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Introduction. From the Other Side of the Street

You have seen Max Bond, even if you do not know that you have seen him. Perhaps you have seen him in the vaulted brick arches that run behind the white marble tomb where Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King rest in Atlanta or in the green dome that rises in Birmingham, Alabama, across the street from the sanctified site where the murder of four girls shifted the Civil Rights Movement. Maybe you have seen him in the ascent of a skyscraper that pierces New York City's uptown skyline or in the workaday mid-rises that make up the dense landscape of downtown Brooklyn. You have seen him in the cascades of water that plummet from the names of the departed to the depths of the footprints of the destroyed Twin Towers and in the reverential spaces that mark the events of September 11, 2001, hundreds of feet below. If not at those sites, then you have seen Max Bond on the National Mall, in the tiered crown of a museum that rests upon the earth mere feet from the Washington Monument, offering entry into a centuries-long history of Blackness in the Americas, and of the foundational role that African Americans, including Bond's own family, played in the story of the United States.

Architects design buildings, and Bond designed many. As much as his traces indelibly persist, however, Bond often remained unseen during his life, a circumstance that has continued in the years since his death. Bond stood as the most successful member of a group that was itself largely unseen, miniscule in its numbers and, in a nation where racism and discrimination were woven into its very fabric, often pushed to the margins. In 1970, soon after Bond launched his first firm, Black architects made up approximately 2 percent of the members of the American Institute of Architects. Fifty years later, their share among licensed architects remained the same. Go into any room of architects, and you were likely to see only one or two Black architects, if any. Exceptions in a sea of whiteness, they were easily overlooked and often ignored. Bond's manner contributed to his limited visibility in a profession where bombast drew attention and reward. Gentlemanly, pensive, and humble, he was professorial even outside of the classrooms where he taught (fig. 1). More eager to teach than tell,

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he valued collaboration as the measure of good design. In a field built upon collective labor but measured by authorship, those habits tended to obscure. If never a staple of the magazines and exhibitions that were the profession's public relations currency, however, Bond did not waver in his ambitions. Armed with the world-making tools of design and taught from childhood that his work must serve the cause of civil rights, Bond charted a path for architecture that was as urgent in his time as in our own.[1]

Seeing this work, and seeing Bond, is the task of this book. Born in 1935 in Louisville, raised across the South and in Haiti, educated at Harvard University, and resident in New York City for the majority of his adulthood—with the exception of a transformative few years in Ghana in the 1960s—Bond in his life spanned crucial chapters in the history of both the Black Freedom Struggle and architecture. These were the decades that saw the long Civil Rights Movement grow from struggles over integration into ferocious demands for racial self-determination, from the rise of affirmative action to contestation over the public memory of the movement itself. These were also the years that saw modern architects and planners rebuild cities in monumental forms and communities rise up in response to mass displacement, that found their architect successors return to Eurocentric historical precedents and a generation of "starchitects" become the profession's center of gravity.

The long history of modern architecture and the long history of civil rights, two of the defining cultural movements of the twentieth century, ran on parallel tracks that rarely touched. In the years since, those who have told their stories have typically charted distinct narratives.[2] For Bond, however, these paths were inextricably and existentially entwined. He was one of the hundreds of thousands present at the March on Washington in 1963; his attendance came as the conclusion of a road trip to visit Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin. Three decades later, he witnessed the resurgent interest in Malcolm X just as he was hired to design a medical research building at the site of the charismatic leader's assassination. An ambitious architect seeking to make a name for himself in his profession's most competitive circle, Bond understood his obligation to the Civil Rights Movement in which his family had long played an important role. An activist who saw this struggle as demanding uncompromising, sometimes radical approaches in the cause of racial justice, he knew his best tools were those that enabled him to physically shape the world.

