PAPER

Collective Bargaining for Collective Housing: Hilberseimer, Goldberg, and the Labor Union's Struggle Towards New Typologies of Living

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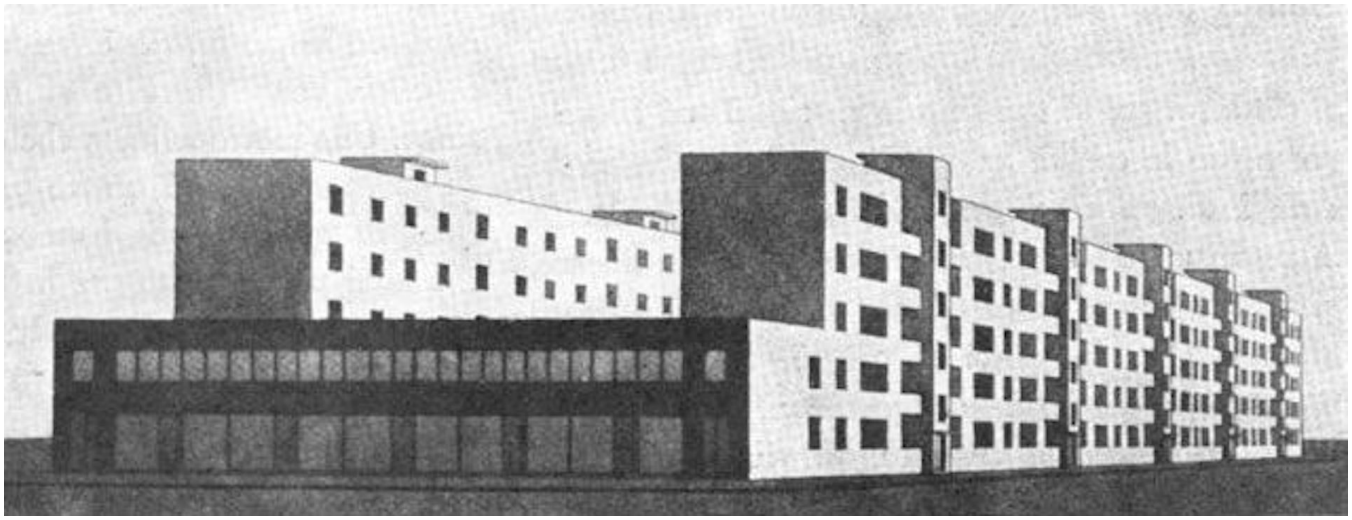
According to the World Bank, 1.6 billion people will be affected by the shortage in housing by 2025 and the United Nations estimates that today 100 million people are without a home—records that are driven by the lack of affordable housing and an exponential rise of housing cost over income. Acknowledging the difficulties to escape today's neoliberal market value begs the question of alternatives to profit-based home ownership and the possibility of a radical rethinking of housing. This essay, therefore, investigates two projects that challenged the economic system in place and rethought housing by rewriting its dominant narratives, financial frameworks, and spatial layouts. In vastly different contexts Ludwig Hilberseimer's 1923 project of the Wohnstadt (residential city) and Bertrand Goldberg's 1960s Marina City in Chicago allied with unions in their struggle for a new kind of housing. In both cases, the partnership between architecture and labor organization pushed the project far beyond spatial and programmatic ambitions. These collaborations point at a model in which a union's knowledge in collective bargaining became instrumental in the creation of housing through an alliance with architecture.

