

COOP
DESIGN
RESEARCH

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M.S.C.
PROGRAM

DECOLONIZING DESIGN:

TOWARDS A POSTCOLONIAL RE-READING OF ASSIGNED
TEXTS FOR AN INTERIOR DESIGNS HISTORY COURSE AT AN
ART AND DESIGN UNIVERSITY IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

Interior design students lack opportunities for sustained critical reflection. The evolution of design history as a discipline from an art history model to a material culture model has created the space to engage in critical reflection. However, less attention has been paid to the utility of postcolonial theory for the design history course, especially as it relates to critical reflection. This thesis demonstrates how postcolonial theory could be applied to an interior design history course. By examining the reading list of a History, Theory, and Criticism I course using a contrapuntal approach, I extracted relevant themes from each book in order to underscore the dominant narrative embedded in these texts, as well as reveal the hidden concepts that could serve to provide students with a broader understanding of the linkages between design and culture, with the effect of informing their studio projects. I argued that these oft-concealed concepts, once revealed, would help students become more responsible designers, which in the long run contributes to a respectful design culture as defined by Elizabeth Tunstall. Finally, as a result of my analysis, I recommend three concepts: hegemony, the 'other', and agency that could be introduced to class discussions, accompanied by a post colonial reflectionnaire to guide students in their reading of the texts.