



Research article

Decolonising the curriculum: US Study Abroad: London Architecture and Urbanism – Albertopolis, South Kensington

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Abstract

This article focuses on ways of decolonising the curriculum of a one-semester London Architecture and Urbanism course taught differently across several US Study Abroad programmes in London. These introductory courses took place in the seminar room and out in the field. With the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a greater focus on teaching in open spaces. The courses are principally structured around the capital's key public developments. Many of the sites have an older historical antecedence. They were largely built between the mid-eighteenth century and the opening decades of the twentieth century during the time of the Empire and the Industrial Revolution. While the Empire has gone, London continues to transmit ideas revolving around the cultural hegemony of a politically, economically and socially superior nation through its urban histories. These histories are sometimes explicit, but are more often hidden, as they become subsumed into London's evolving cityscape. On this basis, introductory architectural courses that outline the city's development, by default, recapitulate the

values of British cultural imperialism. This article examines how London's architectural history and imperial visions can be re-evaluated through the lens of a culturally responsive teaching and learning study abroad platform.

Keywords decolonising the curriculum; US Study Abroad; London; architecture; British cultural imperialism

Introduction

The impact of COVID-19 in Britain from the first lockdown on 23 March 2020 resonated across the political, economic and social spectrum. Higher education saw teaching and learning migrate from the seminar room and lecture hall to the digital and the virtual. On this basis, the pedagogical model became more entrenched within universities' online learning management systems. Another major event followed, this time concerning the global issues and internal tensions relating to historic racism when, over the weekend of 6–7 June 2020, several Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests were held simultaneously across British cities. The BLM protests were in response to the killing of George Floyd, a Black male, by Derek Chauvin, a White Minneapolis police officer, on 25 May 2020. Ben Okri suggests that Floyd's dying words, 'I can't breathe', correlated so directly with the deadly symptoms of COVID-19 that it created a visceral response within the public to 'the ubiquitous and implacable nature of institutional racism'.¹ The impact of Floyd's death hit a deep nerve in British society which started to question its colonial past. In Bristol a statue of Edward Colston (1636–1721), a Member of Parliament, philanthropist, merchant and slave trader, was defaced, toppled and thrown into the River Avon. In the following weeks the national narrative regarding Britain's history, heritage and education came under increased scrutiny. With the Academy's antecedence dating to the Ancient Athens of Plato, its core vision was interrogated. However, the debate was not new, nor were the issues that were being raised.

Prior to the events of 2020 there was an ongoing call to overhaul the ideological basis of the Academy. As Kehinde Andrews asserts: 'University curricula are overwhelmingly Eurocentric, providing a narrow framework of knowledge through which to view the world. Issues of race and racism when taught tend to be marginalised as something additional, extra, a disposable luxury.'² The question is: will the Academy respond by widening its curricula, ensuring that diverse staff and student ratios are at acceptable levels, and continue to send its employees on a range of cultural awareness and related courses? Or will it address the underlying issues of unrestrained bureaucracy, systemic racism, ongoing sexism and the growing area of reverse ageism? To do so, the Academy will need to undertake a forensic approach to the basis of its agency and respond with a fresh and relevant educational strategy for the twenty-first century. The issue with implementing this kind of top-down social action is that it will invariably become a lengthy bureaucratic process involving reports, debates and review committees. Alternatively, smaller and more immediate actions can be undertaken from the bottom up. This article identifies one alternative approach by focusing on Boston University Study Abroad's (BUSA) London Architecture and Urbanism course, which was designed to be taught in the seminar room as well as out in the field. With the onslaught of COVID-19 there has been more reliance on using digital tools in conjunction with teaching in the field. Apart from these shifts, the course structure remains the same.