INTRODUCTION

If we understand housing as one of the basic forms of architecture and one of its main obligations and most urgent responsibilities in today's struggle for available and affordable housing, then architecture has to rethink established forms of living and the politics and economies that surround it. Possible escape routes from the premises of profit-based home ownership, however, are increasingly obstructed in a time when market-sponsored state regulations have stimulated desires for home ownership, limited regulation on single-family homes, undermined the reputation of "social housing," systematically defunded large-scale housing efforts through austerity measures, and limited lot sizes in an effort to privilege private ownership. Studying historical projects that faced similar challenges but managed to rethink housing might produce new insights for a better understanding of our current predicaments and may help us to rethink contemporary housing models. This essay will investigate Ludwig Hilberseimer's conceptual project of the Wohnstadt (residential city) and Bertrand Goldberg's Marina City in Chicago. While at first sight these projects have nothing in common, except for the focus on housing, closer inspection reveals how both projects solicited the assistance of labor unions in an effort to structure an alliance that could circumnavigate dominant market forces, enable experimentation towards new modes of living, and coalesce into new funding structures. Decades apart, based on opposite sides of the Atlantic, and embedded in different socio-political climates, their shared interest in collaborating with unions points toward a larger conceptual rethinking of the architecture of housing. While Hilberseimer utilized housing as a vehicle to combat the laissez-faire urbanism of the 1920s metropolis and Bertrand Goldberg's project for a new housing urbanism sought to rejuvenate a deserted downtown, their envisioned or actualized alliance with unions would become instrumental.

BLOCK CONSOLIDATION THROUGH UNION COLLABORATION

Critiquing the discourse on urban architecture for its abandonment of housing as a quintessential social and architectural concern, Hilberseimer writes in 1927 that it should instead be considered "the actual problem of the architecture of the metropolis."[1] This positions housing at the core of his search for a Großstadtarchitektur (metropolitan architecture) of emerging typologies that were born out of and in response to conditions of the contemporary big city.[2] While current housing projects were, according to Hilberseimer, predominantly based on the single house on narrow plots of privately owned land, Hilberseimer proposes "the communal house, which occupies the entire block and includes not only apartments, places to work, and commercial spaces, but also houses everything else that life demands."[3] Here, the block no longer holds multiple monofunctional residential buildings but instead formulates one large building form that joins different programs. His critique of the capitalist city, subdivided into privately owned lots and driven by the logic of investment and return, is based both on the restrictions that it places on urbanism and the advantages that it gives to revenue driving speculation and exploitation.



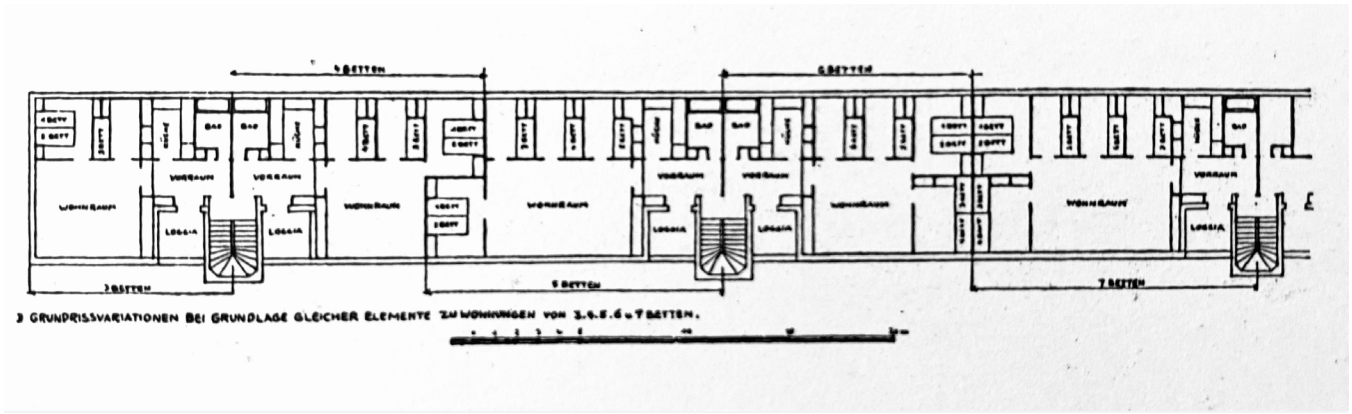


Figure 2a. Ludwig Hilberseimer, Wohnstadt project, block view, 1923. Published in Großstadtarchitektur (1927), 33.
Figure 2b. Ludwig Hilberseimer, Plan variations for apartments of three, four, five, six, and seven beds, 1923. Published in *Großstadtarchitektur* (1927), 32.

quite radical reframing of private ownership, highlighting its responsibilities rather than its rights.

