the rebellion, and the negotiations to end it, were the main reason for my presence at Columbia. As the fortieth anniversary of the rebellion approached, and I still had not found a satisfactory way to pass along my privileged life, I had my third idea: I would tell the story of how the 1968 student rebellion made it possible for me, and a lot of other black students, to get a free architecture education at a world-class university.

One day, when I was having lunch with the alumni relations officer to discuss my endowed scholarship, I mentioned this idea of a book to her and inquired about whether she could put me in touch with the black and Puerto Rican students who had attended the School of Architecture just before and after the rebellion. She, of course, agreed, but we also began talking about having the rebellion be the focus of GSAPP's annual alumni event that year. Many events on campus would be dedicated to fortieth anniversary remembrances, so the idea seemed perfect, and Mark Wigley, the dean of the school, later agreed. My classmates and I would be the featured speakers, and we would share our experiences of attending the school during this momentous period of upheaval. The 2007 GSAPP Alumni Symposium took place in October and turned out to be a joyous reunion of a small group of ethnic minority alumni, with a fabulous private party hosted in the architecture office of J. Max Bond, Jr., our distinguished mentor—whom some of us had knighted as “the dean” of African American architects. By the end of that weekend, I had dug into the memories of Max and my classmates to compile a fairly complete list of ethnic minority architecture and planning students who had attended the school immediately before and after the student rebellion. And that is how the research for this book began.

In the years since, I have slowly unraveled a story that has turned out to be quite unlike the one I had always assumed to be true. In fact, it was not the student rebellion that made possible my attendance at Columbia University, though the rebellion was a very important catalyzing moment. Rather I learned—quite by accident one Sunday as I was squirreling around the Internet—that the funding for the affirmative action recruitment effort came from the Ford Foundation, two years *prior to*

the rebellion. Without that funding, I seriously doubt that there would have been any recruitment effort as part of the negotiations to get classes back up and running. The rebellion just happened to have occurred as university officials were trying to figure out what to do with Ford's \$10 million grant, which was to be used for "urban and minority affairs." I also learned that it was the Division of Planning and not the Division of Architecture that was the leader in the recruitment effort and in the most forward-looking curricular changes that occurred in the School of Architecture. As an architecture student, I had not actually paid much attention to the planning students—architecture was the center of my universe. But I discovered the story of the planning students and their brilliant chairman, Charles Abrams, in the course of retrieving many seemingly untouched file boxes from the bowels of Butler Library, where Columbia stores its magnificent archive of rare books and manuscripts. Sifting through endless folders filled with yellowing paper and disappearing onionskin copies, I learned that the Division of Planning was at the leading edge not only of recruiting ethnic minority students to the School of Architecture, but also of transforming the school's curriculum and shaping it into the humanistic, justice-oriented architecture education I received.

You see, mine was not an *ordinary* Ivy League architecture education; rather, it was an architecture education dedicated to realizing the black power revolution that was exploding nationally, and especially in the streets of Harlem, the country's premier African American ghetto and Columbia's next-door neighbor. Mine was an architecture education dedicated to giving voice to the disenfranchised, to leveraging design to improve the human condition, to bringing about a diverse and inclusive profession of architecture. As a student and not knowing otherwise, I assumed that my architecture education at Columbia University was the norm. As I proceeded with my research, writing and rewriting the book as new information surfaced, I began to realize that it was not only the scholarship money but also the orientation to how I teach and think about architecture that is the privilege I need to pass along to future generations.

In truth, the gift of a free Ivy League education has been more than a little onerous. Columbia exposed me to a transgressive approach to teaching and practice that has forever placed me outside the mainstream and created no small degree of contradiction within my career. As a faculty member in top-notch professional programs of architecture and planning, I am undeniably deep inside the mainstream, charged with equip-

ping already-advantaged students with the technical skills and the ways of being that will enable their even-greater advantage within the dominant society. Yet deep down, my heart rejects those skills and ways of being; my heart beckons me to teach and practice in a way that gives voice to the disenfranchised, that leverages design to improve the lowliest human condition, that seeks to bring about a more diverse and inclusive profession. Over the years, my not-too-disguised passion for social justice has betrayed me, time and time again. Some students have accused me of being too radical, too black, too feminist, too narrowly focused upon inequity; some deans have declared me unfit to serve as an administrator, said I am not really an architect, said I would ruin the curriculum, promote too much community service, and polarize faculty and students; some awards panels have pronounced my work unworthy of recognition, said its social mission outweighs its contributions to architecture education and practice.

And yet there are those few students and colleagues—mostly women and persons of color but also some white men—who have seen me as their guide into the murky waters of transformation. They say I have shown them a way forward in their own quest for revolutionary social change, uncovered truths and shortcomings about the architecture and planning professions, brought the voices of disadvantaged children and low-wage workers into planning and design decisions, and equipped indigenous students with non-Eurocentric tools to redress the unsafe, unsanitary slum conditions that plague their homelands. Like it or not, Columbia's gift demanded that I embrace two contradictory missions: that I simultaneously attain a privileged status within the mainstream of my profession and also seek to change that profession.

