A Brief (but Comprehensive) History of the Chair

This study considers the relationship between the design of chairs and the surprisingly complex human activity of sitting. It argues that the chair, where we spend much of our waking lives, is a very important place—both generic and specific. Each an institution and unique for each person. But the chair has widespread health consequences, contributing to back, hand, shoulder and neck disorders.

Galen Cramer, an architecture professor at the University of California, Berkeley, leads readers through explorations of basic questions like: Where did chairs come from? Why do we continue to sit on them? Why do they look the way they do? And why do we take them for granted? Cramer also questions chair design, examining the interplay of notions of image, comfort and health.

The book presents historical and interpretive social studies that examine the chair as a cultural construction, and it summarizes research findings from the fields of ergonomics, rehabilitative medicine and somatic disciplines that are concerned with the integration of mind and body. It concludes by suggesting how chairs might be reformed (including guidelines for chairs, patches and reclines) and how designers can move beyond exclusive reliance on chairs to rethink the design of interior spaces.

The Chair: Rethinking Culture, Body and Design
Galen Cramer
New York: W.W. Norton, 1996

The Long Walk

Howard University, founded in Washington, D.C., in 1867, has grown from one building to one hundred in response to various institutional needs and circumstances. Three years ago, before embarking on a new master plan, Howard took a long look back—particularly at how the evolution of the physical campus and social activity have intersected over time.

The result is The Long Walk, a generous portrait of the places and traditions that have shaped the campus. It is also a careful study of how the campus's visual and spatial qualities have provided reference points for generations, and other direction for the future. The study was prepared by Henry G. Robinson III, Howard's vice-president for university administration, and Hazel Ruth Edwards, a special assistant to Robinson. Both are Howard graduates and from longtime Howard families.

Robinson and Edwards documented how distinct development periods in Howard's history are articulated through the campus's physical characteristics; they also describe architectural, spatial and social precedents that have remained meaningful over time. One of those is Howard's "Long Walk"—a main north-south path that was once lined by trees and is still, metaphorically, the spine of campus. Their descriptive visual and historical portrait is drawn from university and city records, personal recollections of architects, planners and others, maps, decks, drawings, photos, yearbooks and plans, interviews and observation of campus use patterns.

The study was used as a basis for University 2020: The 1998 Howard University Central Campus Plan, which included a "re-planning" framework that directs the urban design intentions and historic integrity of the campus.

The Long Walk: The Rethinking Legacy of Howard University
Henry G. Robinson III, FAIA, AICP; Hazel Ruth Edwards, AICP