While many of these promises would remain unfulfilled, contributing to the eventual collabs of the Weimar experiment, the document would provide a guide for social reform and union ambitions during the 1920s.[8] Therefore, Hilberseimer's anticipation for union or state involvement in the housing question comes as no surprise. In fact, the German Trade Union Federation (Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund, ADGB) already founded its first Labor Building Association in 1922, embarked on multiple worker-owned cooperative housing projects, and builds thousands of units across the Weimar Republic. (Fig. 1) In addition, the GEHAG (Public Benefit Homestead, Savings, and Building Cooperation), a non-profit housing association that was founded and steered by the ADGB, had its own non-commercial developer (Deutsche Bauhütte), which enabled it to select construction firms on the basis of quality rather than price—a constellation that enabled it to organize, finance, and build projects such as Bruno Taut's "Horseshoe Estate" (1925-1933) or the ADGB Trade Union School in Berlin, Bernau designed by Hannes Meyer and Hans Wittwer (1928-1930).[9]

With this history in mind, Hilberseimer's notion of union involvement appears much less as a utopian vision than an understanding of unions central role for the housing question of Germany in the 1920s and maybe an advertisement of his own project to receptive channels at the federation. The involvement by collective entities and non-profits, however, presented for Hilberseimer not only an opportunity to restructure the investment models for housing but it would become essential in the formation of a new housing urbanism that could project a new kind of city. If the parcelization of blocks limited architecture as an urban project, where the confines of the lot regulate the extent of the project, so could the combination of individual lots into larger compounds be an opportunity to restructure the city and enable an architecture with an urban dimension. His Wohnstadt project (Housing City) from 1923, for example, conceived of an architecture that encompassed

entire urban blocks. (Fig. 2a) Here, the shorter ends were designated as commercial while the longer sides were configured as residential, which results in an urban formation of parallel quiet streets for housing and, at a larger distance, urban corridors of lively streets with stores. Each block becomes a "microcosm of the city."[10]

Hilberseimer's "Gemeinschaftshäuser" (communal housing), as he called them, would not only be situated on large lots that had been combined but encompassed all functions for collective living—architectural mammoths that constituted an amended city and an altered organization of the home. They simultaneously are the city (in the way they provide the functions of it) and build the city (as they configure entire blocks). Interestingly, Hilberseimer addressed both issues—the urban dimension of lot sizes as well as the multiplicity of units—through notions of the collective. For the lots, the involvement of unions and other public collectives was championed while he viewed the abundance of units in housing as a collective in its own right. For the latter, the layout of apartments was instrumentalized by standardizing kitchens, bathrooms, and bedrooms while expanding the living room for family life, dining, and play according to the number of members in the household.[11] (Fig. 2b) The size of much larger living rooms is afforded by the minimal dimensions of the bedrooms—intentionally emphasizing the collective within the confines of the apartment.

While the common bourgeois household entailed a multiplicity of rooms for reception, living, and dining (and in more wealthy households we can also see music rooms, boudoirs, smoking rooms, and offices), Hilberseimer proposes a large living room that would accommodate all activities through designated but overlapping regions, that could transgress over time, and are able to blend into each other. The single living room also consolidates the activities of all members of the household, avoiding segregation and facilitating collective gathering. While each apartment still includes a room with double beds, these sleeping cells are so compact and rudimentary that they could easily adopt to alternative lifestyles beyond the nuclear family. That this was on Hilbersheimer's mind can be deduced from his frequent references of hotels, motels, and boarding houses as the future of high-rise urban living.[12] His often quoted slogan "suitcase instead of moving van" does not merely represent an interest in efficiency and convenience but, instead, was a new mode of living, tailored to a new kind of metropolitan individual—single, childless, and nomadic. In Hilberseimer's quest for a new kind of housing as the scale of the unit and the block, labor union efforts would become instrumental even if they never materialized into large-scale superblocks. Strangely enough, we see the same techniques productively deployed almost forty years later, in a context that was more hostile to union efforts.

