Considering how little physical evidence of the presence of slavery remains in most North American cities, *Slavery in the City* makes a significant contribution to our understanding of human bondage in the United States. The small number of illustrations is a troublesome defect, especially for readers not familiar with the conventions of architectural history. However, the range of methodological approaches used by the contributors to this collection opens up opportunities for future scholars at other urban slave sites.

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**Note**

Fabiola López-Durán

**Eugenics in the Garden: Transatlantic Architecture and the Crafting of Modernity**

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018, 312 pp., 132 b/w illus. $90 (cloth), ISBN 9781477314951; $29.95 (paper), ISBN 9781477314968

Scholarship on twentieth-century architecture beyond Europe and North America has been adjectivizing modernization for the past several decades. Authors write about incomplete modernization, conservative modernization, and unequal modernization to speak of processes that enriched a few at the expense of the many. In 1995, anthropologist Arturo Escobar’s *Encountering Development* convincingly explained how modernity implies coloniality.1 Inequality and exclusion are not side effects of modernization but inherent conditions of its processes. Architectural historians, however, have not been at the forefront of this way of thinking. Much to the contrary, when compared to sociologists, anthropologists, and even art historians, we arrived late to the understanding that gender, race, and ethnicity are fundamental facets of how we narrate (or do not narrate) our histories of modernization.

*Eugenics in the Garden*, by Fabiola López-Durán, marks a significant step toward rectifying this situation. The book traces Le Corbusier’s connection with eugenic concepts developed around the end of the nineteenth century, showing how racist ideas played a role in the transatlantic materialization of Corbusian spatial proposals in Brazil and Argentina. The author gets right to the point: modern architecture as we know it is much closer to white supremacist ideas than we would like to admit.

The book starts and ends in Paris, taking us on a wild ride of more than half a century, from the 1880s to the Vichy Republic of occupied France during World War II. In her introduction, López-Durán reminds us that “race is a social construction that dangerously legitimizes the conviction that inequality is inevitable. This conviction has justified slavery, apartheid, genocide, and its current politically charged forms of segregation and racism” (17). In her next sentence she zeroes in on Le Corbusier, “the genius of modernism,” who, she asserts, “was clearly influenced by theories of evolution and driven by an allegiance to the white race as a superior normative model that crafted not only his doctrine but also the global doctrine and global forms of high modernism” (17). These are strong words that will have a lasting impact in our discipline. But how does López-Durán craft this argument, and what evidence and documentation does she provide to support it? In fact, she provides ample support from primary sources.

In the book’s first chapter, “Practicing Utopía,” López-Durán addresses what she labels the “medicalization of the built environment.” Much has been written about the relationship between medicine and the newborn science of urbanism during the nineteenth century. But what López-Durán examines here is not so much architects writing about medicine as physicians writing about the built environment. The chapter presents a rigorous review of the work of Francis Galton, the creator of the term *eugenics*, which he derived from the Greek word meaning “wellborn.”

In the second chapter, “Paris Goes West,” López-Durán analyzes how Galton’s eugenics went mainstream in France after the foundation, in 1885, of the Musée Social, an institution dedicated to the study of contemporary societal issues. At the turn of the century the Musée Social brought together a prominent group of professionals, including the physicians Adolphe Pinard and Louis Landouzy and urbanist Alfred Agache. Architect members of the Musée Social designed urban projects for several Latin American cities, including master plans for Guayaquil, Ecuador (André Bérard, 1913), Buenos Aires and Havana (Jean-Claude Nicolas Forestier, 1924 and 1925, respectively), Rio de Janeiro (Agache, 1929), and Caracas (Maurice Ro-tival, 1935). Latin American scholars have known for a while that the region became a laboratory for ideas still seen as unsuitable for Europe and North America. López-Durán offers abundant documentation to support this claim.2

“Machines for Modern Life,” her third chapter, shows how entrenched and institutionalized eugenics became in Argentina. The creation in 1911 of the Museo Social Argentino was rooted in Galton’s idea of combating crime with physiognomy, the practice of measuring facial features to “predict” criminal instincts. López-Durán saves her strongest punch for the fourth and final chapter, “Picturing Evolution.” She begins the chapter by noting that Le Corbusier has been discussed from almost every conceivable angle save that of his professing allegiance to eugenics. Reading her book and seeing the wealth of evidence she presents, one cannot avoid the realization that the architect’s racial beliefs have been overlooked or neglected by many of our most celebrated colleagues. As a discipline we must ask why this has been the case.

It is well known that Le Corbusier used Latin America to test his architectural and ideological beliefs. According to López-Durán, between his first trip to Latin America in 1929 and his second in 1936, his discourses were centered on the racial and sexual other, the primitive, nature, and death” that he found across the Atlantic (154). Many documents included here shed new light on Le Corbusier’s belief in eugenics as a solution for Latin America. A page from one of his famous sketchbooks contains a drawing of a humble Afro-Brazilian man beside the words “Acheter livre Carrel” (*Purchase Carrel’s book*)—a reference to the 1935 book *Man, the Unknown* by Alexis Carrel, recipient of the
1912 Nobel Prize in Medicine. Carrel’s writings of the 1930s often touched upon the “degeneration” of contemporary humanity and proposed the elimination of those who might impede the continued improvement of the human race. These are ideas more commonly associated with Nazi Germany than with an architect-hero such as Le Corbusier. Here is López-Durán’s checkmate move. She writes, “It was in Rio during that summer of 1936 that Le Corbusier publicly aligned with Carrel’s eugenic ideology, establishing a direct connection between Carrel’s ideas and his own” (158). This statement is supported by several documents: a letter from Carrel to Le Corbusier dated 31 August 1937, a postcard dated 1942, and Le Corbusier’s notes on Carrel’s lecture of 19 February 1943, a moment when both men were collaborating with the German-aligned Vichy Republic.