The London Architecture and Urbanism course is offered as an open elective that enables students to undertake a different subject area from their main academic field to broaden their curriculum. On this basis the elective attracts students from a range of academic disciplines, many of whom may have no prior knowledge of the subject and may never have written an essay. Given the plethora of learning backgrounds, the aim is to create an equitable learning platform. The main challenge is in the course subject matter – how to decolonise the curriculum of a course that focuses on London's (contested) heritage and (critical) history as well as more modern and contemporary developments. This dilemma forms the main research question of this article, which responds to this conundrum by drawing on pedagogical and study abroad research, contested histories and critical heritage studies. It begins by discussing what study abroad is in terms of its core vision, and how, drawing on the example of London, the city location is a key factor in choosing a programme. The final section explains how the architectural history of London is embedded within the rhetoric of cultural imperialism and does so by drawing on the

case study of Albertopolis. What is explored in this Kensington area is how a particular vision of Britain in the nineteenth century has since changed.

Study abroad

'Historically, study abroad has been caught up in the pursuit of high culture. Throughout the late nineteenth century and during the twentieth century, it was primarily an outgrowth of the Grand Tour, which began in seventeenth-century England, where aristocratic young men were sent to European capitals to complete their classical education.'³ If studying abroad began as a pastime for the privileged male elite, it is a far cry from the less well-off students who desire to study within a different cultural context from their home university. While study abroad originally catered for the Humanities, it has been overtaken by the Social Sciences, with key areas developing in business and management. A further feature of study abroad is that it is becoming professionally valued, thus enriching a student's curriculum vitae. Its contribution to the student's development is why 'companies view study abroad experience as an advantage'.⁴ The overall attraction for students is that it provides the opportunity to study, live and work as an intern in a foreign city, while earning academic course credit outside their home institution. The study abroad figures were incrementally rising until the pandemic hit in 2020. In Spring 2022 the numbers are again returning, which means that providers are marketing their assets to students. For example, BUSA advertises itself as a provider of 'world-class internship and study abroad programs'.⁵

The core aim of all Study Abroad programmes is to offer 'a stimulating, thought-provoking, experiential, outcomes-based curriculum in one or more subjects or disciplines designed for a specific cultural context'.⁶ Alongside the Study Abroad programmes, the main allure is the city in which they are located. London, which has been marketing itself from time immemorial through its representation in literature, images, songs, history, heritage and more, is a major attraction. The students have, therefore, expectations of what it is, how it works and what it might look like. Those enrolled on the London Architecture and Urbanism course can test these expectations through their first-hand encounters with the city. The issue in the pedagogical model, however, is that when they witness contemporary London, they are also seeing the ambitions of a much older city. They continue to be represented in the city's physical and non-physical assets, which include its historic urban fabric.

Clusters of the study abroad centres are also located in London's historic areas, including Bloomsbury and Kensington. BUSA's headquarters at 43 Harrington Gardens, SW7 4JU, in South Kensington, uses its location to explore the local area, which is reflected in the syllabus outline. Lecture One: Introduction and Albertopolis (South Kensington); Lecture Two: Classical Overview (British Museum and Bloomsbury); Lecture Three: Royal Parks: From Private to Public Spaces (St James's Park to Regent's Park); Lecture Four: The City (Museum of London to Tower of London); Lecture Five: Westminster (Westminster Palace and Westminster Abbey); Lecture Six: Renaissance and Neo-Classical London (Covent Garden to Somerset House); Lecture Seven: Battle of the Styles (Westminster Cathedral to the National Gallery); Lecture Eight: Railways and Industrialisation (King's Cross Central to The Stables Camden); Lecture Nine: The Age of Optimism (South Bank to London Bridge) and Lecture Ten: Contemporary and Review (Crossrail to St Pancras).⁷

The syllabus structure and other Study Abroad syllabi that examine London's development face the same issue of 'interpretative problems in imperial history'.⁸ The question is: how to communicate this history through a contemporary and equitable lens? What is important is neither to negate nor to play down these urban histories. It is not even to make them accountable; what matters is to identify and understand them. While the imperial legacy may appear less explicit today within the London cityscape, it nonetheless exists. There are other areas of the imperial legacy that have also become subsumed and neutralised within their existing environments to the extent that they are virtually overlooked – the key one being the English language. Due to the global propagation of English, there is no language barrier for US students studying in London. Over two billion people presently speak English as their first language. By overall number of speakers, it is also the largest language to be spoken and the third-largest by native speakers. When second-language English speakers are included, the estimates vary – at the upper end this is estimated to be more than two billion people. What is important is that English is more than a language, it is an ideological system. Within the five core English-speaking Anglosphere nations, the USA has approximately 254 million first-language speakers, the United Kingdom has 60 million, Canada 26 million, Australia 17 million and New Zealand 4.8 million.

