The Third Los Angeles Project is a course at Occidental College woven together with a series of public conversations, some held on campus and others elsewhere in the city. Directed by Christopher Hawthorne, architecture critic for the Los Angeles Times, the Third L.A. Project will hold up for scrutiny a city that is moving into a dramatically new phase in its civic development.

As it finally builds a comprehensive public transit system and pays serious attention to its long-neglected civic realm, Los Angeles in the midst of profound reinvention. Or perhaps it’s better to call it a profound identity crisis. Either way, the old clichés about the city clearly no longer apply. This is not the deeply private, car-dominated city it was for much of the postwar period. It is turning into a markedly different kind of place: more (if tentatively) public, more willing to test out various kinds of shared or collective urban space, from pocket parks and bike lanes to light-rail cars and vertical living.

At the same time, it’s important to remember that all of the things that L.A. is struggling to add and in fact grew infamous around the world for lacking in the post-war period — mass transit, places to walk, civic architecture, attractive and innovative multifamily housing — it produced in enviable quantities in the early decades of the 20th century. In the most basic sense, that’s why I am calling this initiative the Third Los Angeles. We are not just entering a new phase. We are also rediscovering the virtues and challenges of an earlier one — and acknowledging the full sweep of L.A.’s modern history.

In the First Los Angeles, stretching roughly from the city’s first population boom in the 1880s, the decade modern L.A. was born, through 1940, a city growing at an exponential pace worked to establish a coherent civic identity. The city built a dense, compact and walkable downtown and a comprehensive streetcar system along with a string of great public buildings (the central Library, City Hall and Griffith Observatory along with movie palaces and the campuses of USC, UCLA, Caltech, Occidental and others) and inventive multifamily residential architecture by Irving Gill, Richard Neutra and R.M. Schindler.
In the Second Los Angeles, covering the period from 1940 to the turn of the millennium, we pursued a hugely ambitious experiment in building suburbia—a privatized, car-dominated landscape—at a metropolitan scale. Our most important and innovative architecture, to a dramatic and new degree, was the detached single-family house with private garden, our most impressive infrastructure the freeway and the channelized Los Angeles River. We used architecture, in efforts like the Case Study program, and promoted by deeply charismatic photographs by Julius Shulman and Maynard Parker, to market a vision of postwar affluence not just to Southern California homebuyers but around the world.

Now we are entering a new phase: the Third Los Angeles. Having run out of room to sprawl, virgin land to conquer, the city is doubling back on itself, constructing more infill development and experimenting with denser housing and vertical architecture. We are finally building a comprehensive and public mass-transit system to match the privately run one of the First L.A.

In its simplest terms the challenge of the Third L.A. is to retrofit the Second L.A. to make it more public, more human-scaled, more open and more easily navigable. That effort has some key lessons to learn from the architecture and urbanism of the First L.A.

In a series of six public conversations, the Third Los Angeles Project will explore and explain this new city. It will help Occidental students (many of them new to Los Angeles) and citizens understand and navigate it. And it will play a key role in setting the agenda for new policies and initiatives in Los Angeles, both political and cultural, that might give it a more intelligent and equitable shape.

This course will teach students how to understand Los Angeles, a notoriously slippery city to get a handle on. It will more broadly teach them how to approach the task of analyzing and writing about cities, architecture and the built environment. It will teach them further to think about the connection between Occidental and official city policy in the realms of urban planning, transportation and land use. And it will finally expose them to the work and approach of an architecture critic at a major daily newspaper.
SCHEDULE OF CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND PUBLIC EVENTS: THE THIRD LOS ANGELES

**Week 1: January 21.** Introductory meeting. Overview of the three L.A.s. Review of syllabus, schedule of public events and assignments.

**Week 2: January 28.** The First Los Angeles. Reading: Mayo, McWilliams.

**Week 3: Feb. 4.** The Second Los Angeles. Reading: McCoy, Banham, Plagens, Davis, Smith, Foster.


**Week 6: Feb. 25.** Recap and analysis of first and second public events. Discussion of City of Quartz in advance of the March 4 meeting. Reading: Davis.

**Week 7: March 4. EVENT: City of Quartz at 25** – A critical view of the impact and controversy of Mike Davis’s *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (published in 1990) and what it means for architects and writers a generation later.

[[March 11 Spring Break]]

**Week 8: March 18.** – Recap and analysis of City of Quartz event. Discussion of LACMA in advance of March 25 event. SHORT PAPER DUE.
**Week 9: March 25. EVENT: The New LACMA** – A debate featuring Los Angeles County Museum of Art director Michael Govan and others on the controversial plan by Swiss architect Peter Zumthor to remake the museum campus.

**Week 10: April 1.** Recap of LACMA event. Discussion on the single-family house and the freeway. Reading: Waldie, Avila, Brodsly.


**Week 13: April 22. EVENT: LA What Do We Want the L.A. River to Be?** A walking tour along the Bowtie Project in the Glendale Narrows section of the Los Angeles River followed by a discussion of the river’s emerging role as public and park space for Los Angeles. *At Clockshop Los Angeles.*

**Week 14: April 29 – Final class. LONG PAPER DUE.**

Assignments: Two research papers on themes related the course, its readings and the public events: one of 4-5pp due March 18 and the other of 6-8pp due April 29. In addition, each student will be responsible for leading the in-class discussion on a single author, as well as writing recaps of each of the public events. (Details provided during class time.) Each student will also be asked to contribute to the public events in at least one significant way: examples include helping run a social-media feed, introducing a speaker, reading a passage onstage or helping promote each of the events or with community outreach.

**Grading.** Your grade in the course will be determined as follows:
--Short paper 20%
--Long paper 35%
--Recaps of public events/discussions: 15% (total)
--Contributions to public events (planning/outreach/onstage): 15%
--Attendance/Contributions in class: 15%

**PLEASE NOTE:** Though many of the class sessions will be taken up with public events, this will be very much be an academic course, with a good deal of reading
required and careful attention paid to the quality of students’ research and writing.

**READING: Along with links above, selections (posted to Moodle) from:**

Avila, Eric. *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City.*
Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles.*
McWilliams, Carey. *Southern California: An Island on the Land.*
Waldie, D.J. *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir.*