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Been, Where We Are Going

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GAME CHANGERS

FORUM JOURNAL ARTICLES
THAT HAVE MADE
A DIFFERENCE, 1987-2012

Cultural Diversity in Historic Preservation: Where We Have Been, Where We Are Going

TONI LEE

My 1992 *Forum Journal* essay on cultural diversity in historic preservation was part of a special issue devoted to the diversity topic. It followed the 1991 National Preservation Conference held in San Francisco, Calif., that marked the 25th anniversary of the National Historic Preservation Act. This conference identified diversity as one of the major forces that would shape not only historic preservation, but all aspects of American society in the next quarter century. This projection was based on the demographics resulting from changes in United States immigration policy dating back to the mid-1960s.

Accordingly, the succeeding National Preservation Conference, held in 1992 in Miami, Fla., focused on diversity. The 1992 conference also inaugurated the offering of scholarships to diverse attendees. For the 1992 *Forum Journal* essay, I reviewed more than 70 abstracts submitted to the National Trust in response to its call for papers for the Miami conference. These abstracts represented the experiences of dozens of preservationists who undertook diversity projects or made astute observations about the cultural heritage of diverse communities.



What is different today? The subject of diversity is no longer an edgy topic in the historic preservation field. It is part of the mainstream of historic preservation goals and objectives as well as projects and programs. Much more work is being done with diverse historic places and in cooperation with diverse communities. However, when viewed within the totality of the historic preservation field, the number of diverse historic properties that are officially recognized and preserved still constitutes a small percentage of the total activity.

The ideas presented in my earlier essay point the way toward overcoming this gap. More official recognition should be given to intangible culture, beyond just American Indian tribal historic preservation programs. Yet historic preservation tools remain fairly static; few adjustments have been made to established criteria and standards in order to accommodate cultural differences and the priorities of cultural groups. In order to meet the cultural heritage needs of the nation's diverse population, the field needs to "recalibrate" its current tool box and develop new approaches in partnership with the nation's cultural groups.

Few topics in contemporary American life have so gripped the public's attention as has "cultural diversity." The topic is prominent in daily newspapers, on television, and in the vehicles of mass advertising. It is physically evident in many hometowns where cultural groups either congregate in definable ethnic communities or live among other groups, producing neighborhoods in which dozens of languages are spoken. To travelers, other parts of the country take on a new character as growing populations of immigrants who arrived on our shores in the past quarter of a century are incorporated.

A term of recent vintage, "cultural diversity" generally is used to denote the changing ethnic composition of the

United States through immigration of individuals from Latin America, Africa, the Caribbean, or Southeast Asia and their concentration in certain states and cities. The emergence of such ethnic groups with long roots in American society, as Africans and those from certain Asian groups to positions of public prominence, bolsters the perception of the growing diversity of the nation.

Localities in which ethnic changes are the most pronounced will certainly witness a change in the balance of political power that will influence all other aspects of the community. A recent article in *The New York Times* reflects the tenor of the times: It reported that New York politicians are reaching out into "uncharted territory" in pursuing the votes of the foreign born, "who could one day be as much a force as the turn-of-the-century immigrants who gave political muscle to the Democratic machine of Tammany Hall and gave city politics a decidedly Irish cast."¹ This profound change inspires both fear

2012 marks the 20th anniversary of the diversity scholar program at the National Preservation Conference. To date, more than 1,200 scholars have received scholarships to attend the conference. Pictured here are attendees at the 2011 conference in Buffalo.

PHOTO: NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

and confidence. It causes concern about the effects of a churning ethnic mix in disadvantaged urban areas but also serves as a reassuring reminder that the nation was founded upon, and endured, despite diverse cultural antecedents.

