

REFORMING Architecture

Re-purposing harmful architecture of the past for a healthier future. An exploration in design for social justice.

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“A building has no means of locomotion, it cannot hide itself, it cannot get away. There it is, and there it will stay - telling more truths about him who made it....”

Louis Sullivan 1856-1924



Above and below: Pennsylvania Correctional Institute, Ohio River Pittsburgh. Opposite: “All Me II” (2005) by Wilfred Rembert 1945-2021



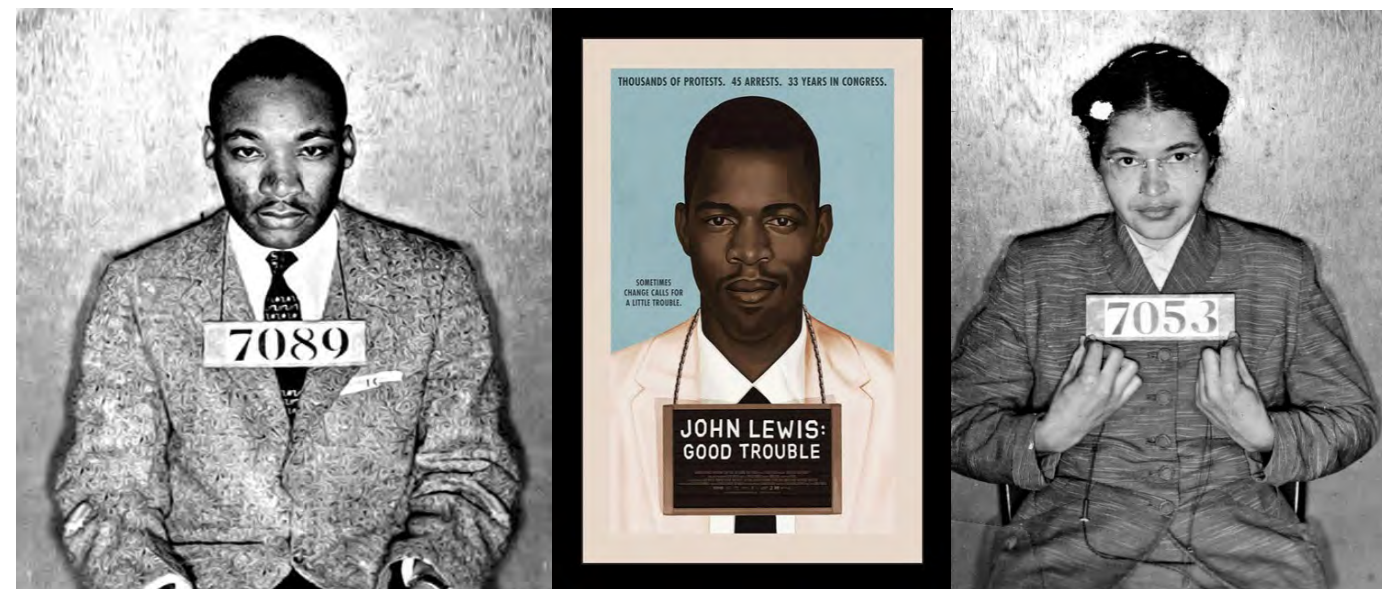
Background

The events of 2020 have given our world a lot of time and reason to think about the value of architecture and the true meaning of its mission to serve society while doing no harm. The architect has been commissioned to design for the most critical needs of society from legislative chambers, courtrooms, prisons, hospitals to offices and homes. The challenges of that work have not always allowed us to weigh in on the policies and implications of each building's purpose. On rare occasions we are afforded the opportunity to rethink the purpose of past structures.

Context

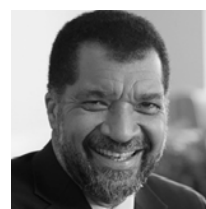
This studio will explore such an opportunity to revisit an abandoned state prison structure, the Pennsylvania Correctional Institution of Pittsburgh, designed almost two centuries ago. The class will explore the social, ethical,

cultural and humanitarian issues of the building's past while examining the residual impact on the community that it has served and the broader communities that it was meant to protect. Using the psychological and architectural fossils of this structure this exploratory studio will be tasked to re-envision a new more humane and environmentally appropriate purpose for a healthier and more sustainable future that serves ALL demographics while undoing the harm caused by the building in its first incarnation. We will also discuss how jails and prisons have been used as a vehicle of protest and change for causes like civil rights.



As a research studio students will work collaboratively to understand the issues of architectural space as a tool of criminal reform as well as their residual effects on disenfranchised communities. We will also touch on the influences of trapped talents and caged creativity on the broader society's culture of art, music, language, fashion, etc.

The class will be encouraged to develop new uses that take advantage of the building's physical properties to help heal the surrounding communities and erase the stigma of its past. The embodied carbon of its massively resilient three foot thick walls and proximity to the Ohio River hint at opportunities for creative reinvention that might provide environmentally jobs and other types of support for the Pittsburgh region of tomorrow.



Above: Wilfred Rember, prison artist
Right: artwork by Wilfred Rember

Left: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: civil rights leader,
Center: movie poster for 'John Lewis : Good Trouble' 2020 dir by Dawn Porter,
Right: Rosa Parkes, civil rights activist.



This social justice studio will be based on several books including:
The New Jim Crow, *Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander
The Color of Law, *A Forgotten History of How our Government Segregated America* by Richard Rothstein