"Come let us build a new world together" had been a mantra of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the force for civil rights co-founded by Bond's first cousin, Julian Bond. A 1963 poster displayed the slogan before Danny Lyon's photograph of three young Black people kneeling (fig. 2). At the image's left is activist and future congressman John Lewis, who would cross Bond's path years later, in a relationship that would profoundly shape the end of the architect's career. As the Civil Rights Movement intensified during this catalyzing year early in Bond's emergence, however, the poster reminded its viewers that activism, like architecture, carried a

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Fig. 2. *Come Let Us Build a New World Together*, 1963. John Lewis is at left in SNCC's iconic poster, with its collective, projective appeal. Danny Lyon, photographer, and Mark Suckle, designer.

fundamentally projective vision at its core: imagine a future, then make it real. Unique among his peers, Bond wove together these separate threads. Architecture was his weapon for social change.[3]

Bond pursued this ideal against a harshly contrasting reality. Modern architecture had emerged with utopian promises in the early twentieth century. New forms and the technology that enabled them would create a world better housed, less deprived, and more equal. Within a few years, however, leading architects' aesthetic and formal concerns—often aimed at an elite audience—took priority over broad social transformation.[4] Within a few decades, the social change that modern architects had wrought struck some observers as not neutral but malign. The monumental, often-disruptive midcentury redevelopment of urban centers enabled by the federal policy of urban renewal and the vast, assembly-line-like transformation of farmland into all-white suburbs led by merchant builders cemented existing patterns of inequality and segregation.[5] Bond took part in the late-1960s challenge to this order with the goal of ensuring a new path forward. Yet as his professional career took off in the 1970s and

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1980s, he witnessed only new paths of retreat. His most prominent peers doubled down on formal pursuits as they turned inward, away from an ailing world. By century's end, architecture's tastemakers celebrated and rewarded spectacle and stardom over deep engagement. Iconic buildings like Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain, performed thrilling, gravity-defying formal stunts that drew visitors and admiring critics, sparking imitators from Milwaukee to Abu Dhabi. But they modeled a globe-trotting aloofness disconnected from on-the-ground realities.[6]

In his Blackness, Bond felt firsthand his profession's deep alienation from the concerns that motivated the century's most imperative social struggle. From the moment he decided to study architecture, he felt the hostility of a field in which people who looked like him were the exception. Race, Bond saw in the years that followed, determined everything, from the training, projects, and funding architects received to the forms buildings took, the nature of interactions between clients and designers, the financial beneficiaries of construction, who inhabited buildings, how critics would (or would not) respond to them, and which structures merited maintenance and preservation. Bond's presence in the room revealed the invisible reality that architecture, neither neutral nor color-blind, was shaped in every way by the fraught racial order of the United States. Yet his conviction—in architecture's potential and in his responsibility to effect it—never ebbed. As his friend Gordon Davis, a trailblazing attorney and public official, described upon Bond's death, the architect had a "steel spine and rock-hard determination."[7]

Buried deep in a notebook Bond kept in 1989 is a phrase he deployed as the title of a lecture presented at the University of Michigan that year and another a decade later at the University of Louisville: "If architecture were for people." This statement stands in for the larger story Bond's life tells, the struggles he faced along the way, and the vision for architecture he nonetheless held. It conveyed Bond's conviction that architecture *had not been* for people. It also signified his belief that architecture *could be* for people and his vision of what constituted a people-centered architecture—one more equal, just, and fair. If architecture were for people. Max Bond's life and work were focused on making it so.[8]

A biography of Bond is a history of modern architecture from the other side of the street. Displacing the main characters—usually white men, often heroicized—who have dominated the narrative of post–World War II architecture renders this era anew. Centering a figure who was present at key moments in the trajectories of modern architecture and the Civil Rights Movement but saw them from a distinct perspective reveals new angles on places we thought we knew well. Bond occupied such places almost from the moment of his birth. Moving within days from his mother's family home in Louisville to the Tennessee Valley, Bond was unknowingly part of one of the most expansive social