CITY LIVING THROUGH UNION FINANCING

Chicagoans of the 1960s witnessed a housing project of unprecedented size grow ever larger on its 3.1-acre site, adjacent to the river, and just across the city's central business district.[13] By acquiring an option on the land in 1959 and purchasing it one year later, the Building Service Employees International Union (BSEIU, also called Janitors' Union) followed the recommendation of Bertrand Goldberg, the architect who had discovered the lot and already developed design schemes for the site in order to build Marina City. (Fig. 3) The initial complex integrated two sixty-story residential towers with nineteen floors of parking (celebrated as the tallest concrete structure in the world), a sixteen-floor office building with a bowling alley, a swimming pool, a theater, and a three-story podium that housed an ice-skating rink, stores, and a marina below.[14] While the project derived its fame from its formal exuberance, material innovation, record-breaking scale, and programmatic complexity, Marina City also needs to be understood as a visionary partnership between architecture and labor organization. In fact, only the confluence between architectural vision and union ambitions made the project possible.

Goldberg's connections to unions goes back to the early 1940s, when he managed to bring union labor into the production of prefabricated houses. He later described: "We had the first union agreements and the only union agreements in the country. Every other prefabricated house was built non-union. We built with union labor … We unionized our factory."[15] In 1950, Goldberg designed a building with an auditorium and exhibition space for the International Union of Operating Engineers and as Igor Marjanović and Katerina Rüedi suggest in their writings on Marina City, it was likely through this connection that Goldberg met the president of the Janitor's union, William McFetridge. It was also McFetridge who first hired Goldberg for their union office and eventually commissioned Marina City.[16] According to Goldberg, it was during this first encounter that McFetridge shared his concern about the growing suburbs and suggested a project that could capture the potential of downtown living: "People move to the suburbs to avoid paying my people the wages that we need to live. If I could persuade people to come back into town to live by showing them a desirable way of living in town, I would like to do that."[17]

The union's interest in housing was at least threefold: many of its members were unable to pay mortgages or even market-rate rents, large housing projects guaranteed the creation of new union jobs, and the need for urban housing promised high returns on investment.[18] While their ambition for Marina City to provide reasonable rental units to a diverse population only partially materialized, the impact of the project's unique connection between workers' interests, population movements, and urban development cannot be overstated.[19] The union had identified that white flight jeopardized downtown jobs, since suburban single-family homes did not utilize the services of janitors, elevator operators, and window washers. Investing in

Figure 3. Bertrand Goldberg explaining the project of Marina City in front of a model to union leader William McFetridge and realtor Charles Swibel. Photograph by Hedrich-Blessing. Courtesy of the Chicago History Museum.

a mixed-use project in downtown Chicago was an ideological statement for Goldberg, while countering suburbia was, for the Janitors' Union, an existential position.

The alignment between the visions of the union and the architect (both imagining a different type of city living) not only altered the urban balance of Chicago and set precedent for concrete construction but also amended insurance regulations, financing procedures, and zoning classifications. At that time, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) only provided mortgage insurance on loans for homes of families with children—a policy that privileged (white) suburban households and disqualified large-scale apartment projects for FHA insurance. According to Goldberg, Chicago's FHA office "conceived of itself as a ruralization force . . . which tried to get people out of the city and into the country."[20] Goldberg and McFetridge, therefore, traveled to Washington, D.C., numerous times at the end of 1959 and the beginning of 1960 in an effort to lobby for no-less than a redefinition of the American family, proposing that it should also include unmarried couples and families without young children. Later on, Goldberg recalls: "We persuaded the federal government … to change their regulations. … The purpose of the FHA was to promote family living with children, and children were always looked upon as sandbox children … [We] got them to change that to a very simple statement—the FHA was for family living."[21]