Awareness about the diverse nature of the American population permeates nearly every sector of American society. Cultural diversity is infused into deliberations surrounding educational

national unity became, instead, the occasion for questions about who discovered whom, the Europeans' domination of the native peoples, the devastation of disease brought by the Europeans, and the cross-currents of cultures between both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

Cultural diversity has also influenced the historic preservation field. At the 1991 National Preservation Conference held in San Francisco cultural diversity

emerged as a key trend of the future that the preservation movement must address. The

THE PROGRAMS AND TOOLS of the past quarter of a century to increase cultural diversity in the historic preservation field continue today.

curricula, employment practices, immigration policy, and urban-revitalization proposals. Commentators express worry about citizens labeling themselves as "hyphenated Americans" and wonder if the nation can remain united in the face of ethnic pride.

During the past decade, the subject of cultural diversity has entered the national discourse because of the results of the 1990 United States census. Analysis of the census produced compelling visual images of changing national demographics. Whereas minority groups were decidedly a minority of the American population at one time, in a few decades the aggregate of minorities will become the majority. At the local level the census explains many of the dynamics in our cities, towns, and rural areas.

The Columbus quincentennial further fueled the debate on cultural diversity. It generated a national discussion about the motivations of the Europeans during the Age of Discovery and their treatment of indigenous cultures in the Americas. What was envisioned as a celebration of

topic is the focus of the 1992 National Preservation Conference, which will be held in Miami. No doubt, cultural diversity will figure in some way in preservation conferences, publications, and programming for years to come.

This article lays out subthemes within the topic of cultural diversity. It is based largely on the more than 70 abstracts submitted to the National Trust for Historic Preservation in response to the call for papers for the 1992 conference distributed to the historic preservation community in the fall of 1991. While the abstracts represent the experiences and activities of the individual abstract writers, as a group they also reflect the status of cultural diversity in the historic preservation field. Additionally, the abstracts rest on the very substantial foundation of a quarter of a century of efforts by the historic preservation field in attaining cultural diversity.

BUILDING ON THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE PAST

The full dimensions or limitations of the term "cultural diversity" are yet to become clear. It covers the history of "minority"



Our definition of what “diverse” means has expanded greatly in the last few decades. In 1999, the Stonewall Inn, the scene of important events that sparked the modern struggle for the civil rights of LGBT Americans was listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

PHOTO: NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

and ethnic groups in the nation from the American Indians who inhabited the Western Hemisphere to the Spanish, English, and French explorers and settlers in the Age of Discovery; the experience of the African-Americans throughout American history; the arrival of the Germans and other European groups during the 19th century; the influx of Eastern and Southern Europeans and Asians at the turn of the century; and the recent arrival of Southeast Asians, Hispanics, Africans, and those from the Caribbean region.

The historic preservation field made initial forays into cultural diversity

in the 1940s and the 1950s with the addition to the National Park system of two properties associated with Tuskegee Institute. The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s and the emergence of the “new social history” in the historical profession expanded the scope of the historic preservation movement. For at least a decade before the celebration of the American bicentennial in 1976, hundreds of commemorative local historical studies were undertaken, and the seeds of cultural diversity in historic preservation were sown.

Heightened awareness and appreciation of ethnic and local history resulted in additions of more African-American properties to the number of National Park Service units during the 1960s and 1970s. Many more minority-related

properties were designated National Historic Landmarks. Major outdoor and historic house museums developed minority-history dimensions to their interpretative programs. Historic preservation agencies at the federal, state, and local levels sponsored surveys of ethnic-related historic properties and nominated eligible properties to the National Register of Historic Places, state registers, and local landmarks and historic districts lists. Conferences on minority preservation were convened to build bridges between minority groups and historic preservation programs.

THE STUDY OF VERNACULAR RESOURCES—often buildings, structures, and landscapes—reveals ethnic and cultural threads that can be traced to Old World sources.

The programs and tools of the past quarter of a century to increase cultural diversity in the historic preservation field continue today. However, the increased cultural diversity of the nation during the 1980s has spurred preservationists to new heights of endeavor. Those workings in the field are aware that without a meaningful involvement of cultural groups in the historic preservation process, the preservation will not enjoy solid public support that translates into political action.