To manage the crazy-making contradictions of this outsider-within role, I sometimes channel a Native American fable about a storm rolling in—out west somewhere, where it can be seen for miles because the terrain is absolutely flat; out west somewhere where Native Americans were banished so African-descended slaves could turn their stolen lands in the Deep South into the cotton-producing wealth that underpins my privileges. But I digress; back to the fable. Out on this flat terrain where you can see for miles, the domesticated animals—the cattle—turn sideways when they see the storm approaching, averting their eyes from the threat. With the problem out of sight, they continue grazing, unperturbed even though the storm is, most assuredly, rolling in. The wild buffalo behave differently. Blessed with wide shoulders and sturdiness, they turn unblinkingly to face the storm; with the entire scene in full view, they prepare to

stand their ground. My Columbia gift has helped me behave like the wild buffalo. Encouraging me not to avert my eyes from injustice, it helped give me the courage—and the Ivy League credentials—to stand unblinking and face the storm that is, most assuredly, rolling in. This book tells the story of how I learned to behave like the wild buffalo. It chronicles Columbia's recruitment effort and also the changes in the curriculum and pedagogy of the School of Architecture that made the recruitment effort successful not only for the ethnic minority students, but also for the surrounding Harlem community—and for the disadvantaged communities most of the ethnic minority alumni chose to serve throughout their careers.

Many people made this odyssey possible. The faculty, staff, and administrators who welcomed me and my ethnic minority classmates into Columbia's School of Architecture are named and recognized within the pages that follow, and I have already made my mea culpa to Vincent Kling. Here I thank those who facilitated the research itself, beginning with the twenty-three of my classmates who provided rich oral histories that, along with my own, narrate first-person perspectives on our school days and the careers that followed. According to the terms of my contract with the University of Washington for conducting the research, pseudonyms appear in the book, but the real names, degrees, and graduation dates of all fifty-nine ethnic minority students who attended the school during this period appear in the back matter along with the biographies of those who provided oral histories. Thanks go to my dearest mentor Max Bond, now deceased, who was an encyclopedia of information about the school and its recruits. Max persistently urged me to collect oral histories from the white students who had been leaders in the rebellion and its aftermath so I would have a comparison group—but I, too, persisted. The white students' story has already been told; mine is the untold story of the ethnic minority students.

Thanks go to GSAPP's Office of Development and Alumni Relations, an official collaborator on the research, and the many different alumni relations officers who provided support over the years. Thanks go also to the University of Washington's College of Built Environments for the sabbatical it provided so I could mine the Columbia archives. Thanks go to the librarians at Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library and at Avery Library's Department of Drawings and Archives, who were especially helpful, including making small adjustments to their rules after I broke my right hand during the first week of my sabbatical. Thanks go to Nancy Hadley at the American Institute of Architects (AIA)

Archives and Records and Randall R. Vosbeck, who helped me piece together AIA's civil rights-era activities.

Thanks go to New York colleague Magda Bogin and Seattle colleagues Susan Kemp and Victoria Kaplan, who patiently advised me on my many different schemes for framing the book over the nine years of its gestation. Thanks goes to doctoral student Elizabeth Circo, who collected the oral histories—some as early as 5:00 a.m., others as late as 11:00 p.m.—recording and then transcribing the sometimes too-loquacious narratives from me and my classmates. A special thanks goes to former architecture student extraordinaire Pamanee Chaiwat, who worked with me via Skype from her home in Thailand, expertly crafting all the graphics for this book.

Finally, a big thanks to all my students—the ones who are in my classes and the ones who are missing from them due to the lack of affirmative action in today's supposedly color-blind society—young people who continually inspire me to tell the story of how I learned to behave like the wild buffalo.

**WHEN IVORY TOWERS
WERE BLACK**

Introduction

Institutional transformation requires a major social dislocation, or even a series of dislocations, “before the anger that underlies protests builds to a high pitch and before that anger can find expression in collective defiance.”¹ Following an insurgency, as protesters attempt to fend off institutional efforts to reestablish normative conditions, the power imbalance between them and the institution almost certainly assures a return to the status quo. Yet, in that brief moment between the coming and going of collective defiance, concessions can be and are won. This book tells the story of an institutional transformation that occurred at an elite school located adjacent to the nation’s premier black neighborhood in an urban mecca of civil rights and black power activism. It asks you to trace an evolutionary arc that begins with an unsettling effort to eliminate the exercise of authoritarian power on campus and in the community, and ends with an equally unsettling return to the status quo.

