Allensworth Rising
ARCH 566: Cross Cultural Topics in Landscape Architecture History, 3 units
Faculty: Alison Hirsch, Associate Professor + Director of Landscape Architecture + Urbanism, Director of Landscape Justice Initiative (https://sites.usc.edu/landscape-justice-initiative/)
Tuesdays, 4-6:50pm

The lower Central Valley town of Allensworth was settled in 1908 to fulfill a vision for Black agrarian self-determination – the first of its kind in California. Colonel Allensworth and his partners founded the town to serve as a center for Black economic and agricultural innovation, and a place of refuge and prosperity for Black families to thrive. While the town experienced setbacks created by systemic racism, in 1974 California State Parks purchased 240 acres in Allensworth and operates it as Allensworth State Historic Park where it has restored and reconstructed primary buildings that made up the historic town – the library, schoolhouse, church, hotel, etc.

Today, the living community of Allensworth adjacent to the State Park is comprised of about 600 people and is predominantly Latinx, including many farmworkers living with high levels of economic, health, immigration status vulnerabilities. Despite challenges, the Allensworth Progressive Association (APA) serves as a community development organization and has been pivotal in the securing of $40 million from the State ($28 million to park and $12 million to community) to ensure Allensworth “rises again.” Central to the vision for the future is a cooperative farm focused on the practice and education of regenerative farming.

This seminar will work in partnership with the Allensworth Progressive Association to envision and contribute to the realization of Allensworth’s aspired future. The seminar will cross urban design, policy and planning, history and heritage conservation [including the African-American burial ground], agriculture and regenerative farming, environmental justice, climate and water policy, and community engagement. Students will work with the APA, State Parks, local Native tribes and other individuals and agencies to contribute to the Community Plan that will secure its path toward a thriving future. The course will be built around a foundation focused on Black and Indigenous land practices and communities modeled on care, mutual aid and cooperation.

Students will visit the site twice during the semester in day trips scheduled collectively to ensure least conflict (the site is 2 hours away). Carpools will be arranged so everyone can participate. Students particularly invested in the place have the opportunity to continue as interns during the summer through the Landscape Justice Initiative (https://sites.usc.edu/landscape-justice-initiative/).