

## Bringing the Local Perspective of Black Architects and Planners to Coincide with NMAAHC Symposium

The Department of Architecture was invited by Dr. Michelle Wilkinson of the National Museum of African American History and Culture to collaborate in bringing the local perspective of Black architects and planners to coincide with the museum's symposium, *Shifting the Landscape: Black Architects and Planners, 1968 to Now*.

Architects, planners, historians, and community members engaged in conversations on Thursday, September 27, 2018 in our Innovation Space about the shared local experiences of the 1968 urban rebellions throughout Washington, D.C. following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. Gregory Carr, chair of Howard's Department of Afro-American Studies, opened the event by bringing the historical references on the occasion. He wove the sentiment across the nation as people rebelled against the unjust conditions facing the black community with the challenges city leaders encountered to rebuild broken landscapes after the riots in 1968. The speech given by Whitney Young, Jr. at the 1968 American Institute of Architects National Convention was a call to action for the [profession](#) to respond to these conditions.

Black designers and planners have been at the forefront of responding to the needs of the community since 1968. Bryan Hudson, president of the National Organization of Minority Architects ([NOMA](#)), addressed this point by providing a perspective on how architects and planners have united since the 1970s to improve the built environment. Many of these practitioners were trained in Howard University's architecture and planning programs and were instrumental in the rebirth of the city's physical environment.

It was fitting that three graduates of Howard's architecture and planning programs engaged in a conversation around what it was like to study in the midst of conditions in the city that caused most units at Howard to close down temporarily. Harry G. Robinson III, dean emeritus of Howard's former School of Architecture and Planning (Bachelor of Architecture 1960 and Master of City Planning 1970) and Alexa Barnes Donaphin, principal at Perkins Eastman (B.Arch 1973 and Master of Architecture 1974) shared their experiences in the architecture programs post-1968. Maxine Brown-Roberts, development review specialist at the District of Columbia Office of Planning (Master of City Planning 1986), who is now involved in planning activities in the city, shared her recent experiences of working

with Howard University on recent development issues. They each shared the impact of the 1968 events on the trajectory of their careers. Professor Bradford Grant moderated the conversation which generated a lot of enthusiasm for Howard University's role in producing practitioners who helped reshape Washington, D.C. as well as other affected cities after 1968.

Derek Hull, chair of the Planning and the Black Community Division of the American Planning Association, set the foundation for unintended consequences of federal housing and transportation policies that impacted neighborhoods of color as a preface to the keynote address given by James Gilleylen. Gilleylen, president of JQuad Planning and Development Group, had been a deputy planning director under Mayor Marion Barry in the late 1980s, when Washington, D.C. saw significant activities to rebuild areas, like the 14<sup>th</sup> Street corridor, affected by the 1968 riots.

An important component of the symposium was exploring the local responses to the rebirth of Washington, D.C. Three panelists brought their individual perspectives on this topic. Dr. Brandi Thompson Summers, Assistant Professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, shared her research on the H Street corridor and the overall notion of a black aesthetic in a changing cultural landscape like D.C. Dr. Samir Meghelli, senior curator at the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, spoke to the historic transformation of the city after 1968, overall, with emphasis on the current redevelopment east of the Anacostia River. An important perspective on this panel was shared by Eric Shaw, director of the District of Columbia Office of Planning (DCOP). Shaw discussed the city's work on social justice and creative placemaking across neighborhoods that are rapidly changing. Professor Edward Dunson, who moderated the session, brought his unique involvement in projects throughout the city.

During the final session, moderated by Professor Dahlia Nduom, the participants engaged in an open discussion about future directions for Black architects and planners. Early on, Dr. Hazel Edwards, chair of the Department of Architecture, indicated that this symposium, while important in marking the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1968 events, was also the beginning of a long and dynamic conversation around issues that still effect communities of color.

Overall, the event provided a forum for an open exchange of ideas and issues to improve participation among various and diverse ethnic groups in Washington, D.C.

"The most powerful conversation on community change happened right down here on Georgia Avenue," commented Eric D. Shaw. About where our future as a community is headed, he added that with a degree in architecture and planning, "we have the skills to take back our neighborhoods."

Many thanks to our panelists and guests who attended and contributed to making our very own symposium, *Broken Landscapes: Local Perspectives on Black Architects and Planners Since 1968*, a huge success!