This turbulent encounter with the forces of social change takes you to New York City to Columbia University’s School of Architecture; it occurs between 1965 and 1976, mirroring the emergence and denouement of the black power movement. You will begin your journey as deadly race rebellions boil over nationwide, sparking frantic efforts to remedy the crisis; your journey will surge ahead during a university-wide student rebellion on Columbia’s campus in 1968; it will drift into obscurity by 1976 as America loses its passion for upending inequality. Your journey will follow the ethnic minority affirmative action recruits who walked through a door of opportunity in between the coming and going

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of insurgency. Reading their oral histories, you will learn about the experiences and legacy of the mostly low- and lower-middle-income recruits who received the gift of an Ivy League education. In reading the untold story of the recruits, you will also learn about a surprisingly little-known era in America's educational, architectural, and urban history when substantial transformations occurred in city-making pedagogy and practice. Some of these transformations have lasted unto this day, as you will see, but you will become one of very few people who knows their origin.

Your journey will also follow two university units that steered the School of Architecture toward an emancipatory approach to education early along its evolutionary arc. One was the Division of Planning, a unit within the school whose legendary chair, Professor Charles Abrams, had worked as an antidiscrimination lawyer; the other was the university-wide Urban Center, established with Ford Foundation monies to carry out "new work by Columbia in the field of urban and minority affairs."² Buoyed by the era's civil rights and black power activism, these two units used Ford's deep pockets to open the ivory tower to a cadre of ethnic minority recruits, involving them and their revolutionary white peers in learning to improve Harlem's slum conditions. As you might imagine, their separate but overlapping pursuit of a community-based social justice agenda put these units on a fatal collision course with the university's assured return to the status quo.

This particular story of institutional transformation can tell you something about contemporary struggles for racial and economic equality—struggles within the university and within the distressed communities in which many urban universities are located. Back then, in the post-World War II era, multiple disruptions occurred in the social fabric. They were due to civil rights and black power activism, urban renewal, deindustrialization, and the Vietnam War, among other extraordinary conditions; layered one on top of the other, ultimately these disruptions led to mass student defiance of the status quo at Columbia and elsewhere. No doubt, you will agree that such extraordinary conditions are infrequent,³ as are opportunities for winning the kind of concessions they create—however briefly. You know that similar disruptions are occurring today as a result of income inequality, homelessness, chronic unemployment, mass incarceration, and a host of other social ills. For example, earning a college degree, the presumed ladder into America's middle class, has become increasingly unattainable as tuition and textbook costs rise, while high-paid administrative and low-paid contingent faculty positions proliferate and custodial workers make do with poverty-level wages. And

despite the stunning election and reelection of the nation's first African American president, perhaps you will agree that "a racial caste system [is] alive and well,"⁴ made even more insidious by the prevailing thrust toward color-blindness.

These and other injustices are occurring against a backdrop of extreme distrust of politicians "just standing around with their arms folded"⁵ in the face of outrageous state-sanctioned violence against people of color, especially black people. These disruptions in "the threads that have been holding the system together"⁶ since the 1970s may well be paving the way for a huge outbreak of collective defiance, as the raucous racial uprisings that have been occurring across the country suggest. In embattled cities from coast to coast—in Ferguson, Baltimore, Salt Lake City, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Baton Rouge, and New York, among many other cities—reaction to police killings of black men "did not so much draw outrage for the deaths alone, but for the systemic problems that have so many black people feeling hopeless."⁷ When the outrage finally explodes, perhaps this book's first-person portrayal of how a transformative process got reversed in one particular university and school can help extend the period of experimentation and reform that a mass defiance of the status quo generates. Perhaps it can help reopen the door of opportunity to ethnic minority students, who are still in strikingly short supply in elite professions like architecture and planning.

The remaining pages of this chapter prepare you to trace the full sweep of the School of Architecture's evolutionary arc; they outline in miniature the entire story, summarize the methodology, and introduce the ethnic minority recruits who provided the oral histories that narrate the book. The chapter ends by providing you with an overview of the book. Now for the whole story so you will know where you are going.

The Arc of Insurgency

Columbia's arc of insurgency began in 1965 as civil rights and black power activism turned violent during the Watts race rebellion and gained steam during the "long hot summer" of 1967 when a racial Armageddon seemed certain.⁸ In response to surging urban tensions, the Ford Foundation provided the university with a \$10 million line of credit to address problems in Harlem,⁹ and the Division of Planning mobilized to take action. A critical milestone along this evolutionary arc was a university-wide student rebellion in April 1968 that included Avery Hall, where the School of Architecture was housed. The rebellion ended in a

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violent bust by the police, igniting among the insurgents in Avery a fierce commitment to social justice; the raw display of power fueled their determination to make a wholesale change in the school's approach to education and to the surrounding ghetto community. The group commenced a three-year, ever-changing experiment in democratic governance and education that about half the faculty fervently supported, and the other half overtly or covertly sought to upend. Overseeing the resultant experimental operation was the enigmatic Dean Kenneth A. Smith; loved by some, despised by others, he was the school's only official administrator despite the faculty's adoption of interim rules, which—in total violation of university statutes—gave students and teaching staff roles in school governance.