The investment by the union demonstrated to the FHA that downtown living was desirable if costs did not exceed the rents in social housing and Goldberg prepared a presentation that steered clear of any design implication. He even redrew the scheme, eliminating any curvature and only showing two square towers, in order to keep the focus on the insurance and "not to bring up the issue of the design."[22] This is one example

Figure 4. Marina City under construction, c. 1961. Goldberg Archive. Courtesy of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Figure 5. Photograph of Geraldine Johnson on her balcony. Published in "Life in the Round," *Ebony* (November 1964.

of the team's constant formal and rhetorical recalibrations to meet different stakeholders on their ground. Goldberg's representational skills (even, or especially, when disguising his visionary design as a conventional blueprint) were fundamental in this regard.[23] Ultimately, the FHA insured ninety percent of the mortgage, making it their largest coverage and the first in downtown Chicago. The resulting adjustment in the policy language of the federal mortgage insurance regulations was one of the project's greatest consequences.

For Maria City, the policy adjustment was essential as the entire complex was conceived as an alternative to the predominant single-family home. When asked if children were included in the concept for the project, Goldberg simply replied: "No, not sandbox children. … We took a very specific section of the people who worked downtown, and couples."[24] This focus not only aimed at a rethinking of the definition of family but for Goldberg also made a new kind of economic and racial diversity possible. Only composed of studios, one bedrooms, and two-bedroom apartments—with a majority in the smaller segment—the rental units aimed at workers and professionals and the success spoke for itself. 2,500 applications were filed for 896 apartments. Even through the rents started to increase, records from 1967 document that the occupational background of residents ranged from teachers and secretaries to models and TV anchors, and that it was equally composed in thirds of single men, single women, and couples. Goldberg's determination to streamline the construction processes paid off. (Fig. 4) Deploying cranes that moved up as the construction of the cores advanced; using reinforced mesh that meant less time for tying reinforcing bars; and utilizing polyester resin fiberglass molds that were reused as work progressed, made the project viable and kept rents relatively low.[25]

Making the building accessible to people of lower income was fundamental for Goldberg but he was also fascinated by "at least a dozen people out of the 900 families that moved into Marina City who had at that time incomes exceeding $100,000 a year …. They couldn't replicate that living [in] any other place. So, they moved in and lived cheek by jowl with people that were making $7,000 or $8,000 a year."[26] The Union and Goldberg shared a counter-intuitive interest in keeping rents low but simultaneously making the project profitable. Goldberg understood that their shared view enabled him to experiment with new modes of housing. In the 1992 interview for the Art Institute's Oral History project, Betty Blum asks: "Your background was so different. I'm somewhat surprised that there was anything that you found to connect with

them." And, Goldberg answers: "My background was totally different, but they loved my ideas. They were amused by my innocence to a great extent, and they respected my work. In a measure, it was a perfect combination to build Marina City. It could not have been done by normal real estate or investment people. They wouldn't have touched it."[27] The divergence of backgrounds and cultural references by the collaborators was according to Goldberg exactly what made the project possible. Here, the diversified expertise of architectural vision, labor union interests, and financial foresight made pointed negotiations, targeted messaging, and a visionary design in the early stages of Marina City possible and remained a driver through the construction of the complex.

