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The Manifest Narrative

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

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Honors Capstone Project in Architecture

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Abstract

I posit that architecture can serve to expose the vital immigration, labor, and consumption processes underlying food production in the United States through a clear narrative made evident by techniques of sequence, mimesis, and composition in a functional monument containing an Immigration Advocacy Center, Community Garden, and Farmer's Market for the city of Sacramento.

In architecture, narrative is the observation, interpretation, and implementation of ideas developed through stories. The architect formulates an observation about something in a society that exists or should exist in the form of a story, finds a time and place where the narrative is applicable, and uses architectural techniques to express this interpretation.

This project uses the narrative architectural tools of sequence, mimesis, and composition to guide immigrants and the broader public through the sequence of interrelated programs, evoke familiar contemporary symbols through mimesis, and participate in the creation of meaningful public space and the artful composition of the city of Sacramento.

Architecture that can express culturally relevant narratives is able to benefit society by making issues apparent and accessible to the public. This project demonstrates how architectural tools can be implemented to provoke this change.

Sacramento, California marks the greatest point of overlap between the four processes of this American Narrative (Immigration, Labor, Transportation, and Consumption). Therefore, this is the right place for the project to expose this narrative and function as a vital interface between different socio-economic groups with the intention of promoting public understanding of and participation in the production of food and the importance of immigration.

The site is the Capitol Park in Sacramento. This is centrally located within the city, is essential to a formal urban promenade of governmental buildings and monuments, and is near the commercial center. These factors make this an ideal site for a symbolic monumental work of architecture that has the capacity to manifest this American Narrative.

Here, I am designing a functional monument containing a community garden, market, and immigration advocacy center. It will connect consumers of agricultural produce with the means of production and will promote an acceptance of and appreciation for the immigrant workers who support our economy.

The mission of this project is important because consumers are currently isolated from the producers, a situation which enables legislation that excludes and criminalizes the very individuals who support and sustain agricultural food production in the United States. This project takes a critical stance toward this isolation and exclusion, embodies a significant American narrative in a habitable monument, and benefits the city of Sacramento with communal programs and a more culturally complex and productive public space.

This thesis project is about exposing the vital processes of immigration, labor, and consumption involved in food production in the United States by articulating this system as a narrative, manifested through a functional monument for the city of Sacramento.

Executive Summary

The United States is a Nation of Immigrants. A central part of the myth and narrative of the United States is based on the historical patterns and phases of various immigrant populations, their struggles, and their assimilation into the diverse culture of the United States.

Each of these successive waves of immigration, however, has met with strong resistance by the existing population, a phenomenon that has persisted to the present day. This dual nature of this American narrative is reflected in the simultaneous existence of the Statue of Liberty, as a symbol of welcoming, and the ever-growing U.S.-Mexico border fence, as an adamant sign of isolation.

While the immigration narrative in all its complexity is often acknowledged in theoretical terms, the practical importance of continuous immigration to the economy of the United States is treated as a separate societal issue. In fact, the United States' agricultural production depends heavily on the supply of migrant workers, almost entirely made up of immigrants. Due to the inconsistency of this work, farm owners hire immigrants who, unlike most people born in the United States, are willing to live without a permanent address, endure the physical labor, and who are in need of the opportunity, even if it is unstable.

I posit that architecture can serve to expose the vital immigration, labor, and consumption processes underlying food production in the United States through a clear narrative made evident by techniques of sequence, mimesis, and composition in a functional monument containing an Immigration Advocacy Center, Community Garden, and Farmer's Market for the city of Sacramento.

This project conflates programs associated with different economic groups in a way that reveals their social relationship. The Immigration Advocacy Center, Community Garden, and Farmer's Market that it houses will become vital to the city of Sacramento as a functional monument. A functional monument is a meaningful structure that can be occupied for a specific program; it describes a monument that is not viewed in the round but that a visitor is immersed in as they experience the narrative that it describes. It connects consumers of agricultural produce with the means of production, promoting an acceptance of and appreciation for the immigrant workers who support our economy.

The architect has a great potential to construct meaning through the interpretation and implementation of culturally relevant stories and events, or those that have been passed down through history, and which still evoke clear images, emotions, and symbolic meaning in a given culture. The culturally sensitive architect deploys not only forms and technologies,

but also symbols, which are defined as “a thing that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract” (Oxford Dictionaries 2013). These symbols are established through stories, which are made familiar to the cultures that participate in an oral or written tradition. There are numerous architectural devices used to indicate narrative. The purpose behind expressing a narrative, whether it is to teach religion, promote a political view, to intimidate, or to encourage, often influences the way in which the narrative is conveyed; everything from the subconscious organization of a plan to the straightforward display of a symbol can indicate the presence of narrative in an architectural work.

The role of narrative in architecture has existed for as long as architecture itself; since the first architect, Daedalus, created the labyrinth in Crete to hold the Minotaur, buildings have been a representation and reminder of the stories that inspired them. Narratives define architecture by providing a system of associations, symbols, and deep cultural meaning by which a building can be interpreted and understood; the Hindu Bull, the Christian Cross, and the Jewish Star of David each have particular connotations specific to the cultural and religious narratives they participate in.

There are many culturally relevant stories in contemporary society: Biblical Parables, Greek Myth, The Iliad and The Odyssey by Homer, The Divine

Comedy by Dante, Folk Tales, Fairy Tales, and Urban Legends. People are taught stories by parents, peers, religious following, and public media. These narratives work not in isolation, but form the rich tapestry of law, religion, tradition, poetry, song, and expression that comprises the diverse, yet often interconnected, oral and written cultures of the world. One of the most important cultural narratives in the United States today and throughout history is immigration in the land of opportunity. How an architectural framework manifests this narrative – whether in an impenetrable wall defining the countries border or an image of welcoming known world-wide – defines what the connotations of this narrative are and how it is considered nationally and internationally. While tall fences and intense patrolling at the U.S.-Mexico border are meant to establish security for Americans, this is inconsistent with the promise of Lady Liberty, a symbol that represents the ideals of freedom and opportunity:

“Give me your tired, your poor,
your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me.
I lift my lamp beside the Golden Door!”

Consumerism and immigration each define the United States in their own way, but are mostly viewed as unrelated. They are intrinsically linked,

however, through the U.S. economy; the sequence from immigration to labor, transportation, and consumption form an essential American narrative.

Agriculture in the United States is strongly dependent on immigration. The expression of a comprehensive narrative would promote a more just and equitable society; in this culture of consumers, the individuals who buy agricultural goods at a grocery store and the immigrant migrant workers who labor to generate the agricultural products are divided. There is a geographical and temporal split that has obfuscated the relationship between consumers and producers in the United States. Agriculture and immigration are interdependent parts of a system founded upon mutually beneficial processes that form a more complete American narrative for both immigration and consumerism.

The narrative of immigration in the land of opportunity does not represent our nation fully. By comprehending the interdependence of immigration, labor, transportation and consumption, the United States will be better able to accommodate present and future immigration and its citizens will have a deeper appreciation for the immigrants and laborers that have always worked towards our nation's prosperity.