Urban Imaginaries
Class and Race in the Americas

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Tuesdays 9:00a - 12:00p
Room 2213 A&AB

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar explores contemporary urbanism through the lens of architecture theory, political philosophy and cultural theory. This course focuses on the role of cultural identity - specifically socioeconomic status, race, and national citizenship - in shaping architectural modernism and urbanism from the postwar period to the present. The seminar scopes out new interventions that differentiate modernist architectural production in the Americas - places where the lasting imprint of colonialism, racial capitalism, experiments in democracy, and social upheavals are resonant in built and speculative architecture and urban design projects - from its European counterpart. Cultural differences - emerging in part as a result of competing conceptions of social freedom and nationalism by different racial subjects - have produced counter-narratives to the universalist European aesthetic narrative of the Modern movement. Architectural and urban design work by architects in the United States, Mexico and Brazil - while channelling the imperatives of idealized democracy - also apply architectural ideologies to populations who have come to know and achieve freedom through deprivation and abject violence.

With architecture and space operating as critical mediators of visual and literary imaginations and fantasies, architecture itself emerges as a projective political and theoretical force in social relations. The seminar will deploy theory as a mode of translating and articulating how visual and spatial work operates within the public imagination. The course pairs readings in architecture, political philosophy and cultural theory with works drawn from contemporary art, architecture/urbanism, and film. This seminar will equip students with the following skills:

1) Ability to think critically across the disciplines of architecture and the humanities;
2) Ability to conceptualize cities as part of a larger cultural construct;
3) Ability to synthesize textual, visual and spatial ideas.

The course is organized around four themes outlined below. Themes I and II provide a theoretical frame for examining the import of egalitarianism within the context of architectural modernity and situating the problematic of urbanization within contexts of political governance and liberalism. Themes III and IV examine the signifying systems of spatial and visual language in transmitting political messages.

I. Egalitarianism
II. Egalitarianism and Urban Imaginaries
III. Propaganda and Social Movement
IV. Aesthetic Politics