What bonds these English-speaking nations together is an older Anglo-Saxon culture that continue to share social, cultural, educational, diplomatic and military links with one another.

Centered first on London and then on Washington, D.C., the Anglosphere has dominated international politics for the world for the past 200 years, perhaps longer. Its agents – companies, empires, states, nations – colonized and industrialized large swathes of the planet and moved millions of its inhabitants, often by force. They also acted as the market and lender of the last resort, the guardian of the reserve currency, and the bulwark against various revisionists and revolutionaries. As a result, the world has now gone Anglobal.⁹

If the Anglosphere relationship has sometimes been strained, in a post-Brexit Britain it has returned to the centre stage. In June 2021, negotiations were under way for a UK–Australia Free Trade Agreement. In September 2021, the UK, USA and Australia created AUKUS, a trilateral security pact to counter Chinese offensives, with the possibility that New Zealand may later join. Along with military and trade links, education is a key service that is exchanged through US universities and UK centres, as well as others in Australia, New Zealand and Canada. While many students enrolled in US universities are nationals, a growing number have dual nationality. A smaller number have citizenship outside the USA. Whatever their nationality they are all required to have passed an English-language admission exam. Once the students fulfil their language and Grade Point Average (GPA) requirements, they are eligible to enrol on a Study Abroad programme.

Ways of seeing

The London Architecture and Urbanism students are taught the technical tools for contextualising history, styles and developments; of equal importance are the theoretical concepts. A useful way of understanding these in relation to the classical style, which is a key ingredient of so much of London's historic development, is through the work of the Roman author, architect, and civil and military engineer Marcus Vitruvius Pollio: 'In architecture, there are these two points: – the thing signified, and that which gives it its significance.'¹⁰ Vitruvius provides the pedagogic scaffolding to understand what the architecture was intended to communicate and why it was important. The question is – what is important? Is it the building, the patron, the people who use it or the bigger vision? Official public buildings are always about the bigger vision of the city and nation's ambitions. How can these narratives be viewed from a more culturally responsive teaching platform that interrogates, rather than passively responds to, the historic architectural programmes? A further challenge is that much of the official architectural literature contributes to 'a patrician reading of imperial history'.¹¹ The publications which focus on alternative approaches that follow a social argument usually begin on the premise of having some prior knowledge of the subject. The other issue is in shifting the focus for introductory architecture students into another area, which detracts from their learning process. This does not mean excluding these literatures, but sensitively using them when they are relevant and appropriate to the topic in question.

A further point is that London is in the British Global North, and much of the literature is produced by authors in this area. However, this is not a simplistic geographic division, as the Empire also extended to the Global South. What does need to be taken into consideration is that this Study Abroad programme does not have the same scope as home institutions that target groups and teach more diverse areas. For example, UCL's guidelines for working with Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students identify the need to 'present a diverse range of voices and perspectives across course content' and 'to draw on knowledge produced in the Global South'.¹² This is not yet within the realm of these Study Abroad courses; however, the alternative is to work with the materials that are available, which means interrogating the existing literatures. This also involves identifying the cultural and historical contexts in which the architecture and urban environments were produced and, crucially, identifying that much of it was built during the Empire when racial inequality was acceptable. Outlining these issues provides a robust two-way forum for the students. Furthermore, there is the call for students to see themselves reflected in curricula. However, this is not always possible, and nor is it the point. Walking into a Holocaust exhibition does not require that students, or indeed any visitors, be represented in what they see. What matters is that they understand why, and that what they are seeing is important. Similarly, with architecture produced during the time of the Empire it is important to understand the vision that

created it and the need for its educators to 'present different strategies' in the teaching and learning environment.¹³