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and architectural experiments of the century, the Tennessee Valley Authority, which transformed the land and infrastructure of much of the American South. There, Bond's father, J. Max Bond Sr., and mother, Ruth Clement Bond, experienced the promises and contradictions of the New Deal before taking their family across a series of campuses and communities that exposed their daughter, Jane, and sons, Max and George, to exceptional Black islands of culture, education, and achievement. Dillard University, the Tuskegee Institute, Port-au-Prince, and Atlanta University exemplified limitless possibility, the Bond parents' high expectations, and other lessons, too. The Bond and Clement families, through the African American church and their extensive education, had moved from enslavement to the Black elite in only two generations. Yet Max Sr. and Ruth insisted that their children shun elitism with a deep commitment to working people, a dedication to knowledge, and an embrace of the promise of the dawning modern world around them.

Bond brought childhood lessons learned on historically Black campuses to the confines of majority-white Harvard University, where, starting at barely sixteen years old, he spent the next seven years. Harvard was an influential nexus of modern architecture, a movement whose tendencies Bond would learn from and struggle against while receiving his formal training. A place of great possibility, Harvard was also a site of discouragement and violence unlike any Bond had experienced in the Deep South. Still, he took from Cambridge an understanding of the social potential of designed space and of his responsibility to shape it. Graduating in 1958, he maintained his parents' commitment to an internationalism that defined his path thereafter. First in Tunisia, where his father had accepted a U.S. government education post, then in Paris, where Bond held a Fulbright fellowship and a job with one of the city's leading modernists, he gained an expanded education in architecture as a tool of empire and as a means of building a new world. Returning stateside, Bond married Jean Carey Bond, a writer with a family tree entwined with histories of Black radicalism, and participated in the transitions of both the Civil Rights Movement and modern architecture amid growing crises within each. The Bonds soon moved to Ghana, where in the late 1960s Bond worked for the postcolonial government of President Kwame Nkrumah, building his first independent design, a library, as part of the nation's program of liberatory modernism. Rising in Bolgatanga, in the country's north, the sculptural concrete structure symbolized the freedom and possibility that modern architecture could enable.

When the Bonds returned to New York in 1967, they brought with them their two young children and an understanding of their responsibility to the Civil Rights Movement through the means of their expertise. Bond's formerly enslaved grandfather had addressed racial inequality through education. His father employed private agitation and print media, his mother the art form of the quilt. His celebrated cousin Julian pursued direct action and elected office. Bond's wife, Jean, took up the pen. Bond fought through architecture. He modeled an architecture of liberation in the struggle against

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disruptive redevelopment in Harlem, his new home. At the helm of one of the era's most catalytic community organizations, Bond demanded that any such plans arise from the needs of Harlemites. At Columbia University, he began an enduring career in academia amid the campus upheaval of the spring of 1968. Insistent on the necessity of training Black students in architecture, he mentored the largest group that had ever enrolled there. The Bonds stayed in New York City for the next half century.

In the wave of optimism that Black architects experienced during the decade's civil rights reckoning, Bond formed his first firm, Bond Ryder Associates, with architect Donald Ryder. Bond Ryder's drafting tables, one of its employees later described, were "filled with brotherhood, hope, intellect and purpose." It became the most prominent Black-owned architecture firm in an era when such firms were growing in unprecedented (though still limited) numbers. Like many of his African American peers, Bond built a practice centered on public and nonprofit projects in the absence of the private commissions his white counterparts attracted. Fueled by federal funding, Bond Ryder designed housing and community centers whose locations in majority-Black and -Brown communities—north of 110th Street, east of the East River—signified the geographic constraints circumscribing the reach of Black architects. Still, such commissions offered the chance to shape an architecture centered on the residents of such communities, amplifying their voices and fostering their participation in the life of the places they inhabited.[9]