Insurgents in the Division of Planning, who assumed leadership of the transformation, decisively situated learning in the surrounding community. In particular, their curriculum engaged students in offering technical assistance in the Puerto Rican communities of East Harlem and Morningside Heights through the East Harlem Planning Studio and later the Community Development and Planning Studio. As a complement to these community-based studios, the division's Urban Action and Experimentation Program (UAEP) undertook community-focused brick-and-mortar projects, which created an ideal client base for students. In a win-win, the Urban Center used its Ford monies to support the supervision of students' service work, thus keeping down the cost of UAEP projects while providing a superior learning experience.

Insurgents also co-designed and implemented a new approach to student-centered learning, called the *platform system*, in which self-selected groups organized to study particular problems. Occurring primarily in the Division of Architecture, some platform system problems were community-based, but many related to problems typically studied in architecture school, like adaptive reuse. Alongside for-credit community-based studios were paid internships, many provided by the Architects Renewal Committee in Harlem (ARCH) or the Real Great Society in East Harlem (RGS/Uptown). Architecture and planning students offered technical assistance through these internships, blurring the line between education, service, and employment—a line further blurred by the fact that community organization staff sometimes had teaching assignments in the school.

Believing that the urban crisis could best be solved by indigenous city-making professionals who would have the cultural competence to facilitate the redevelopment of ethnic minority communities, the School

of Architecture, especially the Division of Planning, set out upon an audacious effort, financed through the Ford-funded Urban Center, to enroll black and Puerto Rican students. The recruitment effort was one of the most successful university-wide and arguably the boldest among the country's architecture and planning schools. It reflected national efforts among city-making professionals to tackle both the urban crisis and the lack of indigenous professionals who could address the crisis. The effort was initiated right after the rebellion through the cleverness of the school's few existing ethnic minority faculty and students and their revolutionary white peers. It gathered speed when the Urban Center funded an assistant to the dean for minority affairs, who tenaciously pursued his charge to catalyze an ethnic minority presence in the school. As the recruitment progressed, the membership of the Black and Puerto Rican Student-Faculty-Administrators Organization (BPRFSAO) grew, and so did its influence; BPRFSAO members became widely respected for their academic performance as well as for their devotion to student recruitment and mentoring, faculty and staff hires, and curricular reform.

The arc of insurgency at the School of Architecture began to peter out when a sequence of bad things happened in the Division of Planning. First was the weakening of an already too small teaching staff that occurred when the charismatic Charles Abrams took a leave of absence and then died, his replacement was denied tenure, and a third chairman was promoted without strong university support. Second was the university's torpedoing of the Urban Center, its linking of the center to the division's "potentially explosive" social justice mission, and its capturing of center funds for a new, sanitized urban studies agenda, which effectively defunded ethnic minority recruitment and community-based teaching. Third was central administration's anointing of a division chairman from the Law School, rumored to have had a run-in with a black community, who was to help the division articulate its role within the university's new urban studies agenda.

Then the School of Architecture was dealt a crushing blow when its centerpiece, the professional program in architecture, received only conditional accreditation, primarily due to the university's longtime disinvestment in the school and a byzantine administrative structure that comingled the university's top-down statutes with the school's democratic interim rules. Intensifying its assaults upon the Division of Planning, the university assigned an external administrator, who had been key in developing the Urban Center torpedo strategy, to oversee all the school's daily operations (which he referred to as the "agonies in Avery"). With

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the Division of Planning weakened by internal interference, the Division of Architecture facing external censure, and the entire school under surveillance, the arc of insurgency was on a sure course toward extinction, especially since student interest in participatory democracy was fading as were the ethnic minority recruits. In the wake of the accreditation report, Smith resigned and university administrators put on hold plans for renovating the school's aging facilities.

Jolted into action, faculty members conceded their contested interim rules, replacing them with ones that maintained the spirit of democratic participation but within the constraints of the university hierarchy. Faculty members' adoption of these new rules officially terminated the school's experimental operation almost exactly three years after it began. Within two years, a democratic search process—the first in the school's history—yielded a new dean, James Stewart Polshek, who took the helm with strong university support for fixing the school's serious malfunctions. After achieving full accreditation for the architecture program, he hastily implemented sweeping changes, converting architecture's undergraduate program into a graduate program, firing and hiring faculty, eliminating the Division of Planning's two applied research centers, and renovating the school's facilities. The rapidity of these changes—captured in a new name, Graduate School of Architecture and Planning (GSAP)—naturally caused some consternation on the part of students, faculty, and even central administration. Overall, however, positives outweighed negatives as the school returned to normalized operations.