The question is: if the architectural and urban environment represents British nationalism that is rooted in the Empire, which has now gone, does it still matter? On this trajectory, Jack Black argues for 'a re-centering of the relationship between empire and nationalism'.¹⁴ In Britain there is a complex relationship with the concept of nationalism. To address this debate would mean identifying who belongs to it, and whether the narrative is the same for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – or is it particular to England, and London? In light of Brexit, the lens is again on nationalism. However, this is not the issue, as it thwarts the real problem, which is imperialism. To teach the London Architecture and Urbanism course from an anti-nationalist viewpoint would not make sense or enable clear arguments. Teaching the course from an anti-imperial perspective through the themes of colonialism, wealth, division, urban decline and social inequity is understandable and explicit. In doing so, the set course is delivered, and the students are equipped with the tools and necessary skills to understand the complexity of what they are seeing. Presenting these kinds of debates requires critical thinking which gives the students agency to participate in their own learning and become equal shareholders in the teaching and learning environment.¹⁵ Creating a holistic and congruent learning platform, which does not end when the class is over, involves the students reading and researching the topics in their independent study time. They are required to participate in an architecture blog and to comment analytically on the images they upload. They are also recommended to undertake independent learning by visiting different parts of London, and other British cities, to explore diversity in the built environment and to think independently about the relationship between society and architectural design.

Albertopolis and South Kensington

A useful way to examine the course curriculum is through the session on Albertopolis, which includes its cultural and educational institutions, as well as related developments. They include the pedestrian South Kensington Subway (1885), which was created to provide access to the buildings of Albertopolis. The 1,420-foot-long subway runs from South Kensington station and under Exhibition Road. Its construction was overseen by the Engineer-in-Chief Sir John Wolfe Barry with JS McCleary on behalf of the Metropolitan District Railway. The South Kensington Subway is Grade II listed and is registered as 'a relic of South Kensington's function as an international exhibition centre, of the application of engineering methods to create a new means of managing foot traffic in a brand new quarter of London, and in the development of "Albertopolis" – a unique and internationally important complex of cultural and educational amenities'.¹⁶ The class session on Albertopolis begins by discussing the inception of the Kensington area, dating from the purchase of Nottingham House by King William III and Queen Mary II. As discussed, the Jacobean house was retained when the architect Sir Christopher Wren added three-storey pavilions at each of the four corners and turned it into a red-brick Dutch-style building. The later Queen Anne extensions, along with the work of the architect William Kent's elaborate state apartments for King George I, are also identified in turning the building into a palace, which became known as Kensington Palace. An outline draft is provided of the building's works, as well as the reasons for its Grade I listing and for the surrounding Kensington Gardens also having heritage status.¹⁷

A vision for the nation

What is important about Kensington Palace is that its Hanoverian Royal line led to it becoming the birthplace of Princess Victoria, who lived there until her accession as Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1837. Queen Victoria married Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha in 1840, which began his bid to raise his status from Prince Consort, and to realise a bigger ambition for the nation. After the Industrial Exposition of 1844 in Paris, the British government created the Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851, with Prince Albert as its president. Along with Henry Cole, and other members of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, he oversaw the implementation of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations. Despite 'all nations' forming part of the official title, what was created was a massive public relations operation in Britain, asserting its primacy.

The Great Exhibition was seen as a celebration of Britain's achievement, its positive transformation to the stage where it could build a palace of prefabricated glass and iron to display the preeminence of its own industry over the rest of the world. Among other things, the Exhibition thereby justified Britain's move towards free trade.¹⁸

The building that Sylvi Johansen identifies as 'a palace of prefabricated glass' was the Crystal Palace.¹⁹ While Robert Harbison discusses the Industrial Revolution as 'the great century of unchecked self-expression in stone and brick', the building that defined it – the Crystal Palace – was constructed out of neither of these materials.²⁰ The building's pre-cast panes of cast iron, plate glass and wood, was certainly the product of machine precision and speed. From the final acceptance of the Crystal Palace's design on 26 July 1850, to its construction and opening on 1 May 1851, it took just over nine months to complete. The Crystal Palace was the first flat-pack building – on an industrial scale. The designer Joseph Paxton was a Member of Parliament, an engineer, architect, gardener and greenhouse designer for Chatsworth House. His Crystal Palace was a massive greenhouse with a floor area of approximately 990,000 square feet. The building was 1,848 feet long and 408 feet wide, with a central transept height of 108 feet, which presented the largest area of factory manufactured transparent glass walling in any building of the time. The scale of the Crystal Palace was emphasised by the trees that it enclosed and the 13,000 exhibits it housed. The spectacle was enhanced through the museum-like precision of its internal organisation with the exhibition areas of Raw Materials, Machinery, Manufacturers and Fine Arts. Guy Debord states that spectacle was about the 'social relationship' between people and objects.²¹ This was demonstrated by the fact that by the time of its closure on 15 October 1851, six million people had visited the Great Exhibition, then equivalent to one-third of Britain's population.

