

## Sample Historiographical Review

This assignment, which you will do a few weeks after the proposal is returned to you (check the deadline on the syllabus) requires you to read 5 secondary books and/or articles on your topic to get a sense of what scholars have said about it. Summarize their major arguments in two or three paragraphs. You should see this as the beginning of your research and as a time in which you can refine, redirect or even change your topic.

### Research Question

What are the historical origins of the colonial Latin America plaza? Where did Spaniards and Portuguese get the idea to build cities centered on open, public spaces?

Low, Setha M. *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000.

This is an excellent book that describes both the European and indigenous influences on the urban plaza in Latin America. While Iberia did not have any real plazas, and the Moors did not use them, there were some in France and some beginning in Italy, and these roots seem to go back to the Romans. In fact, even in Spain, in Madrid in particular, they started building plazas in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, that is, long after America had been discovered and plaza-centered cities had been built there. The author also examines the commonness of plazas in Indian cities, from places as varied as the Caribbean and central Mexico. She speculates that Indian cities may have had as much impact on Iberian town planning as Europe, which is stunning to me, and I imagine controversial. The Spanish never admitted as much.

It is no doubt true that Indian cities such as Tenochtitlan had central plazas as well as gridded streets. They were found in Maya cities, both ruins and those contemporary to the conquest, although the plazas were not often square, and also in southern Mexico cities of the Zapotec. Cuzco, built in a narrow valley, is somewhat gridded, but did have a central square larger than the Spanish square that still survives there. Hence, New World cities might have set a precedent for Spanish American cities. If many knocked down temples and built cathedrals in their place, it also makes sense that plazas, places of power and ceremony, would also be co-opted by the conquerors. The Indians ordered social hierarchies around the plaza, palaces of the rich closest to the square, and the poor lived progressively further as they got poorer. This too was practiced by the Spanish. I wonder if the Spanish practiced this in Spain. If not, that seems good evidence that Indian cities influence the existence and use of the plaza in Spanish American cities. She uses Tenochtitlan and Merida as examples, and while she never proves the influence of Indian towns on Spanish, she does prove they had that potential.

[Do the same as above for 4 more books or articles, focusing on those pages or chapters that deal with your intended topic. Consider revising your question based on what you've learned. Based on my reading of the above book, I might refine and narrow my topic as follows.]

### Revised Research Question

What impact did the urban designs and public spaces in indigenous cities in America have on the construction of plazas by Spaniards and Portuguese in America.