Still, two residual and interconnected problems remained that would drag on for several years: one related to the school's rapidly vanishing cohort of ethnic minority recruits, the other related to the Division of Planning's ever more unpopular social justice mission. As recruitment efforts lagged, the BPRSFAO and the assistant to the dean for minority affairs went on the offensive, registering complaints with school and university administrators, and once even engaging the services of a politically connected Harlem attorney. Even though some of the complaints proved baseless, Polshek (with the guidance of an assistant dean who was trained as a social worker) proved particularly adept at negotiating BPRSFAO's demands to the satisfaction of all involved, their vanishing numbers bringing finality to the conflict. The problem with the Division of Planning was not so easily resolved.

A complaint from the assistant to the dean for minority affairs unfortunately shone a spotlight on the PhD in Urban Planning program, his complaint sparking a review by a Graduate School for Arts and Sci-

ences (GSAS) committee that oversaw the program. The review began collegially enough but turned vicious when the primary senior faculty member in the PhD program resigned. GSAS halted admissions and appointed a different committee that insisted upon reorienting the program from an applied social justice perspective to an abstract theoretical one. Characterizing the division's social justice mission as a threat to the university's search for truth, the committee rejected its choice for a new senior faculty member, condemning her as a political advocate rather than a researcher. Outraged, Polshak accused GSAS of stifling GSAP's development through a perverted use of university statutes. He demanded—and received—an apology from central administration, but in the long run the Division of Planning had to bend to the will of GSAS on all counts in order to reopen its doctoral program, now unfunded and with few students wanting to enroll.

Meantime, the broader sociopolitical context changed as backlash against reforms wrought by civil rights legislation grew. Fearful of violent civil rights activism and their own downward mobility, middle-class whites bought into President Richard M. Nixon's law-and-order agenda, which replaced social programs with mass incarceration. At the same time, conservative politicians, particularly two congressmen from Arkansas, discredited groups like RGS/Uptown while tightening the purse strings of the Ford Foundation, an unabashed supporter of civil rights activism. Federal disinvestment in public housing was assuredly the last milestone along the school's evolutionary arc. When combined with an energy crisis and related fiscal crisis, a cycle of urban disinvestment began that dashed the hopes of the newly minted ethnic minority alumni for utilizing their skills to improve the living environments of poor ethnic minority communities. As they exited school to find the doors to their careers all but closed, an accrediting team returned to review the new graduate program in architecture, finding its mostly white, well-to-do students overly invested in heroic architecture but passive on social issues.

Thus did the arc of insurgency—graphically illustrated by the rapid increase and decline of cohort members entering and graduating from the school (see Figure 1)—vanish into obscurity, but its outcomes have persisted unto this day. As you will see, its legacy lived on in the achievements of the ethnic minority alumni and in the educational innovations in community-engaged learning, both of which have contributed to advances in city-making practice and education. These successes notwithstanding, the militancy that catalyzed Columbia's insurrection has reappeared on the national and global horizon in reaction to the race-based

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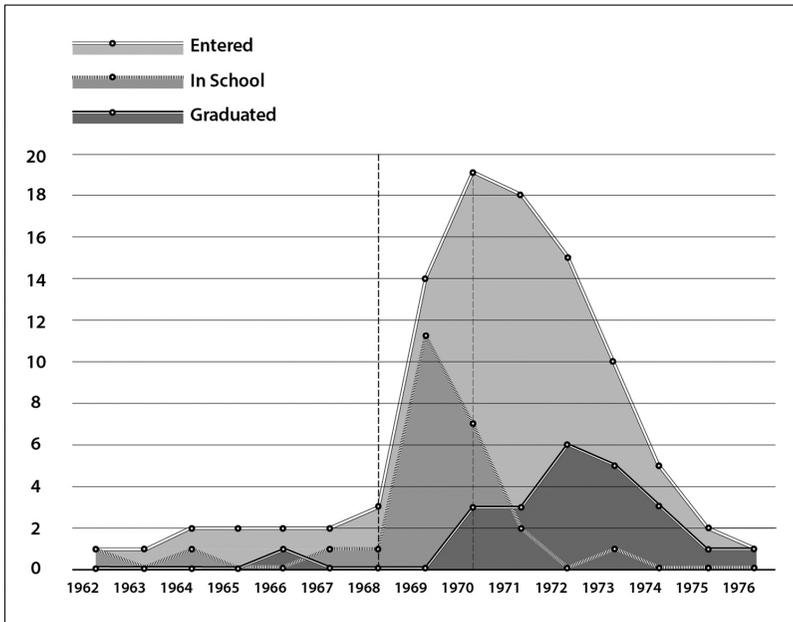


Figure 1. This chart of the rapid increase and decline of cohort members entering and graduating from the school between 1962 and 1976 offers a graphic illustration of the arc of insurgency.

injustices of corporate capitalism. These perilous times call upon students and faculty to engage anew in the impassioned dialogue that sparked transformation at the School of Architecture beginning in the summer of 1968.

