

UEP 308

Architecture and the Built Environment/Third Los Angeles Project

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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 if uncertain phase in its civic development.

As it finally builds a comprehensive public transit system and returns its attention to a 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 city it was for much of the postwar period, expanding rapidly and organized around the car, the freeway and the single-family house. 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 many of the things 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 World War II, 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 College 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 1945 to the turn of the millennium, we pursued a hugely ambitious experiment in building suburbia -- a privatized, car-dominated landscape -- at a vast 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.

But there are also fresh challenges that mark the Third L.A. as surely as those new opportunities do. They include the specter of climate change, the decline of manufacturing and industry across Southern California and a political system marked by weak leadership, overlapping constituencies and feeble levels of civic engagement. (And we might add, as this course begins in January 2017, the prospect of open political conflict between L.A. and the new Trump administration in Washington.) Many residents, particularly the beneficiaries of Second L.A. policies favoring home and car ownership, see the evolution toward the Third L.A. not as something to encourage but as something to be anxious about or to fight.

In a series of public conversations during the spring of 2017, 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 offer students a range of ways to analyze 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. It will expose them to the work and approach of an architecture critic at a major daily newspaper.

## **SCHEDULE OF CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND PUBLIC EVENTS**

**Week 1: January 25.** Introductory meeting.

Overview of the three L.A.s. and the conceptual framework of the Third Los Angeles. Review of syllabus, schedule of public events and assignments.

**Week 2: February 1.** The First Los Angeles.

Plus more details on the public events and field trip. Reading: Mayo, McWilliams. Guest: Prof. William Deverell, Director, Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West.

**Week 3: Feb. 8.** NO CLASS

**Week 4: Feb 15.** The Second Los Angeles.

Reading: Avila, Banham, Brodsky, Davis, Foster, McCoy, Plagens, Smith, Waldie. Guest: D.J. Waldie, author, *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir*.

**Week 5: Feb. 22.** The Third Los Angeles.

Reading:

<https://boomcalifornia.com/2016/05/10/christopher-hawthorne-third-los-angeles-interview/>

<https://boomcalifornia.com/2016/12/29/a-boom-interview-in-conversation-with-jennifer-wolch-and-dana-cuff/>

<http://www.latimes.com/la-ca-harbor-boulevard-los-angeles-index-htmlstory.html>; <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/boulevards/la-ca-atlantic-boulevard-los-angeles-index-htmlstory.html>;  
<http://www.latimes.com/la-ca-lankershim-boulevard-los-angeles-index-dto-htmlstory.html>; <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/boulevards/la-ca-sunset-boulevard-los-angeles-index-htmlstory.html>

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-immigration-architecture-full-coverage-htmlstory.html>

[Watch: https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/episodes/third-la-with-architecture-critic-christopher-hawthorne](https://www.kcet.org/shows/artbound/episodes/third-la-with-architecture-critic-christopher-hawthorne)

**First short paper due.**

**Week 6: March 1.**

EVENT: MEASURE S and the politics of housing.

Location: Architecture + Design Museum, 900 E 4th St, Los Angeles, CA 90013.

[[**March 8.** SPRING BREAK -- NO CLASS]]

**Week 7: March 15.**

CASE STUDY: BUNKER HILL.

Reading: Anderton et al., Grand Illusion: A Story of Ambition, and Its Limits, on L.A.'s Bunker Hill.

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-broad-review-20150830-column.html>

<http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-et-cm-womens-march-los-angeles-pershing-square-20170121-story.html>

**DATE TBD in March:** Saturday tour: Landscapes of the Third Los Angeles

**Week 8: March 22.**

EVENT: Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti in conversation with Christopher Hawthorne. Location: Thorne Hall.

<http://www.lamag.com/citythinkblog/real-eric-garcetti/>

<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-newton-column-mayor-garcetti-20140428-column.html>

Paper #1 returned.

**Week 9: March 29.**

EVENT: A conversation with Long Beach Mayor Robert Garcia and Compton Mayor Aja Brown. Choi Auditorium.

**Week 10: April 5.**

Recap of mayors' events. CASE STUDY: THE LOS ANGELES RIVER.

Reading: Orsi; Gandy.

Price:

Part One: [http://www.believmag.com/issues/200604/?read=article\\_price](http://www.believmag.com/issues/200604/?read=article_price);  
Part Two: [http://www.believmag.com/issues/200605/?read=article\\_price](http://www.believmag.com/issues/200605/?read=article_price)

## **Second short paper due.**

### **Week 11: April 12.**

Covering the Third Los Angeles.

Guests: Laura Nelson and Carolina Miranda of the Los Angeles Times.

Paper #2 returned.

### **Week 12: April 19.**

Designing the Third Los Angeles. Guests will include architects and others. Final in-class meeting. Recap of public events, readings and class themes.

### **Week 13: April 26.**

EVENT: The Future of the Silver Lake Reservoir. Location: Choi Auditorium.

## **Wed., May 10: Final paper due.**

**Assignments/expectations. Two short papers** on themes related to the course, its readings and the public events: one of 2-3pp due Feb. 22 and a second of 4-5pp due April 5. **One final paper** of 6-8pp due May 10. The class will collectively be responsible for planning the April 6 panel discussion on campus. Each student will be expected to keep up with the reading and contribute meaningfully to class discussions. Each student will also be asked to contribute to all of 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 #1: 20%

--Short paper #2: 20%

--Final paper: 40%

--Attendance/contributions in class and to panels: 20%

**PLEASE NOTE:** Though four 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. Your attendance at each class meeting and public event is expected.

**READING: Along with links above, selections (posted to Moodle) from some or all of the following:**

Anderton, Frances, ed. *Grand Illusion: A Story of Ambition, and Its Limits, on L.A.'s Bunker Hill*.

Avila, Eric. *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City*.

Banham, Reyner. *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*.

Brodsky, David. *L.A Freeway: An Appreciative Essay*.

Davis, Mike. *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*.

Davis. *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster*.

Foster, Sesshu. *City Terrace Field Manual: Poems*.

Gandy, Matthew. *Riparian Anomie: Reflections on the Los Angeles River*.

Mayo, Morrow. *Los Angeles*.

McWilliams, Carey. *Southern California: An Island on the Land*.

McCoy, Esther. *Piecing Together Los Angeles: An Esther McCoy Reader*.

Orsi, Jared. *Hazardous Metropolis: Flooding and Urban Ecology in Los Angeles*.

Smith, Anna Deavere. *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*.

Waldie, D.J. *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir*.