Those large-scale projects helped the firm make its name, yet when the public coffers dried up in the mid-1970s, Bond Ryder and its counterparts were left exposed. Bond Ryder stayed above water with a series of civic and cultural commissions in the early 1980s that established Bond as the go-to architect for buildings engaging the history of race. Monuments to the ongoing civil rights struggle, like Atlanta's King Center for Nonviolent Social Change, and repositories of the knowledge it celebrated, like Harlem's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, provided opportunities for Bond to explore the links between design choices and racialized labor inequality, architectural form and the African Diaspora. Simultaneously, he gained a reputation as a patient teacher and role model as Columbia became a key site for debates over architecture's future. A dissenting voice amid the profession's renewed interest in a Western tradition in which Bond did not see himself or his Black peers, he gained new status as the chair of the university's architecture division.

By decade's end, years on the economic edge forced Bond to make a difficult decision about his firm amid an ongoing national recession. Bond merged with the larger and majority-white firm Davis, Brody & Associates, a move that exemplified the dilemmas confronting Black architects if they wished to persist. Bond Ryder's collapse alarmed Bond's peers; at the same time, his ascent as the first Black partner of a majority-white New York firm carried great meaning at the profession's epicenter. Bond, at this point also dean of the architecture school at the City College of New York, gained a larger

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platform and the kinds of privately funded projects that had previously eluded him. He also faced the tough question of how to balance his ideals with the harsh realities of professional success. Bond found one avenue as a voice of conscience. In his designs and prose, he insisted on the importance of collaboration and humility over celebrity and, amid a conservative turn toward Eurocentrism, advocated for a cultural pluralism in which Black history played a constitutive role. Both principles rebuked a field turning increasingly inward.

In 1996 the firm took a new name, Davis Brody Bond, registering a new level of visibility for Bond. His involvement at the center of projects like the addition to the Harvard Club of New York in Midtown Manhattan put Black architects' handprints in places they had never been. Amid questions over the future of the city and growing anxiety over affordability, homogeneity, and the unimaginable shock of September 11, 2001, Bond became an outspoken advocate for cities as democratic, diverse spaces where, crucially, Black people had a secure foothold. This ideal, which Bond called the "working city," shaped his work in a transforming Harlem. He also became a central player in two of the new millennium's most significant projects: the effort to realize a memorial at Ground Zero on the site of the destroyed World Trade Center and the campaign to build a new Smithsonian museum on the National Mall recording the foundational history of African Americans. Bond's reputation for collaboration and diplomacy won him roles navigating the social and political turbulence of these dizzyingly complex tasks. Both the National September 11 Memorial and Museum and the National Museum of African American History and Culture reached completion only after his death, recording Bond's presence and absence at two of the most visible sites in the nation.

Looking through Bond's eyes reveals both a more promising and more pernicious history of architecture in the late twentieth century than has been told. Promising, because Bond's biography charts a counter-history of buildings and cities in this era, one in which designers centered social concerns and engaged deeply with the people impacted by design. That had been the hope of the professional upheaval of the late 1960s, a moment of critical reflection that pledged a new social responsibility on the part of the people shaping the built environment. While Bond and many of his Black peers maintained that commitment, the profession's vanguard retreated into a period of self-referentiality, professed autonomy, and theoretical preoccupation that prioritized form over social responsibility. Bond cared about form too, but he insisted on attention to the reality that buildings were living things in which life unfolded. "At least to us," he told an audience at the University of California, Berkeley in 1974, "the most important things are not so much the shapes but what we'd hope the content of the buildings would be."[10]

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In insisting on his field's social obligations, Bond was holding architecture to the egalitarian promises its modernist evangelists had made early in the century. For him, the path back to those transformative ambitions was not an abstract utopianism but a specific one: the ongoing struggle for civil rights. The Civil Rights Movement had long engaged in the work of world making as a means of activism.[11] Equipped with the tools to build that world, Bond traced an approach that varied over eras and contexts but maintained several consistent goals. He sought broad participation and collaboration from architecture's first conception to its eventual use and afterlife, a democratic rebuke to his field's history of exclusion and domination of people and space. He espoused and shaped an internationalist vision of architecture, invoking modernist traditions from places like Ghana and Havana that countered his profession's long history of elitist Eurocentrism. And he celebrated urban spaces and the people—especially Black people—who lived in them, an engagement with everyday life and everyday people in an era when the dominant discourse often maligned diverse cities. Bond showed what architecture could be: a corrective in a world where racism and discrimination had wrought great harm. Looking closely at his work offers nothing less than a new idea of what constitutes good design, redefining predominantly aesthetic qualitative judgments with criteria based in broad participation, diverse representation, and economic opportunity.

