

UCSC Archaeology and Biological Anthropology Lunch Talks  
Wednesday, October 21<sup>st</sup>, 12:00 Noon  
**Zoom Registration Information coming soon!**

# Cooperation and the Great Houses of the Island Capital of the Calusa

**Victor D. Thompson**  
*Department of Anthropology*  
*University of Georgia*

Recent work at Mound Key, the Capital of the Calusa Kingdom, identifies large structures on top of one of the largest mounds that likely was associated with a powerful long-lived lineage or “house.” The rise to power for this group coincided with a significant amelioration of the shallow-water estuarine environment of Estero Bay during the Warm Medieval Period into the Little Ice Age. This time frame also saw shifts in technology that allowed for the large-scale capture and management surplus of fish harvests. The social and technological histories of Mound Key indicate that these prominent houses did not occur in a vacuum and the complex political system that emerged among the Calusa required high degrees of cooperation and trust in leadership, as well as the collective management of public goods. This talk examines how successive members of this powerful house were able to transmit political and social capital. The political and social mechanisms at Mound Key may provide insight into the functioning of Calusa society prior to the sixteenth century. The broader landscape may have been organized much like the great houses were at the community level--a series of small polities that participated in a fluctuating heterarchical and perhaps cooperating system.