DOCUMENTING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The survey of potentially historic properties constitutes a common early step in many preservation endeavors. The process of surveying frequently raises the consciousness of citizens about significant properties in their locality. Survey information may be used for planning

purposes and for preparing nominations for listing in the National Register or state registers and for local designation of properties important to cities, towns, counties, and rural areas. Listing entails recognition and some protection, particularly at the local level where zoning regulations come into play. Listing serves as a threshold for tax incentives and grant programs at all levels of government and in the private sector.

THE LOCAL HISTORY CONTEXT

The focus on local history and local historical significance, one of the great leaps forward taken by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, has sparked an awareness of ethnic and cultural diversity. The 1966 act directed state historic preservation offices to conduct comprehensive surveys, many of which unearthed information about ethnic groups that settled in urban neighborhoods and rural enclaves. Preservationists cite community studies as preparatory to uncovering cultural diversity in local historical settings.

The documentation of the North Brentwood community in Prince George's County, Maryland, by Susan G. Pearl is a representative example of a local survey that resulted in a greater awareness of cultural diversity. The project revealed that the community was founded by Captain Wallace A. Bartlett, a white man who commanded the colored troops from Maryland during the Civil War. In 1892 Bartlett planned a black residential community at the time of the reunion of the veterans of the colored troops. Such community institutions as churches, schools,



The preservation and conservation of intangible elements of the nation's cultural heritage, such as music and crafts, are important components in telling the history of diverse communities. Here the musical heritage of the Arkansas Delta is celebrated at the King Biscuit Blues Festival.

PHOTO: ARKANSAS DELTA RURAL HERITAGE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

businesses, citizens' and firemen's associations served to bind together the subdivision and encourage its development into the 20th century.²

VERNACULAR RESOURCES

The study of vernacular resources—often buildings, structures, and landscapes—reveals ethnic and cultural threads that can be traced to Old World sources. These threads become interwoven with the forces of necessity—climate and available building materials, for example—to produce vernacular forms. Vernacular studies also embrace the gradual absorption of distinctively ethnic forms into mass-produced popular building types made desirable by lower costs and by the inhabitants' willingness to conform to the mainstream of American life.

For example, Dena Sanford documented the Korpivaara community in central Montana, an isolated collection of Finnish log homesteads and related agricultural land. Each bore "character-

istics of the Northern European building forms, uses, and farmstead organization." Located in an area experiencing economic decline and obsolescence, the community's resources serve as a challenge to preservationists concerned with finding viable uses for historic buildings.³ A group of properties associated with the Korpivaara community recently was listed in the National Register of Historic Places as part of a multiple property nomination.

THE USE OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL RESOURCES

Intangible cultural resources present preservationists with additional sources of documentation for tangible historical resources during evaluation and registration processes. Some preservationists also view intangibles as resources that can be appreciated quite apart from physical places because they are as compelling a reflection of culture as tangible resources. As Elizabeth Morton stated when describing her efforts to organize a folklife track at the annual California Preservation Conference, "The primary goal is...to encourage preservationists to expand their definition of cultural stewardship to include a stronger focus on [the collection, recording, and interpretation of] intangible resources."⁴ Patricia L. Parker and Thomas F. King suggest that options for addressing traditions and lifeways include broadening the scope of the National Register of Historic Places, establishing a parallel "register," and including consideration of traditions and lifeways in public agency planning.⁵

Cultural conservation was a concept developed in the report, *Cultural Conservation: The Protection of the Cultural*