Little of this will be entirely new to informed historians, yet somehow much of López-Durán’s evidence has been neglected or submerged for many decades. For instance, she features two of Le Corbusier’s drawings of the Ministry of Education in Rio. One is of the original unbuilt proposal of 1936, the other was done at the end of World War II and was based on a photograph—sent to Le Corbusier by Lucio Costa—of the completed building. Seeking to claim authorship of a magnificent structure built in Brazil before he could do anything on a comparable scale in Europe, Le Corbusier backdated the latter drawing, making it appear to have been made in 1936 and published soon after. These are the sorts of seemingly minor details that we overlook all the time, until we decide to stop doing so.

Fabiola López-Durán decided not to overlook such evidence, and this is the most significant contribution of Eugenics in the Garden. She rigorously analyzes primary documents pertaining to the exchange of ideas among France, Brazil, and Argentina to illuminate processes and exclusions that we can no longer avoid. In her words, “Eugenics, which in the early twentieth century was used to justify the exclusion of Africans, Asians, and even immigrants from southern and eastern Europe in an attempt to normalize a patriarchal society, ideally white and heterosexual, is now reactivated, and with it, racism and segregation have once again been officially legitimized” (190).

Ideas such as those that motivated the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville in August 2017 often seem as if drawn from the dustbin of history and are frequently dismissed as extremist outliers. In fact, such ideas have long been far more widespread and common than we might like to admit. According to Arturo Escobar, modernization has always benefited a white male heteronormative minority, to the exclusion of the majority of people on our small planet. The surprise is how little we have discussed this fact in architectural scholarship. In this regard, López-Durán’s book is a timely and powerful contribution to the slow dismantling of a Eurocentric and sometimes—directly or indirectly—white supremacist history of architecture.

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Notes


Catherine Seavitt Nordenson
Depositions: Roberto Burle Marx and Public Landscapes under Dictatorship
Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018, 336 pp., 20 maps, 161 b&w illus. $45 (cloth), ISBN 9781477315736

Roberto Burle Marx is well known for his innovative, abstract, tropical modernist landscape designs, and for his advocacy in protecting Brazil’s natural landscapes and exotic flora. His first commission, completed in 1932 with the architects Gregori Warchavchik and Lucio Costa, marked the beginning of his many collaborations with Costa and, later, Oscar Niemeyer. Burle Marx’s designs are widely admired and have influenced many subsequent landscape designers around the world. His work has been celebrated in numerous exhibitions, including recent shows at the Museum of Brazilian Sculpture in São Paulo and the Jewish Museum in New York. Catherine Seavitt Nordenson’s Depositions: Roberto Burle Marx and Public Landscapes under Dictatorship interrogates Burle Marx’s legacy, exploring the nuances of his role as a designer, conservationist, and public figure working under Brazil’s dictatorial military government, which lasted from 1964 until 1985.

Nordenson analyzes eighteen position papers, or depositions, that Burle Marx presented and published from 1967 to 1974 while serving on the advisory board of the Ministry of Education and Culture and as a member of the Federal Council of Culture. Addressing issues of land conservation and the ecological devastation of Brazilian landscapes, Burle Marx generally opposed the government’s strategy for national development. Nordenson provides a thorough analysis of his papers, using them to examine the often-contradictory historical, political, and social circumstances of Brazilian life during the repressive anos de chumbo (years of lead)—the regime’s most brutal period but also an era of unprecedented economic growth, one remembered by many as the milagre economico, or economic miracle. Even as intellectual and creative communities were persecuted or fled the country, Burle Marx voluntarily collaborated with the dictatorship as a cultural adviser, demonstrating both his hope for change and his consent to repressive rule.

Burle Marx’s situation prompts Nordenson to reflect on the frequently complex and conflicted positions of design professionals working under dictatorial regimes, and to consider how aesthetics can blind us to the troubling circumstances underlying many prominent modernist landscapes and buildings. She reminds us that Niemeyer, having left Brazil in these years because of his Communist Party affiliation, nonetheless returned frequently to manage his ongoing work at the new capital city of Brasilia. Burle Marx also produced several projects there for the military government, including landscapes for the Ministry of Foreign Relations (1965), the Ministry of the Army (1970), and the National Accounts Tribunal (1973). He owed his appointment to the Federal Council of Culture, Nordenson explains, to alliances with some of the most powerful figures in Brazilian politics. He and Niemeyer were hardly alone in their collaborations with the dictatorship. Artists and intellectuals such as Gilberto Freyre,