

Title: Hidden Power and Built Form: The Politics Behind the Architecture

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Abstract:

Emeritus Professor in the Department of Linguistics & Philosophy at MIT, Avram Noam Chomsky is amongst the world's most cited living scholars. Lauded as the 'father' of modern linguistics and instigator of the 'cognitive revolution' he was voted the "world's top public intellectual" in 2005. He is, however, best known, and at his most controversial, in the fields of political criticism and activism. Perhaps the most prolific author alive today he has engaged with issues ranging from the Vietnam War, US policy in South and Central America, what he calls the 'US-Palestinian-Israeli problem', the Spanish Civil War and the Indonesian invasion of East Timor, to name but a few. The scope of his thinking is nothing short of immense.

Despite this range of subjects, however, one area that Chomsky has not discussed is the built environment. Here, for the first time he is asked to consider the contemporary infrastructure of the United States in the context of his writings, criticism, and thought. In doing so, he discusses the military infrastructure crossing large swathes of the southern United States in the form of the US-Mexican border. He also discusses urban sprawl as a product of what he calls "social engineering"—a project conceived and orchestrated by a sophisticated web of affiliations across the government and the private sector. Caught up in this, he also pinpoints the subprime crisis and the current economic recession as the result of a matrix of forces within which architecture inevitably played a role. In short, he offers his particular perspective on what lies behind some of America's most conspicuous architectural and infrastructural projects.