Heritage of the United States (1981), a joint effort of the Secretary of the Interior and the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. It addressed the preservation and conservation of intangible elements of the nation's cultural heritage, such as arts, skills, folklife, and folkways.⁶ This concept was adopted in the Maine Acadian Culture Survey coordinated by C. Ray Brassieur. The study

family or clan to succeeding generations. "Every piece of oral history and cultural tradition is considered extremely valuable and thus is safeguarded tightly within the soul of the individual keepers." The sacredness of these traditions often frustrates researchers who are intent on documentation.⁹

The conflict between the desires of cultural groups to preserve proper-

ties significant to them and the risk to those sites if culturally sensitive information is revealed about

them is a concern of Elizabeth A. Brandt. On the basis of her experience with Pueblo Indian and Apache communities, she contends that techniques exist for "understanding, preserving, and respecting the religious and political concerns of Indian communities while still providing adequate documentation using oral history, ethnography, documentary history, and photography."¹⁰

HOLISTIC APPROACH

Addressing cultural diversity in historic preservation requires preservationists to understand what "history" and "culture" mean to various cultural groups. The definitions most often do not coincide with those of what is termed the "mainstream" American or the "dominant" culture. For example, Roger Anyon describes the Zuni Archaeology Program as "holistic" in approach. The multifaceted strategy toward cultural heritage is oriented toward "holistic historic and cultural preservation goals of the Zuni Tribe." One of the projects involves the development of a museum oriented to community

ADDRESSING CULTURAL DIVERSITY in historic preservation requires preservationists to understand what "history" and "culture" mean to various cultural groups.

of the French speaking Acadians in the Upper St. John Valley of Maine addressed the importance of language, ethnic identity, traditional belief systems, vernacular architecture, and material culture.⁷

Jazz is a musical form that originated in an area known as Congo Square in New Orleans, La. Jane S. Brooks traced the history of jazz from Congo Square, where slaves and free persons of color gathered to drum, dance, and "rekindle their ties to Africa." When blended with military brass bands after the Civil War, the "Western instrumentation with African rhythm" gave the world this uniquely American art form. Since jazz is an art form that continues to evolve, "the challenge for the preservationist" Brooks contends, "is how to interpret this living history in a way that is at the same time respectful and dynamic; that acknowledges the role of the past and the promise of the future."⁸

Emensio Eperiam of Pohnpei, Micronesia, addressed the significance of oral history in documenting a culture's history. Oral studies and traditions are passed from elder members of a

interests and needs. Religious leaders are consulted about impacts on traditional cultural practices. Additionally, “traditional seed varieties are being collected as the genesis of a Tribal Seed Bank.” Zuni cultural values are “fully incorporated into the Zuni Sustainable Development Plan.”¹¹

The holistic approach is essential to many cultures because they make little distinction between the sacred and the secular and between history and religion. Writing about her work with American Indian cultures of the Southwest, Lynne Sebastian observes “the whole earth is a sacred landscape, integrally related to the history, beliefs, and practices of the people.” These differing cultural perspectives make the fit between historic preservation regulations and programs and American Indian culture often an uncomfortable one.¹²

INTERPRETING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The interpretation of national, state, regional, or local history is, to many, the essential purpose of historic preservation. Historic and cultural resources are saved not only as living parts of our communities, but also as places that express the nation’s history. How that history is written or conveyed to the public determines how that public views its past and directs the national debate about the future.

For many years, some preservationists, community leaders, and representatives of various cultural groups viewed the historic preservation movement as concerned primarily with the history of national leaders and with the architecture of the affluent. In encouraging increased appreciation of the role of all cultural and economic groups in the

interpretation of the nation’s history, these individuals and groups inspired a revisiting of many established historic sites and places as well as the exploration of new resources that hold the keys to a more inclusive historical portrait.

REDISCOVERING AMERICA

The interpretation of the culturally diverse dimensions of historic buildings and places is often based on new documentation. This documentation can lead to new understandings of historic resources that previously were viewed in a single dimension. New discoveries and interpretations are under way at large, established historic sites and house museums, among them Colonial Williamsburg and Mount Vernon. Both properties are expanding their research efforts and interpretation to encompass the experience of both slaves and free blacks in 18th-century life.