An insight into the Great Exhibition and the Crystal Palace is provided in the original source material. George Routledge & Co. published their own guidebook which states: 'The great Industrial Exhibition of 1851 will stand out in history as one of the most important events in the progress of society. No other event, up to this period, has extended its interest over so large a surface as the globe.'²² While the trade event offered the international exhibitors a platform to showcase their goods, it provided Britain with the opportunity to assert its industrial advances. The building was referred to as the 'Industrial Palace' in light of the machine-produced goods that were on display, and because of the industrial construction of the building.²³ Ultimately, the Great Exhibition was about promoting trade, while endorsing the nation's political values and foreign policies through the soft power of appeal and attraction. What followed was an economic success which saw a surplus of £186,000 in profits being generated. The modern equivalent would be approximately £20 million; however, this does not equate to the relative value of the figure at the time. The buildings created with the £186,000 included the Victoria and Albert Museum (now the V&A), the Natural History Museum and the Royal Albert Hall, with some funds later going to the construction of the Science Museum, and more. Twenty million pounds today would not be enough to establish even one of these institutions on a like-for-like basis.

Building Albertopolis: the architecture of the Empire

Under the recommendation of Prince Albert, 86 acres of land in the Brompton area of Kensington, to the south of the Great Exhibition in Hyde Park, were purchased to create a centre of imperial learning. Maxine Stephenson asserts that 'education was a key site through which notions of empire were to be disseminated'.²⁴ What underpinned the imperial vision was that 'Britain's superiority was a given'.²⁵ If the Great Exhibition was a demonstration of the hard power of the Industrial Revolution, then Albertopolis was the soft imperial power of 'attraction and persuasion'.²⁶ Albertopolis included many educational institutions such as Imperial College, the Royal College of Art, the Royal College of Music, the Royal Geographical Society and the Royal Institute of Navigation. While some of the smaller institutions later became subsumed into other organisations, or entirely disappeared, the ones that remain are impressive, for their scale as well as their educational and cultural reach. The institution that combines these areas is the V&A, which began as the Museum of Manufactures. After the Great Exhibition closed, several display objects became part of the founding collection of the Museum of Manufactures in 1852, which opened at Marlborough House before transferring to Somerset House.

When the collection outgrew its Somerset House rooms, temporary iron structures were erected on the Cromwell Road in Kensington, which were known as the Brompton Boilers. They were also unable to provide sufficient space for the collection.²⁷ Under the supervision of military engineer Captain Francis

Fowke, permanent buildings were constructed which opened as part of the South Kensington Museum in 1857. The North and South Courts opened in 1862. Fowke worked with other architects, engineers and designers, with a separate studio of decorative designers, headed by Godfrey Sykes. Fowke died in 1865 and Sykes in 1866 with their studios continuing in the 1870s and 1880s. An architectural competition was held in 1891 to create a coherent scheme for the buildings, which led to the appointment of Aston Webb. Under Webb a new entrance was created on the Cromwell Road, its ornate façade with classical detailing constructed out of red brick with stone and terracotta dressings. Behind the façade, the new buildings included long galleries extending along Cromwell Road, an octagon and the architectural courts. Inaugurated in 1899 by Queen Victoria, the name was changed to the Victoria and Albert Museum. While the VA emerged as a bastion of industrial design, for its first Director Henry Cole it was also a place of learning. One of Cole's core decisions was that it should have late-night openings so that working people could visit in the evenings.

