Spanish Colonial: Color and Race in the Architecture of Southern California

This seminar examines several episodes from the history and theory of Latiné culture in the architecture of Southern California. As a vast territory absorbed in the late eighteenth century by the Spanish empire, the urban organization as well as municipal and religious architecture of Alta California was regulated by a colonial system that was already over two hundred years old when it expanded into what is now the United States. With Mexico City, built from the ruins of Mexica Tenochtitlan, as its bureaucratic, political and economic center, New Spain’s colonial architecture would extend via the Laws of the Indies (1573) to the founding of San Diego, Los Angeles, and points northward. The surrender of economic tributes from these territories to the Spanish crown was accomplished through the same codes, following a taxonomic racial apparatus that sorted the populace by their physiognomic features, skin color, and parental lineage; this system would regulate clothing and occupations, sexual and religious lives, and dispossess the vast majority from ancestral lands.

By the 1920s, a century after Spanish power had ceded control to Mexican and, eventually, American governance, the Spanish Colonial aesthetic was cited by architects as diverse as Bertram Goodhue and Irving Gill as amenable to the climate of Southern California and appropriate to the temperament of its residents, a picturesque inheritance from a bucolic colonial past. Indeed, Spanish Colonial architecture would become the very image of history, supplanting the rounded forms of Tongva and Kumeyaay villages and other forms of indigenous land organization throughout the region. Decades later it would expand beyond crumbling missions and Goodhue’s nostalgic municipal and exposition designs and into the maroon and umber interiors of 1970s Spanish Colonial interior décor, organizing the wood-paneled surfaces of television cabinets, the design of talk show sets and the “Spanish Gold”-painted metal creases of the Chrysler Cordoba coupe. Most recently, it perennially appears as a tract development style in contemporary inland suburbs from San Diego to Santa Barbara. Along the way, the beiges, fawns and creams of its plaster surfaces, both ubiquitous and so distinct from the dazzling colors of Mexican architecture, form both a product of and backdrop for the fluctuations of the region’s building industry, which remains one of the main employers of Latiné and undocumented immigrant labor. An architecture that binds colonial imagery to a reliance on a criminalized workforce offers clues to its durable cultural power; indeed we may ask
what it is about Spanish Colonial architecture that makes it particularly suitable to contemporary Southern California.

Our discussions will examine how this particular architecture came to manifest colonial power, to normalize its displacements and violence, and has finally faded into a field of vague monochrome neutrality even as the speed of its production and efficiencies of scale increase. Although the seminar will focus on tracing the historical and contemporary manifestations of this architecture, we will more broadly discuss architecture’s role in European colonial expansion as well as its profound power to normalize the conditions of its formation. The seminar examines not only how colonization was manifested through architecture, but how questions of decolonization can be addressed by examining architecture’s relationship to race, class, gender and sexuality.


Calendar and Reading

Week 1 /Aug 27       Introductory Lecture and Discussion

Part 1: Color Theory

Week 2 /Sep 3        Tenochtitlán
Mundy, Barbara E. Selections from *The Death of Aztec Tenochtitlan, the Life of Mexico City*. Reprint edition, University of Texas Press, 2015.

Week 3 /Sep 10       Spanish Colonialism

Week 4 /Sep 17       Spanish Colonial Architecture in Southern California

Week 5 /Sep 24       Borderland Visit
(Tentative: US/Mexico border visit)

Week 6 /Oct 1  
**Avocado Gold: 1970s Spanish Colonial Décor**

*Submission of paper topic description*

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**Part 2: “Violent” Color**

Week 7 /Oct 8  
**Modern Architecture in Mexico I: Authenticity and Identity**

Week 8 /Oct 15  
**Fall Recess—no class meeting**

Week 9 /Oct 22  
**Mexican Polychrome**

Week 10 /Oct 29  
**Modern Architecture in Mexico II: Watching Mexico in Color**

*Film*
The Olympics in Mexico dir. Alberto Isaac (1969), Mexico.

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**Part 3: Beige**

Week 11 /Nov 5  
**Circulation**
Minca, Claudio. “Geographies of the Camp.” *Political Geography*, vol. 49, Nov. 2015,
Week 12 /Nov 12   The Border

Week 13 /Nov 19   Workplaces
http://whobuilds.org/who-builds-your-architecture-a-critical-field-guide/

Week 14 /Nov 26   Thanksgiving Holiday-- no class meeting

Week 15 /Dec 3   Beige

Presentation and discussion of paper topics

Bibliography
---. “Race and Miscegenation in Early Twentieth-Century Mexican Architecture.” *Race and Modern Architecture*, edited by Irene Cheng et al., University of


Florentine Codex, Book 12, Ch 01 | Early Nahuatl Library. https://enl.uoregon.edu/fcbk12ch01.