Reinterpretation of historic properties is taking place as well. For example, Kim Alan Williams described the origins of Fort Concho National Historic Landmark in San Angelo, Tex., as based on “Anglo-western expansion and dominance as part of the manifest



The Fort Concho National Historic Landmark in San Angelo, Tex., has expanded its programming to recognize the role that African Americans and Hispanics played in the history of the site.

PHOTO: FORT CONCHO NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK.

destiny doctrine.” The image of the fort continued to be associated with an elitist setting through much of the 20th century, despite the presence of blacks and Hispanics in the community. Beginning in 1979, a new master plan integrated the two cultural groups. The annual celebration of the Fiesta del Concho involves the Hispanic and Anglo communities, and “special buffalo-soldier ancestor programs and archives now

mobility are combined, presents particular dilemmas in interpretation and rehabilitation. Meredith Arms Bzdak described Union City, N.J., as presenting a continuum in ethnic diversity from the mid-19th century with the arrival of German settlers via Ellis Island to Puerto Ricans, Cubans, and more recently, immigrants from Central and South America. The succession of groups altered the built environment of Union

IN ORDER TO ADDRESS culturally diverse resources, preservationists must elicit and respect the views of the groups associated with the resources.

City, causing a tremendous challenge in evaluating the significance of

highlight Afro-American contributions to Fort Concho and the city.” School programs offer pioneer days during which students experience a multicultural pioneer experience.¹³ Research efforts directed specifically at the many cultural dimensions of a historic property are also reflected in the Nevada Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology’s study of ethnic groups in the Virginia City Landmark District. During the mining boom of the 1850s, Virginia City was populated by many foreign-born citizens, including Asians, African Americans, Europeans, Mexicans, and Latin Americans. According to Ronald M. James, the Virginia City project “endeavors to understand these groups as they coexisted and interacted. As one of the mining West’s first truly multicultural settings, Virginia City provides an excellent example of an assimilation process that is crucial to understanding our diverse heritage.”¹⁴

historic resources. It is particularly difficult for preservationists “accustomed to the investigation of more homogeneous environments.”¹⁵

The continuous adaptation of buildings and places to suit new owners raises questions about the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation, according to Penelope S. Watson. The Standards encourage retaining later changes to a building that have become a part of its overall history. However, buildings can be built for an affluent owner and then subdivided and altered for worker housing. Likewise, worker housing can be upgraded by subsequent owners. “In the first scenario, would destruction of later, inferior finishes be an improper, culturally biased decision? In the second case, would retention of later finishes ‘whitewash’ the history of the site as interpreted to the public?”¹⁶

How do preservationists treat historic areas now used as “Chinatowns,” particularly when the buildings were previously used by other immigrant groups and reflect early non-Chinese-American history. In Boston’s

CULTURAL LAYERING

“Cultural layering,” which results when cultural diversity and demographic

Chinatown, “only a handful of the present structures were built reflecting the ethnicity of the present Chinese residents and businesses.” Through the development of a community plan, Ting Fun-Yeh and Philip B. Herr state that the area’s earlier history is being protected, “while the physical and cultural interests of the Chinese community are served, contributing to social equity and the cultural richness of the metropolitan area.”¹⁷

HERITAGE TOURISM

The historic preservation community has studied the potential for using culturally diverse historic resources in attracting tourism. Elizabeth MacNeil Boggess noted that recent inventories of American Indian and African-American resources in Natchez, Miss., have formed part of a “strategy for multicultural management and tourism” and a complementary tourist experience to the traditional route based on the city’s large mansions and antebellum plantation houses.¹⁸

