Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation
A4105 Advanced Architecture Studio V Fall 2018
Richard Plunz, Critic
Jonathan Kirschenfeld, Associate Critic

NEW PARADIGMS FOR A RESILIENT VIEQUES

Vieques, Playa Caracas*, May 2018*

> *If as Julio Ortega has argued, 'whatever happens in Puerto Rico .... will be a rehearsal of what's going to happen in Latin America;' in the same manner we contend that whatever happens in Vieques will be a rehearsal of what's going to happen in Puerto Rico.*
> Luis Galanes Valldejuli, *Tourism and Language in Vieques* (2018)
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> *'We need reinvention not reconstruction..."*
> quoted in Naomi Klein, *The Battle for Paradise* (2018)

Vieques is a small island adjacent to the main island of Puerto Rico, with a population of about 9,000. It took a direct hit from Hurricane Maria on September 20 of 2017, a Category 4 storm that left over 400 homes destroyed and hundreds more damaged. Now, one year later, large questions remain about the processes of rebuilding. Under consideration is not only short-term return to some form of "normalcy," but also potentials for a radically new approach to resources and quality of life. This studio presents opportunities to engage several scales within the Vieques spectrum: to include immediate rebuilding needs while researching longer-term options for reinvention and the opportunity to develop innovative design responses at manageable scales. Innovation on Vieques will have the potential to reverberate on the Puerto Rican mainland and on other Caribbean islands.

Vieques can be described as a "colony of a colony." Whereas mainland Puerto Rico is heavily dependent on imports from the mainland United States, Vieques depends almost completely on the big island for energy, water and food. Now, in our Post-Maria thinking, aspects of the island's peripheral existence can represent opportunity. Given that Vieques is a small community on a small island, changes can allow Viequenses to have greater control over their destiny. Such is the hope of many in the Vieques community and is the utopic aspect of this studio challenge: how to imagine and visualize the potentials of

Vieques and how to empower the local community to "re-imagine Vieques" as a new kind of self-sustaining environment. This question will be integrated with the highly pragmatic aspect of our challenge, which has to do with the remaining immediacy of addressing the partial or complete destruction of homes.

Our core concern will be the study of housing and related livelihood futures for Vieques. Working within a coalition of local officials and experts, families and local students, our studio team will evaluate existing housing needs and options for residents, with particular reference to the constraints of post-Maria FEMA and HUD recovery efforts. From this starting point, we will attempt to create a new recovery strategy for the island that better addresses development potentials. The end product will be the design of new resilient housing prototypes and correlated community nodes. **Three scales** of design exploration will be pursued:

1. **First** is engagement with the **HOUSES** and needs of **LOCAL RESIDENTS**, who are still experiencing immediate housing difficulties and have aspirations for re-imagining their lives and livelihoods. We will examine a group of 8-12 houses. This exploration will inform the demonstration **HOUSE DESIGN**(s) to be proposed by each student. Low density single-family housing is the predominant model on the island. Given the small, shrinking population, this is unlikely to change. Land ownership is highly valued, especially given a history of expropriation by the US Navy. Existing conditions provide an opportunity to create housing that challenges the dichotomy between urban and rural, man-made and natural.
2. A **second** core design concern is to examine several **SITES** available for innovative community design options within the village of Isabel Segunda and periphery (6-10 site options). This exploration will inform a **COMMUNITY NODE DESIGN** to be proposed by each student. This aspect of the studio will focus on undeveloped municipally-owned sites that may become a locus for public functions that improve community resilience. This may be accomplished by increasing food security, improving communication networks, bridging divisions between native Viequenses and newcomers/tourists, or addressing other aspects of community needs.
3. A **third** core design concern is to research long-term resilient **BUILDING SYSTEMS** with regard to climate considerations and to address questions of ecology, resources, and identity. This exploration will inform a **BUILDING COMPONENT DESIGN** to be proposed by each student. This scale of design will provide the opportunity to address building and maintenance as a process in which the act of construction is as important as the building itself to the Vieques community. And it will point to the need for radically rethinking of the long-term nature of building systems to address resiliency in the face of intensified present and future ecological challenges.

Vieques community client and partner organizations will work closely with the studio both for the field study and design development components. Included are: the Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust, the Municipal Government of Vieques, Hope Builders and the Institute for Puerto Rican Culture. On the Columbia side, this initiative stems from collaboration with the Earth Institute Urban Design Lab.

Field Study in Vieques will be as follows: Arrival **Sunday, September 23** and departure **Saturday, September 30**. Semester schedule is below:

Week 1-2 Preparation of base survey materials and background review
Week 3 Vieques Site Survey (in Vieques)
Sept 23-29 SITE VISIT
Week 4-6 Processing Survey/Initial Program. Design development
Week 7 Progress Review and Report (with Vieques representatives)
Oct 25 MIDTERM REVIEW
Week 8-9 Housing design prototyping
Week 10-13 Overall design development: community node and building component scales.
***Nov 6 pre*-FINAL REVIEW** (with Mark Martin Bras, Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust)
Week 14: Final Review and Report Preparation
December 12 FINAL REVIEW (with Vieques representatives)