Hines, Thomas S. Irving Gill and the Architecture of Reform: A Study in Modernist
Mignolo, Walter D. “Ch. 4 Decoloniality at Large and Ch. 5 The Darker Side of the Enlightenment.” The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options, Duke University Press, 2011, pp. 149–212.
Mundy, Barbara E. The Death of Aztec Tenochtitlan, the Life of Mexico City. Reprint edition, University of Texas Press, 2015.


**Films**

The Olympics in Mexico dir. Alberto Isaac (1969), Mexico.
En El Hoyo. Dir Juan Carlos Rulfo (2007), Mexico.
Course Requirements
This course is a seminar; its success depends on group discussions informed by readings. Students must complete all assigned readings and submit a 1-page reading response each week. During the semester, each student will “co-host” one session with the instructor. In it, the student will present a short (10 min) introduction and summary of the reading with comments on its main arguments. The presentation should include images that pertain directly to the assigned reading and conclude with several questions for discussion. During the course’s final meeting there will be presentations (10-12 mins) and discussion of paper topics and research. At week 10, students will be advised of their performance in the course, determined by participation, reading responses and formulation of the paper topic. Final papers will be submitted at the end of Exam Week.

Final papers will be evaluated by the quality of their thesis, as well as the creativity and clarity of their argument. All papers must be double-spaced and paginated, with footnotes. Captions and credits are required for all images and citations for all reference material should follow Modern Language Association (MLA) format.

Grading
20% reading responses
15% participation and co-hosting session
15% presentation of the paper topic
50% final paper

Grades will be determined based upon quality of work produced, improvement over the course of the semester, completion of class requirements, quality of participation, attendance, attitude and ethical conduct. USC grading policies will be discussed on the first day of class, and any questions regarding grades or policies should be directed to the instructor and/or the registrar. A passing grade in the course requires committed completion of all work. Incomplete work will not be evaluated. Work submitted late will drop one full letter grade each day after the deadline.

Class Policies
The class meets Fridays from 10:00 to 11:50am. Attendance is mandatory at all class meetings. Students can not work on other classes during seminar meetings. All activities that require one to be away should be scheduled to occur outside of class hours. Leaving prior to the end of regularly scheduled class times will result in an absence unless arranged in advance with the instructor.

Attendance Policy
Any student who is absent without an acceptable excuse more than three times during a fifteen-week term will not receive credit for the course. The instructor may view unexcused lateness or departures from class as full absences.

Academic Conduct
USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious
academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity http://equity.usc.edu/ or to the Department of Public Safety http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-publicsafety/online-forms/contact-us. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/ provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems
A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information http://emergency.usc.edu/ will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Religious Holidays
The University recognizes the diversity of our community and the potential for conflicts involving academic activities and personal religious observation. The university provides a guide to such observances for reference and suggests that any concerns about lack of attendance or inability to participate fully in the course activity be fully aired at the start of the term. As a general principle, students should be excused from class for these events if properly documented and if provisions can be made to accommodate the absence and make up the lost work. Constraints on participation that conflict with adequate participation in the course and cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of the faculty and the student need to be identified prior to the drop add date for registration. After the drop add date the University and the School of Architecture shall be the sole arbiter of what constitutes appropriate attendance and participation in a given course. Any student concerned about missing class for a recognized religious holiday should bring this matter up with your instructor at the start of the semester. A list of recognized religious holidays may be found at:
http://www.usc.edu/programs/religious_life/calendar/ 7

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 - 24/7 on call
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255
Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/

Sexual Assault Resource Center
For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: http://sarc.usc.edu/

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX compliance – (213) 740-5086
Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. https://equity.usc.edu/

Bias Assessment Response and Support
Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/

Student Support & Advocacy - (213) 821-4710
Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/

Diversity at USC
Tabs for Events, Programs and Training, Task Force (including representatives for each school), Chronology, Participate, Resources for Students. https://diversity.usc.edu/

USC Emergency Information
Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, http://emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.
Provides overall safety to USC community. http://dps.usc.edu