Mario L. Sanchez is developing a heritage trail following a 180-mile-long linear corridor along the Lower Rio Grande between Texas and Mexico. The proposed heritage corridor will interpret the culturally diverse resources in both the United States and Mexico and will cover the shared cultural heritage of both nations. The common themes include colonial river settlements, ranching, river steamboat trade, agricultural development, and military conflicts. The development of cultural tourism in the region promises to foster preservation, economic development, and better relations between communities on both sides of the river.¹⁹

HERITAGE FESTIVALS

Heritage festivals serve to strengthen the ties among members of particular cultural groups and to provide recreational/educational opportunities for other groups. For example, Murney Gerlach reports that “since the late 1980s, San Diego has moved increasingly to preserve its historic and cultural resources, especially in light of the fact that almost forty-three percent of the population of southern California is Hispanic, Asian, African-American, or nonwhite.” Schools and cultural organizations have redesigned their offerings to reflect this change in fairs and festivals organized to bring communities together.²⁰

CULTURAL EQUITY

The inclusion of culturally diverse groups and their historical resources into the historic preservation field challenges some of the movement’s basic premises. Not all cultural groups view heritage resources in the same way. Some groups may value resources of little apparent value to others; other groups may value the same resources but at varying degrees of importance. In order to address culturally diverse resources, preservationists must elicit and respect the views of the groups associated with the resources. During a 1990 conference on cultural conservation at the Library of Congress, James Early outlined the concept of “cultural equity”: “The basic purpose for inclusion [of culturally diverse people (people of color) in policy positions]... is to recalibrate, if not in some instances overturn, reigning assumptions, criteria, expectations, standards, canons, even epistemologies, to engage perspectives and criteria historically evolved by other cultures—cultural equity.”²¹ Carolyn

Torma observes that the challenges ensuing from differing cultural values between conventional preservation standards and cultural groups spring “from a somewhat limited understanding of one culture or subculture by another.”²²

The gap between the scholars of the historic preservation movement and the

A similar situation exists in the Marshall Islands. Dirk H. R. Spennemann observes that the cultural properties associated with Europeans are considered and treated as more important than indigenous historic sites. “For the islanders a coral head sticking out in the lagoon, with all the oral traditions

connected with it, has a far greater spiritual and historical importance than any building

IN THE CENTRAL CITY lie the city’s origins, its historic architecture, its ethnic history, and the history of its growth and development.

groups whose past and present lifeways are the objects of study is discussed by Veletta Canouts. She notes that many cultural resources are “multiply esteemed” and communication between the interested parties often fails because of differences in cultural assumptions and cultural values. “Communication has remained essentially unidirectional...as this information has been fielded by passive audiences who are not encouraged to engage in active discourse.”²³

DOMINANT/INDIGENOUS GROUPS

The disparity between dominant cultures and indigenous groups in the area of historic preservation is evident in the Caribbean region. William Chapman asserts that “historic preservation, when it did come to the islands, tended to be borne by Europeans and North Americans who generally imposed their own ideas of preservation upon an often alienated populace.” In fact, historic preservation was viewed “as an effort to expropriate an indigenous culture and as the imposition of a new kind of colonial power.” As a first step in finding common ground, Chapman suggests that basic cultural differences be understood and appreciated. Only then can a more effective preservation approach be effected.²⁴

the foreigners call ‘historical’.” The Micronesian Historic Preservation Programs are redressing this imbalance by increasingly focusing on the recognition of traditional places and landscapes and “in treating such traditional properties on par with historic buildings.”²⁵

INVOLVING ETHNIC PARTICIPATION

The National Park Service’s Applied Ethnography Program was established to develop methods and programs to manage park resources so that both culturally sensitive resources and the traditional users’ needs are protected. Muriel Crespi and Jenny Masur define cultural resources as embracing subsistence grounds, massive geological features valued as homelands of spiritual entities, and traditional ethnic neighborhoods. Because these resources are not monumental, they have often been undervalued. However, they contribute to people’s sense of cultural distinctiveness. “The integrity and continuing use of such resources, on-site or through legends and myths, can be essential to a groups’ cultural vitality.”²⁶