Changing points of view

One of the points raised in the course session is that, despite the scale of the buildings that form Albertopolis, it lacks the grand gesture of other nineteenth-century city developments. When Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann was serving as prefect of Seine (1853–1870) he remodelled medieval Paris into an imperial vision on behalf of Emperor Napoleon III. London did not have the same kind of autocratic leader as Napoleon III, nor did (or does) it have a masterplan. The dilemma of Albertopolis, which is reflective of the rest of historic London, is that it is essentially an ad-hoc set of buildings assembled around or near Exhibition Road. This point is explored by David Gilbert and Felix Driver, who argue that London is best 'understood as a public expression of the particular character of different national imperialisms [and] relative lack of a monumental cityscape as the manifestation of a distinctively British imperialism of liberalism and free-trade'.²⁸ The authors propose that the idiosyncrasy of the capital's architecture reflected the *laissez-faire* economic trade model of the time. On this basis, big business, rather than an aristocratic ambition, was the cornerstone of the Great Exhibition. If *laissez-faire* economics was replicated in architectural design (and a lack of desire to intervene by creating grand designs), the same rule appeared to apply to its patrons. Following Albert's death in 1861, the term Albertopolis fell into disuse, with the area being referred to as South Kensington. Sir George Gilbert Scott's *Albert Memorial* (1872) garnered less than favourable reviews when it opened, which continued into the following century. As Nigel R. Jones asserts: 'Twentieth-century critics derided Sir George Gilbert Scott's spiky Gothic ciborium (canopy) built (1862–1872) as too gaudily Victorian.'²⁹ While this was about the heavy design of the monument, it was also a reflection on the ambitions of Prince Albert.

Conclusion: changing pedagogy – changing visions

Since the *Albert Memorial's* restoration in 2006, it is possible to see the elaborate gothic canopy above the bronze gilded statue of Prince Albert, who is seated and reading a copy of the Great Exhibition catalogue. At each of the four step corners of the monument are groups of figures representing Europe, Asia, Africa and the USA, where Britain had, or had held, colonies. The Albert Memorial represents a vision of Britain that has since changed, and which was given greater momentum with the events of 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic and George Floyd's death on their own would have been powerful catalysts for change but combined created a new way of thinking about Britain, society, cities, architecture and education. One outcome directly related to the pandemic is that it created a greater reliance on online learning. Despite this, 'pedagogy-driven activities' remain at the hub of 'technology-driven processes' rather than the other way around.³⁰ What is evident is that the main core educational strategies have become more entrenched. Active learning remains at the centre of the teaching and learning platform through reflection-based activities within the seminar room and field trips. Blended learning is delivered through face-to-face and online activities, which include the architectural blog, as Jared Keengwe and Joachim Jack Agamba assert: '[students] prefer technology to play similar roles in their learning the way it does in their lives'.³¹ A further educational strategy is the case study, which, as with Albertopolis, provides the opportunity to survey the entire development of an area, from the application of a theory, the Great Exhibition, to the final design, Albertopolis.

What the London Architecture and Urbanism course indicates in its revised form is a greater emphasis on discussion-based teaching and learning through the students engaging in critical thinking about complex issues. Exploring social issues in relation to architecture, weighing up evidence and testing propositions enables students to reach their own conclusions. This promotes equity and inclusivity and gives them a stronger sense of their own identity. Finally, experiential learning is at the core of the teaching model, which provides the students with the opportunity to directly encounter the architecture and urbanism. It is a highly effective educational strategy in broadening the students' analytical skills. Overall, transparency is integral to delivering the London Architecture and Urbanism course, which includes presenting the original architectural programmes as they were intended to be seen, and showing how and why these visions have changed. The aim is to engage the students in a different way, from existing, and sometimes linear, architectural histories. The objective is to unpack and decolonise the curriculum within a culturally responsive teaching and learning platform. It is important to uphold that 'cultural study and cultural adaptation are independent mechanisms through which people are changed'.³² Students are only changed through authentic transformative educational interactions, which means interrogating all aspects of the Study Abroad programme. Arguably, the students are the descendants of the Grand Tour travellers and while they may no longer be exclusively elite or male, they are privileged in having the opportunity to study abroad.