These differences in view, however, also came at a price. The white, masculine, and predominantly catholic Janitors Union membership easily accepted economic diversity but installed gatekeepers to limit the number of black residents. Instruction to do so, Goldberg believed, came directly from McFedridge.[28] While only a hunch by Goldberg, the statistics expose the union's racism. According to an article in Ebony from 1964, only six black inhabitants rented at Marina City, making racial diversity almost negligible. (Fig. 5) Interviewing and shadowing the grade school teacher and librarian Geraldine Johnson and the real estate broker Albert Gaskin throughout their daily lives at Marina City, the article reports on occasional interactions with fellow renters, who mistook them for personnel. At the same time, it also cites Gaskin, who "had sought similar housing in Evanston and was turned down because of his race. He suffered the same rebuff on Chicago's Northside. Determined to live as near his work as possible, the bachelor ignored cheaper housing further away and accepted a three-room apartment at Marina City."[29] This suggests that despite the union's efforts, it might still have been easier to rent at Marina City than in other housing complexes in and around Chicago. While Marina City's alignment between unions and architecture produced the largest partnership in North America between these entities and resulted in an effective collaboration that projected beyond architectural visions of mass housing and union efforts to organize and bargain for housing justice, the project's agenda has clear limits that are based in its historical, geographical, and urban context.

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In our time of ballooning housing costs, stagnant wages, failed trickle-down economics, and shortages of affordable housing, Hilberseimer's envisioned collaboration with unions in the restructuring of an urban architecture as well as Goldberg's collective efforts and shared responsibilities with unions point towards possible alternatives to conventional narratives in housing, established financial models, and modes private ownership. While architecture and unions have long shared an interest in affordable housing, examples of productive collaborations are rather rare.[30] Both projects go beyond individual urban lots, the nuclear family, and conventional financial structures and might, therefore, help us to articulate new typologies for living that rethink the politics and economies that surround them—shifting attention from house to housing, from individual to social, from private to communal, from restrictive to inclusive forms of dwelling. As they outline a productive relational dependency between architecture and labor unions, they might offer an instructive model for new types of organized, collective involvements in the architecture of housing.

ENDNOTES

1. Ludwig Hilberseimer, Großstadtarchitektur (Stuttgart: Julius Hoffmann, 1927), 21. All translations from German into English are by the author unless otherwise indicated.
2. His notion of a metropolitan architecture was shaped by the art and architectural critic Karl Scheffler, who's early formulation of an Architecture of the Metropolis (1913) would motivate Hilberseimer's writings. On the concept of a "metropolitan architecture" and the influence of Scheffler on Hilberseimer, see Alexander Eisenschmidt's essay "Invention of a Metropolitan Architecture: From the Existing City to Collective Housing," in Hilberseimer – Infrastructures of Modernity, Reihe Bauwelt Fundamente (Berlin: Birkhäuser, 2022) and the chapter "Extrapolation: Urban Spielraum and the Project of a Metropolitan Architecture," in The Good Metropolis: From Urban Formlessness to Metropolitan Architecture (Berlin/Basel: Birkhäuser, 2019). In addition, see Richard Pommer, "'More a Necropolis than a Metropolis' – Ludwig Hilberseimer's Highrise City and Modern City Planning," in Richard Pommer, David Spaeth, and Kevin Harrington, In the Shadow of Mies: Ludwig Hilberseimer, Architect, Educator, and Urban Planner (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago and Rizzoli International Publications, 1988), 16-53; and Richard Anderson, "Introduction: An End to Speculation," in Metropolisarchitecture and Selected Essays / Ludwig Hilberseimer, ed. Richard Anderson, trans. Richard Anderson and Julie Dawson (New York: GSAPP Books, 2012), 15-81.
3. Ibid., 18.
4. Ibid., 22-23.
5. William T. Ham, "Labor Under the German Republic," The Quarterly Journal of Economics, vol. 48, no. 2 (Feburary 1934), 204.
6. After the Halbergerstadter Congress in 1892 legitimized unions once again, the membership grew from 259,000 to 2,500,000 in only twenty years. By the 1920s, membership had reached 13 million.
7. "Article 155," in The Constitution of the German Reich, August 11, 1919, transl. Office of U.S. Chief of Counsel, 26-27.
8. Dan P. Silverman, "A Pledge Unredeemed: The Housing Crisis in Weimar Germany," Central European History, vol. 3, no. 1/2 (March-June 1970), 112-139.
9. While stylistic preferences of union-organized housing varied by location, their concerted effort to collaborate with architects in the tackling of the housing problem is revealing. In the context of Berlin, the modern avant-garde had considerable impact.
10. I borrow the phrase "microcosm of the city" from Alan Colquhoun's definition of superblock. See Colquhoun 1971, 96.
11. Hilberseimer, Großstadtarchitektur, 30-33.
12. Ludwig Hilberseimer, "Großstadtbauten," Neue Architektur (Hannover: Apossverlag, 1925). Here cited from Ludwig Hilberseimer, Grosstadtbauten, Merz 18/19 (Hannover: Merz Verlag, 1926), 28: "The high-rise for living is conceived as boarding house [… where] the single apartments should benefit from the advantages of a collective …"
13. Interestingly, the site is also the first block the original 1830 plat of Chicago, surveyed and drawn by James Thompson in preparation for the lot sales to finance the Illinois and Michigan Canal. Block number 1, on the northern bank of the Chicago River and adjacent to Dearborn Street from its conception, was occupied by some of the city's first white settler-colonizers, was subsequently owned by the Galena & Chicago Union Railroad and the Chicago & Northwester Railroad, and was covered by railway tracks and parking lots until the Janitors' Union bought the land.
14. For a historical analysis of Marina City's connection to the BSEIU, see Igor Marjanović and Katerina Rüedi, "The Deal," in Marina City: Bertrand Goldberg's Urban Vision (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010), 92–105.