A regional National Park Service ethnographer, George S. Esber, Jr., suggests that current efforts to increase

minority participation are often inadequate because they “are rooted in an idealism that is often expressed in terms of a need for increased sensitivity, kinder...behavior, invitations to participate, and a willingness to consult.” Ultimately, such gestures are viewed as insincere. Esber suggests that overcoming social distance between cultures lies in the use of language and terminology. “To achieve this end requires a challenge to many misconceptions that are routinely expressed in dominant society. An audit of current language use and thought represents a necessary first step in creating a more hospitable environment for enhanced communication and minority preservation.”²⁷

THE URBAN CHALLENGE

The nation’s cities remain its foremost cultural centers. In the central city lie the city’s origins, its historic architecture, its ethnic history, and the history of its growth and development. There also lie the origins of the imagery by which it is portrayed in literature and of the memories of countless individuals. These, too, are the places that today reflect the consequences of neglect by city services, abandonment by the middle class, and relegation to the most disadvantaged in American society.

Can historic preservation help reclaim the nation’s cities? Often historic preservationists carry in their historic preservation “tool chest” an offer to deliver services to the inner city. Judith Ann Johnson developed the Special Neighborhood Awareness

Project, which was intended as a model for educating low-income residents about preservation as a strategy for neighborhood revitalization. However, because the neighborhood did not become involved in the project, the project failed to achieve its objective of creating a model for other preservation efforts in minority areas. Johnson views the aftermath of the failure as providing lessons important for developing a more effective model.²⁸

Holding the view that historic preservation can be the “glue to hold together the fabric of diverse ethnic, cultural, and racial groups” in urban centers, Donald D. Slesnick II and Louise Yarbrough suggest that revolving funds represent an innovative approach to physically improving the condition of older neighborhoods “while underwriting projects that have created jobs, provided new sources of housing, and overcome the ethnic and cultural barriers that prevent the development of a sense of community.” A revolving fund could be made up of monies from private foundations and government agencies along with set-aside

OFTEN HISTORIC PRESERVATIONISTS carry in their historic preservation “tool chest” an offer to deliver services to the inner city.

bank guarantees. The fund could be used to procure, restore and resell historic properties. It could also serve as a source of low-interest second/third-mortgage money for repairs and maintenance.²⁹

CULTURAL UNITY ISSUES

The current national preoccupation with cultural diversity has produced myriad observations about the pros and cons of ethnic pride and as many recommendations about how to increase, decrease,

or accept the current level of interest. Editorial writer Joel Kotkin wrote recently in *The Washington Post* that the transformation of California into a new kind of society—an amalgam of Asian, Latino, African-American as well as Anglo influences—was sending shock waves through virtually every sector of the state's society. The recent riots in Los Angeles raised the specter of a “fundamental choice between cosmopolitan multiracialism or a descent into tribalism.”³⁰

The prospect of cultural pride resulting in the disintegration of American society runs counter to the history of the nation itself. For as long as the nation evolved, particularly since the Age of Discovery, Americans

despite the passage of generations. In the *Star Tribune*, it was reported that suburbs in Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area still retain their identification as Scandinavian, German, or Irish. In response to a report that suburbs continued to be defined by ethnicity, Rudolph Vecoli, director of the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota, observed, “Immigrants historically moved to places where they felt most comfortable, where people spoke their language and knew their customs, whether in the country towns or city neighborhoods...But even today, people naturally settle near relatives or near their churches.”³¹

In another case, Ted J. Ligibel studied the Toledo, Ohio, neighborhood of

Birmingham, an intact Eastern European neighborhood. Founded a century

PRESERVATIONISTS HAVE MOVED far beyond urging one another to simply do more in the area of cultural diversity; they also are doing their work differently.

have enjoyed the right to practice their own cultural traditions as well as to join the mainstream culture and view themselves as “American.” History also indicates that retention of cultural distinctiveness is essential to the adjustment of new arrivals in the nation and continues to play an important role in determining how individuals view themselves and their future prospects. Preservationists have documented the role of cultural awareness and pride in American history and the continuity of cultural characteristics to the present.