As an addendum, from the ground up what can be overlooked is that study abroad is part of a much wider global and political network. In autumn 2021, the US government made a renewed commitment to international study that acknowledged the role its partners and allies were making in becoming fierce competitors with their own international programmes. 'While the United States remains the top host nation of international students in the world due to its quality of education and diverse offerings, other countries, including our closest partners and allies, are now aggressively competing with the United States to host those students.'³³ For the US government, the idea of nation remains at the core of the pedagogical model. For Study Abroad programmes in Britain, the idea of nation is under consideration. A further consideration is time. When the statue of Edward Colston (1636–1721) was thrown into the River Avon in 2020 it was in response to a growing tide of rage over racism. The statue was originally erected in Bristol city centre in 1895, almost 175 years after his death. Its installation made explicit the attitudes of late Victorian society to trade and slavery and was produced in the same century as Albertopolis. The vision of British cultural imperialism was more than the imposition of its political or economic dominance; it was about legitimising what should never have been legitimised. Architecture, urban environments and monuments act as legitimising zones and they are never neutral. For this reason, it is essential to contextualise them within the time they were produced and to examine why these visions have needed to be changed.

Notes

¹Okri, '“I can't breathe”: Why George Floyd's words reverberate around the world'.

²Andrews, 'Blackness, Empire and migration', 701.

³Lewin, 'The quest for global citizenship through Study Abroad', xiv.

⁴Petzold and Peter, 'The social norm to study abroad', 886.

⁵<https://www.bu.edu/abroad>.

⁶Pasquarelli, 'Defining an academically sound, culturally relevant study abroad curriculum', 35.

⁷This section of the London Architecture and Urbanism course was taught from September to December 2021 by me with modifications due to the pandemic.

⁸Ballantyne, 'The changing shape of the modern British Empire', 429.

⁹Vucetic, *The Anglosphere*, 3.

¹⁰Pollio, *The Ten Books of Architecture*, 5–13.

¹¹Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*, 49.

¹²UCL, *BAME Awarding Gap Project Staff Toolkit*, 11.

¹³Ambrose et al., *How Learning Works*, 211.

¹⁴Black, 'The United Kingdom and British Empire', 19.

¹⁵<https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/culturally-responsive-teaching-strategies/>.

¹⁶Historic England, <https://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1392462>.

- ¹⁷London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, and The Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, *Townscape and Visual Analysis*, 7.
- ¹⁸Johansen, 'The Great Exhibition', 59–60.
- ¹⁹Johansen, 'The Great Exhibition', 59–60.
- ²⁰Harbison, *Eccentric Spaces*, 23.
- ²¹Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 7.
- ²²George Routledge & Co., *A Guide to the Great Exhibition*, 1.
- ²³Hunt, *Synopsis of the contents of the Great Exhibition*, 5.
- ²⁴Stephenson, 'Learning about empire', 24.
- ²⁵Stephenson, 'Learning about empire', 24.
- ²⁶Nye, 'Soft power', 1.
- ²⁷<https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/building-the-museum#slideshow=31131014slide=0>.
- ²⁸Gilbert and Driver, 'Capital and Empire', 25.
- ²⁹Jones, *Architecture of England, Scotland, and Wales*, 223.
- ³⁰Štuikys, *Smart Learning Objects*, 8.
- ³¹Keengwe and Agamba, *Models for Improving and Optimizing Online and Blended Learning*, 2.
- ³²Cho and Morris, 'Cultural study and problem-solving gains', 945.
- ³³US Government, 'Reengaging the world to make the United States stronger at home'.

Declarations and conflicts of interest

Research ethics statement

The authors conducted the research reported in this article in accordance with Boston University standards.

Consent for publication statement

The author declares that research participants' informed consent to publication of findings – including photos, videos and any personal or identifiable information – was secured prior to publication.

Conflicts of interest statement

The author is Guest Editor of *Architecture_MPS* 21 this article is included in; all efforts to sufficiently blind the author during peer review of this article have been made. The author declares no further conflicts with this article.

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