15. Bertrand Goldberg, Oral History of Bertrand Goldberg, interviewed by Betty Blum (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 1992), 110.
16. Igor Marjanović and Katerina Rüedi, Marina City (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2010), 41.
17. Goldberg, Oral History of Bertrand Goldberg, 157.
18. The Housing Market Analysis Report of 1959 suggests that at least 39,000 urban housing units were needed at the time. Box 41, folder 11, Special Collections and University Archive, University of Illinois at Chicago.
19. Already by 1961, union members raised concerns about investing their pension, health, and welfare funds into Marina City. This attitude solidified with the recession and the understanding that the rents for the apartments would likely be out of reach for many union members. In addition, a 1964 issue of Ebony magazine noted that only six of the 896 units of Marina City were at the time occupied by Black tenants. Cited from Final Landmark Designation Report, Marina City (City of Chicago, Department of Planning and Development, 2015), 30.
20. Bertrand Goldberg, "4 Bertrand Goldberg," interview by John W. Cook and Heinrich Klotz, in Conversations with Architects, ed. John W. Cook and Heinrich Klotz (New York: Praeger, 1973), 136.
21. Goldberg, Oral History of Bertrand Goldberg, 164.
22. Goldberg, "4 Bertrand Goldberg," 136.
23. Alluding to Goldberg's influential role in rewriting the FHA rules, Sarah Whiting points out, "It would not be a stretch to claim that the condominium building book that redefined downtown Chicago in the decades following the construction of Marina City owes an enormous debt to Goldberg." Cited from Sarah Whiting, "Speculating Beyond Iconicity: Bertrand Goldberg's Urban Project," in Bertrand Goldberg: Architecture of Invention, ed. Zoë Ryan (Chicago; New Haven, CT: Art Institute of Chicago; Yale University Press, 2011), 145–67.
24. Goldberg, Oral History of Bertrand Goldberg, 164-165.
25. Portland Cement, who provided the concrete for the project, would in 1965 release the promotional film This is Marina City. It advertised the cost-saving methods and record-breaking construction speeds of building one floor per day on alternating towers.
26. Ibid., 173.
27. Ibid., 159.
28. Ibid.
29. "Life in the Round," Ebony (November 1964), 107.
30. For an outline on today's union strategies for better housing, see Stephen Lerner and Christina Livingston, "Why Unions Must Bargain for Affordable Housing—and How," The American Prospect (February 2019), https://prospect.org/labor/unions-must-bargain-affordable-housing-and/.