The Methodology

The initial investigation—collecting oral histories from the affirmative action recruits—began in 2007 prior to a symposium for the school's alumni. My research assistant¹⁰ utilized a two-part protocol: the first part collecting biographical histories, the second part delving into career histories and thoughts about improving cultural diversity in architecture and planning.¹¹ Working from audiotaped recordings, she produced the verbatim transcripts utilized in this book,¹² spending a full sixteen months to complete her work instead of the planned two months. The time period extended primarily due to the busy lives of the interviewees, who

were working overtime as the Great Recession reduced their staff and increased their search for clients.

A parallel review of primary and secondary archival materials provided a context for the oral histories. Also begun in 2007, its point of departure was the school's centennial publication titled *The Making of an Architect, 1881–1981: Columbia University in the City of New York*.¹³ In 2008, a weeklong review of the minutes of the Faculty of Architecture (dating back to 1931) and of the transcripts of interviews done for the centennial publication enlarged this evolving picture of the institutional context. Then in 2013, a monthlong visit to the archives uncovered documents that had been confidential at the time of the centennial research and led to a complete reframing of the book. These documents revealed the Division of Planning's pivotal role in the insurgency—a program not mentioned in *The Making of an Architect*, which deals solely with the Division of Architecture¹⁴—and the Urban Center's role in funding the division's work. They also provided new insights into the school's evolving governance system and the university administration's paternalistic relationship with the school.¹⁵

This book triangulates published sources and archival data with the oral histories of the ethnic minority recruits to convey to you, as accurately as possible, the events occurring during the School of Architecture's evolutionary years, acknowledging the author's tenuous position as both documentarian and member of the cohort that narrates the story. Also acknowledged is that cohort members had varied experiences depending upon their enrollment in particular degree programs. Most (fifteen of the twenty-four cohort members) were in the professional degree program in architecture,¹⁶ the longest and most externally regulated of the school's programs and the one with the strongest Eurocentric roots. Of the remaining nine members, seven (including one doctoral student) were earning degrees in urban planning, the most community-engaged, justice-oriented program, with two people earning degrees in specialized programs that were largely unaffected by the community-engaged, student-centered experiments (see Figure 2). Despite these differences in the programs—and despite the dynamic evolution that was in progress within the school—cohort members' oral histories demonstrate a remarkable consistency, as you will see.

The Oral History Cohort

You will read the oral histories of twenty-four of the architecture and planning alumni, this author included, who attended the school just

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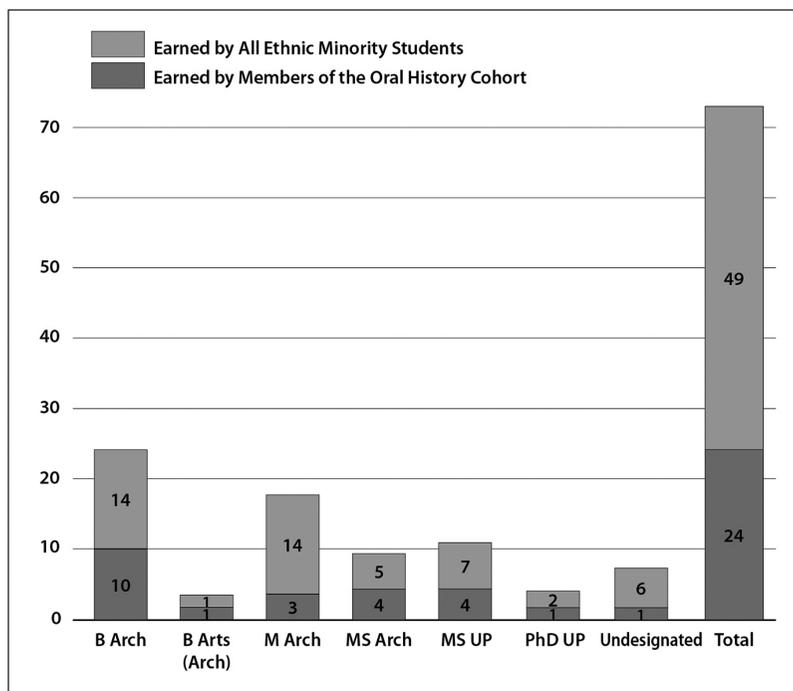


Figure 2. This chart of the degrees earned by cohort members and by all ethnic minority recruits indicates that more architecture than urban planning recruits graduated in both groups due to the much larger size of the architecture program.

before and after the student rebellion. The list began with just eight or nine names but expanded to forty-six persons (including forty-one who had graduated) during a gathering of ethnic minority alumni at the 2007 Alumni Day symposium of what is now called the Graduate School of Architecture Planning and Preservation (GSAPP). Eliminating alumni who were deceased, incapacitated, or had no contact information left a potential pool of twenty-nine; just five persons in the pool declined, which created an oral history cohort of twenty-four persons. The cohort's enrollment years overlaid onto a historical timeline of events that shaped their student experiences defined the period of investigation as 1965 to 1976, though one cohort member did not graduate until 1978 (see Figure 3).