At the same time, the experiences of Bond and his community of Black architects unearth a bleaker and more pernicious history of architecture in this period. Bond's career dramatizes the extent to which designers of color remained fundamentally marginalized in the profession, even amid the ongoing struggle for racial equality. At its broadest, his story illuminates the limits of civil rights gains even for the most successful Black professionals. Bond and his peers faced pervasive constraints including social barriers restricting the kinds of work they could get, financial vulnerability in decades of boom and bust, and biases—stated and unstated, grotesque and subtle—that devalued their skills. Seeing Bond's efforts to confront and push past the many obstacles that checked the reach of his influence provides an intimate perspective on iconic eras in the Black Freedom Struggle as it unfolded in the built environment. Bond navigated the segregation of the American South, the fight for integration in the 1950s and 1960s and the radical movements that followed, the conservative backlash and recessions of the 1970s and 1980s, and the culture wars of the 1990s. Each era forced him to make difficult choices mediated by his identity as a racial exception in his field.[12]

The marginalization that Bond battled—and the far greater marginalization that confronted the great majority of Black architects who did not reach the same rungs—brought material consequences that reverberate to the present day. The socially engaged approach that Bond shaped remained at the fringes of the profession in part because he and his fellow architects of color remained consigned to those edges too, despite their many accomplishments. The built environment in these decades might

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have taken a very different direction, one more focused on solving fundamental, still-persistent societal inequalities, if not for the implicit and explicit discrimination that Bond's very presence revealed.

Like any historical figure, Bond was imperfect, and the intent of this book is not to suggest otherwise. As his career progressed, the projects he took on and the decisions forced by those projects did not meet with unanimous approval. Bond was uncomfortable with the contradictions that arose in a profession fundamentally dependent on the availability of public and private capital. To survive as a Black architect at times required that he soften his democratic ideals. And as much as he sought to transcend his unique position among the African American elite, his education and social status sometimes distanced him from the people for whom he hoped to work. Solving those contradictions was not always straightforward. Yet for those swept up in the expansiveness of his picture of what architecture could be, Bond stood as a rare presence in a field full of outsize egos, harsh criticism, exploitative labor, and overwhelming whiteness. "I learned about this man—Max Bond—who embodied so many of the things I wanted to be," remembered architect Peter Cook of his early impressions of a figure with whom he would later work closely. "Look, here's a man who was an architect, an educator, a civic and public servant, an activist, an urban thinker, and was—like me—a proud African American!"[13]

Irony greeted the project of writing Bond's biography, however. While exceptional as an individual, he had spent his career challenging the cult of individualism rampant in architecture and its history. "Part of the process … of making us more responsible socially," Bond told an audience in 1989, "would make us participate much more with the people we serve … and we would be less dictators of form, the high priests of form."[14] The elevation of heroic, often flawed figures frustrated Bond in a profession whose built works were inherently collective, from their conception to their lived reality after completion. Bond recognized that the emphasis on prominent individuals obscured the underlying labors of people—from office staff to construction workers to residents—who were more likely to be Black or Brown. And such tales rarely, if ever, celebrated even the most accomplished architects of color. In spite of Bond's efforts, architecture continues to be a profession that uses individuals as exemplars. They include many of the figures who most frustrated him, their elevation coming despite—or because of—behavior and interests antithetical to his values.[15] Not centering Bond would be a means of reflecting the collectivist ethos he espoused. But not telling his story would leave him, the broader community of Black architects, and the overlooked history he represents unseen.[16]