CULTURAL CONTINUITY AND RETENTION

One recent example from the 1990 census demonstrates the remarkable endurance of cultural distinctiveness

ago, the neighborhood “retains...many of the customs of the Old World, some of which died out in the homeland due to religious and political oppression.” (In fact, one such custom, the Bethlehem Christmas Play was taped by Hungarian National Television as a historical record of a lost tradition) The close connections that remain between Birmingham and the Old World can also be demonstrated in churches, social halls, schools, and commercial buildings, all of which display ethnic iconography or Old World forms. One residential street appears to be laid out according to the pattern of villages in rural Hungary.³²

CONCLUSION

Preservationists have moved far beyond urging one another to simply do more

in the area of cultural diversity; they also are doing their work differently. No longer are they prepackaging their historic preservation tools and delivering them to cultural groups. With the influence of such related professional groups as anthropologists, ethnographers, folklorists, and community planners, preservationists are learning to work with cultural groups, to ask them what their priorities are, to discern how historic preservation tools can work for the groups, and to make adjustments to the tools in order to accommodate cultural differences.

The ability of the historic preservation field to address the needs of the nation's various cultural entities will determine its success as a national mainstream movement. It also will influence the comprehension of the nation's history as a whole—whether at the national level or from the vantage point of a small community. Historic preservation efforts leave a consequential legacy in telling the extraordinary story of how, out of many nations, a single and enduring nation was formed. **FJ**

TONI J. LEE IS an independent historian from Arlington, Va. She was a historian for the National Register of Historic Places, Interagency Resources Division, the National Park Service from 1989 to 2012. Her article first appeared in the *Forum Journal*, July/August 1992.

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- 18 Elizabeth MacNeil Boggess, "Natchez-on-the-Mississippi: A Case Study in Multicultural Tourism," abstract for 46th National Preservation Conference.
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- 20 Murney Gerlach, "Multiculturalism in a Quincentennial Year in San Diego," abstract for 46th National Preservation Conference.

- 21 James Early, "Engaging New Perspectives," in "Reconfiguring the Cultural Mission: Excerpts from the Conference," *Folklife Center News*, XII (1990), p. 9.
- 22 Carolyn Torma, "The Right to Own History: Native American Challenges to Historic Preservation and Public History," abstract for 46th National Preservation Conference.
- 23 Veletta Canouts, "Reading the Past: Multicultural Interpretation," abstract for 46th National Preservation Conference.
- 24 William Chapman, "Historic Preservation in the Caribbean: Prospects for the Future," abstract for 46th National Preservation Conference.
- 25 Dirk H.R. Spennemann, "Historic Preservation and Multiculturalism: A Pacific Perspective," abstract for 46th National Preservation Conference.
- 26 Muriel Crespi and Jenny Masur, "Beyond Monumentalism: The National Park Service Applied Ethnography Program," abstract for 46th National Preservation Conference.
- 27 George S. Esber, "Building Bridges in National Park Service Programs," abstract for 46th National Preservation Conference.
- 28 Judith Ann Johnson, no title, abstract for 46th National Preservation Conference.
- 29 Donald D. Slesnick II and Louise Yarbrough, "The Historic Preservation Revolving Fund as an Outreach to the Inner City," abstract for 46th National Preservation Conference.
- 30 Joel Kotkin, "California's Lesson: How the Golden State Views the Nation's 21st Century," *The Washington Post*, May 31, 1992, pp. C1-C2.
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- 32 Ted J. Ligibel, "Birmingham: Preserving an Ethnic Identity," abstract for 46th National Preservation Conference.