Several years after completing the oral histories, the 2013 search

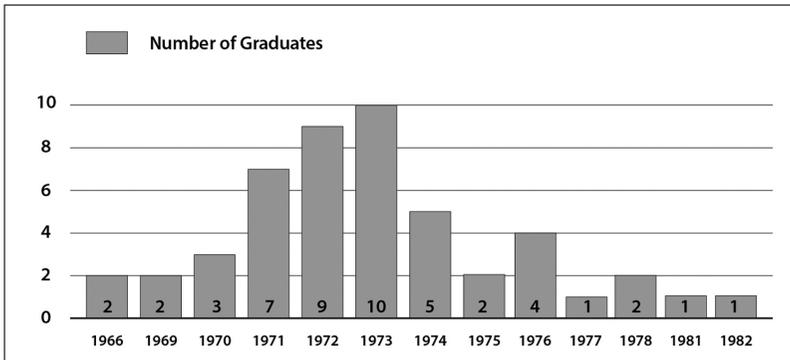


Figure 3. This chart of graduation dates indicates that ethnic minority graduations peaked in 1973, reflecting the exceptional recruitment efforts occurring in 1969 and 1970; graduations declined to pre-experiment levels after 1976, reflecting the curtailment of those efforts as the resolve to achieve educational equity waned nationally and within the school.

through archival records revealed the names of another thirteen persons, of whom eight had graduated. You see, in a student body that ranged from about 300 to 350, the School of Architecture had a groundbreaking total of at least fifty-nine ethnic minority students in attendance during its evolutionary arc, including forty-nine who graduated. However, the oral histories you will read are from the original group of twenty-four.¹⁷

This group, including ten women and forty-nine men, formed the only significant group of historically marginalized students to attend GSAPP unto this day. You should find their educational and professional achievements impressive; they earned a total of fifty-six degrees from Columbia, including thirty-one master's degrees and three doctoral degrees. After graduating from Columbia, eight earned a total of eleven advanced degrees from other institutions; at least twenty-one are licensed architects in the United States, with four being fellows in the American Institute of Architects (AIA);¹⁸ at least two are licensed planners, at least one is a licensed interior designer, at least two have foreign certification, at least two are distinguished fine artists, and at least one is a college president.¹⁹

The school's recruitment of ethnic minority students was so successful that, up until 2007, Columbia University had graduated more African Americans who became licensed architects than all but the historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs)—a total of fifty-seven persons, or 4 percent of all the licensed black architects in the United States and

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6 percent of all those educated at over 117 majority schools combined.²⁰ As of 2006, 35 percent of Columbia's black licensed architects were enrolled during the short period under investigation, a remarkable statistic since, until then, the School of Architecture (founded in 1881) had produced just five black architects—Hilyard R. Robinson (*Columbia* 1924), John Louis Wilson (*Columbia* 1928), Beverly L. Greene (*Columbia* 1945), Norma Merrick Sklarek (*Columbia* 1950), and Jeh V. Johnson (*Columbia* 1958)—three of whom achieved fellowship status in AIA.²¹

As you will see, members of the oral history cohort have thrived in all sectors of the workplace, achieving distinction as firm principals, administrators, planners, academics, and fine artists. They used their Ivy League education to overcome discrimination and fiscal crisis, ultimately carving out singular careers and winning the respect of fellow city-making professionals. And practically all continued to seek an improved quality of life in disadvantaged ethnic minority communities.

The Book

Your journey begins with a chapter on the national and local dislocations that occurred post–World War II up until 1965 as Negroes migrated from the South to midwestern and northern cities that were soon ravaged by urban renewal, suburbanization, and deindustrialization. You read about a simultaneous movement to achieve educational equity that featured black students who advanced a community-engaged notion of higher education. You read the stories of the oral history cohort members that relate their experiences during this period. You see how the movement gave black students access to the Ivy League, including at Columbia, where aggressive urban renewal in Harlem charged race relations. Finally, you read about the School of Architecture's decades-long marginalization by university administrators, who selected a parade of weak leaders and kept faculty salaries among the lowest in the university.