As much as Bond did not seek the spotlight, his family understood that the record of his work, like that of his parents, his uncles Horace Mann Bond and Rufus Clement,

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Fig. 3. J. Max Bond Jr. (top center, in white T-shirt) with Julian Bond (bottom center, in gray shirt) and his sister, Jane Bond Moore (top left), at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, ca. summer 1948. Bond's uncle (and Julian and Jane's father), Horace Mann Bond, was then the university's president.

and his cousin Julian Bond, must be preserved so that it could be known (fig. 3). I first visited Bond's papers at Columbia University in June 2010, soon after they were acquired following his 2009 death, to research his involvement in the 1960s with the Architects' Renewal Committee in Harlem. At that point still unprocessed and unorganized, they offered traces—a journal entry documenting a frustrating meeting, color slides recording Bond's camera view, a thank-you note from a student to a mentor—that spoke to a life far greater than the few years that interested me at that point.

I returned frequently over the next decade and a half, learning more about Bond and the trials he faced as a Black architect. Financial records told me that the end of Bond Ryder had been more frustrating and difficult than the public story its partners conveyed. Damaged photographs indicated the precariousness of an architect's office operating in an aging space that eventually caught flame. That fire, along with the vagaries of what is kept and disposed over a life, left gaps. I worked to cover those with research in Bond's parents' papers, also at Columbia, which included myriad transoceanic letters sent to and from the children they adored, and visited dozens of collections documenting the civil rights organizations, labor unions, academic departments, colleagues, and clients that intersected with Bond's life and work along the way. Numerous interviews, too, helped reveal the experience of living, working, and learning

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with a person who was eager to help others realize their own ambitions and who long remained a vivid presence in their minds.

Finally, visiting as many extant examples of Bond's work as possible offered revelations that even the most comprehensive archive cannot equal, especially for an architect who embraced the reality that his moment shaping a building represented only a part of its unfolding story. Manifold lessons about the life and unpredictable afterlife of Bond's vision were evident in the warm welcome of the property manager who proudly showed me the community center that he had long cared for in Brownsville, Brooklyn; my lonely passage around the boarded-up Neigh Dormitory on a rainy Mississippi fall day; my walk from the Mary McLeod Bethune Memorial straight west to the U.S. Capitol; and the descent into the earth fundamental to my experience of both the museum at Ground Zero and the National Museum of African American History and Culture.

As I was writing this book, questions about architecture's social responsibility and lack of racial diversity rushed to the surface to a degree unmatched since 1968. They arose in response to the regressive backlash that followed the nation's first Black president, growing outrage over racial disparities in criminal justice and police brutality, a pandemic whose divergent effects traced race and class, and abundant evidence that worsening income inequality was imperiling everything from housing to health for those not at the top. Understandably, critics watched this pendulum swing with doubt, justifiably suspicious of the very possibility that architecture, a field embedded in unequal economic and social structures, could ever have the means or will to transcend those structures.[17] Given past failures, short attention spans, the many who never asked about social responsibility at all, and the only-increasing intensity of racial backlash to this very day, there is plenty of reason for skepticism around a fundamental question: Can architecture bring positive social change?

An affirmative answer can be found among those, like Bond, who had never stopped asking. For them, the stakes were existential. Bond spent his life and career taking what steps he could toward creating the more equal, more just world he imagined. As much as the effort followed uneven terrain, he had no doubt about its possibility, nor its necessity. His story maps a path that, if often overlooked in his time, remains accessible into the present. The evidence of its potential resides in the traces he left behind: a plaza amplifying the voices of a community rarely heard, flexible dorm rooms enabling students to make a home in a hostile environment, a brick and the Black bricklayer who placed it, and a modern façade liberated from histories of white supremacy and racial violence. Those, for Bond, were just some of the ingredients toward an architecture for people.

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