You continue your journey in Chapter 2 by reading about mounting racial tensions in the nation's metropolises during a period bracketed by the 1965 Watts rebellion and the 1967 Newark, Detroit, and Harlem rebellions. You read about responses by professional organizations in architecture and planning—responses so conservative that a radical group called Planners for Equal Opportunity formed, drawing the FBI's attention. You learn about mounting racial tensions in New York City as angry residents descended upon Mayor John Lindsay to protest housing conditions, and you are introduced to two community groups (ARCH

and RGS/Uptown) that responded to these conditions. You also learn about mounting conflicts between Columbia and its neighbors, the Ford Foundation's paradoxical response to the conflict, and cohort members' reactions. Finally, you learn about the School of Architecture, its administration, and its response to the conflict.

In Chapter 3, you focus upon the explosions of 1968 when violence was omnipresent both nationally and in New York City. You read about the spectacles of the Vietnam War, the King assassination, and the ghetto war, these spectacles almost perfectly matched by a freewheeling counter-culture. You also learn about the anger that finally built into insurgency at Columbia, catalyzed by the university's construction of a gymnasium in a Harlem park, the Vietnam War draft, and the university's support of the war. You learn that, after the insurgency exploded full force, insurgents gained control of five university buildings, including Avery Hall, which housed the School of Architecture. Finally, you learn that a violent police bust cleared all the buildings on the eighth day after the first occupation, but also set in motion a more determined insurgency.

In Chapter 4, you read about a counterforce of incredible creativity that the display of brute police force ignited, including faculty support at the School of Architecture for a university-wide boycott. You learn about the faculty's adoption of the "May 17th Resolution," which contained illegal interim rules that set in motion the school's experimental operation. You also learn that, during the following summer, student-led groups began meeting to hammer out a completely transformed curriculum that established new modes of learning and a new relationship to the surrounding community. Finally, you learn about the all-out search for ethnic minority students that began with just three ethnic minority students and faculty and then snowballed as news of the effort spread.

In Chapter 5, you experience the steepest part of the school's arc of insurgency, occurring when an unparalleled crop of ethnic minority recruits walked through Avery's oak doors. You see that the recruits have fearlessly transgressed institutional norms so that what is outside in the community has come inside into the school, and vice versa. You also see that they have gained access to Avery's inner sanctum, the design studio, where revolutionary students have disrupted the off-putting traditions of studio instruction. You read how a growing body of recruits helped open up the studios to the community through for-credit courses and paid internships sponsored by the Division of Planning. Finally, you read about the projects the recruits completed, which were wide-ranging and frequently practical in nature.

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In Chapter 6, you learn about the recruits' brief sojourn at the apex of the arc of insurgency as the school sprinted ahead of national affirmative action efforts. Then you read about the descent that ensued as widespread conservatism unraveled the school's experimental operation. You read about battles between the school and university that attracted an external administrator's scrutiny as the planning division took the lead in the downward trajectory. You see how the university stripped the Urban Center of its funds, eliminating the planning division's major source of support for its recruits and their community-based work. You see how the descent sped up when the architecture program received a conditional accreditation, prompting Dean Smith's resignation and the external administrator's threat of receivership should a replacement not be found immediately. You see how BPRFSAO and the assistant dean for minority affairs went on the offensive when ethnic minority enrollment plummeted. Finally, you learn that the faculty adopted new rules in May 1971, ending the school's experimental operation.

In Chapter 7, you learn that, when James Stewart Polshek became dean in July 1972, he undertook a slew of changes, some of which had devastating consequences for the recruits. You learn that, in addition to securing full accreditation and funds for Avery's expansion, Polshek eliminated architecture's undergraduate degree and planning's community engagement programs. You learn that BPRFSAO fought declining recruitment efforts, with Polshek's evenhandedness calming the battle and the recruits' plummeting numbers bringing finality to it. You also learn that university administrators eliminated the division of planning's social justice mission and rejected its choice for a well-known senior faculty member as a nationwide fiscal crisis devastated poor communities. Finally, you see that as the devastation spread, the school turned toward educating affluent students who were concerned more with heroic architecture than with social reform.

In the final chapter, you see how a fiscal crisis overshadowed the beginning careers of the ethnic minority alumni. You learn how conservative policies eliminated the work many had planned to do, isolating them as lone individuals within an all-white world. You learn how, during their early career years, they navigated the difficult transition to work from school, passing in unusually high numbers the Architecture Registration Exam. You learn how, during their middle years, they continued progressing primarily by overachieving and by benefiting from affirmative action and emerging city-making trends. You see that the alumni came into their own amid a booming economy, securing significant professional

recognition while maintaining their grounding in social justice. Finally, you read a call for faculty and students to follow the School of Architecture's insurgents, and you receive closing instructions for transforming today's institutions of repression in a manner that can thwart a return to the status quo.

You conclude your journey with an epilogue that issues a first-person call to action—to you and to transgressive faculty at today's institutions of higher education—a call to join me in becoming “intellectual freedom fighters”²² as the extremely perilous social disruptions of a new insurgency come into view.